

INSIDE
THE MEDIUM'S CABINET

JOSEPH DUNNINGER

NEW YORK

DAVID KEMP AND COMPANY

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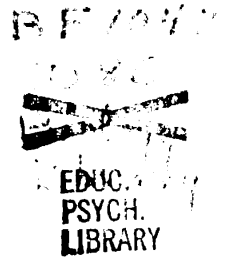
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TYPOGRAPHY BY M. A. FRIEDMAN



FOREWORD

I HAVE BEEN INSIDE THE MEDIUM'S CABINET. It is a place unhaunted. It serves only as a covering for trickery and fraud.

Such practices have been linked with false theories of survival. They cloud an issue that is vital to mankind. Therefore the frauds within the medium's cabinet are to be condemned and exposed.

Inside the medium's cabinet, I have discovered the trickery that lies there. I have challenged the mediums to produce the marvels that only ghosts can bring.

—(v)—

When they have finished with their efforts, I have entered the same cabinet. By natural, scientific methods, I have duplicated and surpassed the phenomena which they say belong only to the unknown.

There are natural laws that still remain for science to discover. There is the soul of life, itself, to which religion alone can supply the needs of man.

But neither science nor religion belongs within the medium's cabinet. Sham is the only dweller behind those tight-closed curtains. It masks as pseudo-science; it voices false religion. The wise are not deceived.

To shamsters who will dispute my statement, I have one single answer. My challenge remains open. That is the answer which words can not defy.

Let them bring their prodigies to the proving ground. Within the medium's cabinet, I shall reproduce or explain whatever they can offer.

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INSIDE
THE MEDIUM'S CABINET

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE PRANKS OF MIDNIGHT VISITORS from the great beyond have been recorded time and again. The question continually arises, "Do the spirits of the departed return?"

This is a material world we live in; and the oft-repeated tales of uncanny powers, supernatural, if you please, of various mediums, seem to come either from an organized group of spirit press agents, or from the distorted minds of those who have attended séances, and believe they have seen everything from a spook

—(1)—

midget to an organized army of ectoplastic visitors, such as are reported to have walked the streets of Rome during the reign of the great Caesar.

The World War, which cannot be recorded as a thing of the past for centuries to come, is to my mind directly responsible for the sensational boom which has given to spiritualism millions of believers; and has incidentally been the foundation upon which thousands of present day charlatans, disguised in the robes of ghost producers, are harvesting sums of money and in many instances small fortunes. Even the skeptical minded individual who heretofore looked upon spiritualism as mere child's play, or food for the weaker minded, frequents a séance parlor with the actual hope of receiving a communication from some departed loved one.

To the gullible minded, and unfortunately these are numerous, spiritualists seem a god-send; to the scientific minded, and to the investigator, this class of self-styled mystic is nothing more than a mountebank.

The writer does not wish to question anyone's religious beliefs, but does wish to take a definite stand against all unscientific demonstrations and all spiritualistic hokus-pocus, which, as a rule, are designed only to prey upon trusting and believing people, either

to extract money from them directly or indirectly, or otherwise to obtain publicity for ulterior purposes.

Of course, not everything is fraud. Much is self deception which may be termed self hypnosis. If you sit in a darkened room and are sufficiently keyed up, your senses will play all sorts of tricks provided the nervous system is receptive.

The psyche investigator understands this phase thoroughly, and also knows how self hypnosis works under these circumstances, particularly when the subject is anxious to believe the most incredible things that are going to be enacted in front of him. The subconscious mind is a wonderful machine, as anyone who has read Coue can testify.

If you are in a receptive state of mind, you can make yourself imagine almost anything. It may be noted here that nearly all of the distinguished converts to spiritualism are older men, men in their fifties and sixties. What is the explanation? The fact that their senses are not as sharp as those of younger men would not seem the real one.

It is my conviction that we all have a secret longing for the future, with an anticipation of what lies before us; and the man who has reached the autumn of life, unconsciously craves assurance of a tangible hereafter. If a man of years sees what is apparently

evidence of a very definite existence beyond the pale, he will readily accept it under the subtle persuasion of a convincing medium.

In this class we find the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who published the statement that his last years on earth were being spent in preparation for the life to come. Mentally, by his own admission, Conan Doyle retired from the world, and shut out thoughts of material things, in the belief that he was making ready for another phase of existence.

To a man who has willingly placed himself in this state of mind, nothing is incredible. Sir Arthur endorsed a number of mediums residing both here and abroad, who he claimed were genuine, and upon whose demonstrations he based his sincere belief.

Let it be clearly understood that I place no stigma upon those who have chosen Spiritualism purely as a religion. As a belief, they are entitled to hold it as their own, without interference from others.

But I do attack those who have masked themselves as believers in order to prey upon the sincere. These masqueraders are the fraudulent mediums; and in their craftiness, they have interwoven themselves with the Spiritualistic faith, that they may cry out in holy horror every time that they—as individuals—are justifiably called to task.

To reiterate this point would be both burdensome and unnecessary; a sop to the masqueraders themselves. Hence, I am making it plain that whenever I speak adversely of certain Spiritualistic practices, my criticism is directed solely against the class of pretenders that I have mentioned. They have so identified themselves with Spiritualism, as the public recognizes it, that I am forced to adopt their own nomenclature when I refer to them.

In the course of my career as a mystifier, I have lectured upon the frauds of Spiritualism and have publicly demonstrated the methods by which supposed mediums accomplish their spooky manifestations.

Under the management of Frances Rockefeller King, of the Private Entertainment Department of the National Broadcasting Company, I have made appearances for the past seventeen years; and I have frequently been approached by persons who have witnessed my entertainments, asking me to explain specific cases which have puzzled them.

Mr. A. Frank Jones, my friend and personal representative, who has accompanied me on all my tours, has been reluctant for me to enter into discussions after my performances. The nature of my work has been too exacting, both in large theaters and at private

engagements, for me to receive visitors at the conclusion of my entertainments.

Yet, whenever Mr. Jones has been approached by a person who has been burdened by the worry that only false mediums can cause, he has invariably broken his rule and encouraged an interview between that person and myself. It has been our mutual desire to prove helpful to those persons who have suffered through the unscrupulous efforts of charlatans.

CHAPTER II

MAGICIANS VERSUS MEDIUMS

EVER SINCE MEDIUMSHIP BECAME A PROFESSION, its practitioners have met with opposition from magicians. This is not surprising. The duel is a natural one.

The same fundamental desire stimulates both the medium and the magician. Both feel the urge to mystify the public. Both have held to the same theory: "Mundus vult decipi; decipiatur," and they enjoy the privilege of belonging to the chosen few who can deceive the world.

—(7)—

So much so, that mediums and magicians alike have fought against the exposure of their methods. In the case of the cruder mediums and magicians—the majority in both groups—this opposition to exposure had become fanaticism. Possessed of a few tawdry “secrets,” they quiver with alarm when even the most insignificant methods appear in print. For they know that they are dependent upon the poor devices that they have kept from the public; not upon their own ability.

Capable mediums, as well as capable magicians, are not troubled by exposés. They have ingenuity of their own. They improve their methods to suit every need. They know that the wiser a layman believes himself to be, the easier is he deceived. Clever mediums and able magicians are actually helped through exposés, which lessen the inflated importance of the tyros who have tried to imitate the great.

I have said that mediums and magicians are inspired by the same urge. This is an important fact to remember. It explains a riddle which has long baffled the public, including skeptical persons. We frequently hear talk of mediums who ask no price for their work. They give séances without gain; and claim their practice is a proof that they must be genuine.

Such “proof” is not acceptable.

Study the amateur magician and you will see why. He performs for no profit. He spends money lavishly for new appliances. He wastes business hours practicing his tricks. He delights in bewildering his friends. Most of all, he rants if any one belittles his performances or expresses inside knowledge of his methods.

He has the same primary urge as the medium. One that is irresistible; that carries its devotee in willy-nilly fashion along the path to personal grandeur which is his conception of fame. Neither amateur medium nor amateur magician will ever relinquish an iota of importance that he once has claimed.

In the professional class, mediums and magicians alike devote themselves to another urge, the acquisition of wealth. They have a mutual advantage, for they are experienced in lines which impress great portions of the public. The world still wishes to be deceived; and the proposition is simply to make the world pay.

Between mediums and magicians, however, lies a barrier; a real one, for it is as definite as the bars which cover a prison cell. Those within are the mediums: they are the crooked; and therefore, often the shrewder. Those outside are the magicians, whose efforts are honest.

What the medium seeks to gain by fraud, the magi-

cian tries to obtain legitimately: namely, a public following that will be impressed by some one who possesses skill at mystification. The matter of showing profit through such efforts is purely dependent upon the business ability of the individual.

Many magicians have seen their own creations copied and used for fraud by so-called mediums. Quite naturally, this annoys them. Nevertheless; it is common sense, not jealousy, that causes professional magicians to denounce all producers of psychic phenomena and to class them as fakers.

The real leaders in the magical profession agree unanimously that from ninety to ninety-five percent of all spirit mediums are apparent frauds; and that the remainder may be proven the same. They have learned this fact from both observation and experience.

Mediums, with their claims to the miraculous, have a hold upon the public that magicians can seldom acquire. At the same time, magicians have always been a threat to the mediums. The greater the popular interest in psychic manifestations becomes, the more opportunity there is for the exposers of such phenomena.

Thus magicians, who fight to preserve their own secrets, hold no qualms about exposing those of mediums. This is not paradoxical. It might be likened to

a motor-cycle policeman exceeding the speed limit in order to overtake a speeding motorist.

Magicians feel that they are rendering a public service when they denounce fraudulent mediums. Actually they are so doing. The fact that they acquire profit and publicity through their activities does not alter the circumstance.

Mediums have stolen magicians' methods. Similarly, magicians have invaded the preserves of mediums. During the nineteenth century, the Davenport Brothers were the most famous of practicing mediums. Two celebrated magicians: Maskelyne, in England; Kellar, in America, discovered methods of the Davenports and copied them to advantage.

Other magicians have given "spook shows," attracting patrons to the theaters by promises of spirit cabinet séances and other apparent manifestations. True to form, they have either stated these presentations to be trickery, or have exposed the methods used. Houdini, in his war on fake psychics, was simply carrying to an extreme, demonstrations that many others had attempted before him.

If magicians, generally, were capable, the psychic racket would have been ended long ago. The sad side of the story is that capable magicians are few. Those who are properly qualified to expose spirit mediums

are frequently too busy traveling to concentrate upon damaging the reputations of mediums, particularly because the latter prefer permanent abodes and can easily slide to temporary cover when an attack threatens them.

This leaves the battle to the “local” magicians; and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, a magician, if capable, would no longer remain “local.” Thus the much vaunted campaigns that magicians have instituted against mediums have invariably dissipated, without the accomplishment of permanent results.

There is a ludicrous side to the “battles” between magicians and mediums. Though a magician may be completely ignorant of a certain medium’s actual methods, he does at least know that the medium is dependent upon trickery. The magician, therefore, begins by exposing the methods which he *thinks* the medium is using.

Some people accept the explanations; and the medium’s business suffers. If it holds up too well, the magician continues his “exposures” and makes the medium feel the pinch more tightly. In the great majority of cases, the magician is lucky if he scores one hit out of ten. Nevertheless, if he actually succeeds in putting a medium out of business, he takes great credit unto himself.

Actually, the accomplishment is due to the medium's own qualms. The medium *is* practicing trickery; and the attention brought to that fact makes it harder for him to handle his clients. He finds himself in the unenviable position where the only way to show that the magician is wrong is to explain how he *actually* handles his séance spooks. No one relishes a dilemma; spirit mediums particularly dislike such a pass.

With all this, the main fact still persists. Apprentices are unable to do a craftsman's job. Magicians, unqualified in methods of psychic research, frequently hodge-podge their efforts. Worst of all, they lay their own measures open to ridicule.

A few years ago, a group of magicians began an anti-spiritualistic campaign that centered chiefly in New York. Their war consisted in attacking quasi-psychics who were on the radio, or performing in theaters. They also denounced fortune-tellers, tea-cup readers, and other small-fry.

The only portion of the campaign that concerned deep-dyed fakery was the exposé—in print—of methods used by mediums. Old tricks were brought from camphor; imaginary exposés were manufactured; supported by a few usable mediumistic methods, these manifestoes of anti-fraud were deluged upon the public.

All that this campaign actually accomplished was

to push astrologers and numerologists off the radio programs, from which they were already due to vanish; for they had overburdened the air. It also gave the magicians a chance to clean house. For the very society that began the campaign found that it was harboring among its members a variety of the very fakers which it was out to ruin.

Real mediums scarcely blinked. Instead, they enjoyed a smile when the campaign reached its finish. As an aftermath, the magicians presented a séance of their own; and in it, proved the toothlessness that went along with their fierce bark.

Although they claimed to know all the real methods of mediums, including materializations, these magicians were unable to produce a single manifestation that according to press accounts was better than a hanky-panky trick. Though they had the benefit of a stage—as opposed to a medium's more difficult circle of sitters—they blotched their ghost show.

The climax, in pitch darkness, was to have been the materialization of a "spook." Though they admitted that mediums could produce fake "ghosts" of wraithlike, luminous appearance, the "spirit" that the magicians conjured was not visible even to persons in the front rows of the audience.

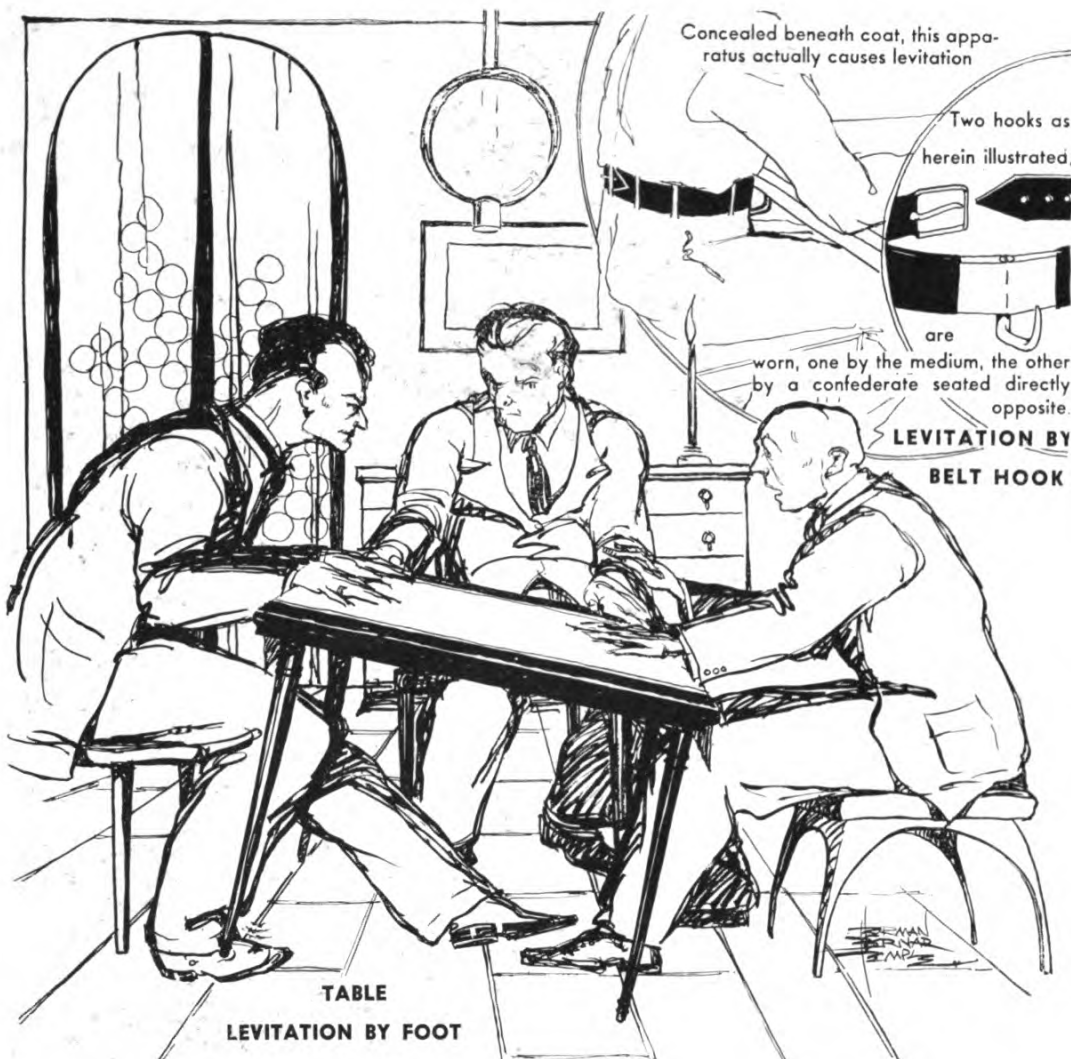
When magicians seek to expose spirit frauds, they



Spirit Hands Made from Melted Wax Are Commonly Used as Evidence of Supernatural Phenomena at Seances.

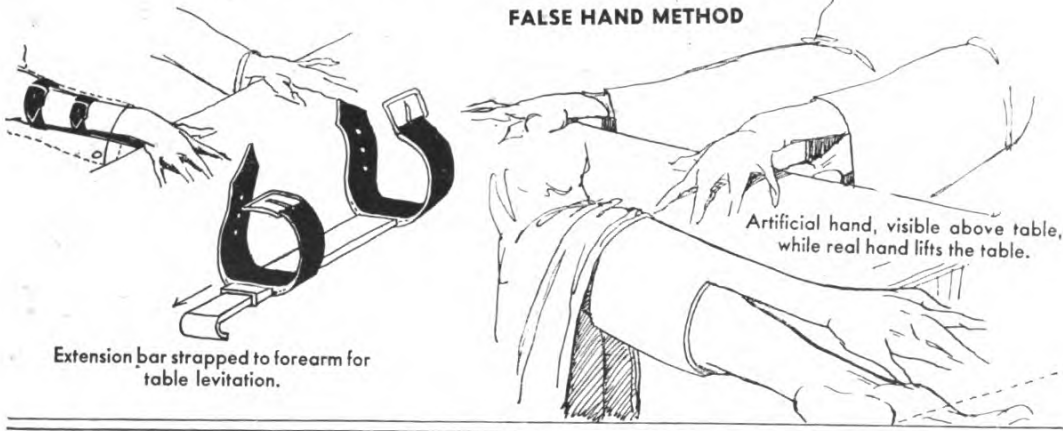
A Container of Water and One of Melted Paraffin Placed in Front of the Cabinet Are Customary. After an Interval in the Darkened Cabinet, the Hands Are Discovered.

The Author Illustrates How Various Types of Hands Are Made by Alternately Dipping the Hand First in the Water and Then in the Wax.



Extremely simple form commonly used by mediums.

FALSE HAND METHOD





Dunninger Illustrates a Mechanical Apparatus which Mediums Use for Producing Spirit Raps. It is Secretly Attached to the Outside of the Door, and by Pulling a String which Is Carried Inside the Room, the Apparatus Is Released, Producing Knocks at Timed Intervals.

The Insert Shows the Clock-work Mechanism. This Is Used by Mediums Who Wish to Produce Raps in Strange Quarters.



1 Subject places question written on slate, face down on stack of slates . . . same size

METHOD OF SECRETLY OBTAINING SPECTATOR'S QUESTION

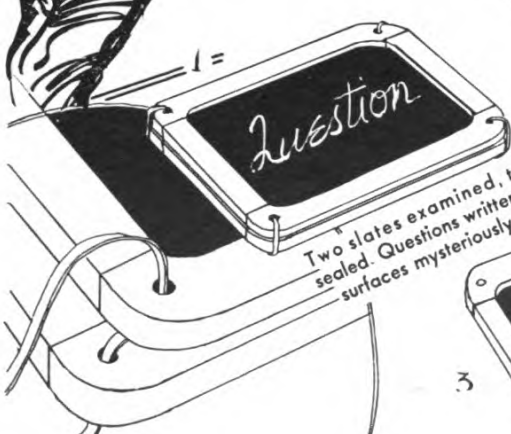


2 Medium covers pile of slates with larger slate.

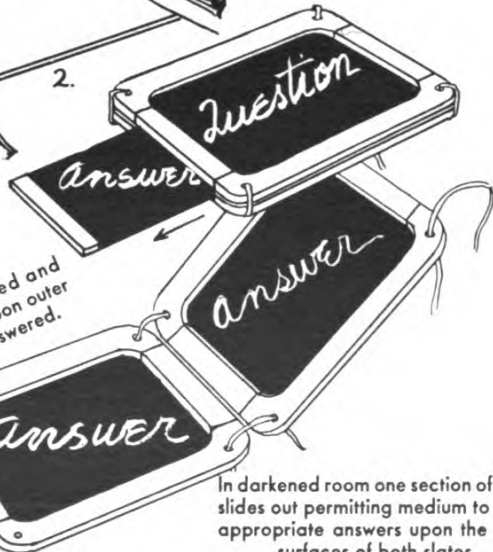


Medium picks up top slate and asks 3 subject to concentrate on it

At same time secretly picks up slate with question.



