

## Foreword

THOUGH THE THEME IS AN INTERESTING ONE NO ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE IN THE SUBSEQUENT PAGES TO TRACE THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPIRIT PAINTINGS. SO WIDELY AND SO VEHEMENTLY HAS AN UNAVAILING WAR OF WORDS BEEN WAGED, PERTAINING TO THIS REMARKABLE ILLUSION, THAT IT WOULD BE EXCEEDINGLY UNWISE AT THIS TIME TO TRESPASS IN THIS DOMAIN.

LET US, THEREFORE, CONFINE OUR ATTENTION TO THE MORE INTERESTING AND ENLIGHTENING TASK OF ANALYZING THE PROBLEM AS PRESENTED BY THE NOTABLY SUCCESSFUL PERFORMER WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THIS EXPOSITION.

SURELY, THE FACT THAT MR. NIXON PRESENTED THIS ACT FOR TWO ENTIRE SEASONS OVER THE LARGEST CIRCUITS IN THIS COUNTRY, IS WELL WORTHY OF YOUR CONSIDERATION.

SHOULD YOU, THEN, AS IT IS BELIEVED YOU MOST ASSUREDLY WILL, GAIN FROM THE FOLLOWING PAGES A THOROUGH WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE MANNER OF ITS PRESENTATION AND THE METHOD OF ITS CONSTRUCTION AND SHOULD YOU FIND IT IN YOUR HEART TO EXPRESS ADMIRATION FOR THE DELIGHTFUL AND ASTONISHING SIMPLICITY OF THE WHOLE, THEN INDEED WOULD OUR MISSION BE FULFILLED AND OUR MOST EARNEST DESIRE GRATIFIED.

THE EDITOR.



## Effect

Let us imagine for a moment that we are passing before the lobby of a theatre and that we are attracted by display matter advertising the Spirit Paintings. We have heard much and read much of late concerning the research work of eminent scientists in the field of Psychological Phenomena.

Prof. Hyslop, Dr. Flammarion, Dr. Hugo Munsterberg, Cæsar Lambroso, and the Society of Psychical Research have devoted much time and energy to their investigation, oftentimes, 'tis true, arriving at widely different conclusions.

Is it a wonder then that the "unknown" world casts its weird and fascinating spell over us? Do disembodied spirits exist and manifest themselves to man? Do they or can they paint upon a canvas with unseen fingers, in a few moments, subjects which took great masters years to complete?

Our interest is aroused. We investigate still further. Oh yes! Here is a picture of the good Dr. Nixon, arch master of the spirits. We wonder whether they follow the Doctor about the country, ever ready at his call, or do you suppose he carries them as excess baggage or perchance in a strong box from which they are released when it is time for the act to go on.

We speculate as to whether or not it took years to train them. Possibly, like the trained dogs, it is all done by kindness.

But why this levity! Here is a clipping from a great city newspaper which speaks in awed tones of the baffling problem. Here is a testimonial from a master scientist who has wagged his wise head in perplexity. Here again is a testimonial of a club of magicians who have attended the performance and have failed even after summoning all their experience of the past to find a suitable solution.

All this may be, but we, personally, are hard-headed and skeptical. Dr. Nixon will have to show us. We will view this little seance from our own angle.

We, therefore, with just antagonism in our souls, slip one over on the house and buy a ticket for the performance, and thereby score the first engagement, a victory for the Spirit Paintings.

About 9.30 we sit a bit straighter in our seats in anticipation of the opening of the Spirit Painting Act. The curtain rises slowly and we behold a large artist's frame or easel which we later learn is technically known as a "shadow box." The stage is held by a charming little lady in the costume of a page.

The performer makes his appearance in full dress, and in a few words explains that the apparatus used consists of a frame in which the canvas is to be placed and the shadow box serving as a container for both the frame and the canvas. We are then asked to observe the presence of a very powerful light placed directly behind the shadow box and which is to be used to more clearly delineate the development of the picture. He further

calls our attention to several pure white canvases stretched upon the usual framework.

In order that we may be persuaded that chicanery and subterfuge are not numbered among his accomplishments, he suggests that two large gummed labels be taken into the audience to be autographed. One of these, we are informed, he proposes to stick on each of the two canvases selected, so that we may be quite assured of the fact that no exchanges are effected and, furthermore, that we may be positive that the spirit picture is actually materialized upon the face of the one selected.