Two slates examined, taped and sealed. Questions written upon outer surfaces mysteriously answered.



In darkened room one section of slate slides out permitting medium to write appropriate answers upon the inner surfaces of both slates.

should remember that they possess but an iota of the necessary qualification. Knowledge of trickery is insufficient. A real investigator must have the ability to study mediums as personalities. He must have some understanding of the psychological factors which dominate a medium. He must have a real acquaintance with the subject of spiritualism, its origin and its claims.

The cry of "Fake" means nothing if it can not be proven. That is something that most magicians forget. Also, they totally ignore another side of spiritualism; its intellectual appeal. Spiritualism had drawn exponents who pose as preachers, as prophets, sometimes as messiahs. Such claimants can not be eradicated through shouts of trickery raised by amateur magicians.

Read this quotation from an article by the Reverend Arthur Ford. It is a sample of the "inspiration" that believers receive with joy:

And the great spirits who have redeemed humanity from much that is ugly and limiting; these through whom God has shone like the sun through an eastern window, to man's spiritual enlightenment, become to him not merely historic personages, but actual friends and companions along the way. He does not read about them; he holds high and holy converse with them. He becomes great in spirit because he lives in closest communion with those who are no longer in bondage to earthly conventions; he develops a great compassion for those who limit themselves to a physical world alone.

That is the type of stuff that makes doubtful believers "see the light"; that produces longing for contact with those on the "astral plane." Whether or not its author feels kindly toward the fifty cent mediums who hold hymn-shrieking parlor séances, it is obvious that such writings can encourage new customers to such psychic circles.

Can the magicians match such statements?

Seldom. Their usual line of speech is "canned patter" rehearsed beforehand, or *ad lib* remarks that accompany the serious procedures of jamming a silk handkerchief into a hollow celluloid egg, or extracting a collapsible fake head of cabbage from a gentleman's derby hat.

Arthur Ford recognized the limitations of the average conjurer when he wrote the article in which the previous excerpt appeared. He had previously "debated" with Howard Thurston the magician; and he referred to that "triumph" by following with this ridicule:

My recent debate with Thurston the magician has resulted in several interesting things. Among the most amusing have been the flood of challenges from all sorts of second-rate magicians and vaudeville performers who seem to need a bit of publicity. Nearly all of these letters are in the form of letters couched in most ungrammatical terms. Nearly all of them have caught a few stock phrases from the late Houdini who

was only a degree less ignorant than themselves, and these phrases they repeat with the monotonous repetition of a poll parrot discoursing on crackers. I regret that I can not help these fellows. The greatest of them all, having retracted his statements and openly admitted that Spiritualism is a case which can not be upset by a simple trick, I have neither time nor inclination to further the publicity stunts of unknown aspirants to first page honors. . . .

Through this statement, we observe the very point that I have mentioned. The Rev. Arthur Ford exhibited one advantage that he possessed over most magicians; namely, the ability to use good grammar. He admitted, however, that there are such persons as “more intelligent magicians” and he cited one who had written him. I quote from the next paragraph in the article by Arthur Ford:

A letter from Will Goldston, of London, informs me that a number of magicians there have formed a circle under the guidance of Hannen Swaffer and are seriously studying Spiritualism.

This brings us to Will Goldston, the one notable exception to my own statement that the “real leaders in the magical profession are agreed upon the predominance of fraud in spirit manifestations.”

Will Goldston was once a performer of a special type of magic known as the “black art act.” He became a dealer in magical equipment; and wrote many

books on magic. So many, in fact, that he is recognized as the most prolific of all authors on technical magic.

Mr. Goldston concedes the possibility of genuine spirit manifestations. He declares that he has witnessed such phenomena. He, himself, considers it rather unusual that he does so. In fact, Mr. Goldston has stated:

As a magician by profession and a spiritualist by belief, I am regarded by many persons as being just a trifle eccentric.

I am one of the "many persons" to whom Mr. Goldston refers, but when a man *emphasizes* that he may plausibly be regarded as eccentric, I admire his frankness. I admire it so much, indeed, that I need *proof* that he *is* eccentric. Inasmuch as I have never met Mr. Goldston, I chose to examine his writings to learn just how real an authority he was on magic; or how qualified he might be as an investigator of psychic phenomena.

Will Goldston once expressed himself upon the subject of the so-called Houdini message, which Mrs. Houdini was said to have received through the mediumship of Doctor Arthur Ford. Goldston stated:

The news (of the Houdini message) created a great sensation in the United States. A few of the smaller magicians who were unable to offer a reasonable explanation of the affair immediately decided that the whole thing was a fake. A certain section of the American press boosted the views of these

magical nobodies, and in a short while, Mrs. Houdini and the Rev. Ford were openly accused of fraud.

In his statement, Goldston omitted the names of the "Magical nobodies" and he was wise in doing so. Had he mentioned any names, his statement would have disproved itself.

As I will show, Mr. Goldston's belief in his infallibility as an authority is without basis. Unfortunately, he did not bother to collect facts before launching out on a sea of rhetorical opinions.

There were not a "few smaller magicians" connected with the case. There was only one professional performer versed in magic who thoroughly denounced the Houdini message as fraudulent. That one was myself. This was his first inaccuracy. In this connection he takes a little stab in the dark—perhaps his séance experiences trained the man in this kind of research. He slides in the little phrase "magical nobodies." Poor Will! The word of such an authority as he has proved himself to be need never be taken seriously even by a most sensitive person, which I am not.

However, for the sake of the facts which were at his disposal let me quote excerpts from a published biography:

Dunninger, while still in his early twenties played the longest New York consecutive engagement that was ever played by

any magician—sixty-five weeks. . . . His reputation grew with his age until now as a society entertainer he has climbed to the uppermost rung of the ladder . . . not alone has Dunninger entertained the exclusive four hundred many times over but likewise has entertained five Presidents of the United States, Thomas A. Edison, who expressed both a personal and scientific interest in his work, and the Prince of Wales at the time of His Royal Highness' visit at the Rodman Wanamaker estate on Long Island. The *English Press* commented on the incident.

Also:

In the season 1926 and 1927 Dunninger headlined the Keith Albee Orpheum theatres from coast to coast. He received the largest salary ever paid any mystery working individual in the history of vaudeville.

The distinction of having headlined the two-a-day circuits has only been claimed by four master entertainers in the entire history of American vaudeville, namely, Houdini, Horace Goldin, Mercedes and myself.

There was plenty more where that came from, available in more than one form, such as the American Press. However, Mr. Goldston's rather breezy way of dismissing as of small scope such a "section of the American Press" as included every New York City newspaper, with nation-wide despatches by the United Press and the International News Service indicates his ignorance of that subject. The clippings accumulated

on the Houdini case easily filled about thirty-five pages of an extremely large-sized scrap-book.

My curiosity whetted, I determined to find out just how much Will Goldston knew about American magicians. I delved through one of his volumes entitled "Great Magicians' Tricks." Therein, he eulogized a youthful visitor to London, who—Goldston says—"reminds me of a huge over-grown schoolboy." Of this performer, who to my knowledge had never appeared in vaudeville, on road show tour, or Chautauqua circuit, Goldston declares:

He is reckoned as the fourth best magician that America has ever produced. The three who take pride of place are Harry Kellar, Houdini and Howard Thurston.

In so attesting, Goldston deliberately ignores more than one dozen prominent magicians of America, some of international repute, who had built established careers over a period of many years; and who include such famous performers as T. Nelson Downs and Nate Leipsig, two of the most competent sleight-of-hand performers in the world. In the same category I might mention such outstanding magical personalities as S. S. Henry, Eugene Laurant, Karl Germaine, Harry Blackstone, William Robinson (Ching Ling Soo), Nicola, Dante, Charles Carter and Lafayette.

An astounding utterance, that one, even from Will Goldston. So extravagant, indeed, that he contradicts it himself, in the *very same book*. Forgetting his friend the “fourth best,” he turns to another magician, Horace Goldin, whom he eulogizes:

Horace Goldin is the greatest personality in magic today. He towers like a colossus above his confreres. . . . I quite seriously suggest that he is as great an artist as any one. . . . As an illusionist, he is certainly better than . . . Houdini. . . . As a showman, he ranks . . . second only to Houdini.

Horace Goldin is a great magician; he is also an American. Will Goldston ranks him as the best in the business. What has happened to Goldston’s “fourth best” American magician who rated next to Kellar, Houdini and Thurston?

Not only in the realm of comment and criticism is Will Goldston less than sure of himself. Many of his books contain magical impossibilities. Stage tricks that to my mind never could work in the manner explained. I cite one example: a “floating lady” or “levitation” illusion described in his book “Tricks and Illusions.”

Therein, a girl is supposed to rest in a cradle that is situated in front of a sheet of upright glass that comes vertically through the stage. The cradle is connected to the top of the glass sheet by a rod. That sheet of

glass is expected to support the strain of the girl's weight, which bears downward. Such details as the fitting of the rod to the top edge of the glass and how the side edges of the glass will remain invisible to the audience, are not mentioned. The leverage of the girl's weight renders the levitation impossible; yet Goldston says:

This startling experiment has created a sensation in various parts of the world. The illustrations correctly explain the method of this seemingly impossible wonder.

During the year 1920, Will Goldston, in his *Magazine of Magic*, advertised a new book published by Will Goldston, Limited, entitled "Magical Rope Ties and Escapes," by Houdini. In the advertisement, he stated, in capital letters:

NEVER HAS SUCH A VALUABLE COLLECTION
OF ESCAPE SECRETS BEEN OFFERED TO MAGI-
CIANS.

A large part of the Houdini book consisted of "secrets" which had appeared in Burling Hull's "Thirty-three Rope Ties and Chain Releases," published five years before. Practically every magician had read it; possibly not Will Goldston. His collection of magical books, advertised for sale at about the

same time, was extensive; but did not list a copy of Hull's book.

Will Goldston's first *magnum opus*—he had several—was called "Exclusive Magical Secrets." The book was fitted with lock and key that the uninitiated might not pry into the sacred archives of the owner. Every applicant was required to sign a pledge that he would not divulge the contents of the volume. "Exclusive Magical Secrets" was followed by two other locked books, selling as high as ten and twenty dollars each.

A few years after Houdini's death, a book was published in London entitled "The Secrets of Houdini" by J. C. Cannell. Its final chapters are filled with *verbatim* explanations of stage illusions, taken from Goldston's "Exclusive Magical Secrets" and the other two "protected" volumes.

Did Will Goldston protest this? Apparently not. One of the most recent books which Goldston has written contains a friendly foreword from J. C. Cannell, whom Mr. Goldston regards most highly. I presume that the pledges of secrecy were signed only by *purchasers* of "Exclusive Magical Secrets."

Will Goldston would seem by no means possessed of a perfect memory. In his *Magazine of Magic* for January, 1915, he quotes statements made by Horace Goldin. In the February issue, he apologizes:

Horace Goldin was the subject of our December's* "Talks With Celebrities." We wrote the article without reference to our notes of a recent interview with him, and our memory proved defective in an important particular. The article attributed to Mr. Goldin certain observations as to the War which were in fact ours and not his. He has called our attention to this, and we take the earliest opportunity of explaining the matter to our readers and of offering him our sincerest regret. . . .

I have quoted these excerpts from Will Goldston's writings because to me they indicate that he is neither a reliable authority on magic, nor a qualified investigator of spiritualism. I hold the latter opinion because of his misquotations in the interview with Horace Goldin. A spiritualistic investigator must be able to recall exactly *who* made every statement on an important occasion; otherwise his reports of what occurred in a séance room are valueless.

I consider a man versed in magic to be unwise if he makes public statements championing spiritualism. I hold that opinion because such a man must know that the majority of mediums are frauds, even though he may concede that a few are genuine. Knowing that, he must also know that all will benefit through his statements.

The harm that his endorsement can cause will cer-

* Another Goldston inaccuracy. The interview was published in the January issue.

tainly outweigh any benefit that his testimony will produce. Therefore, a magician with an "open mind" will do best if he avoids too much discussion. That, I again affirm, is my opinion.

Will Goldston has told vividly of a séance in which he met the earth-bound "spirit" of Houdini. He proclaims:

Is Houdini earth-bound? I think he is. . . .

Houdini is lost in his new sphere. He was almost a difficult man to convince, and I think it more than likely that he does not realise he is dead, dead, I mean, in an earthly sense. He has lost his perspective, and, as a spiritual being, cannot realise his true position in regard to the friends he has left on earth.

He thinks he is still one of us. . . .

How many attempts he has made to communicate with me since his tragic death he alone knows. This particular séance had been held because an entity who called himself Houdini had said, "Send for Will." So I went along. . . .

The "ghost" at this séance was somewhat coherent. Goldston states:

His wrists were held together as though fastened by unseen handcuffs. He was struggling violently, evidently endeavoring to free himself. "I'm Houdini," he whispered in a hoarse, almost unrecognisable voice. "Don't you know me?" He appeared to want to tell us something, but lacked the power. At last he pulled his wrists apart as though he had escaped from the manacles. A few seconds later he was gone.

Before I can credit that story, I would like to see a girl float in air, supported by an invisible sheet of glass. I would like to know whether Houdini's "ghost" was really handcuffed, or whether it was restrained by one of the rope ties described in two different books.

Perhaps the ghost came to question just *who* was the fourth best magician in America. Or it may have wished to correct some quotations attributed to Houdini while in life. Will Goldston published quite a few of his interviews with Houdini. Ones that had occurred while Houdini was on this mortal sphere. But they were not printed until after he had gone to the astral plane.

I shall have to wait until Mr. Goldston has held more interviews with Houdini's wraith. While I wait, I shall remain a doubter. Even to the fact that the ghost appeared at all.

Should my doubts fade, I can restore them by reading more of Will Goldston's books.

CHAPTER III

THE MILLIONAIRE MEDIUM

JOHN SLATER WAS KNOWN AS THE “MILLIONAIRE MEDIUM.” The term was an apt one. He acquired great wealth through his claim of mediumship; and his career extended over a fifty year period. At the time of his death, only a few years ago, Slater was more than seventy years of age.

Slater was a “missionary” of the National Spiritualistic Association. He resided in California; but his tours carried him from coast to coast. Mediums in every city relied upon John Slater to “show the light” to

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doubters; and statistics—if such were obtainable—would show that thousands of deluded converts to spiritualism were brought into the ranks through Slater's efforts.

Message reading was Slater's specialty; both in public lectures and in private demonstrations. He relied entirely upon that one type of mediumship; for he found it profitable. He was seen wherever spiritualists congregated; at their conventions, at colonies such as Lily Dale. He was always welcome.

For John Slater was an affable personality; and one of the few among practicing mediums who might have been described as "distinguished." One newspaper writer termed him "a small, bird-like, white-haired man"; and the phrase fitted.

Message readers composed an old school of mediumship that flourished in the nineties. They travelled everywhere, hob-nobbed with local mediums and thus gained valuable information regarding the "faithful" in the towns that they visited.

Some moved independently, forming their own circles. These men constituted a clique, who used their private "blue book" to pass data among themselves. When they crashed a barren town, they sent spies ahead to accumulate the facts they needed. They swelled their blue book through such methods.

Various factors damaged the game of message reading; and made it obsolete. One was mistrust on the part of local mediums. If they teemed with too many "readers," they lost their hold on their own "clients." Another cause was dispute among the readers themselves. They battled over "territory" like sales agents of a business concern.

Then the act was popularized in vaudeville; by such demonstrators as Anna Eva Fay. So prevalent was message reading that all exposers of fraudulent mediumship picked it as the best game to batter. Scores of message reading methods were laid bare to the public.

Message reading faded. It was due for a revival. John Slater adopted it; and built his gift into a monopoly. He was friendly with the local mediums. They were ready to welcome a "reader" who would strengthen their own petty status. John Slater was received everywhere.

Every "reader," relies upon two faculties. One, methods of learning the contents of sealed envelopes; the other an aptitude for giving "answers" to the questions themselves. Learning the contents of the envelopes is, of course, the primary objective.

Slater knew the methods of his predecessors. He knew that they had been exposed in print. Therefore,

he boldly proved that he was not employing any of three well-known systems, all suited to platform work.

One such method was known as the "one ahead," still used by glib local mediums. The message reader collects a batch of questions sealed in envelopes. He holds an envelope to his head; pretends to read its question and gives an answer. A member of the audience admits having written the question; and declares the answer to be correct.

That person is a "plant," employed by the medium. The envelope that he sealed is marked; and it is *not* the one which the medium holds to his head. The medium has picked out another envelope; when he opens it to read the plant's question verbatim, he glibly recites the question that his confederate wrote.

At the same time, he reads the *bona fide* question and places it on the table. He picks up another envelope; calls out the question that he has just read. Naturally, it is recognized. He answers it, opens the envelope and verifies the question by pretending to read it aloud. Instead, he reads the one that he has placed on the table.

He is ready to proceed with another question; and does so, envelope after envelope until he has exhausted the supply. He leaves his confederate's envelope—the marked one—for the finish.

John Slater proved that he did not use this method. As proof, he returned question and envelope to the writer directly after he gave a reading.

The second method often employed was the "alcohol system." Through this trick, a question could be read without opening the envelope. The medium carried a sponge soaked in alcohol. He drew it across the face of the envelope. This made the envelope transparent; the message could be read and answered; then returned to its writer intact.

John Slater did not use the alcohol method. He foreswore all the clever devices for concealing the useful sponge, such as keeping it in a batch of dummy envelopes. He emphasized that he used no alcohol, by coming to the footlights, pulling up his sleeves and showing his hands empty before he read a question.

In fact, he told his audience all about this method, to prove he was no faker. All the while, he was covering another proof that he might have mentioned; but was wise enough to avoid. He was not using an alcohol sponge because he tore open the majority of his envelopes before returning them. If he had been using the "alcohol system," such a procedure would have been unnecessary.

We are touching my first clue. *Slater tore open envelopes before returning them and their contents.*

The third old method was the “switch.” In it, sealed envelopes are gathered, substituted for another batch, and carried off stage. There they are opened, the messages learned. The medium either burns the dummy envelopes or pretends that they are the originals.

John Slater did not employ the “switch.” He proved that definitely by returning the original envelopes and their questions. But he never talked about imitators who carried originals off stage. Why not? Because Slater’s envelopes went behind the scene, prior to his demonstration.

This gives us the second clue. *Slater’s collected envelopes were carried off stage.*

Through the points which I have mentioned in italics; and through direct observation of John Slater’s demonstration, I learned the procedure that he could have easily used. I intended to expose it in detail while he was still a practicing medium but certain circumstances caused me to postpone it.

One was that although John Slater carried no alcohol up his sleeve, I felt it quite certain that he had a few reserve methods parked there. I wanted to witness more of his demonstrations before I made my analysis.

He knew that I was investigating him. He might

have had another method ready; and I wanted to view him incognito in case he might be testing it. This was difficult because Slater traveled all about the country and I was forced to await my opportunity. While I was holding matters in abeyance the second circumstance intervened.

John Slater died. Did he carry his method to the astral plane? I shall herewith describe how his demonstration could have been performed.

When persons came to the hall where John Slater "lectured," their first procedure was to pay a fee, frequently as high as two dollars. They were then provided with paper and envelopes.

They wrote questions and sealed them in the envelopes. They were required to write their identifying initials or a number upon a corner of the envelope so they could identify it later. Their own paper and envelopes could be used if they desired.