Two canvases are now placed in the frame. The one selected, properly identified by the presence of the autographed label, faces the audience while the second (one of those unselected) is placed directly behind the first; thus all available space in the frame is occupied and the possibility of introducing another canvas is precluded beyond question.

We are now informed that subjects are required. Accordingly, a package of postal cards—about 100 in number—is brought forward and we are told that each represents a famous painting of one of the great masters.

One at a time the cards are removed from the pile borne on a tray by an assistant and passed from the left to the right hand. The audience are told that they may indicate their choice verbally, by telling the performer when to stop as the cards are passing from hand to hand.

As soon as the choice is indicated, the subjects are announced and we are ready for the beginning of the seance. Tonight we have chosen the well known subjects, "Miss Innocence" and "The Prince of Nassau."

The arc light is now turned on while the house and stage lights are turned entirely out.

The canvas now glows weirdly with a pure white light against a curtain of darkness. The assistant places her hand between the canvas and the light in order to demonstrate that everything is clear between these two vital points. The hand is clearly delineated in shadow on the highly illuminated canvas. We are now cautioned to concentrate our attention upon the change which we are told is about to take place upon the pure white surface.

Closely we watch, and we are somewhat startled to note the slightest suggestion of light and shadow in the upper right hand corner of the canvas. Slowly light and shadow become color. But look! A similar phenomenon is at present taking place in the lower left corner and now in all portions, excepting the center, shades and colors are making their appearance—a delicate pink here and the suggestion of azure blue there. And now there is a development in the central portion until the entire canvas is surfeited with a nebulous mass of color. From this chaotic mass is born the suggestion of forms and their outline. Now we observe the delineation of features and the accurate registering of color, until before us completely developed,

clearly marked in the most minute detail, is the incomparable masterpiece of Joshua Reynolds—Miss Innocence.

The house and stage is now illuminated, the canvas removed from the frame and brought forward for our inspection. The label is identified by the member of the audience by whom it was autographed. We are thus convinced beyond the possibility of argument that the painting has surely been developed on the canvas selected, and that no substitution has taken place.

Truly, the *unseen fingers* have performed their ghostly work well and, after the manner of spirits, most mysteriously; for we are compelled at this moment to agree with Hamlet, "that truly there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

We are told by the performer at this point, that, in order to circumvent any possible argument to the effect that the method of development might be photographic in nature, he will cause the instantaneous appearance of the second subject upon the canvas. Accordingly, the lights are turned out; immediately on again. Incredible as it may seem, before us now, on the chosen canvas, is the finished painting of the Prince of Nassau, which is immediately removed and the autographed label presented as in the first instance.

An additional test is now imposed by causing the gradual dematerialization of the painting. The features now become indistinct and all trace of outline slowly disappears. We have nothing left now but a heterogeneous mass of colors which gradually pass away until nothing remains but the pure white glowing canvas.

For the last time the lights are again raised. The seance has ended. The performer, with a smile of confidence, bids us good-night and leaves us in a state of perplexity much more profound than when we were entirely uninitiated.

We have been an eyewitness to the effect, but what of the cause?

Was it accomplished by spirit fingers or fingers directed by spirits?

Let us become more prosaic and suggest the use of chemicals or mechanics. One principal seems to answer as well as another and we, too, feel that we may well add our names to those already enlisted in the great army of the perplexed.

Of one important fact, however, we are quite positive. We know that we have been exceedingly well entertained and that we are very grateful to the good Doctor for a most pleasant and thoroughly absorbing quarter of an hour.

## Details of Construction

In order that an intelligent understanding of the apparatus may be acquired to better prepare us to comprehend the references which follow, we consider it wise at this point to direct the reader's attention to the subsequent details of construction.

The first object of interest is the shadow frame or box in which the frame containing the canvases is ultimately placed. This interesting piece of furniture is made use of by the artist to enable him to observe the effect of lights and shadows on his finished work. A reference to (Fig. I) will describe better than words its general construction and external characteristics. It should be noted, however, that the ends of the box are covered with black cloth which is slit two inches from front rail with laps facing the rear. This aperture allows the admission of the hand when necessary, (Fig. I-AP). Internally, however, the box is worthy of very close analysis. Across the top, front to rear, eight and one-half inches from each end runs a brass wire  $5/16$ " in diameter. These perform the functions of rails, upon which the traveling carriage, soon to be described, rides. It is a matter of interest at this juncture to note that the point at which the wires are made fast on the front is  $1/4$ " higher than the terminal points at the rear. Directly between the two wires is a grommeted hole, through which runs the lines which operate the carriage, (Fig. I-A). This carriage is in nature, a frame 32 by 48 inches inside measurement, constructed of  $7/8$ " material 1" wide. The stops which are upright are constructed of  $3/8$ " material 2" wide. Seven inches from each end of the carriage at the top is located a brass screw eye (Fig. II-a and b): and upon these, from the wires or rails, is suspended this carriage, (Fig. II.)

On the rear side of each of the carriage uprights, (Fig. 2-c) attached centrally, is a metal hook approximately 5" long. There is 1" of space between return, while the return itself is 2" long. The function of these hooks is to securely retain the canvas in the carriage by securing it between the frame and the cloth. The description of the box is now complete save for a careful reference to the diagram which clearly shows the method of the stringing which controls the operation of the carriage.

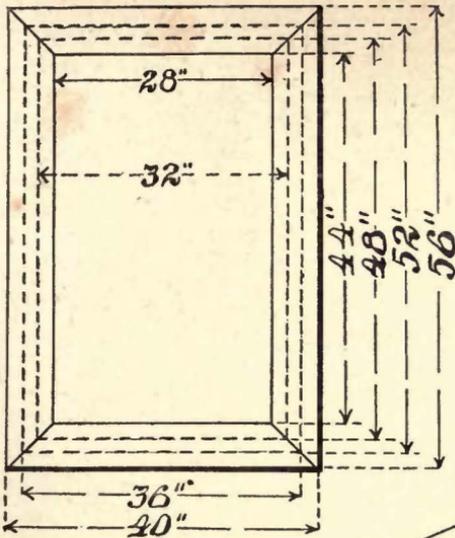
It will be noted that the string marked "a b" when pulled moves the carriage towards the arc while "c d" carries it in the opposite direction. In order to facilitate this operation the two strings "a b" are joined at X and go away as one string while "c d" are joined at "y." Hereafter, these strings will be called the controller.

The frame proper, (Fig. III) measures 44" x 28" inside and is composed of material 6" x  $7/8$ ". On the back of this frame is the canvas retaining frame of  $7/8$ " material 1" wide. Inside measurement 32" x 48". There is no cross piece at the top of the second frame.

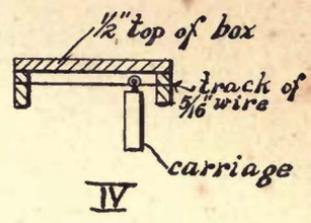
The light used is of the ordinary "flood" variety from one thousand to three thousand candle power.

It is of course obvious that the controller must ultimately be in the hands of the assistant off stage, although at the time the shadow box is moved about during its demonstration, there must be no attachment which would compromise this movement.

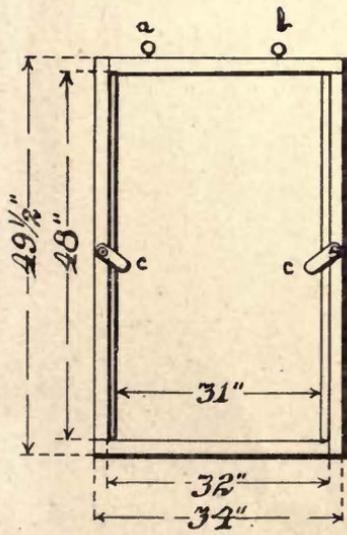
This is accomplished by rolling that portion of the string,