The sealed envelopes were placed in baskets that remained in the lobby. At intervals, batches of envelopes were carried back stage. Slater's séance was always ready to begin; but there were usually attendant delays due to late comers. Slater did not want to be disturbed by persons walking in and out of the hall after his "lecture" had begun. He spent too much time in prelim-

inary “concentration” to have his chances of “communication” with the spirits destroyed.

This suggested a solution. My explanation follows:

The envelopes that went back stage were opened; and no time was lost in this action. They were slit along the end away from any corner that bore initials. The messages were removed, their contents noted and inscribed in brief near the slit end of the envelope. Then the messages were replaced. When the envelopes were carried on the stage and placed on the medium’s table they showed no signs of tampering. A well slit envelope cannot be detected even when casually handled. But the reader allowed no handling of the envelopes. His notes would have been observed.

When Slater picked up an envelope he held it to his head with the writing side toward his eyes. Having noted the identifying initials or numbers he called upon that person to announce himself. When the questioner arose in the audience, Slater repeated the message and gave an answer.

Close by the footlights he tore open the end of the envelope and in that action ripped away the entire half inch upon which the tiny notations had been made.

Sometimes Slater kindly displayed the envelope to

a person close at hand so that they could see the number while the envelope remained “unopened”. This was not marvelous. An envelope has two sides. The initials were on one; Slater’s notations on the other.

Slater could also have used a few tricks that were suited to the type of audience that he faced. It must be remembered that Slater drew many more believers than skeptics. The great majority—some skeptics included—used the envelopes that he supplied. Some envelopes could easily have been treated with paraffin on the back. An envelope sealed against paraffin can be opened readily and sealed again.

Slater was always able to return a small percentage of the envelopes still sealed. I have described the type of reserve method that was at his disposal.

There is another method of returning an envelope intact. That is to know the question beforehand; and this was particularly easy in Slater’s performances. Believers could be told by their own mediums to place certain combinations of numbers and letters as identifying marks upon their envelopes.

The reason given would be that the sincere believers could gain precedence over the curiosity seekers when Slater looked among the envelopes and picked one from the batch. The mediums would naturally ap-

prove this idea because they invariably had pet disciples present who would gain greater comprehension of the spirit world if shown “more light” through Slater’s demonstrations.

Thus Slater could know beforehand just who had written certain questions through information from the local mediums regarding the special numbers. Those envelopes would be sure-fire; they would not need to be opened at all.

Slater made a great show when he came to certain envelopes. It was lucky that he had no alcohol sponge up his sleeve for he would have shaken it loose with the Saint Vitus action that he performed in showing his hands empty and exhibiting the sealed envelope to those close by the footlights. Believers always came early and got the front seats.

We have covered methods of learning the contents of sealed envelopes. The other side of the case relates to the answering of questions. Slater was one who “knew the answers”; in many cases literally.

For years and years hundreds of self-styled psychics have shown their aptitude toward guessing answers. The longer their experience the better they become. Time and again I have met such persons in challenge and have proven that I who claim no supernatural power can answer questions that they cannot.

According to the newspapers John Slater amazed the spiritualists by one marvelous prediction. He prophesied that Hoover would be elected President in 1928. At about the same time I predicted the election of Mayor Walker and gave the figures of his coming majority. My prediction was correct. Therefore the statement that I have just made regarding my ability to surpass the guesses was proven specifically in the case of Slater.

Slater was simply a man of average ability but with long experience in "reading." His exaggerated claims gained their only substantiation through the very phase that I have mentioned. His audiences were flooded with believers whose inside affairs were known to their own mediums; the same persons with whom Slater co-operated.

Many mediums relied upon Slater to convince the skeptics whom they themselves feared. Often they acquired information regarding skeptics but were afraid to use it for fear those persons would demand new revelations which they could not make.

Slater's performance was a one-shot affair. He left the skeptics stunned; departed and was no longer available for other tests.

My own criticism of Slater's work lay not only in the fact that he was useful to fraudulent mediums; I

also took exception to certain statements that he made upon the platform. Had he been able *genuinely* to divulge the contents of sealed envelopes I still would have held objection.

Slater did not base his work upon a supportable hypothesis.

He upheld the preposterous. He declared, without qualification, that he was aided by the presence of spirits. He stated that those invisible beings read the questions and inspired him with the answers. I was prepared to dispute such claims.

When Slater came to New York in June, 1929, I was prepared to challenge him. He appeared at the annual convention of the New York General Assembly of Spiritualists. He faced a huge audience at the Hotel Pennsylvania.

I arrived accompanied by Dr. Joseph H. Kraus, editor of *Science and Invention*, and other friends, bringing two sealed envelopes—each containing a message. I also had a check for \$21,000 on the Central Hanover Bank and Trust Company, made out to John Slater, signed by the treasurer of the Experimenter Publishing Company.

Each of the sealed envelopes contained a written word. We had taken the precaution to place each message between thin sheets of metal, also contained in

the envelope. The envelopes were so sealed that any tampering could be detected afterward.

I offered Slater the check for \$21,000 if he could learn the contents of either envelope. The envelopes were to be given to him on the platform and returned to us intact without leaving our sight. Slater marched up and down the platform in agitation and emphatically refused to undertake the test.

My offer aroused huge antagonism throughout the audience. Knowing that many of those present were spirit mediums who claimed powers that resembled Slater's pretensions, I challenged anyone present to take up the test which Slater had refused. Not one accepted. Instead it awoke a chorus of: "Thow him out!"

The word in one envelope was the name Palladino. Since Palladino was known as the most famous of all mediums who had departed to the spirit plane it seems surprising that *not one* of the assemblage of supposedly genuine mediums could even guess the name.

I and my companions were forcibly ejected, although we created no disturbance. All the commotion began with the spiritualists and ended with them. After I left some of my representatives unknown to those present remained. Probably Slater and his fellow mediums were too disturbed to receive psychic impressions of their presence. It was then that Slater issued

a statement to the effect that I had done something quite unorthodox; that I would not have dared to do it in any church of any other creed. To this I take logical exceptions.

Slater's performance was not being given in a church. It was advertised as a convention. If Slater and others chose to regard it as a church service they were the ones who were behaving in an unorthodox fashion, for an admittance fee was charged for the affair.

My test was not the first that Slater had avoided. It represented the conclusive case in which Slater directly refused to apply his professed powers to the answering of a question that could not be handled by trickery.

Slater used apt phrases. When he picked up an envelope he said that he would "psychomotrize" it; that the spirit of a departed person would whisper the answer into his ear. Claiming to be *en rapport* with the spirit world he failed to receive the slightest inkling from the spirit of Palladino. Yet Palladino's "spirit" is one that bobs up at séance after séance so readily that it seems unnecessary to invoke it.

John Slater was in the business for profit. His life was devoted to mediumship and money. He found no difficulty reading messages when the price was two dollars. But he could not take a chance for twenty-one thousand. It was inconsistent; but that is hardly

surprising. Inconsistency is the back bone of spiritualism.

Methods and tip-offs are a boon to every "reader." John Slater could give good readings often because he had plenty of information. He monopolized the field for himself. The secret of any reader's success is his ability to exaggerate and to create readings that seem sensible to the average person who is anxious to be convinced.

Such was John Slater, a veritable Billy Sunday of spiritualism, whose local contacts welcomed him because he converted their skeptical cohorts and gave new life to vacant séance rooms wherever he had been.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUDINI MESSAGE

WHEN HOUDINI DIED, IN 1926, HIS demise was hailed with great rejoicing throughout all spiritdom. Earthly disciples of the astral sphere had cause to rejoice. They were freed from the menace of an antagonist who had been ceaseless and untiring in his efforts to expose the frauds of mediumship.

So great was the relief that few mediums attempted to capitalize upon Houdini's death. They were afraid to seek the limelight where Houdini's name was concerned. They knew that documentary evidence might

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prove a boomerang. It was poor policy for any prominent medium to run the risk of stirring up facts that might bring forth details of his own sweet past.

Houdini's files remained a threat. They contained a blacklist of fakers. Many foes of fraudulent mediumship claimed access to those records. Mediums dreaded new thrusts from somewhere; and they found themselves in their favorite element—the dark. Somehow, the voices of their own spirit guides were absent.

Sometimes, publicity seekers produce beneficial results. This was so in the matter of Houdini's records. There were many magicians who had known Houdini, shaken hands with him, or purchased a second-hand copy of a book that he had autographed for some one else. These fleshly survivors of Houdini were as numerous as the spirit guides of mediums; and many of them possessed professional names quite as grotesque as those of the spirit controls.

The public was promised forthcoming duels between these factions; and the crux of it all lay in the fact that many individuals in the legion of magicians claimed to be the chosen party who had been named as recipient of Houdini's files.

This pleased me immensely; for amid the hubbub, I had quietly acquired the greater portion of Houdini's most important records for my own collection. In order

to keep the mediums guessing—a good practice, for they usually guess badly—I deliberately rejected a quantity of duplicate records and useless notes. The magical claimants kept up their scramble; actually obtained some of the extra documents and increased their boasts.

The real truth about the bestowal of Houdini's records arrived as a bombshell in 1928, when I produced a book of Houdini's Spirit Exposés, in connection with some of my own Psychical Explanations. That publication ended all attempts at controversy.

Mediums, meanwhile, had been itchy about the Houdini matter. They made two false starts; both of which brought them trouble.

Their first insinuation was that Houdini's sudden death had been the result of a concentrated attack by spirits themselves; that he, as the foe of spiritualism, had been singled out for punishment because he had denounced the faith.

This was a bad move; one that carried all the inconsistencies of spiritualistic claims. Certainly, if Houdini had been slain by spirits, only the malignant type of astral being would have joined in the assassination. Yet mediums claimed to have dealings only with good spirits. Whenever they bungled séances, they blamed it upon the evil forces. Why should malignant spirits,

who delight in ruining the reputations of mediums, have taken away the one man who was doing the same work by human efforts?

The only answer was that good spirits, not bad, had done Houdini to death. That not only damaged the reputation of the good spirits; but it brought the argument closer home. Since the mediums were earthly agents of good spirits; and did the bidding of those controls, the summary implied that the mediums themselves might have been instrumental in Houdini's death.

Realizing this, mediums generally became vague about the story of spirits who meted punishment. They switched to their second move: the claim that Houdini's death had been foretold. They actually named mediums who had "prophesied" that Houdini would die within a given period after the date of prediction.

This attempt went into the discard when alert skeptics pointed out that those specific mediums had made the same predictions, regularly and methodically, over periods of months and years. Predictions that are renewed each time they run out are certain to be correct some day, when they concern the death of a person.

So the spirit mediums tried to forget Houdini. Perhaps they would have done so, if it had not been for the publicity that his name still gained. Magicians,

unable to crash into print through their own ability, were continually using Houdini's name as a spear-head to pierce the resistant hides of newspaper editors. The horizon teemed with Houdini's "assistants"; his "pupils"; his "successors." They buzzed like gnats about the heads of mediums. Though stingless, they proved annoying. Some medium had to get the flit.

The first to splurge on a big scale was Nino Pecoraro, whose checkered history occupies another chapter in this volume. Nino gained undue publicity late in April, 1928. The poison needed an antidote. I supplied it a few weeks later.

Early in May, 1928, I presented a séance of my own, in which I produced Houdini's "ghost" along with other manifestations of an astounding nature. Not only did I disprove the claims of Nino Pecoraro; I established a high-water mark that I knew no pretended medium could reach. I stated definitely that my results were gained through sheer trickery; that I possessed no mediumistic power. In so doing, I issued a direct challenge to all fraudulent spook-producers. It was "hands-off" so far as future Houdini séances were concerned. I knew, without question, that mediums would avoid hurting their doubtful reputations by attempting to produce, in their puny fashion, new mani-

festations that would prove ridiculous when compared to mine.

I quote from an Associated Press despatch of May fourth:

Pecoraro's séance was given . . . several days ago and the best he could do after five hours was to produce a voice purporting to be Houdini's which seemed to have nothing of importance to say.

Dunninger . . . before the same audience of thirty newspaper men and women and under identical conditions, produced a luminous figure resembling Houdini, a message in Houdini's handwriting, snatches of oral conversation and a parafin cast of an ectoplasmic hand which is to be examined for Houdini's finger-prints.

Mrs. Houdini declared the handwriting was "Harry's to the life" and the luminous portrait the best she has seen, although she has attended many séances in the hope of receiving the code message her husband had given her and which he said he would try to transmit after death.

Dunninger was bound hands and feet, the knots sealed with wax and after being searched was placed behind a curtain. Within twenty minutes, writing appeared on cards and slates that had been left in view of the audience, a tambourine went sailing through the air and fingerprints appeared on modeling wax.

There are factors in this account that demand emphasis. The séance, as stated, was before a group of persons who had *previously attended* an almost blank séance by a pretended medium, *under the identical*

conditions. It is a known fact that many skeptical sitters become sharper and more perceptive when they attend their second séance. The first law of deception is to show the spectator a marvel which he does not expect to witness.

My audience was whetted to the limit. Persons present had aided in balking Nino Pecoraro. I was at a disadvantage far greater than the medium; yet I accomplished all that he did not—and a great deal that he could not have tried to do.

Quoting from the same despatch, I present an interesting side-light of the seance:

Charles E. Davenport, Pecoraro's manager, after viewing the performance with astonishment, said Dunninger had mediumistic powers, even if he did not know it.

My reply was:

"That accusation is not true. I give you my word everything you have seen here is a put up job, accomplished without a particle of aid from any superhuman source."

The United Press despatch was similar to the A. P. story that I have quoted. However, it emphasized one feature that I quote verbatim, because of its later importance. The U. P. said:

Before he died, Houdini made a pact with his wife and friends that the first one to die should do everything in his

power to send messages from the other world. An elaborate system of signals was devised as a check on spiritualism. Since Houdini's death, his wife has been attending an endless round of séances watching for the sign. So far it has failed to appear.

Last night she became excited when her husband's handwriting appeared and said it was "Harry's to the life."

There is one primary rule in the fakery of spirit mediumship. That is to concentrate upon persons who have suffered a bereavement. Through the strict application of that ghoulish practice, fakers have managed to gain their strongest converts. Find me an ardent believer who has succumbed to the guile of a fraudulent medium; and in a large percentage of the cases we will learn that the dupe was trapped soon after he or she had suffered the loss of a close friend or relative; particularly one whose death was sudden or unfortunate.

Spirit mediums recognize that this practice has brought them their strongest followers. It was through such application on the part of so-called psychics that Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle joined the fold.

All the while that spirit mediums had been cautious, following Houdini's death, they had also been trying their old game. They knew that Beatrice Houdini had suffered through her husband's death. They saw also that she was in a strained, emotional condition.

There, in that United Press account, was an indica-

tion far more accurate than any that fraudulent mediums have ever given. It told of Beatrice Houdini's growing interest in séances.

I failed to heed the warning. I knew that Mrs. Houdini had been attending the "endless round of séances"; also that she was in an excitable condition. But it must be remembered that she and I had already conferred regarding the publication of Houdini's records. Mrs. Houdini had seen the game of quackery from the inside. She seemed immune to the crooked tactics of the mediums.

Constant pressure, however, invariably lessens resistance. It seems an obvious fact that in May, 1928, Beatrice Houdini was more ready to believe in psychic manifestations than she had previously been.

There was opportunity to score a spiritualistic triumph by producing a message from Houdini. There was a channel through which it could be accomplished; namely, by revealing the coded message that Mrs. Houdini knew. This meant that Mrs. Houdini, herself, must be chosen as the recipient of the message.

There was a man who saw the possibilities.

I refer to the Reverend Arthur Ford.

According to a newspaper account of his career,

Arthur Ford was a native of Florida, who attended Transylvania College, in Lexington, Kentucky, where he received his master's degree. He was ordained a minister, becoming pastor of the Christian Church, of the Disciples of Christ, at Barbourville, Kentucky.

He attributed his interest in spiritualism to his college days, when a friend of his styled "Fletcher," promised some day to communicate with him from the spirit world. Fletcher died; Ford received messages; and the spirit of Fletcher became his control.

Chautauqua circuits were at their height. Arthur Ford entered that field and delivered lectures on psychic phenomena. He met magicians; for they were numerous in Chautauqua; and it is likely that so keen a psychologist as Mr. Ford observed their work.

Magicians, particularly in Chautauqua, had a fondness for anti-spiritualistic tricks; for those items in their repertoire were best received by audiences. One very competent performer in that field made a specialty of producing "spirit paintings," which he never claimed as genuine; but which certainly were better and more convincing than the usual brand developed by fake mediums.

Some time later, Arthur Ford arrived in New York. Fletcher was becoming more prolific with his messages; in New York, Ford became the head of the

First Spirit Church in America, and demonstrated his occult powers in public performances and private circles.

I find no record of Arthur Ford seeking combat with Houdini; although Ford, familiar with the ways of magicians and presumably a sincere spiritualist, would have been a logical man to dispute Houdini's argument that all mediums were frauds. Instead, he took exception to an article that quoted Howard Thurston, the famous magician, as saying that he—Thurston—could duplicate anything which a medium was able to "materialize"; and that all mediums, and spiritualism in general, were only the means of working upon the susceptibilities of the public.

Professing indignation, Ford challenged Thurston to meet him at a public debate. Thurston accepted; and wired me to come to the meeting. I was in the lecture hall when the discussion took place.

Two factors were apparent. First, that Ford was a man who had spent his life in lecturing on psychic subjects; second, that Thurston was not a challenger of Spiritualism in a sense that resembled Houdini's.

It was my natural assumption that so well informed a man as Ford would know Thurston's actual views toward Spiritualism. Thurston had been misquoted in the article. His actual claim was that he could dupli-

cate the performance of any *bogus* spiritualist. He was in sympathy with the *aims* of spiritualism and had not denied the possibility of an existence after death. He was merely concerned lest frauds be perpetrated.

Instead of actually debating, Thurston clarified his statements. Ford made an address, in which he disregarded important work done by Houdini and expressed belief in the work of Margery, the Boston medium. He referred to me several times, depreciating articles that I had written for a scientific magazine, disputing the claims of mediums.

Ford's desire for debate on Spiritualism showed cleverness. It gave the subject a supposed status that it did not deserve. The only way to approach Spiritualism is to consider it a fraud; for statistics prove that the overwhelming majority of supposed phenomena have been faked.

To take Spiritualism as an open question gives it a fifty percent claim. In short, the best way to aid a non-debatable cause is to debate it. Moreover, in any debate, it is not the merit of the particular side that impresses the listener; it is the argumentative skill of the debater. Arthur Ford had found a way to combat magicians. Forensics were his oyster; there were no magicians skilled in debate.

One would have expected the Reverend Arthur Ford

to stay within his chosen field. Brilliant, established, disdainful of magicians who cherished wisps of Houdini's mantle, he held an excellent advantage. He could have maintained it. Instead, he took a step which proved damaging to his position. He decided to reveal the Houdini code.

The stage was set for a drama that was to stir the world of Spiritualism. A drama packed with startling denouements, with unexpected actors cast in singular roles.

CHAPTER V

THE MESSAGE THAT MISSED

AS PREFACE TO THE EVENTS WHICH concerned the so-called Houdini message, I shall ask the reader to carefully consider the statements as presented. It will be noted that they consist chiefly of facts that were placed on public record.

The Reverend Arthur Ford played a large part in those events. He produced a message; he attributed the exploit to the wraith of Fletcher. In this he claimed sincerity; and his claim is justifiable. There is a good reason to allow that Ford *believed* that he heard words through Fletcher.

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I have already credited Arthur Ford with high intelligence. His own keenness should have informed him that the message, as he delivered it, was not the sort that would have come from Houdini. Many persons have heard "voices" and in that experience have not weighed their own utterances when they have repeated the statements.

Word by word, so Ford claimed, the Houdini code was gained by Fletcher from Houdini's spirit. An oddity in itself, for if Fletcher had communicated with Houdini on the spirit plane, he would have received the words all at once; or not at all.

I never knew Fletcher; but I had known Houdini. I speak from personal recollection of Houdini's ways.

The big smash struck on Tuesday, January 8, 1929. It clanked from the pink front page of the New York *Evening Graphic*, that lamented tabloid that once thrilled the public with manufactured news and pieced-together photographs.