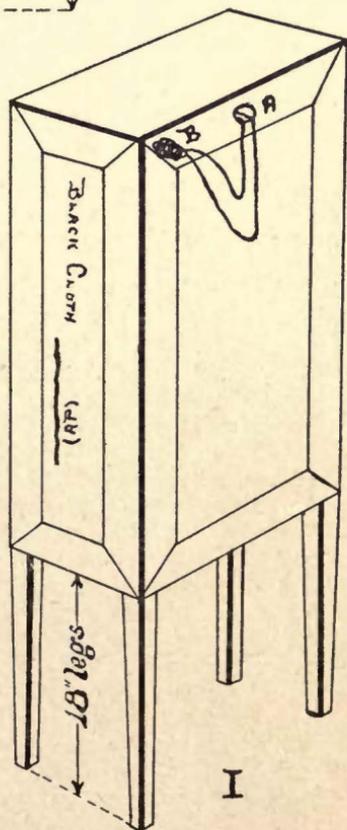
III



IV



II



I

Box 14" deep  
51 1/2" inside length  
35" " width

which is not employed within the box proper, into a compact parcel, that it may be hung upon a pin placed near the upper left hand back corner. (Fig. I-B).

While turning on the light, the assistant removes the thread and hands it to the assistant off stage, covering the move with the body.

The canvases measure 32" x 48".

Now that the reader has become acquainted with the working details of the apparatus his only task will be to follow closely the details of presentation.



## Details of Presentation

Following a short preoration which concisely covers the developments about to take place the performer directs the attention of the audience toward the apparatus used.

Frequently we will refer to the movements of two assistants, one on the stage and one off the stage. The former will be designated as No. 1 and the latter as No. 2.

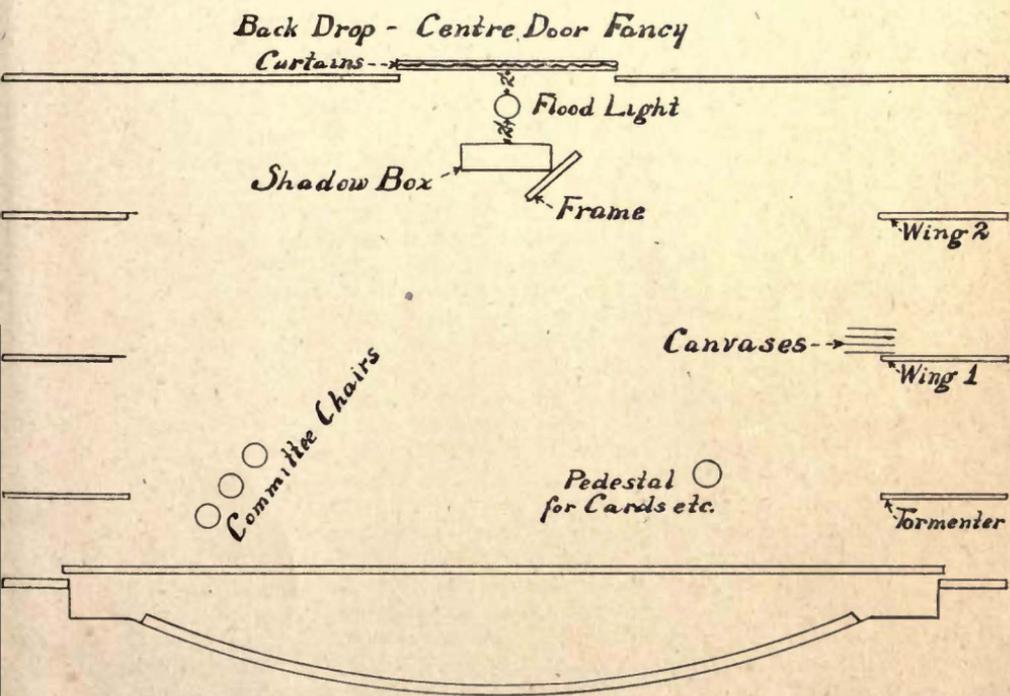
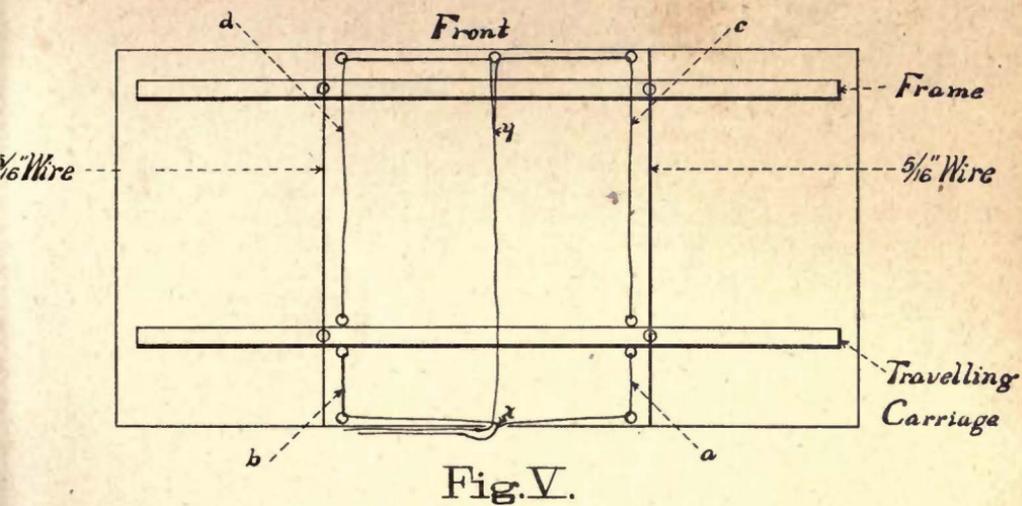
The first object of interest is the shadow box, which the audience is told is to be used for the reception of the frame and canvas. In order that it may be clearly understood that there is no concealed space or other questionable features it is turned completely about so that it may be seen from all sides.

He next explains that the frame (Fig. III) is used to retain the chosen canvas. It is held during its introduction with reverse side toward the audience. (It is faced toward the audience when placed in shadow box.) At the conclusion of his remarks the performer steps around in front of the reverse side, lifts the frame and carries it to the shadow box against which it is rested.

The lamp is used, so 'tis stated, to show the workings of the spirits after which it is placed two feet behind the shadow box and turned on and off that its powerful effect may be noted.

This movement presents the desired opportunity for handing the No. 2 assistant the controller. Therefore, as No. 1 stoops to turn on the switch with right hand, the left is raised to the pin upon which the coiled line is resting. This is removed, passed to the left hand, which in its turn passes it to No. 2; the assistant off stage, who is awaiting its reception. This is not at all difficult for it will be remembered that the lamp is but two feet behind the shadow-box and but two feet in front of the back drop. (Fig. VI shows relative positions of apparatus).

No. 2 is standing behind the back drop in a straight line with the light. The line is made fast to a safety pin inserted in the drop so that No. 2 may proceed to wing No. 1 for his next duty. His next duty is soon to be described.



**Fig.VI.**

Five white canvases, each stretched upon the usual wooden frame are next introduced. They are held fanwise by assistant No. 1, ends resting on stage. The selection of a canvas is then invited and the audience indicate their choice by the designation of a number as 1, 2 or 3. The one selected is carried by the performer close to the foot-lights. The hand is held behind the canvas so that its shadow is clearly delineated. This step is designed to demonstrate clearly the absence of any preparation. It is then placed in the frame with its face toward the audience. It will be recalled that the frame is resting with its reverse side toward the audience and against the shadow box.

A second canvas is next selected by the same method as followed with the first, and is carried to the foot-lights and the shadow cast by the hand noted. While this demonstration is taking place, assistant No. 1 retires with the three unselected, to wing No. 1 against which they are allowed to rest, allowing approximately three-quarters of the surfaces to be exposed to the audience. While assistant No. 1 is apparently adjusting the canvases, assistant No. 2, who is off stage at wing No. 1 holding the first subject to be materialized, face away from the audience pushes forward his, and steals away the hindmost canvas.

Simultaneously assistant No. 1 picks up this subject canvas and walks toward frame and shadow box, in an apparently careless manner, yet concealing the subject by holding it in front of her. This canvas is put in the frame face against the face of the one already placed. While assistant No. 1 is walking towards the frame the performer with the selected canvas, goes to wing No. 1 where it is placed across the ends of the two which remain at that point.