I quote the *Graphic*:

From the depths of the great unknown, the voice of Harry Houdini came back to-day to allay the feverish suffering of his widow, Beatrice, as she tossed restlessly on a sick bed in her home at 67 Payson Avenue.

Although near death herself, Mrs. Houdini has not the slightest doubt that the voice from the grave was that of her beloved husband, for it spoke in a code known only to the great magician and his faithful helpmeet on earth.

Slowly, the words, nine in all, fell from the lips of the medium, who, with a party of spectators, were grouped about the sick bed.

“Rosabelle—answer—tell—pray, answer—look—tell—answer, answer—tell——”

And, according to the code devised by Houdini some four years ago, the mystic utterance translated signifies the single word:

“BELIEVE.”

Two years before his death, Houdini had fashioned the code, known only to himself and Mrs. Houdini. They used it on the stage in mind-reading demonstrations and the only copy of it in existence is locked in the vaults of the Manufacturer's Trust Company.

“If it is possible for the spirit to return to this mundane sphere, I shall come back to you,” the magician told his wife at the time. “You will know it is I, not the imaginings of fake mediums, because I shall converse in this code.”

Since Houdini's death the widow had been literally swamped with letters from persons in all parts of the world, seeking to collect the \$10,000 reward she offered for proof of spiritualism.

The *Graphic* continued with the statement that Mrs. Houdini had learned that the Reverend Arthur Ford had received a ten word message, with instructions to deliver it to her. Consequently, the séance was arranged; and the story resumed:

Doctor Ford went into his trance shortly after noon. He communicated with a spirit he referred to as Fletcher, and to those within hearing of his voice it seemed that Fletcher was the only one from whom he could glean Houdini's message.

"Hello, Fletcher," Doctor Ford began.

Then he turned to the auditors and said:

"The man is coming through—the same man as the other night."

The medium quoted what Fletcher told him Houdini was saying: "I want to speak to my sweetheart and repeat my message."

Then came the mystic words which meant nothing to those grouped about, but which seemed to startle and obsess the sick woman on the bed. She cried out for their meaning. . . .

"The message is a single word from Houdini," said the medium. "The word is 'believe'."

The account concluded with a final statement from Doctor Ford. One which purported to be the voice of Fletcher, speaking for Houdini. Words which Ford, himself, could guess would be hurled into print. They are worth reading; for they so closely resemble the usual patter that a medium glibly gives to a group of sitters. That is, words which a medium would give, if possessed of diction as excellent as that of Doctor Ford's:

Spare no time or money to undo my attitude of doubt while on earth. Now that I have found my way back, I can come often, sweetheart. Give yourself to placing the truth before all those who have lost the faith and want to take hold again.

Believe me, life is continuous. Tell the world there is no death. I will be close to you. I expect to use this instrument many times in the future. Tell the world, sweetheart, that Harry Houdini lives and will prove it a thousand times.

Personally, I have attended many séances and have heard the "spirits" of once intelligent persons converse, all using the same grammatical errors that are peculiar to the medium. This statement from the "spirit" of Houdini was merely a reversal of the usual. In speech, Houdini was direct, blunt, and unemotional when delivering an important statement. Perhaps, transmitting through Fletcher and Ford, he found those "instruments" to be dramatic amplifiers. It is rather difficult to picture Houdini himself adopting the language of a juvenile lead.

The news of the mid-day séance was exclusively a *Graphic* story. It was written by a young woman named Rea Jaure; and it appeared promptly that same afternoon, a fact that was to hold significance later. But before I discuss the sensational sequel, I shall present some previous facts that introduced themselves into this case.

A reference to the account of the séance in May, 1928, will show that Mrs. Houdini had placed a reward of \$10,000 for any one who could deliver her husband's message. That offer was part of a \$31,000 total, backed by *Science and Invention Magazine*. Mrs. Houdini's share formed a portion of the fund, during 1928.

Then, some weeks before Ford's séance, Mrs. Houdini withdrew her \$10,000 from the fund.

That, in itself, denoted apprehension of a definite sort. Mrs. Houdini had impressed every one with her sincerity regarding the cash award. We believed quite firmly that she would gladly have paid the money in the case of a genuine message. But it is quite as certain that she would not have wanted the cash paid for a doubtful message.

Mrs. Houdini's withdrawal of the award was possibly, therefore, an indication of anticipated doubt. On January 9th the day after the séance, she made a statement which through its wording fits directly with this opinion. The statement was as follows:

Regardless of any statements made to the contrary, I wish to declare that the message in its entirety, and in the agreed upon sequence, given to me by Arthur Ford, is the correct message prearranged between Mr. Houdini and myself.

Beatrice Houdini

It is interesting to observe that the statement merely says that the message was correct. It does not state that Mrs. Houdini believed it was obtained by psychic means. As a matter of fact there were several very easy ways in which the message could have been obtained. When these became known the séance episode burst like a bubble.

On a night previous to the séance I met Miss Daisy White, formerly a magician's assistant, who not only

knew Houdini and Mrs. Houdini; but claimed acquaintance with Arthur Ford. Miss White told me that a big story was due to break. Hence I was not surprised when the account appeared in the *Graphic*.

On the next day, January 10th, I gave a demonstration for newspaper men in which I correctly read ten words which were written and concealed from me. I did this partly to offset any coming claim for the remainder of the award; it was my purpose to prove that words unseen and unknown at the outset, could be learned so long as they were in the mind of a living person.

Inasmuch as Mrs. Houdini knew the words which Ford uttered, they were words known to a living person. His demonstration gave no proof whatsoever that the message had come through Houdini's spirit.

Before I had an opportunity to proceed further with this matter, another story broke in the *New York Graphic*. It appeared simultaneously with other newspapers that carried accounts of my test.

This story was as sensational as the first. Its headlines were twice as large. It declared that the Houdini message was a hoax. I quote from its paragraphs:

The *Graphic* today is in a position to expose one of the most monumental "psychic" hoaxes ever perpetrated on the American public—the purported communication from the spirit world

of Harry Houdini to his widow, Beatrice. Evidence gathered by this newspaper shows that the sensational message was carefully rehearsed prior to its quotation's premier.

The truth of the affair is that Rea Jaure, a *Graphic* reporter, prepared her story 24 hours before the séance was held. Miss Jaure held up her information pending an opportunity to get all of the facts in connection with the hoax rather than publish a premature and inconclusive story.

The account stated that Miss Jaure had made an appointment with Arthur Ford on the evening following the séance; that Ford made his appearance at the Jaure apartment twenty minutes after eleven. Hidden in the breakfast room of the apartment were two representatives from the *Graphic*.

In the course of the conversation Miss Jaure voiced her inside knowledge of the story, mentioning that she had possessed a copy of the code one day before the séance. This produced apprehensions on the part of the Rev. Mr. Ford. The *Graphic* quoted him as saying:

"But you must play ball. Really I'd be glad to make financial compensation."

Rejecting this offer Miss Jaure brought the discussion to the matter of the code itself. Regarding this code she asked Mr. Ford directly:

"You didn't get it spiritualistically, did you?"

Ford's reply, as printed in the *Graphic*, was:

“You know, Rea, I couldn't have done that.”

It is unnecessary to discuss in detail any reasons that the *Graphic* may have had for printing a reversal of its original story. Inasmuch as the *Graphic* subsisted upon coined news, the opportunity of making two stories out of one could have been sufficiently attractive to that tabloid journal.

The vital point is this: The séance story was given to the *Graphic* exclusively. Whatever reliance we may place upon the original story must also be given to the second. If Mr. Ford denies his admission to Rea Jaure he is also denying the accuracy of the only newspaper reporter who reported the séance itself.

My investigations were concentrated upon the code, and possible ways in which it was obtained. I was quite willing to believe that Arthur Ford delivered the correct code and message to Beatrice Houdini. Her signed statement to that effect is plain enough.

The code was simply one which was originally used for a pretended telepathy act. Each word stood for a figure. There were ten words in all as follows:

Pray	1	Please	6
Answer	2	Speak	7
Say	3	Quickly	8
Now	4	Look	9
Tell	5	Be Quick	10

Through these words separately or in combination it is possible to signal any number. The words also stood for letters of the alphabet in rotation.

Thus we translate the code: Answer (B); Tell (E); Pray, answer (L); Look (I); Tell (E); Answer, answer (V); Tell (E).

Facts were misstated regarding this code through which Arthur Ford produced the word "Believe." It was not specially prepared by Houdini only two years before his death. The code was more than a century old and had been used by the Houdinis in an act of their own for thirty years. It was an antiquated type of code that could have been passed to any number of mind reading teams; and is probably being used verbatim by side show performers today.

This code did not have to be told to Arthur Ford, or any spirit control such as Fletcher. The code was *already in print*. It had appeared on page 105 of Houdini's biography, which appeared soon after the magician's death. All that any one needed to know in order to reveal a message was that Mrs. Houdini expected to receive it in that code.

Moreover, it was also publicly known that any message for Mrs. Houdini was to come in some form of code. That fact was printed by the newspapers at the

time of my investigation of Nino Pecoraro, as quoted in the previous chapter.

With her secret dependent upon such slim threads, it is small wonder that Mrs. Houdini decided to withdraw her prize offer of ten thousand dollars. Considered impartially, that action in itself would prove to an astute observer that some clue was available.

Any one hoping to bring a message from Houdini should logically have read his biography as the best source to learn about Houdini. The code would have impressed itself upon any searcher for information. Coupled with the facts that Mrs. Houdini expected a message in code and had withdrawn her prize offer, there was every chance to form conclusions.

Arthur Ford did not trust the "Fletcher" message to a chance séance. Instead, he first had a letter delivered to Mrs. Houdini, stating that he had received a message in coded words, which he quoted. It was after he had learned of the remarkable effect of this letter that he went through with the séance.

These facts do not alter my willingness to believe in Arthur Ford's sincerity. What I disclaim is that the message ever came from Houdini. The facts show that happenings on this earthly plane could have accomplished results more effectively than any meeting between the shades of Houdini and Fletcher.

When one depends upon “voices” to produce an answer which perplexes him, it is rather much like gaining a hunch. No intent is necessary on the part of the individual to form a definite conclusion. It comes subconsciously; and can be sincerely attributed to any unusual qualification which the individual thinks that he possesses.

From the standpoint of the psychologist, we can consider the possibility that Arthur Ford, conversant with facts about Houdini, identified certain conclusions with the scene that he had pictured: namely, a spirit conversation between Houdini and Fletcher.

While such a hypothesis exists, supported by such tangible facts as the printed code, a code message expected, and the withdrawal of the prize offer; no sane investigator would be justified in thrusting this case from the solid province of the psychological into the doubtful realm of the psychical.

There were other facts, however, that came into the case. I knew that Mrs. Houdini had been ill and worried; that it was possible that she might have thoughtlessly repeated bits of information that could have carried. Such, even if they had not reached Doctor Ford, would certainly show that no message could be considered genuine.

My investigation proved that there were others be-

side Mrs. Houdini who could have held clues. A nurse who was present at Houdini's death was said to have heard Houdini murmur his wife's pet name "Rosa-belle," together with a reference to the code.

Another person to be considered was Daisy White. She is said to have admitted that she had gained similar information. I had not forgotten her "tip-off" that she had given me prior to the séance. I sought to gain more facts from Daisy White; while so occupied, I was approached by a man named Joseph Bantino, who lived in the same apartment house. Bantino offered to make a statement.

He was allowed to do so, in the presence of reporters; at the home of Mrs. Houdini. I quote from the New York *Telegram* of January 15th, 1929:

Bantino opined that Ford received the message from Daisy White, who in turn had the code from Houdini long before he ever became a spirit.

The opinion was Bantino's; not mine. I have included it as a matter of record, only. My own opinion is simply this: Whether or not future statements may be made, the fact stands that every detail necessary to the production of a code message from Houdini was available to any one in a position to use it.

When Arthur Ford delivered the message, he had

no need of a spirit control to accomplish his supreme test.

So far as pressing any charges of fraudulence against Arthur Ford, it was the spiritualists themselves who took the action. Once, Arthur Ford had told me that if ever I ran across a medium who was a member of his church and who was proved to be deluding subjects, he would consider it his duty to have that person ejected from the organization. Such conscientious virtue seemed to be universal among the New York spiritualists.

They expelled the Reverend Arthur Ford from membership in the Manhattan group of the United Spiritualist League. Their charge was "conduct unbecoming a spiritualist minister." This statement was printed in the *Sun*, on January 25, 1929.

One month later, the *Graphic* of February 26, announced that Ford was cleared by the United Spiritualist League. This move followed the lead of the First Spiritual Church, which claimed there was not enough evidence against the medium.

Although Ford considered this a vindication from the charge that the Houdini message was not genuine, he announced that he would make no attempt to claim the \$21,000 still standing as prize money to the medium who successfully communicated with Houdini.

This was worthy of note; since there were other persons who expected messages from Houdini. One was Regimus Weiss, in Philadelphia, an opponent of spiritualism. Another was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose sympathy for mediumship was high.

Mrs. Houdini, quite disturbed during the commotion that followed the exposé, had suggested that skeptics—or others—try to produce those messages.

Why not Ford?

His control, Fletcher, was presumably *en rapport* with Houdini's spirit. Through that same spirit guide, Ford had brought the alleged statement from Houdini:

Spare no time or money to undo my attitude of doubt while on earth. . . . Give yourself to placing the truth before all those who have lost the faith. . . . I expect to use this instrument many times in the future. . . . Harry Houdini lives and will prove it a thousand times . . .

Time? Money? Why did Ford not gain the \$21,000 for the cause? He had only to learn the other messages, to which he could have had no access. Why has Ford, the instrument, not been used? To prove Houdini's choice of him?

The answer?

Perhaps it was because one statement—unsponsored by a spirit control—told more than that gush of words attributed to Houdini. Those printed words:

“You know, Rea, I couldn’t do that.”

The case of the Houdini message is closed. Stripped to a skeleton, it hangs in the closet of the mediumistic fraternity. Occasionally, they open the door and rattle the bones; but only when believers are present. For spiritualistic believers are the best of all believers. They believe anything. When they see a skeleton rattle, they suppose that a psychic force has impelled it—not a string. Particularly when it dances to a tune from which the sour notes have been carefully removed.

The dance of this particular skeleton is, accordingly, rare and brief. The astral orchestra went off key, the day after Arthur Ford’s great séance. Spirit mediums may tell the first chapter of that episode. But—spiritualistically speaking—the story ends where it really should begin.

Viewed from the perspective of the present, the supposed Houdini message loses all of the ephemeral importance which it possessed for a single day. Arthur Ford still has his followers. Perhaps they have all forgotten the singular incidents that involved the so-called Houdini message.

It would not be surprising if Ford’s followers were forgetful. Ford, himself, has shown an ability to disremember certain of his own statements. I quote from Arthur Ford’s own page, in the magazine “Immor-

tality" for December 1927—an issue that appeared *prior* to the time of the Houdini message.

Following a paragraph in which he criticises magicians as a group, Ford states:

On the other hand, a few of the more intelligent magicians have taken a more reasonable attitude . . . [Then, continuing in the same paragraph]. . . . Dunninger, the most famous Mentalist in America discussed the matter at length with me the other day and I find him really intelligent on the subject. He has an open mind and is a gentleman. He has agreed that if he undertakes an exposé of Spiritualism, he will state the name of the medium exposed and say whether said medium is a member in good standing in the Spiritualist movement, or whether it is merely a person engaged in mediumistic work on an independent basis. He is fair enough to admit that the Spiritualist movement cannot be held responsible for the practices of persons in no way connected with the organization. He will find Spiritualist leaders as much interested in cleaning out these charlatans as he could possibly be. . . .

I have quoted what Arthur Ford said *before* the incident of the Houdini message. What has happened to his well-formed opinions and definitely expressed statements since that episode? I quote from the *New York Post* of Friday, March 22, 1935. This was the day after Arthur Ford accompanied a party of believers in an airplane flight, during which they heard spirit voices. Airplanes, it seems, ride closer to the astral plane. They are also free from excess weight,

such as reporters and investigators. When I called the plane séance questionable, the following reply was printed in the *Post*:

“Dunninger is only a vaudeville performer who has no standing whatever in serious psychical research circles,” Ford said. “The only time he ever gets his name in the paper is when he attacks some one who is doing serious work. No one who knows anything about the question takes him seriously.”

A comparison of the second statement with the first might indicate that the Rev. Arthur Ford has included himself among the class who know nothing about psychic matters, since he personally took me seriously enough in his article published some years before.

Perhaps the episode of the Houdini message altered his viewpoint. It was the one occurrence that could well have produced the change. But it is to be remembered that during my exposé of the Houdini message, I lived up to my agreement with Arthur Ford. I stated the name of the medium—Ford, himself—and where he stood in the Spiritualist movement.

This side-light on the opinions, past and present, that are held by the Rev. Arthur Ford are not of great value in determining the final status of the supposed Houdini message that was piped through from astral sources on January 8, 1929.

The one person qualified to deliver a valid opinion

on the subject of the message is Beatrice Houdini. Restored to health, relieved of the pressure and confusion which caused her to deliver conflicting statements, she is able to answer for herself. She has done so. I quote from the Los Angeles *Examiner* of July 22, 1935:

Nine years ago Harry Houdini, master magician, died. Before he died, he had made a strange compact with his wife. It was this . . . that he would seek to communicate with her from the beyond, and he gave her certain code signals whereby she might know when he spoke.

But to date, though her vigil has never relaxed, there has come no word across that dread border. Mrs. Houdini had been married thirty-three years to her famous husband when he died.

"I receive many messages that are supposed to come from Houdini through mediums and strange séances," she explained, "but they never mean anything to me. Very often I go to séances, hoping and praying that the signals Houdini gave me will be heard. No message comes to me while I am waiting to hear."

This is conclusive. Whatever the claims of mediums; whatever the delusions of those who have been present at their séances; one fact alone can be acceptable to thinking persons who do not mix absurdities with logic.

Harry Houdini has never spoken from beyond the grave.

CHAPTER VI

THE CASE OF MRS. WERNER

I AM INCLUDING A DESCRIPTION OF THE séance in which Mrs. Wilhelmina Werner tried for the \$10,000 prize. I do so for two reasons. First: To show that it is possible for a medium to be sincere and at the same time employ technicalities which are artificial; second, to demonstrate that members of the spiritualistic group hear or learn what other mediums have done, so that we usually find the same type of phenomena offered.

I have an open mind; but I am hard to convince. If

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any genuine phenomena should be shown me I am almost certain it would be "brought through" in a manner totally new to me. It would hold no marks of the "hokum" type of séance. It would not be expressed in the jargon of the professional medium. It would not appear in the dark.

Mrs. Werner and her husband Stanley, were connected with the spiritualistic union of New York. She was a medium and he was a lecturer. Both were obviously sincere. Mrs. Werner requested that the test meeting be held in a high building where neither radio nor noise could reach her and where she would be nearer Heaven—I saw no reason not to comply with her wish, since it did not interfere in the least with the requirements. We obtained a room on the 82nd floor of the Empire State Building with the requisite chairs and a table.

I opened the meeting by stating my position regarding spirit phenomena. I also performed a few feats of trickery, saying for the benefit of those present that these had been used in the past to dupe the faithful followers of the cult. Mrs. Werner, an elderly placid woman with gray, bobbed hair; her husband, a serious looking little man, both watched me in friendly fashion. I then asked Mrs. Werner if she were ready and if so I would like her to get across to me from

the spirit world the ten code words from Mr. Edison which we discussed before he died.

Mr. Werner, however, wished to make a few remarks. He gave a short lecture on spiritualism as they understood it.

Mrs. Werner then began. She placed her hands upon the table which then tipped, rising and falling with one leg always on the floor. It spun forward into the audience with some force. She suddenly became tense and the table subsided. Mr. Werner called for lights out. A red bulb was left glowing by his consent. Mrs. Werner's tenseness increased, until rigidity was pronounced. She made awkward gestures, hissing and sighing sounds. Mr. Werner watched her closely. Occasionally he clucked a little and emitted gutturals in German as Mrs. Werner gestured in her trance.

The trance and rigidity of this medium were genuine. There was no doubt of that. It was a case of complete self-hypnosis. Now to see what could result from it.

Mr. Werner agreed that the lights should come on again since the trance was complete. Photographers present prepared to take pictures of the scene. Mrs. Werner arose, clasped my hand and began to mutter in broken English.

"Is this Mr. Edison?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Werner. "I am here." She spoke

with a German accent in a tone which did not resemble Mr. Edison's.

"Do you remember our last conversation?" I continued.

"Yes." (after a pause.)

"Can you tell me anything about it?"

No answer. Instead Mrs. Werner muttered;

"My family does not believe in spirits and I am worried about it."

I repeated my question.

"I am sorry," replied Mrs. Werner.

She began to grow less rigid, and finally became limp. She sat down. She had been standing for over an hour and a half and had given no other information. Occasionally there was incoherent muttering, and slight sounds were heard; particularly some faint raps.

When the raps were heard, Mr. Werner exclaimed:

"It's her raps!"

Evidently, the raps were a usual form of phenomenon with Mrs. Werner. This was not surprising; none of her manifestations appeared new and spirit raps are one of the oldest of all physical evidences pressed by spiritualistic believers.

The raps, however, were to produce a ludicrous sequel; one of the most laughable occurrences that I have ever witnessed at a séance.

While Mrs. Werner was in a trance condition, a sharp knocking sound suddenly supplanted the feeble raps. It came uncannily; it brought the sitters to the edges of their chairs and it raised Mr. Werner to a high pitch of excitement.

Then, timed almost to perfection, the door of the room opened. A janitor thrust his head into view and interrupted the séance with the statement:

“If that steam-fitter downstairs is abothering you folks, I’ll go down and tell ’im to lay off. This ain’t no time to be fixin’ radiators, anyhow.”

After Mrs. Werner again awoke, I announced to the assemblage:

“I think you will agree with me that nothing authentic was presented.”

There were no protests from the audience.

Mr. Werner, however, said earnestly that he thought perhaps there had been too much light. He went on to say that he, too, had received a message from Mr. Edison on August first. It also referred to different points of view held by his family. Mrs. Werner was impressed by this message because it began with “Tonawanda—Edison.”

The word Tonawanda meant nothing to me. It was not one of the code words.

My résumé of the Werner séance brings up some in-

teresting points. It is sound to say that the sincerity of a spirit medium may be considered in inverse ratio to the number of manifestations produced. This, of course, when conflicting factors are eliminated.

In cases of sheer fraud, poorer manifestations are simply the crudity of the faker. The clever tricksters produce more phenomena than the clumsy. But in *all* absolute frauds, the séances are marked by the glib volubility of the pretended mediums.

When one encounters a case of serious minded demonstrators, it frequently follows that the mediums themselves share a delusion with their clients. My description of the Werners shows them sincere in their own belief of spirits.

Werner held conviction that his wife was a genuine medium. Mrs. Werner, in her efforts to demonstrate his claim, forced herself into a hypnotic condition, wherein she resorted to artificialities which she either failed to remember fully or considered insufficient to produce the results which occurred.

It was because of their own exaggerated beliefs that the Werners made their bid for the award. Doubtless they had heard of the old-fashioned phenomena which Mrs. Werner was able to produce. What little they could show seemed genuine to them. If they had chosen to deal in fakery, they would either have rehearsed

other manifestations or would not have attempted the séance at all.

There were two physical manifestations: the table-tilting and the raps. Both were easily explainable; neither could match the same phenomena as produced by mediums in the past.

Table-tilting is one of the chief recreations of amateur spirit circles. When persons press upon a light table and fancy that it should gyrate, the table often obliges. Subconscious pressure produces many surprising results. But these have been tested, analyzed; shown to be purely the outcome of muscular effort.

In Mrs. Werner's hypnotic state, eccentric activities of the table were to be expected. But *never* did the table lift itself completely from the floor and remain suspended. That, of course, is the essential manifestation necessary to bring a table-tilting exhibition out of the simple class of muscular control.

Not that a levitated table is a proof of genuine spirit control. On the contrary, it is a case that can definitely depend upon trickery. There are many ways of accomplishing it. Eusapia Palladino made a specialty of this stunt. Her method was the "hand and foot clamp" at which she was surprisingly adept.

The hand presses a top corner of the table and moves it forward. The toe of the foot goes beneath the table

leg. Hand and foot lever the light table to a horizontal position. The table rises when the foot is lifted. Palladino accomplished it without raising her heel from the floor. An upward tilt of the toe did the trick; after a measured period of "levitation," a jolting release of the clamp sent the table skidding.

Palladino was caught in this trick by black-clad investigators who crawled along the floor, unseen by the medium. Her own requirement of darkness in the séance room proved her undoing. But there was no need for such observation with Mrs. Werner. She merely tilted the table.

In fact, her inability to produce a levitation of the table indicated that trickery of the self-admitted type was taboo with her. She knew, like many others, that the table acted oddly at her wish. Neither she nor her husband, I presume, had ever considered the table's gyrations from the standpoint of a mechanical operation; for both were in a mood to accept the spiritualistic explanation.

The matter of the raps was most unusual. I checked carefully for the source of the raps, located it; and thereby made a discovery that emphasized my verdict that Mrs. Werner was both self-hypnotic and sincere.

The most famous of spirit rappings were produced by the Fox Sisters, many years ago. Their method was

later exposed. They snapped the joints of their toes and thus caused the raps. It takes a talented toe-joint to produce the sound; but the ability is not uncommon.

It is so surprising in result that it frequently has amazed the operators. This was true in the case of the Fox Sisters. While they were conscious of the physical action, a person in an auto-hypnotic state could be almost oblivious to it.

Specifically, that person—Mrs. Werner for example—could know that a toe action was necessary; but could consider it to be a mere formula, insufficient in itself to gain the result; but necessary—for some vague reason—to cause the spirits to respond.

This is quite credible, for it checks with the matter of the table tilting, which has so frequently been proven a sub-conscious matter. The Fox girls began their “raps” spontaneously; another reason why Mrs. Werner should have done the same.

I have stated that the raps were most unusual. That was because they were so feeble. That fact troubled Mr. Werner. His actions showed that he had heard better raps during the medium’s former séances. It may have troubled Mrs. Werner, also. Had either known why the raps were unimpressive, they would have known beforehand that the results would be bad.

That is why I hold to my opinion of their sincerity.

They had never experimented with the raps on a physical basis any more than with the table tilting. I knew why the raps were failures.

The room where the séance was held was equipped with a concrete floor. In their call for a séance room “high up”—a sincere hope that their séance would be better—the Werners showed their ignorance of the type of room they really needed to get the best results.

Probably all of Mrs. Werner's séances had been held in a room with a wooden floor. That was why the raps had so impressed them. They needed a sounding board to produce the full effect. When the foot is pressed hard against the floor, as Mrs. Werner's was, a snap of the toe joint will produce a surprisingly loud sound with a wooden floor to aid it.

That factor was responsible for the Fox Sisters becoming mediums. They first found that they could produce the raps in bed, at night, when they pressed their bare feet against the solid wood base-board of the bed—an ideal condition for enlargement of the sounds.

With concrete as the flooring, Mrs. Werner's raps were certain to be ineffective. Yet Mr. Werner could not understand it; and he—beyond all others—was enthused when the steam-fitter chimed in with an improvement.

The Werners made no further attempt to gain the prize award. They recognized their own limitations; but I give them credit for their honest attempt. Though the manifestations of mediums like Mrs. Werner lead believers into a barren wilderness, the desert trip is shared by the mediums also.

That is fair enough. Sincere believers in any mistaken notion will always find persons of their ilk, to travel with them. But they do not throw the burden upon their followers. In a sense, their efforts are beneficial; for they attract and hold many persons who might otherwise become the dupes of fakers.

In this day when spiritualism forms the last stronghold in the realm of charlatanism, any circle which may serve as refuge from the preying outlaws has a purpose. Complete believers in spiritualism will never heed the sound advice of skeptics. But they will show confidence in the few mediums who are themselves sincere; and thereby gain some immunity from the majority who would dupe them.

Not that I would recommend clients to the Werners. Wherever sincere spiritualists gather, the vultures are apt to be ready in the offing.

MADAM TAYLOR

OCCASIONALLY, FROM THAT VAST HOST of small-fry operators, known only to their local districts or in one or two cities, emerges a more distinctive figure. Madam Taylor, a Negress, originally from Philadelphia, belonged to this class. I first heard of her after she had settled in New York. She was said to be a great materialization medium. Her daring gained her power, her reputation for producing phenomena grew. The Hearst papers asked me to investigate her. But those "in the know" informed me it would be impossible for me to see her.

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At least I could try. So, one early January evening, I rang her doorbell. She lived in Harlem in a brown-stone front. The door was opened by a colored woman of unknown age but undoubtedly two hundred and fifty pounds in weight. I asked for a private séance. I assured her I had heard that she did some remarkable things. She demurred, looking at me closely.

“Did you ever hear of Dunninger?” she asked sharply.

“Who?” I inquired.

“The mind-reader,” she explained, “he goes around exposing people. He is the world’s greatest hater of mediums. You look like him.”

I continued to look innocent.

“Madam,” I replied, “I understand that you have strong spirit forces. Ask them. They will tell you if I am Dunninger.”

Gratified, Madam Taylor graciously consented to concentrate and let me know her decision the next day.

The spirits misled her. I phoned her the day following. She invited me to come at any time. I requested the privilege of bringing a few friends that afternoon. Madam, swiftly counting up the fees, consented. The fee was five dollars a person.

Our group arrived at eight o’clock. We were informed that the regular meeting room was not available; so we were conducted to a smaller room, where

we sat facing two doorways. One door gave us a view of the bath-room, which the medium stated she would use as a cabinet because of the limited space.

The other door was to remain closed; because the room beyond was occupied by a "boarder" who could not be disturbed. This seemed logical. Inasmuch as Madam Taylor conducted most of her sésances at night, with considerable attendant noise, a chance boarder would probably prefer to sleep in the daytime.

The room remained lighted; Madam occupied a lone seat in the bath-room while we remained outside the improvised "cabinet." Some one began to play a reed organ on the first floor; while it throbbed and moaned, we were asked to join in singing hymns. The chorus completed, Madam delivered a lecture from her exclusive abode. It was a dissertation on Spiritualism, in words of four syllables.

All the while, I was thinking of the "boarder." I still remembered him, after Madam insisted that our room be darkened so that the séance proper could commence. Obviously, there was a discrepancy in the fact that the boarder could not be disturbed; followed by the immediate call for loudly sung hymns, with the calliope accompaniment of the reed organ.

After a short period of darkness, we heard a falsetto voice pipe from the "cabinet." Several other voices

followed, in varied tones. A phosphorescent “ghost” flitted close to us; then subsided into the cabinet. Next came a burst of song, in a man’s voice—it was a Negro spiritual, finely sung. It was sung suspiciously close to our circle.

Soon afterward, lights were called for; Madam emerged from the cabinet and appeared triumphant. We gave the look of being impressed. She stated that if we cared for another séance, something even better than this one would be possible. We set January 8th as a date; we were told to arrive in the evening, as the séance would be held in the regular audience chamber.

There was nothing startling about the séance which we had witnessed. We knew that it was simply a “feeler” on Madam Taylor’s part. We had refrained from making a “grab” for the one spook that had appeared. Under the conditions, a phosphorescent sheet could have served the purpose.

The voices, though impressive in the darkness, were easily explained; and they revealed the mystery of the boarder. Madam could produce all the falsetto voices that she required; but a booming basso could add effect to the proceedings. There was a “boarder” in the other room, as she had said; he was the one who supplied some of the voices and the song.

In the darkness, he had only to open the door of

his room, at a time previously designated. But it was then that he made a mistake. Because of the darkness, he did not want to grope too far away from the door, so he delivered his vocal efforts from the wall between the doorways. Madam's voice, only a short interval from his, came distinctly from the bath-room that served as cabinet.

On the eighth of January, we formed a party of five, including Louis Sobol, columnist, Amster Spiro, editor of the *Evening Journal*, David J. Lustig and Joe Cowan. We arrived at Madam Taylor's to find a mixed group of fifty persons assembled in the audience chamber. This was a much larger room than the one where we had held the first séance.

The audience was seated in rows; Madam occupied a large chair at the other end of the room, where she was flanked by two associates. She was gowned entirely in black.

There were curtains that could be drawn shut, so that the medium's end of the room would form a cabinet. When all was ready for the séance, the lights were extinguished to produce the total darkness that the medium required.

Some one called for the spirit of a deceased aviator. Soon, a pin point of light flashed across the ceiling and gyrated, probably simulating the tail-spin in which

the aviator had completed his last landing. The light was supposed to be the aviator. I held to a different opinion.

The phenomenon obviously came from a fountain-pen flashlight, with its glass treated with lamp-black; then marked by a pin point. This accounted for the tiny dot of mysterious light. Gauging my direction, I reached out in the darkness and caught a moving, up-raised arm.

"Pardon me," I asked. "Is that *your* arm?"

There was no response from the aviator. The light disappeared instantly. Madam filled the unhappy pause by calling out to learn if others wanted spirits to materialize. This gave me a new opportunity.

Recalling that I was here for as much testing as possible and wishing to tax Madam's ingenuity, I asked for an old horse of mine to be materialized. Needless to say this was a purely mythical animal. I named her "Edna." For a moment only silence and darkness answered me. Madam was thinking. Finally she said:

"Your horse Edna is on Mars. She carries Christy Mathewson on her back. She is very happy. She still loves you." A clumping sound began, around and around the room. Suddenly I felt a frightful pain in my shin. The lights. Madam sat in her chair and watched me rub my leg. I felt that in spite of the spirits.

Madam had divined that Dunninger was present. Edna had been almost too convincing. Edna had kicked me.

A voice from the general audience asked for a departed one. In the following darkness a huge white mass wavered around the room. The room shook a little. (I drew in my legs.) Madam must be under way again. Square and towering the departed one lingered then vanished. The audience was satisfied. But I was not. The method was too apparent. The medium was wearing a white petticoat under her black dress; the dress itself was lined with gleaming white. By holding the dress above her head she could give that square effect; also the surfaces presented to us would be entirely white.

But Madam Taylor was not through yet. As the light button clicked she was disclosed lying on a couch, in a trance. Something white protruded from her lips.

Ectoplasm!

I leaned over her and poked it delicately. To keep her trance Madam had to lie still. I peeled off a little bit and examined it. The audience protested. Did I want to kill Madam? But I had seen enough. Into her séance Madam had introduced a marshmallow. I would not have been surprised if it had been a horse!

After the séance, there was a hitch before the next.

Madam had learned by guess-work and experience what the spirits had failed to tell her. She had learned my identity; knowing that fact, I expected that I would be denied future admittance. However, Madam gamely allowed me to attend another séance. Everything was smoothed by the sum of 30 dollars. Exposure or not, 30 dollars was a lot of money.

I came to Madam Taylor's with a larger group than before. The medium had received the 30 dollars; but before letting us up to the séance room, she drew me aside; then commented:

"Jest a minute. After all, this is our 'developing night'; for so many people, I should have more money."

She meant it; so I handed over an extra ten spot. Satisfied with the bonus, Madam murmured that everything was *all* right and to "go right on up."

We found the developing class. There were seventy-five present, Negroes and whites, all garbed in white coats supplied by Madam. It looked like commencement day at a barber's college, without benefit of laundry. We were invited to don white coats, since some were available; but decided to postpone our "development" and sit as spectators only.

Madam had handled matters cagily. She had taken in forty dollars and brought us to witness a meeting wherein materializations would be absent. For the de-

veloping class was here to listen only to the voices of spirit controls. The "class" consisted of those aspiring to mediumship. They were learning to "grow" during such meetings as this, so that some day they might run spirit circles of their own. Madam, of course, collected from the students for the training.

We had our forty dollars worth before the evening ended.

Madam began to produce voices, representing various controls whom the students were trying to cultivate. The developers were thus able to talk personally with the controls and try to arrange matters for the future. There were complaints from the sitters; answers from the spirits. The chief bone of contention was that the controls had not shown up when called for independently by the persons who had undergone Madam's course of training.

These developed into spats between the living and the dead. A red-headed white woman demanded to know why *White Hawk*, her promised control, had not come to her séance the other night. She had invited many people. Yet the trumpet had refused to blow; the table had not moved; she had gained no messages.

In short, the séance had flopped. The expectant medium had registered complete failure; and her

friends not only thought her a fraud, but called her one. She was here to place the blame on *White Hawk*.

Madam went into a trance. She brought *White Hawk*, who defended himself irritably. He was a busy spirit. He had other things to do besides come to séances. And had she—the red-headed medium—contributed her usual five dollar fee to Madam Taylor's church?

The woman ceased her complaints. She became apologetic. She had only three dollars. She had been unable to give five. *White Hawk* became scornful. What did she expect? That spirits will help her if she does not help the church?

White Hawk made it plain that three dollars was not a sufficient contribution. Hereafter, developers would have to make it five. With that tirade, *White Hawk* departed, having squelched the complaints of several others before they had opportunity to voice them.

It went on and on. Arguments on other subjects; alibis by various controls, summoned to the carpet. Finally, with the class work done, Madam Taylor became herself and gave one of her speeches on Spiritualism. She remarked, in passing:

"Now you-all here who believe in the spirits the Almighty Power will be over you-all unless you-all do something which may or may not be."

The speech made very little sense. Perhaps Madam saw only through a glass darkly. Some of her warning may have been intended for me. Perhaps *White Hawk* had whispered what was coming.

I had investigated Madam Taylor; from the earlier séances, I had learned enough of her methods. This one simply added first-hand information regarding her system of squeezing money from her most ardent dupes. I proceeded to expose the medium as a fraud.

The next day, the newspapers carried accounts of my visits to Madam Taylor. Afterward, I suspect Madam was short a few members. But her believers shouted that she had been persecuted. In a short while, she probably had an even larger following.

For dupes will be dupes. Once deluded thoroughly, they never lose the urge to attend séances and contribute steady sums to the ever-grasping mediums. They escape from the tentacles of the racket only when they end their journey here and depart to the other plane.

Even then, they are not finished, if they have made themselves well-known as spiritualistic believers. Their memory still persists in psychic circles. They become controls who help the poor mediums who are still faced by the problem of making a comfortable living on this terrestrial sphere.

CHAPTER VIII

NINO PECORARO

THE MEDIUMISTIC CAREER OF NINO Pecoraro stands out as one of the most important cases in the annals of modern psychic investigation. The history of this young Italian's endeavors into the realm of the spiritualistic, the effect which his work had upon believers and the motives which guided his efforts, are all of timely interest.

Had Pecoraro presented his séances in the nineteenth century instead of the twentieth, he would probably be considered as an epoch-making medium whom

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spiritualists would remember as one whose genuineness could not be disputed. As a natural marvel, he far surpassed such tyros as the Fox Sisters, whose manifestations, many years ago, were accepted as real despite their crudity. Only one factor led to the Waterloo of Pecoraro's psychic career. That was his desire to convince skeptics as well as believers, in hopes of monetary award. Had he limited his séances to the faithful, he would never have been discredited.

Nino Pecoraro had the natural qualifications for a successful medium, from the spiritualist's standpoint. There is a great chasm between the mere believer and the one who is supposed to possess genuine psychic powers. The believers look on and admire, while the medium produces the manifestations.

It therefore follows that the untutored medium is a more convincing type than is the suave, sophisticated wonder-worker. Spiritualists consider mediumship in the light of a God-given power and whenever they discover a medium of plebeian origin—particularly one who shows no signs of keen intellectuality—they consider that medium to be ideal.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in describing Nino Pecoraro, stated: "He was a stunted, under-nourished youth with a face of premature age and could only speak a few words of English." In this respect, Nino

had possibilities of becoming a logical successor to the famous Eusapia Palladino—a matter that became apparent in certain of his séances.

When Conan Doyle was in America spreading the doctrine of Spiritualism, Nino Pecoraro was in the early throes of his developing mediumship. He had come to the attention of various Spiritualists and a group of psychic researchers arranged that Sir Arthur should witness one of Nino's séances.