Performer and assistant now lift the frame into the shadow box. (Subject is now at the rear.) This move throws subject into the traveling carriage. The hooks (Fig. II-CC) are dropped or adjusted so that they fall between canvas and framework along the side. This move has locked the subject securely in the carriage, while the left hand hooks frame to shadow box. (Use [AP] Fig. I for entrance to interior). The subject is now ready to be drawn to the rear of the shadow box by assistant No. 2 by means of the controller. He now pulls the string drawing the carriage to the rear of the box so that when the lights are all pulled off with the exception of the flood there will be no image cast on the front canvas. This much accomplished No. 1 repairs to a property pedestal or table and procures a tray bearing labels, postals and pencils.

The performer states that he now requires identification marks, and that for this purpose he will use gummed labels autographed by members of the audience. Accordingly he goes into the audience to obtain the signatures. These procured he returns to the stage and hands them to No. 1. No. 2 proceeds immediately to the shadow box in which rest the two canvases selected, one at front, subject at rear. In his journey

ample opportunity is presented to enable her to shift the two autographed labels for two dummies. One dummy is pasted on the top rail of the canvas now facing the audience while the second is pasted on the second selected canvas at the wings. The two autographed labels are now in the possession of the assistant and are, at the proper time, to be applied to the painted canvases.

Subjects are now required. For this purpose about 100 postal cards of famous paintings are utilized. It should be quite obvious that the first card must be forced to correspond to the subject now in the frame. The choice may be indicated by a verbal request to stop, as the cards are passing from the pile to the left, and thence to the right hand. The force may be effected by many different methods, the choice of which may better be left with the individual performer. The second is chosen at random after which the subjects are announced. The second one chosen is announced first, that assistant No. 2 may know what subject he is to procure for later development.

It is now stated that everything is in readiness for the materialization. Assistant No. 1 thereupon steps to the flood light and turns it on. While the right hand is engaged in turning the switch the left places the autographed label upon the top rail of the subject canvas.

At the cue "lights please!" the stage and house lights with the exception of the "flood" are darkened. The performer now passes between the lights and shadow box and calls attention to the shadow upon the canvas. This move, of course, is designed to obviate any impression that may exist to the effect that there may not be a clear line between lights and canvas. (Bear in mind that at this stage the traveling carriage is at the rear of the box). In other words, the painted canvas is too far away from the front canvas to cast upon it either an image or the suggestion of an image. The performer now begins to ask the audience to note the colors which are appearing in the upper right hand corner, and simultaneously assistant No. 2 begins to take up on the controller pulling the carriage forward toward the front canvas. As it approaches, more distinct become the colors and more clearly are outlines delineated. The performer and assistant, of course, synchronize word and action so that they blend perfectly up to the point of the complete development of the painting.

So simple and yet so wonderful is the principle involved that it is really difficult to realize that it is responsible for the remarkable effect produced.

If we state our principle in other words we would say, at a given distance the light shining through the painted canvas casts no image upon the one in front. When the distance is decreased and the painted canvas approaches the front canvas the more distinct becomes the image, until the maximum effect is obtained and the space between the two canvases eliminated.

From the foregoing it will be readily appreciated that the mechanical plot, what little there is, revolves about the traveling carriage and its movements backward and forward.

We must return, however, from our momentary digression and proceed with the movements of the performer after the development of the painting. It is his task now to convince his audience that a painting has in reality not only been materialized, but that it has been materialized upon the chosen canvas.

Performer and assistant now proceed to shadow box and in the act of removing the frame and canvases therefrom, secretly release the canvas from the traveling carriage as well as performing a similar action in relation to the frame and shadow box. This accomplished they remove the frame which is carried toward the foot lights, and the performer knocks the two canvases from their resting place within.

After their removal the ends are turned toward the audience with the faces still close together. Under the mask of these movements assistant No. 1, who has been aiding in the work, has an opportunity to steal away the unautographed or fake label which the reader will remember was placed on the canvas selected by the audience as already described. The performer during these few moments has been describing his movements and slowly and cautiously by suggestion, has been carrying the mind away from the relative positions of the canvases. This is in preparation of the move which now takes place. The canvas from which the label has just been stolen is exhibited as the indifferent one and the attention of the audience is called to the fact that it is devoid of label. He now exhibits the other canvas, and states, "And here you will observe the finished painting upon the chosen canvas and you will further note that it bears the autographed label, proving to you conclusively that no exchange has been effected and that the materialization has positively taken place, beyond any possibility of doubt, upon the chosen canvas."

This statement is so logical and so well substantiated by the evidence of the presence of the autographed label that a suspicion that a slight mistatement has been made does not enter the mind of the audience.

So engrossed is the mind with the wonderful effect which has been produced that it does not, for a moment even, stumble upon the seemingly trivial fact concerning which painting was in front and which in back. So rapidly have developments taken place and so wonderful have been the effects produced that the mental process has been more rapid than analytical. The audience, of course, in answer to the final argument that the subject corresponds with that of the chosen postal have nothing left other than to give up the proverbial ghost.

While the performer is engaged in exhibiting the painting, assistant No. 1 retires with the frame to the shadow box against which it is allowed to rest, reverse side toward the audience as

before. The selected canvas which has been resting at wing No. 1, as described, is next removed by the same assistant and carried to the frame and inserted.

The statement is now made that the theory is often advanced that the process of materialization is either photographic in nature or dependent upon the use of chemicals. In order to prove that such a method of procedure is not followed the performer states that he will cause the instantaneous materialization of the second chosen subject.

The same steal and shift is executed as in the first instance and the subsequent moves made in exact duplication of those employed in the first materialization.

As soon as the painted canvas is locked in the traveling carriage the assistant No. 2 takes up on controller and pulls it to the back of the shadow box.

The house and stage lights are now extinguished with the exception of the "flood." The canvas, of course, shows only the pure white glow. Thus the audience is convinced that at present, at least, there is no painting in existence. The lights are again raised. Assistant No. 2 takes this immediate opportunity to pull the carriage back to the frame by taking up on "y".

Once again the lights are lowered but this time with the result that the audience is greeted with the vision of the completed masterpiece.

A further test of interest may at this point be imposed by causing the slow and visible dematerialization of the painting. The *modus operandi* is, of course, simply the reverse of materialization and does not need further exposition. If the dematerialization is utilized the finished canvas may be shown at the conclusion, even without being again materialized. It is, of course, more logical to develop it once again.

Perhaps the best method, however, is to remove it from the frame for exhibition purposes immediately after its instantaneous materialization.

After the close of the act the materialized paintings are carried to the lobby of the theatre where they are allowed to remain on exhibition as the audience files out after the close of the performance. And now we have concluded with the facts pertinent to the method of presentation and our task is near completion but there is certain data concerning the preparation of the paintings which are most emphatically important if the maximum effect is to be attained. We will, therefore, refer the reader to the following chapter:

## Suggestions

The reader's close attention to the following material is most earnestly recommended for the facts noted have resulted from a vast amount of experimenting as well as two seasons of practical experience with the Spirit Painting Act.

Instead of building canvas frames purchase 32" x 48" mortised end, artist stretchers.

Paste down the canvas edges to frame work and tack securely.

Procure the brand of muslin known as "Indian Head" to paint upon. The cost is about 15 cents per yard.

After this has been stretched upon the frame it must be sized. For this purpose use "rye-flour" sizing. In applying use a tool with a blunt end forcing the size first into front and then into back of fabric. After this has been completed allow it to dry for twenty-four hours.

As far as the paint is concerned use nothing but turpentine colors, taking care to use only opaque pigments.

When applying these colors do not use any turpentine.

Be sure that all colors are ground in oil. While the colors are wet see that they are rubbed well into the cloth.

The artist should outline or sketch in the painting with a hair line brush and blue paint.

Around the edge of the canvas paint in a 2" marginal line using a preparation of whiting and alcohol.

For the controller use an 18 lb. fish line. It is sufficiently strong to carry the required load.

Should you find in some instances that the colors show through on the reverse side of the muslin, it will be necessary to use double thickness.

The number of subjects which the average act playing vaudeville will require is not less than twenty-five. This avoids repetition.

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We have made every effort in the foregoing pages to make this explanation thoroughly intelligible and we trust that we have not striven in vain, and we also cherish the hope that the reader's task of following our work has been as pleasure-giving and as instructive as its preparation has been to us.