The success of this affair—judged from the convincing effect it had upon the Spiritualists who were present—increased the prestige of Nino Pecoraro. As a result, he became a recognized medium and his case was cited by leading Spiritualists as proof conclusive that psychic phenomena could manifest themselves through human agency.

All of Nino's séances were weird and impressive. That the reader may fully appreciate the effect that these affairs had upon the witnesses, a graphic description of a typical séance is given herewith.

A small group of solemn sitters are gathered in a séance room. The medium makes his appearance. He is taciturn and very serious in bearing. A special cabinet has been prepared for him at the end of the room. It consists of a screen of curtains, beyond which is a chair.

Nino, reaching this improvised cabinet, seats himself in the chair and the sitters are allowed to bind him in any manner that they choose. His hands are encased in long black mittens. His wrists are bound with cords and wires. Knots are sealed and Nino's body is tied to the chair.

His only reaction to this treatment is an increasing seriousness. Nino is going into his trance. His body is rigid; his eyes are staring. Those who have bound him stand back, almost in awe. One of Nino's sponsors speaks in a low voice. He requests the witnesses to note the oddities of this trance. They feel the stiffness of Nino's body. They touch his eyeballs. He gives no response. The committee, satisfied that the binding is complete, retires.

The curtains are closed. The lights are turned down until only the glimmer of one red incandescent throws its ghoulish gleam upon the scene. The sitters wait in expectation. Those new to this séance room believe it impossible that manifestations can be produced by a medium so securely bound. Yet Nino's condition is impressive. His trance is so remarkable that even the most pronounced skeptics are puzzled.

In the midst of an unearthly silence—long, tense minutes have passed by now—a shuddering cry comes from the cabinet. The spectators grip the arms of their

chairs. They look at one another in unfeigned terror. In that hovering gloom, one can not believe that the scream has come from human lips.

New sounds are coming—ghostly whispers sound sibilant through the séance room. Another voice speaks with broken syllables. It is announcing the name of Palladino. The breathless sitters wait; they hear the voice speak in Italian, Palladino's native tongue.

"I who used to call back the spirits—" the falsetto tones resemble the shrill utterance of a woman "—I who used to call back the spirits now come back as a spirit myself!"

Silence; then the manifestations begin in new form. The ripples of an eerie breeze whisk through the room. That mysterious wind is coming from the cabinet. The believers are tense. This is the "strong cool breeze, the sure sign of psychic power," described by Conan Doyle as emanating from Nino's cabinet!

The curtains have parted. In the dim light, a table that was placed within the cabinet is leaping about, dancing in ghostly cadence, uncontrolled by human hand! The manifestations are at their height. Spirit forms invisible are cavorting about the entranced medium!

The table flies through the air and clatters to the floor; its lifelike qualities are ended when it has been

propelled from that haunted spot. Other objects fly into view—the medium's collar, his tie, his belt. He is in the grip of prankish ghosts!

The curtains hang listless once more. The spirits have ceased their havoc. After the first exuberance of materialization, they have given way to more sober messengers from the ethereal realm. A quiet voice is speaking. It is giving the name of a person in the room.

"I am the spirit of your son—" a listener nods as he hears the words "—I wish to speak with you —"

Slowly, the listener approaches at the call. He reaches the cabinet. He stops and waits, his nerves tingling in response to the psychic atmosphere. An object appears through the curtain; it is a living hand. Fearfully, the believer receives the grasp. He recognizes the clasp of his departed son. His trembling fingers release their hold. The spectral hand slides back through the curtain and is lost in oblivion. The sitter returns to his place among the other members of the group.

Quiet moments follow; the curtains belly as though inspired by a parting, farewell breeze. The sitters sense that the spirits are leaving. They have materialized themselves in part; the call of the other world takes them back to the plane above.

More than an hour has passed, yet time has seemed

but momentary. Those who understand the happenings of the séance room recognize that the weird events are ended. Cautiously, they approach the curtains and draw them aside. They find Nino, his body and wrists still bound, his hands encased within the long black mittens, his stoop-shouldered form grotesquely slumped in the chair.

They are careful when they arouse the medium. He is still insensible to his surroundings. His pulse alone seems vaguely normal. The whites of his bulging eyes are incapable of sensation. It is a full quarter of an hour before he comes out of his trance, to lie gasping in the chair, staring wonderingly at those about him. He is exhausted and does not appear to understand the importance of the events which have just transpired in his presence. His wrists pain him; the cords and wires have made cruel welts.

Revived, Nino grins sheepishly at those about him. He, more than any one else present, appears to be ignorant of what has just occurred. He has submitted to these tests instinctively; but he can not explain why. His sponsors are the ones who tell the new host of believers that this psychic influence draws Nino to it; that he can not resist it. Nino is exhausted; the spirits have used him as their human agency and have weakened him.

Such séances as these convinced the skeptical. Of Nino Pecoraro, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle declared: "I thought the youth was a true medium and might develop into something remarkable."

Sir Arthur knew nothing of Nino Pecoraro's past nor of his future. He was guided—and deceived—because his mind was occupied solely with the present.

The case of Nino Pecoraro is an important one, for behind it lies a remarkable story. What was the explanation of Nino Pecoraro's amazing trances? Ardent Spiritualists had their answer. The youth was a genuine medium! Nothing in the past could have prepared him for fakery. The future would reveal him as a man to whom Spiritualists could point with satisfaction.

But in this, the believers were sadly wrong. That forgotten past of Nino Pecoraro was to have a most appreciable influence upon his future. It was to lead him into fields where keen skeptics would be waiting. He was to match his wits with those prepared to explain the unexplainable.

Hard, tight cords; sealed knots; twisted wires; long black mittens. These seemed proof of Nino's inability to fake the phenomena. Spirit voices and eerie cries; weird breezes and spirit hands. A table that was moved

by an unseen force. What more could be required to convince the most hardened skeptic?

Yet the unexplainable was explained. The challenge of Nino Pecoraro was answered. The truth was to be revealed and with it, the world to learn the eccentric notions that filled the brain of this Italian youth.

The explanations are chapters in themselves—amazing sequels to the events that have just been described. They form a story of shattered hopes and misguided beliefs; for they tell the motives that led Nino Pecoraro to step beyond the limitations which surrounded him.

The failure of Nino Pecoraro, his own explanation of why he tried to develop his so-called mediumship; both are remarkable. They tell a strange story of the deceiver who was deluded by those whom he deceived.

Those who praised Nino most highly were to desert him, as spiritualists have always repudiated their discredited mediums. For the case of Nino Pecoraro, which Conan Doyle hoped would develop into higher mediumship, was destined to become a lasting proof *against* the reality of psychic phenomena.

Nino Pecoraro, who proved that the spirits spoke, was himself to prove that they did not speak. Where Conan Doyle had seen the genuine, the world was to learn the fraudulent.

CHAPTER IX

THE PECORARO TEST SÉANCES

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, NINO PECORARO underwent a period of successful mediumistic development. The fame of his materializations increased. Leading Spiritualists pronounced him as one of the greatest of modern mediums.

Judged from the believer's standpoint, Nino had increased his psychic powers; considered by the skeptic, he had simply become more clever in his trickery. Nino's case was bidding to become a focal point in the controversy on Spiritualism. It was Nino himself who produced the issue.

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The increasing size of the awards offered by *Science and Invention* was the cause. Beginning with a one thousand dollar offer by the magazine itself, Joseph F. Rinn had placed an award of ten thousand dollars for genuine psychic phenomena. I had personally added ten thousand dollars for manifestations which I could not duplicate. Mrs. Houdini had followed with a ten thousand dollar offer to any medium who could bring a ten word message promised by Houdini.

These awards, grossing thirty-one thousand dollars, offered an attractive target for mediums. They carried more than actual monetary return. Mediums who disclaimed desire for money could not well ignore the challenge, for to meet it successfully would mean wide recognition.

Nino Pecoraro saw these opportunities.

On Thursday, April 26, 1928, he appeared at the offices of *Science and Invention* accompanied by his manager, Mr. C. E. Davenport. Nino was ready to try for the prize money.

He had previously given a preliminary séance at Mrs. Houdini's; one that had brought no remarkable result; but it had apparently added to his confidence. Mrs. Houdini and I were both present when the test séance was arranged in the magazine office. A committee was formed; the new séance began.

Dressed in collarless shirt, trousers, socks and shoes, Nino was bound by the committee. His hands were covered by two leather gloves, which were sewn to his shirt. He was tied with ropes, their knots sealed. A leather harness was strapped about his chest. Nino was seated in a chair during the binding and was fastened by the ropes to the chair itself.

On several occasions, Nino objected to the tightness of the bonds. It was explained that when he passed into a trance, he might become convulsive and thereby destroy some of the seals on the knots. Onlookers were pledged not to interfere with the medium during his séance; and agreed not to photograph him unless he gave the signal.

Nino was placed in a corner of the room; a curtain was drawn in front of him. The only light was a dim red bulb, six feet in front of the cabinet.

Ten minutes after the curtains were closed, a falsetto voice began its speech, claiming to be the spirit control, Eusapia Palladino. The "control" called for an examination of the medium. Lights were turned on; Nino was noted, still bound, in a supposed cataleptic state.

Lights went off. At times, more voices spoke. The falsetto claimed to be Palladino; another tone pur-

ported to be Houdini. Both sounded as though uttered by Nino. Houdini's voice was far from natural.

One hour and a half after the séance had commenced, a piece of paper was picked up from a table in front of the cabinet and carried through the curtain. At a signal—presumably from the spirit guide—a photographer was permitted to take a flashlight of the scene. The photograph, when developed, showed *more* than the piece of paper in the air. It revealed Nino's hand an instant before it managed to withdraw into the cabinet.

Despite the fact that the "voice" of Palladino kept promising remarkable phenomena, such as wax hand impressions, table raps, a materialization of Houdini's spirit and his handwriting, not one of these occurred. Outside of the fluttering paper, the only other phenomenon was the accidental dropping of a pencil on the floor.

When Nino's bonds were examined at the termination of the séance, several seals were discovered broken.

Approximately one week later, I gave a séance in which I submitted to the same conditions that Nino had undergone. In that demonstration, I produced phenomena which Nino had hoped to bring but had not. One was the writing of a name on a card sealed in a box *outside* the cabinet. Another was the "mate-

rialization" of Houdini's face, which was photographed peering from the curtain and proved to be a remarkable likeness.

I also produced a message on a slate, in Houdini's handwriting; together with wax impressions of fingerprints other than my own. Mr. Davenport, present at my séance, proclaimed me to be a genuine medium.

When the cabinet was opened, I was found bound as originally, with every knot still sealed on the ropes. Nevertheless, all my results were produced by material means and had no spirit aid whatever.

Nino Pecoraro was still to be heard from. He continued his offers to produce phenomena. He gave séances, under new management. In July, 1930, two years after his first endeavors, I attended a séance which Nino gave in an apartment. He spoke in a voice supposed to be Conan Doyle's, stating that he appeared through the courtesy of Palladino and Houdini.

Nino produced a few physical manifestations, including finger-prints purporting to be Doyle's. A later report from the Bureau of Criminal Examination stated that when examined, the prints proved to be those of Nino.

This was the first of a series of séances, all under similar auspices. They took place during July and

August, 1930. While various oddities occurred, there was nothing produced that could not have been done by Nino if temporarily out of his bonds.

As some of the high-lights, I cite the following:

During one séance, a voice proclaimed that Doyle and Houdini were on the other side of Saturn. During another, the medium came under the control of an Indian chief; and Nino's gyrations in the cabinet were nearly sufficient to break up the place.

Once the voice of Napoleon spoke—with an Italian accent—and there was a message to Mussolini, declaring that he would engage in a war with France and win it. Photographs taken at some of these séances showed some oddities when developed. Certain ones were obviously faked.

The most significant factor in all of Nino's séances was his inability to produce creditable phenomena when in a position to do so. His work consisted in self-extrication from the bonds; that accomplished, he had opportunity to do remarkable things; but did not make use of it.

To begin with, his "voices" were a device to kill time while he was getting out of the ropes. To a deluded believer, they could have seemed the voice of spirits—but that, in itself, shows how far the imagination of an impressionable sitter will carry him.

Palladino's falsetto was unconvincing, even though Nino, also an Italian, could simulate the broken accent that Palladino used in life. But when "spirits" of other nationalities used the same dialect, the effect was ludicrous.

Nino deliberately singled me out to be the recipient of a message from Houdini. When it came, I took it as I heard it. I lacked the strained condition that grips believers in the dark room. I heard the words as they were uttered. They came in a voice unlike Houdini's—a voice that was singularly a disguised tone of Nino's. The voice exclaimed:

"Dunninge! This is Houdeen! How are you, Dunninge?"

This was a typical sample of Houdini's supposed voice. Other spirits, such as Doyle's, also blundered with a pronounced Italian accent. Nino was not supposed to be speaking for those spirits; his claim was that their own voices were coming from the cabinet. Such a claim showed the ridiculous measures to which this medium went.

Where Nino Pecoraro actually excelled was in his ability to extricate himself from bonds and later—under certain circumstances—wriggle back into them. This ability was essential to his production of so-called

physical phenomena. As a self-liberator, Nino stood in a class by himself.

He depended not only upon set methods, as is the case with every rope-tie artist; but also upon intuition. His confidence, however, was sometimes too great. That is why he struck trouble in his séance for *Science and Invention*. He was tied too well.

The first principle in accomplishing a rope release is to gain desired positions which will allow for slack. Several treatises have been published on this subject; many methods used by magicians—and by mediums—have been exposed. Methods which allow for a return to the bonds have been included in those explanations.

Nino worked for slack. His complaints regarding bonds that were too tight was evidence of this. The excuse was given that Nino was apt to become convulsive while under restraint. That, too, was significant. Releases from difficult ties often require a great deal of effort, with accompanying commotion. It was wise to have the sitters expect it and allow for it.

Getting out of the bonds was only half. Returning into them was another story. Nino always anticipated trouble on that score. The explanation was given, therefore, that his convulsions might destroy the seals on knots. Almost invariably, when Nino was competently bound, seals were found broken afterward.

Sometimes Nino was completely foiled in his effort to regain the bonds. In those cases, he would throw himself into terrific writhings, sufficient to ruin the bonds entirely. One of his pet stunts was to batter about in the chair until he smashed it. With the chair arm broken off, Nino could overcome the knots and have a later excuse for not being in the exact condition of bondage that had existed at the outset.

One crafty measure, of his own origination, was the method whereby he overcame the handicap of the gloves. It will be recalled that he was collarless; that he was clad in shirt and that the gloves were sewn to the sleeves.

Nino's shirts had stiff cuffs. He wore a size just large enough to enable him to draw his hands inward. The fact that the gloves were sewn to the sleeves meant no handicap. Indeed, it aided; had the gloves been bound about the medium's wrists, his task would have been difficult.

With this start, Nino had little difficulty in extrication without too much damage to the bonds. He could always return his hands to the gloves for the finish of the séance. It required some contortion to get his arms out of the shirt sleeves at the beginning; but the replacement was simple.

Ropes and harness offered obstacles which he over-

came as best he could, resorting to the chair smash when occasion demanded. Once free enough to produce manifestations, Nino went ahead with them. But there—as with the voices—he was limited.

He could thrust his own face from the curtains; he could extend his own hand and shake those of sitters while he piped vocally that the hand was that of a spirit. He could reach for objects and snatch them from tables outside the cabinet. He could write messages on cards or slates, or make finger-prints in wax. He did all these things while released.

But he did them inartistically. He wrote my name on a piece of paper, claiming that Houdini's spirit was doing it. He added Houdini's purported signature and misspelled it. When he did the same through the "spirit" of Conan Doyle, the signature was written: "Cohn Doyle."

Ready to meet every challenge, Nino blundered into many tests; and among his crude results were occasional occurrences that showed flashes of unusual ingenuity.

Investigators wanted to take photographs of manifestations. Nino agreed. When he knew that there would be no chance to have the plates faked, he adopted such measures as the one at the *Science and Invention* séance, where he yanked the paper toward

the cabinet and called for a flashlight, hoping that his hand would be out of sight when the flash occurred. He failed on that one; but he succeeded quite well on another occasion.

Ectoplasm was called for; Nino offered to produce it and have the ethereal substance photographed. The camera was directed at a given spot. The flash puffed when called for. When the plate was developed, it showed a hazy streak of white that matched the accepted descriptions of ectoplasm.

Nino accomplished this simply, but cleverly. He whisked a handkerchief through the air at the instant of the flash. In quick motion, the handkerchief blurred the plate and even left semi-transparent edges. The ruse produced a far better brand of ectoplasm, photographically speaking, than that rendered by mediums specializing in the ectoplastic field.

In all his activities, Nino Pecoraro was eccentric. This phase of his behavior impressed itself. He wanted money; at the same time, he took no small pride in his accomplishments. His contempt for bonds indicated that he felt confidence in his ability at self-release.

He gave some indications of self-hypnosis; and frequently threw himself into violent fits, not only when he needed to ruin a chair; but when sitters insisted upon entering the cabinet with him. On more than

one occasion, Nino hurled himself—chair and all—in the direction of an investigator who was too close at hand.

In the course of my investigations, I found Nino to be somewhat friendly. He seemed pleased when I attended his séances; not only because he may have looked forward to another try for the prize award, but because he also wanted to impress me with his ability.

One night, when Nino was to give a séance in Brooklyn, he wanted me to bring along a pair of handcuffs; because he had heard it said that no one could slip such devices from his wrists. Houdini had often emphasized that point. I sensed that Nino wanted to try the supposedly impossible. This fitted with my opinion that his work was purely physical. I brought the handcuffs.

Nino actually slipped them at the séance. It was a give-away, for his wrists and hands were mauled; and I was criticized for brutality, despite the fact that I had brought the cuffs at Nino's own request. Nino himself was grateful for the favor. He proved that on the way to the séance.

It was during the ride that Nino staged the unexpected. He was not in a trance; he spoke in his own voice. He said:

“To-night, I am going to exposa spiritualism. Exposa

the whola damn business. I am a greata medium; but wat I get? Not even a packa of cigarettes!”

Frankly, I was amazed. More so than I had ever been by any of Nino's various trance voices. I hardly believed that the medium's words were real. But Nino continued his insistence.

At the séance, he talked against spiritualism. He let us see him slip the handcuffs. He persisted in his statement that he was through. Something had soured Nino against the psychic game.

Nino Pecoraro was ready to deliver the confession that rocked the material realm of fraudulent mediumship.

CHAPTER X

THE PECORARO CONFESSIONS

ON APRIL 8, 1931, NINO PECORARO joined me on Broadway. It was the middle of the afternoon; but he was attired in tuxedo. He wanted to be at his best; for he was to gain front page publicity.

Accompanying us were reporters and newspaper camera men. We had arranged the time and place. Nino was ready to recount his past and deliver a complete exposé of the methods that he had used to accomplish his manifestations.

That day, Nino told his story. It was a complete confession of his career as a medium.

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Born and raised in Italy, Nino had held an aversion to military duty. When the time approached for him to join the army, he became eccentric. He found himself capable of assuming a trancelike condition, accompanied by wild spasms.

By his own confession Nino was confined in an insane asylum.

There, he continued his mad fits. He was bound; he broke loose. It pleased him. He acted wilder than before, so they would place him in a strait-jacket and give him the chance to escape from it.

He gained his chance. He released himself from the jacket.

His case became a puzzling one. He showed himself more rational. He was finally declared to be neither insane nor fit for military service.

Soon afterward, Nino came to America.

Nino had heard of two persons who impressed him. One was Eusapia Palladino. She, like Nino, was an Italian who had possessed unusual gifts. She had come to America and had gained fame through giving spirit séances. The other was Harry Houdini. He had won fame and fortune through his ability at releasing himself from restraints.

Originally, Nino had told me that one night Palladino had come to him in a vision and had told him

to carry on her work. She had promised then to always do his bidding; that was why she had become his spirit control.

His confession changed that story. He had chosen Palladino merely as a prototype. He decided to give private séances according to ideas of his own. During them, he wanted to surpass Houdini. He had no knowledge of Houdini's methods; he thought that they consisted chiefly of brute force. Wiry and strong, Nino felt able to get out of anything. That was why he depended upon ingenuity in preference to set method.

Nino began with séances in the Italian districts. He gained a manager who finally solicited séances for regular spiritualistic circles. Nino came into the lime-light.

Some of the early séances were profitable; but they were irregular. Nino wanted a larger field and sought it. His work as a medium served to increase his eccentricities. For a while, he became self-deluded.

It was not a desire to dupe people that started him as a medium. Nino wanted to be the center of a show. He wanted to gain praise for his extraordinary abilities. The sitters who came to the séance rooms desired manifestations, so Nino produced them. Yet in his own mind, it was still a battle of wits—his ability to escape

from almost any form of binding and to return to his bonds without discovery.

This accounted for the odd development of Nino's séances. So far as his releases were concerned, they were the result of amazing cleverness; but his manifestations—when released—were simple and limited. His career might have been a short one, but for the abundance of imagination in the minds of the ardent Spiritualists who attended his séances.

Seeing his simple manifestations treated as remarkable phenomena, Nino began to wonder at himself. He could not explain his natural ability for escaping from bonds. When surrounded by intelligent persons who praised him for his mediumship, Nino began to believe that these people were right!

In describing his séance for Sir Conan Doyle, Nino explained all that had happened. Confined behind the curtains, he managed to extricate himself from the cords and wires without difficulty. He could sense the expectations of the people beyond the curtains. He began to move the curtains. He heard audible gasps—Sir Arthur and others declaring that they could feel the breeze that was moving the curtains. Nino seized the table with one black-mittened hand. He made the table move up and down, finally tossing it from the

curtains. This caused profound amazement, his hand being invisible in the dim light.

A natural mimic, Nino had used falsetto cries back in the days when he had bewildered the army examiners in Italy. He used that same voice to talk in Italian, announcing himself as Palladino.

Pulling a hand free from its mitten, Nino thrust his arm through the curtains and called out in broken English, declaring himself to be a spirit. According to Nino, Conan Doyle grasped his hand and was positive that he had felt the grip of his dead son.

More curtain rustling; getting back into bonds; the faking of a trance condition—these completed the manifestations. But he had his own opinion of Doyle's description of the occurrence. Nino described the happening in this fashion:

"Damn fool, taka my han'—thinka it dead son—that nota my bizness. When I shaka da curtain, he think it a spirit breeze."

It was asserted in England that Nino had never held a séance with Conan Doyle. Nino declared that he did; that he hoaxed Doyle. In his book, "Our American Adventure," Doyle gives the details of a séance with Pecoraro. It was in that book that Doyle declared: "I thought the youth was a true medium and might develop into something remarkable."

Nino did a complete job with his exposé. He described every detail of his séances, posed for still pictures and motion shots for news reels. That done, he dictated and signed a complete confession of his past.

His chief reason for the confession appeared to be a disappointment because his hopes had not been realized. He had believed that all mediums were fakers. His own experience proved it to his complete satisfaction. Spiritualists had so marveled at Nino's séances that he had found himself in a mental whirl. "They driva me craze—" was the manner in which he expressed it.

Other mediums had made money. Nino was convinced that his work was superior to theirs. Nevertheless, he had subsisted on comparatively little. He had made the endeavor to capture the *Science and Invention* award because he knew it would bring him cash as well as prestige.

The name of Houdini had come to play such an important part in Nino's affairs that he had decided he had been mistaken in his choice of a career. The psychic field was too limited. He no longer wanted to be a second Palladino; he wanted to become a successor to Houdini. He pictured himself touring in vaudeville, presenting an escape act.

Houdini had exposed the fakery in Spiritualism and

had gained his fame through an honest presentation of ability in the field of escapes. Hence Nino regarded his confession—through its exposé of fraudulent mediumship—to be the first step necessary in his newly planned career.

Nino left no detail uncovered. He exposed every device, including the handkerchief wave that had produced a photograph of supposed ectoplasm.

The effect of Nino's confession was an immediate excitement among Spiritualistic believers. Some denounced Nino as a faker of the lowest type. Others declared that his confession had been forced. Some insisted that he was too ignorant to recognize the powers that he actually possessed. A few sought to repudiate him entirely by declaring that they had never heard of him.

Among these was Lady Doyle, who resented the introduction of the late Sir Arthur's name. However, newspaper clippings and Doyle's own writings stood as absolute proof that Sir Arthur had witnessed Nino's séance and had been impressed by it.

It was a perfect case against Spiritualism, that brought forth as never before the hysteria and self-delusion that surround ardent believers. Nevertheless, certain Spiritualists were not content with the discredit that had been cast upon their pet beliefs. They

introduced new measures to further prove the simple-mindedness that so frequently possesses them.

They bribed Nino into a repudiation of his confession. That has been a regular trick of psychic believers for many years. Any self-confessed medium will recant under proper persuasion. Nino again came under the influence of the believers. They harped upon his genuine powers. They promised to reinstate him; to arrange wonderful séances which would bring him pecuniary return.

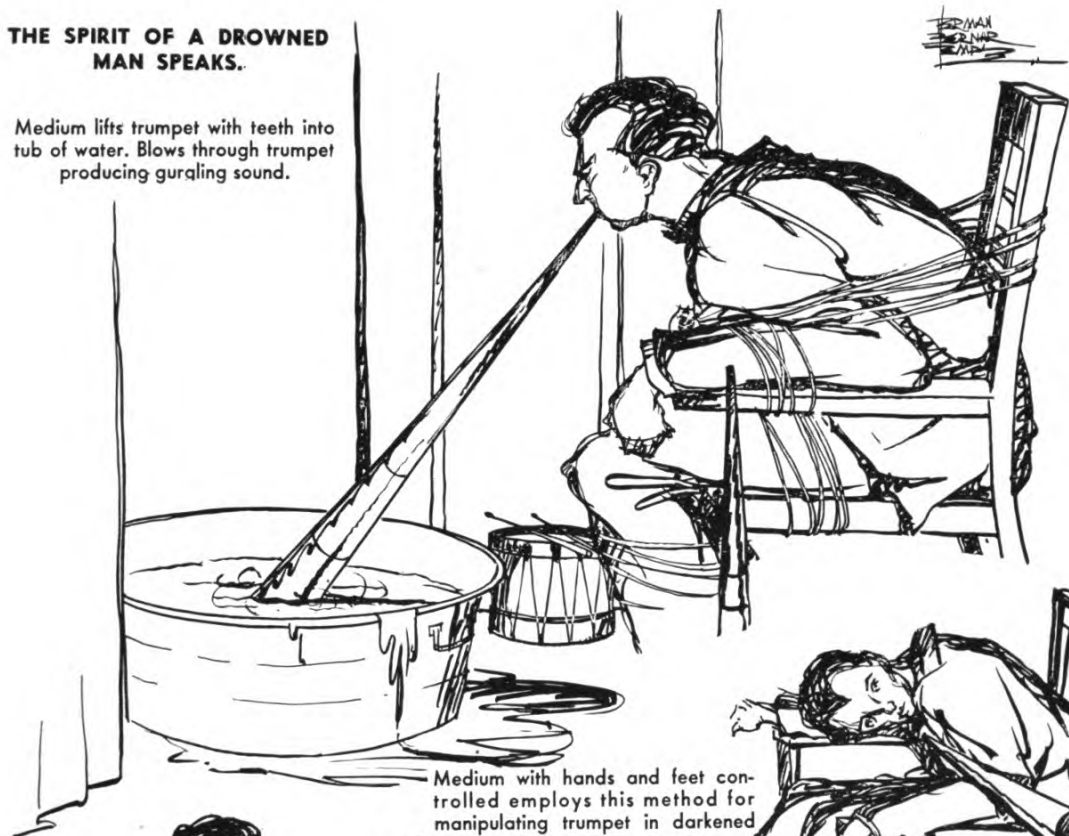
Extravagant promises, like real ghosts, invariably fail to materialize. With Nino's repudiation in the bag, his sponsors let him down cold. Nino acted accordingly. He sought me again; and told the truth concerning his repudiation.

Thus Nino Pecoraro not only ended his own mediumship, but revealed the conniving methods of those who champion the so-called psychic science. Backed with sworn affidavits, supplemented by direct statements to newspapermen, doubled in its effectiveness by the hysterical outbursts of Spiritualists themselves, the confession of Nino Pecoraro stands as an unyielding proof that true spirit manifestations do not exist.

With all the press notices that had included his name, Nino felt confident of gaining success as an escape artist. He did not realize that he lacked per-

THE SPIRIT OF A DROWNED MAN SPEAKS.

Medium lifts trumpet with teeth into tub of water. Blows through trumpet producing gurgling sound.



Medium with hands and feet controlled employs this method for manipulating trumpet in darkened room.



1 Picks up trumpet with teeth—



2. Swings trumpet around and into crook of arm—



Rests trumpet in crook of arm and now has mouth free with which to speak.

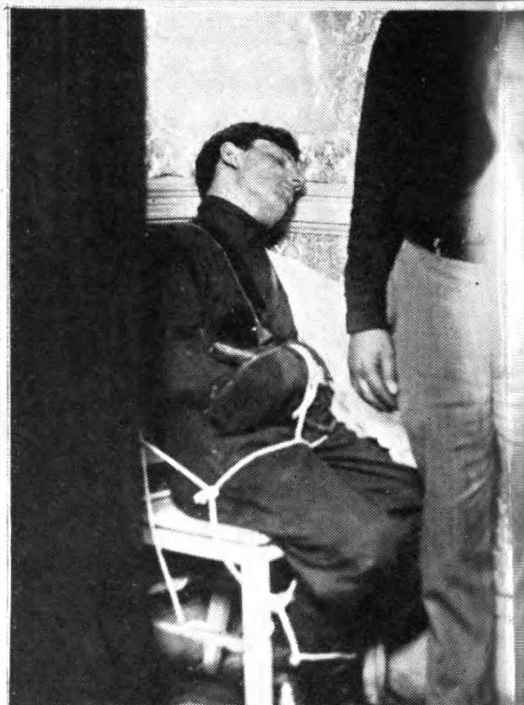


Medium by slight whisper undetectable at short distance, produces amplified sound in trumpet, which spectators recognize as a spirit voice.



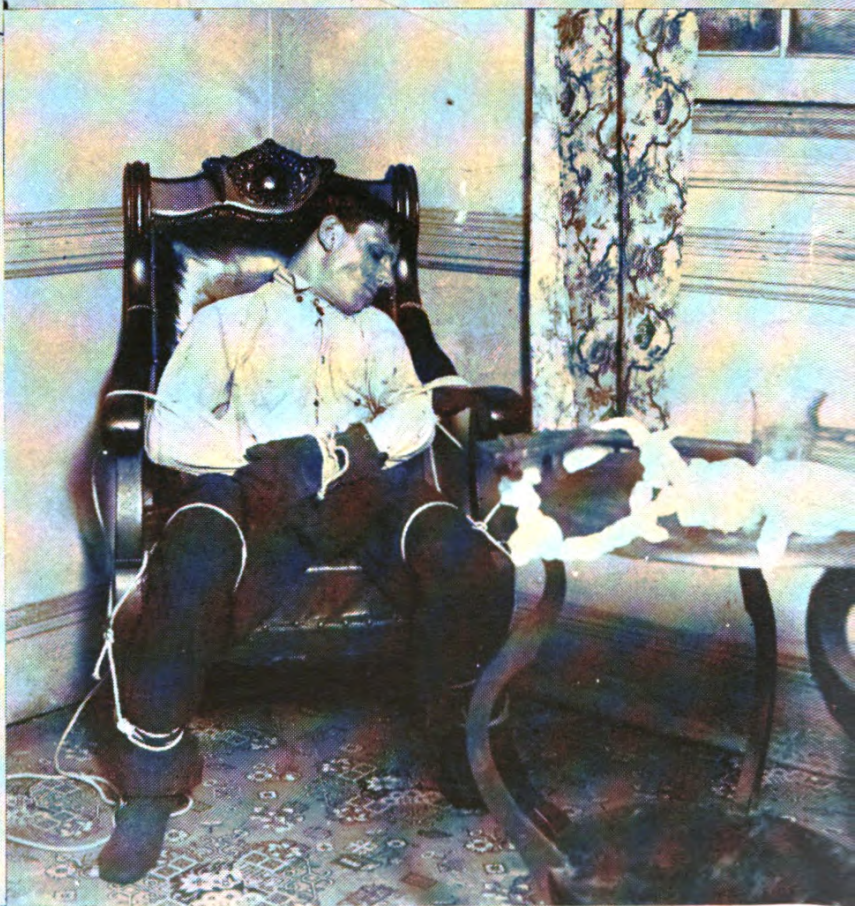
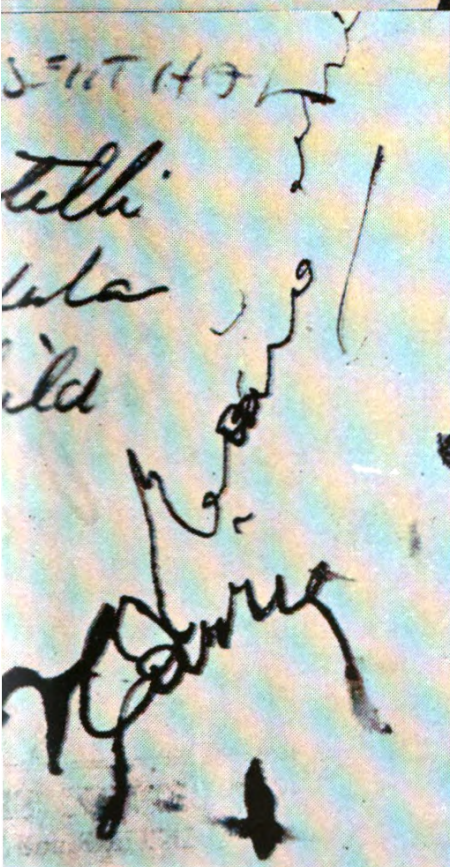


Nino Pecoraro Bound before Entering Cabinet.
So-called Ectoplasm Produced by Waving Paper in Front
of Camera. (Method Admitted by Pecoraro.)



LESTER A. RO
Luigi Pignat
Anna Lopez
Bill Bloomsbury

Spirit Photo Produced by Pecoraro
touched after
Spirit Signature of Enrico Caruso
Pecoraro's Seance. Completely Un
Other Names Are the Sig



iro. Negative Admitted Re-
Seance.
o and Houdini Produced at
like Genuine Signature. The
natures of Witnesses.

Spirit Photograph Taken under Test Conditions at Pecoraro's
Seance. Likewise Admitted to the Author to Have Been a
Retouched Negative.
Nino Pecoraro Genuinely Exhausted after One of His
Seances. Note That Many of the Bindings Are Disturbed.

New York City,
Thursday,
April 9, 1931.

To Whom It May Concern:-

I, Nino Pecoraro, previously known as a spirit medium for the past eleven years, hereby declare that I personally possess the psychic ability of liberating myself from all sorts of bindings, and various forms of restraint, thereby enabling me to freely use my body to do all sorts of things, such as message writing, trumpet blowing, moving of objects, writing of messages upon paper, and creating all sorts of phenomenal effects.

I hereby state that I have, in the past, as in the present, been able to do these things PERSONALLY, and ABSOLUTELY UNASSISTED, and thereby state that in as much as I do these things MYSELF, and am strictly conscious thereof, I have never been aided by ANY SPIRITS, nor any SPIRITUALISTIC force whatsoever.

I therefore do not believe that ANYONE ever saw a genuine spirit, in as much as in all of the eleven years of my experience, I NEVER SAW ONE, and DO NOT believe that anyone else ever saw a spirit.

I personally produced EVERYTHING that was ever seen by my investigators, without any SPIRITUALISTIC aid what so ever.

Signed by

Nino Pecoraro
Paul Dunninger
C. Spencer
J. C. Ambrose

Witnessed by

Paul Dunninger
Heber J. Dunninger
Orville Wood

Original Confession of Nino Pecoraro Made before Dunninger and
Witnessed by Representatives of the Press.

sonality, showmanship and business ability. Had he possessed those, he would have coined money as a medium.

He was due for failure, also, as a performer of escape tricks. He made a few appearances at some smaller New York theaters; but his liberation act lacked the effectiveness it needed.

Nino was much freer of mind, however. With his double confession, he had completely finished his chances of returning to the psychic racket. I had announced my true opinion; namely, that as an exponent of self-extrication, Nino possessed unique qualifications.

He liked publicity; he was pleased when he saw his picture in the newspapers. He wore a huge grin in the photographs where he exposed the mediumistic stunts. But he could not understand why his performances were not in immediate demand.

An instance of Nino's simplicity in reasoning occurred some time afterward. He came to me with his usual complaint. He wanted success and had not gained it.

"Dunninge," said Nino, "I am a greata medium."

I agreed with him.

"Tella me," he inquired, "how can da paper say other more greata than Nino?"

That expressed, he asked:

“Dunninge, you do somet’ing for me?”

I asked him to continue with the request. Nino picked up paper and pen.

“You writa here what great man Nino is. You say how Nino get out of ropes, how he get out of anything.”

I reminded Nino that I had already made public statements as to his capability at escapes. He shook his head. He apparently reasoned that people did not believe. I asked him what he wanted in the way of a statement. He began to roll one off, voicing the most extravagant claims regarding himself.

I had it taken on the typewriter. It covered pages; and as it progressed, I saw that such a statement from any one would be preposterous. But I knew also that Nino would begin his argument all over again, if nothing was done about it.

Nino’s jargon was put into reasonable English on the machine. After it was finished, Nino read it with a series of satisfied nods and declared:

“Good.”

I had picked up the pen. I handed it to Nino and said:

“There is your testimonial. Sign it.”

Nino signed the document, pocketed it and de-

parted. A few days later, he returned. He produced the testimonial which recounted all his potential exploits and announced:

“Dunninge, they read this. They laugh and say this is no good. They say you no sign it.”

“Nino,” I asked, “you did all these things, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t do them, did I?”

“No.”

“Then how can I sign my name to what *you* did?”

Nino folded the pages and put them back in his pocket.

“You right,” he affirmed. “You right. Maybe they musta be craze.”

Among his claims, Nino declared himself to be greater than Houdini ever was. He expressed it thus:

“You tie me up. I get out—then I get in. Houdeen, he get out—no get in. Nino do this. Nino better than Houdeen.”

Nino also recounted one of the many incidents that made it impossible for him to pursue his new career. Some one in Philadelphia had offered him one hundred dollars to be put in a steel cage; then come out in full view and thus prove that it could be done by trickery.

“I go to Philadelphia two times,” Nino told me. “No money. I say, ‘Where is da hundred dollar?’ They say: ‘First you do da phenomena.’ I say: ‘First I get da money.’ Should I show them trick for nothing?”

It was this lack of trust in any business arrangement that prevented Nino from putting on his escapes publicly. Even under management, he was apt to protest any ordinary requirement, such as a try-out performance.

Nino dropped his theatrical plans not long after he had abandoned his fraudulent mediumship. The last that I heard of him, he had gone back to Italy.

In Nino Pecoraro's confession, we have ample proof of an old story; that of the professional medium whose career is furthered not by inborn dishonesty; but through absolute ignorance, sponsored and promoted by the eagerness of persons anxious to be deceived. Just as the crafty fakers imbue dupes with belief; so do the believers drag bewildered nonentities from obscurity and praise them as real mediums.

There are many odd paths to mediumship; and others beside Nino Pecoraro have followed them. His case is one that will stand out as permanent proof of this truth.

CHAPTER XI

MY SÉANCES WITH FRANK DECKER

IN JANUARY, 1930, WHEN FRANK DECKER, a society medium in New York, offered to try for the prize money backed by the Science and Invention Magazine, I was still chairman of their committee for Psychical Research. The prize however had dwindled to \$21,000. The withdrawal of Mrs. Houdini's contribution had reduced it from \$31,000, the sum that Nino Pecoraro had hoped to win in 1928. By the terms of the prize offer Mr. Decker couldn't have the money if I could duplicate the physical phenomena.

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The reason for confining the field of activity to the purely physical is logical, since it is possible to bring into a séance (in one's head) information for mental demonstration, whether gotten by direct inquiry or by mind reading. Genuine physical manifestations, on the other hand, cannot be prepared beforehand.

The test was held in a fourth floor room of the Governor Clinton Hotel in New York City at 11 P.M. As usual the curtains were drawn and light chinks shut out and the door locked. The hands of the medium were held by two members of the press. Each held one arm and leg during the seance. Trumpets were placed within the circle.

Every medium has his own system of procedure and Mr. Decker requested that the group, about fifty in number, sing a hymn such as "Glory, glory, Halleluiah." He directed also if a spirit touched anyone to be sure and say "Thank you!"

As the company hummed the hymn trumpets began falling about the floor. A voice here and there remarked that something had touched them.

Suddenly a voice, high, falsetto, piped,
"This is Patsy."

Patsy was greeted very cordially by the audience. People asked questions. Patsy called out the first names of many of the audience and told them their dead

grandmothers were asking for them and sending their love. Patsy named one man's grandmother by her full name and also told him that his brother now in China had recently met with an accident but was recovering.

One member of our group for that evening was Emile Rousseau, a former member of the Metropolitan Opera Co. The other control of Mr. Decker's whispered hoarsely, as Enrico Caruso began to sing through the lungs and mouth of Mr. Rousseau, that Emile was being directed by Caruso. Needless to say the message had come through from the spirit world that Mr. Rousseau was requested to sing. Mr. Rousseau had been for some time an adherent of the spiritualistic cult.

The test was over. The lights came on and I prepared to take over the situation. A newspaper woman held one of my arms and legs and Mr. Decker took a grapevine twist on the other arm and leg.

Lights out.

In five minutes, by natural means, I managed to make the trumpets act in frisky fashion and saw to it that everyone in the front row was touched. Although Decker had been quite correct in his information to his audience there was no requirement in the offer that correct readings also be duplicated. As it was, when my demonstration was finished Decker said that

I must have mediumistic powers. His remark reminded me that Charles Davenport, Nino Pecoraro's manager, —before Nino had confessed his fraud to the world— also claimed that I was a medium after I had duplicated Nino's performances.

The newspaper jury decided that Mr. Decker was not entitled to the prize. I learned later that the reporter whose brother had been in China discovered that a business associate of his brother was a regular client of mediums. Rousseau confided to friends, without realizing the implications of the remark, that his voice had always been judged similar in type to Caruso's when they had been in the Metropolitan together. This information does not reflect upon Decker's sincerity. It simply credits him with unusual mental capabilities which can not be classed as the results of spirit guidance.

In April of 1930 Mr. Decker expressed a desire to try for the award again. This time he asked for more difficult conditions for both of us.

The challenge was accepted and resulted in a four-hour competitive séance in the Ambassador Hotel. The arrangements were interesting so they should be described in some detail.

A wooden box, two feet square and four feet high, with a sloping front similar to the type used for ship-

ping pianos, was built to order and inspected thoroughly by the press. Bound hand and foot and in the nude Mr. Decker entered the cabinet first. The top was fashioned of two semicircular pieces, fitted closely about the neck. These were nailed and screwed down, precluding the possibility of any manipulations through the opening.

While the room was darkened a group composed mostly of members of the press awaited developments. They came. Decker and his spirits caused two trumpets to topple from a table placed some distance in front of the cabinet; tambourines tinkled; handkerchiefs swished against sleeves.

Mr. Decker's spirits also told who among the audience had bought stock, how much money one man had remaining after the party he had attended the night before and several other little personal items.

Having performed his part of the bargain Mr. Decker was extricated from the box, clothed, and it became my turn. Following the exact program to which he had submitted, I in turn entered the box. The neck pieces were adjusted and fastened securely. Again the room was in darkness. I reproduced all the physical phenomena originally presented by the medium except that I managed to overthrow three trumpets instead of

only two. This time I threw in a little information, too. I exposed one man who had forgotten the name of his first wife. Incidentally I might mention that it was agreed by the press that the tests just undergone by us were more difficult than the famous "Margery" had been asked to undergo.

Since I had met the requirements in duplicating the manifestations in a purely physical way, Mr. Decker was eliminated as a legitimate claimant for the \$21,000.

For seven months there were no further developments. But in November, during a séance at the darkened headquarters of the Spiritual and Ethical Society, 304 W. 91st street, Mr. John O'Neill of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* was very much impressed by an experiment in levitation. Mr. O'Neill is a man for whom I have the highest regard for he is fair-minded and balanced in his attitude toward the whole question. However, the very fact that he was impressed by this demonstration made me wish that he should have both possibilities presented to him. He had discovered the powers of the believers. I offered him an opportunity to find out if the powers of those who believe in the supernatural but never the supernatural were not as great.

On Nov. 6th Mr. O'Neill's description of the séance appeared in the *Eagle*. On Nov. 7th I suggested that I

come to the *Eagle* office and duplicate in broad daylight what O'Neill had experienced in the dark. Mr. Decker proved to be the person I was challenging. Being an excellent sport, he accepted. The séance was arranged for a future date.

On November 17th Mr. Decker was forced to call off the contest although Mr. O'Neill had enthusiastically arranged to have a group of eminent research scientists and engineers to watch the two of us at work. Mr. Decker's hands were tied. Although I lost my temper at the time and accused Mr. Decker of wriggling out of the affair it became obvious when Mrs. Helen Wells, president of the Spiritual and Ethical Society, proclaimed her sentiments in the matter, that since Mr. Decker was under contract with them at the time and they were paying his salary, he could do nothing. Mrs. Wells announced her decision as follows:

"We do not approve of Mr. Decker taking part in any test with Dunninger. He took part in two previous tests with Dunninger and they have been unfair. My spirit guides advise against permitting him to have anything to do with Dunninger and we have no intention of going contrary to what our guides advise."

This message *must* have come from spirit guides, for, until Mrs. Wells suggested unfair tactics on my part no

one in the groups at the two séances—including Decker himself—had even suggested such a thing.

On November 18th the Society announced a change of decision. Whether or not the “guides” were responsible, or simply over-ruled, the fact stands that the society offered the use of their rooms for a test. I agreed immediately although the rooms did not meet requirements for test conditions. I said I would duplicate any performance Mr. Decker chose to put on in the spiritualistic rooms.

On Mr. Decker's receiving this information he protested that he had no intention of producing any phenomena; but that I would be expected to duplicate the previous performance in levitation, as I had promised to do in the *Eagle* office. Since I had not been present at the levitation and did not know except through Mr. O'Neill's description what had happened this was unreasonable, as Mr. O'Neill agreed. He told Mr. Decker that he could offer no valid objection to producing phenomena for me to duplicate. Then Mr. Decker explained himself—and it was a legitimate explanation. The society permitted him no other choice. Any change in the plan he outlined would cause him to lose his job. When I was told of the situation by O'Neill I offered to buy the contract from the Spiritual and Ethical

Society and pay Decker's salary due on the balance of said contract. I offered a check for the lump sum.

There was no word from Decker. Thinking it over afterward it seemed perhaps a bit too much to expect of him. If he had accepted my offer it would have appeared disloyal to his chosen group. So we did not challenge him on the point.

The next year, on Jan. 30, 1931, our belief in Mr. Decker was justified. No longer under contract on that date a séance was arranged at the Crescent Athletic Club. Decker said that the spirits told him Dunninger would be convinced and that Dunninger sometimes used psychic force in his own performances.

I naturally disclaimed any such powers. Mr. Decker's naïveté did not alter the facts—that what I do is done by trickery and absolutely nothing else.

This séance was short and undecisive. No physical phenomena were produced. The Lord's prayer was recited, and followed by group singing. Then came Patsy who talked about my relatives. Patsy however, produced no visible presences. A gruff voice spoke, saying it was Doyle and spoke of a letter written to me by him. Nothing evidential came through later, although such was promised by the voice. Mr. Decker was ill with grippe and came out of his trance prematurely. But during the séance, Decker described a "lettergram"

which I had received from Houdini dated Dec. 14, 1923 from Little Rock. He said it had a picture in two upper corners. Decker said the message was as follows:

“Will be in New York for a few days. Have hurt my right leg. Regards, Houdini.”

I promised to look in my files to see if his information was correct. The test was ended. Since no physical phenomena were produced I was not called upon to duplicate any. But since Mr. Decker had given out so much information I decided to show my own ability as a “mentalists.”

Quoting from Mr. O'Neill's write-up of the affair, he commented upon the apparent lack of Mr. Decker's physical phenomena which is the only thing eligible for judgment in a test.

About my own exhibition he commented as follows:

“Dunninger's exhibition was one which a medium could well offer as evidential phenomena. He stated later that he produced his results neither by psychic phenomena nor sleight of hand but used ‘hypnotic clairvoyance.’

“Dunninger is a hypnotist and it is a considerable problem to me to determine where this line should be drawn between what Dunninger calls mental powers

and what spiritualists call psychic powers—the closest approach I can make is—a difference in degree. Dunninger has learned how to bring certain mental powers under control at all times—considers these powers normal—while the spiritualists—going rather afield in trying to top other powers, have almost no control over them and sensing this lack ascribe results to supernatural entities.”

This is a very thoughtful analysis of the subject. But I want to point out, especially in Mr. Decker’s case, that while I have repeatedly insisted that he does not get his effects by spirit-help any more than I do, he has already been credited by me as having powers also of “hypnotic clairvoyance.” My desire to test out the spirit evidences is not actuated by a desire to destroy any idea of certain mental powers being impossible to man. All I wish to emphasize is that so far *physical phenomena* have not been proved genuine spirit work. There have been abundant evidences of mental telepathy and clairvoyance.

On February 3rd I announced in the newspapers that I had found the Houdini Lettergram in my file; that Decker’s rendition was nearly correct but incomplete. I stated that the letter was misplaced in the file from among Houdini’s papers to a place among the photographs.

The complete letter follows:

My Dear Dunninger:

Will be back in N. Y. for a few days. Hurt my right leg.
Am laying off. Regards,

Houdini.

Don't know your address as my address book is in N. Y.

Unfortunately Mr. Decker mistook my remark as a reflection upon himself. He insisted that he had not removed anything from my files. That was not my meaning.

CHAPTER XII

MEDICAL MEDIUMSHIP

MEDICAL MEDIUMSHIP IS A DEEP-ROOTED factor in spiritualism. From the standpoint of the medium, it is profitable. It is also unsafe. This type of spiritualistic fraud is one against which the law can strike. Practicing medicine without a license is an offense in itself.

There are many instances which show the prevalence of medical mediumship. Conan Doyle once recited how the spirit of his dead son massaged him. At a spiritualistic congress some years ago, one afternoon confer-

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ence was devoted to “healers,” who invited sufferers from the audience and called upon spirit aid to ease the ailments.

As a rule, these “treatments” are handled in cagy fashion. That fact proves that the vast majority of mediums know that they are imposters. Potentially, every medium is a “healer”; because, through contact with spirits of all degrees, they should certainly be able to tap sources of medical information through famous physicians who have passed to the spirit world.

But that would force proof of psychic powers, should the mediums come before the law. Strangely, with all their urge to convert the world to Spiritualism, mediums do not care to argue their cases in law courts, where they would gain great publicity for their cause.

We find, therefore, that many mediums strictly avoid giving medical advice. When consulted on the subject, they either hedge and give evasive answers; or they tap some spirit source and pipe through the decree that the client should “see a physician.”

Once sure of their customers, however, there are mediums who will privately bring medical advice from the other world. There are others—comparatively few in number—who go the whole route and specialize in psychic healing. They run the risk because the game proves worth it.

Two medical mediums whom I investigated present contrasts, because of their different modes of operation. One has definite peculiarities to say the least. The other was definitely in the fake medium racket, for he used "materializations" to emphasize his treatments.

The first medium mentioned was W. J. Palmer. He professed to be able to cure diseases, including "a crick in the back" through psycho-massage. Since Palmer called himself a medium, he warranted investigation. On February 25, 1931, I visited Palmer; and I was accompanied by Allen H. Smith of the United Press.

Palmer guessed that he was under test; but it did not embarrass him in the least. When Smith announced that he had come for treatment, Palmer looked him over and decided that Smith had arterio-sclerosis. Palmer thought that he could cure the patient; so he placed Smith in a straight-backed chair and stood behind him.

Palmer immediately went into his trance. It resembled an epileptic fit. He shivered, clapped his hands at his sides, and whooped like an Indian. He ground his teeth; and explained that he was under the "control" of a spirit who had once been a dentist. Besides the dentist, Palmer was possessed by Indians and a couple of chemists. This assortment of guiding spirits had a

field day. Smith was a patient subject; and when Palmer began to tug his ears, to cure the arterio-sclerosis, the patience was all that saved him. Smith said afterward that it felt as if Palmer had been trying to cure him of an "open mind."

The treatment ended, Palmer told us about his career. He had picked up an assortment of medical terms, none of which he fully understood, and had gained conviction that through his whooping and grinding, he could cure people. He insisted that all his trance articulations came from actual "controls."

"I used to be a farmer in Rhode Island," asserted Palmer, seriously. "I used to go to church Sunday nights; and all these friends of mine would jump up and holler how bad they were. So I left Rhode Island and come to New York, getting me a job in the fish business, which I wish to state I have been in fifty years, an' an honest man, too.

"Well, I didn't think no more of it, when one day I was leanin' over my oyster board, kind of alookin' at a bunch of oysters when there come upon me a goofy feelin' an' I see a spirit amongst the oysters. That was the beginnin'."

Palmer's case was a ridiculous one. While our visit proved that fact, the case could hardly be called an ex-

posure. There had never been any possibility of concealment.

But in contrast to the spirit-possessed oysterman, we have the later case of Dr. Emerson Gilbert.

The law first noticed Doctor Gilbert. Rumors had reached the police of a medium who could produce a certain "Doctor Walker" from the spirit world. The medium called himself Doctor Gilbert; he produced manifestations and gave treatments in his apartment. Through Gilbert, the spirit hands of "Doctor Walker" had reputedly effected amazing cures.

Two policewomen, Hannah Dolan and Hannah Moench, were sent to investigate. They called upon Doctor Gilbert at his residence at 200 West Fifty-fourth Street. They posed as prospective patients; Gilbert welcomed them and collected a fee of five dollars each, for a reading, plus ten dollars apiece for one of "Doctor Walker's" treatments. Gilbert had two employes present: one was a man who told fortunes; the other was a registered nurse.

The procedure proved quite simple. Ushered into the office, the patients were requested to disrobe to a meager point of attire. They rested upon the treatment table and awaited developments. Hannah Moench was chosen as the first patient. Doctor Gilbert arrived, darkened the room and entered a spirit cabinet. After about

ten minutes, a gleaming figure emerged and the treatment began. Since Doctor Gilbert had disappeared, it was to be assumed that the expected apparition had arrived.

Since Hannah Moench, as an investigator, did not need medical attention, one moment of spiritual massage was sufficient to convince her that she had to deal with a human being; and not a ghost. Springing from the table, she called for detectives who were stationed outside. They arrived; and she denounced Doctor Gilbert, "Doctor Walker" and the whole procedure.

The police searched the house. They netted one phosphorescent cheese-cloth robe and some photographs of "Doctor Walker" in his gleaming outfit. The searchers also located the corporeal form of Doctor Emerson Gilbert, who was forcibly plucked from a closet.

Gilbert was brought before Magistrate Johan J. Goldstein. At the hearing, the medium protested that he was unjustly accused; and offered to prove the fact. He testified that he had a degree of Doctor of Divinity from Indiana State Central University.

The judge decided to give Gilbert a chance to clear himself before final arraignment. If he could produce a genuine ghost, matters would be reconsidered. If not, sentence would be imposed. Gilbert finally agreed to

the test; he was given the privilege of holding the séance at his apartment.

The séance was arranged for March 4, 1935. I received a request from Magistrate Goldstein that I be present as an investigator. Newspaper reporters were also invited.

Upon the evening stated, I arrived and found my path to the apartment opposed. Members of the Reverend Doctor's flock had come to see justice done; and they seemed ready to aid justice by creating a disturbance outside. I finally forced my way into the apartment; only to be challenged by Gilbert. The medium was bitter at what he was pleased to call my "disturbing presence."

I assured Gilbert that I had attended many séances; and had officiated when other mediums had attempted demonstrations of phenomena; but that never before had this criticism been directed against me. The magistrate insisted that I remain.

Doctor Gilbert repaired sulkily to his cabinet. He spent thirty minutes in that receptacle and produced only silence. He emerged in a huff and declared that there were too many conflicting elements. The magistrate, realizing the large number of persons present, decided to give Gilbert another chance.

The medium had an attorney present. I conferred

with the lawyer and the magistrate. I stated that if Doctor Gilbert could produce physical phenomena which I could not duplicate by scientific means, he would be eligible for an award of ten thousand dollars.

I stipulated that the séance should be held in a hotel room, agreeable to both parties; that the medium could have a cabinet formed by a curtain that produced a triangular recess in a blank corner of the room. I added other provisos: the medium's hands and feet to be held; and photographs to be taken at the medium's discretion. The affair was to be a test séance.

This offered great opportunity for a medium, if actually genuine. It gave Gilbert a chance to clear himself, to collect ten thousand dollars and advance the cause of Spiritualism. He heard the terms and consented to undertake the test, with one proviso. He wanted first to "magnetize" the room where the séance would be held.

I agreed that he could magnetize it while under observation. Gilbert's attorney, however, seemed reluctant to the plan; his understanding of Gilbert's powers was that the medium could not always produce phenomena but had to wait until the spirits were willing to help.

So a specified time was allowed Gilbert, to set a date for the séance. Since his spirits had so gladly helped those who had come to him for treatment, we felt sure that they would aid him in his own time of stress.

In the meantime, I inspected the exhibits taken by the police. In examining this evidence of the raid, I noted that the photographs of "Doctor Walker" showed the spirit in a gown that closely matched the phosphorescent cheese-cloth that the law had grabbed.

The time limit lapsed. Gilbert chose neither to rely upon spirits or new cheese-cloth. He made no arrangement for the demonstration; on March 19th, he was brought before Magistrate Goldstein and he confessed that he was a fake. He was fined fifty dollars; and given a suspended sentence of four months in the work-house.

Gilbert's aids were dismissed. The medium was advised not to resume his racket. Since then, the healing specter of "Doctor Walker" has made no reappearances.

The case of Doctor Emerson Gilbert is important because it shows the courses that the law can adopt in dealing with such charlatans. The case, as conducted by Magistrate Goldstein, shows the exact procedure which the law may take in matters of this sort.

It has therefore been included as an appendix in this volume.

CHAPTER XIII

AROUND THE PSYCHIC CIRCLES

EVERY CITY AND TOWN IN THE COUNTRY is haunted—not by ghosts, but by mediums. Nightly, they hold their hodge-podge “sittings” and take in their gullible clients. Tales are unfolded regarding these marvelous psychics; and those stories are repeated, with due exaggeration. Sometimes skeptics attend such séances and are somewhat startled—if not convinced—by a few of the “revelations” that they hear.

It is impossible to handle these myriad cases by attempting to expose each one individually. Their meth-

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ods are the same: they are guessers, pumpers, and they thrive on information. In smaller cities, they learn facts about nearly every one in town and recognize persons whom they are supposed to have never seen or known of before.

In larger cities, such mediums concentrate upon their clients and learn what other persons are likely to come to the séances. When they lack information, they rely upon guess-work and the statements that newcomers let slip during the artful process of the medium's "pumping."

It must be remembered that a skeptic is not a qualified investigator. In fact, most skeptics are entirely untrained in investigation. When a pronounced skeptic is puzzled by something that occurs at a séance, it merely gives the medium claim to cleverness; not to any genuine ability in tapping spirit sources.

Believers *always* find mediums amazing. Skeptics *occasionally* find them puzzling. Investigators *never* discover anything at those séances other than triviality.

In the course of my investigations, I have visited scores of "parlor" séances and have often been served the same broth: dishwater. Occasionally, I have encountered persons who are attempting mediumship on a sincere basis; persons who are devotees of Spiritualism as a religion and who therefore attempt no trickery.

The informative statements given by such persons are less accurate than those of the deliberate “pumpers.” Persons who are sincere rely upon their intuition and hence pass many opportunities where “pumping” would avail in the production of accurate statements.

In this chapter, I shall recount a series of visits to practicing mediums in New York, which I made with Joseph Cowan, a representative of the *New York Evening Journal*. They give a fair idea of what may be expected from the average séance, when fairly and impartially viewed.

These séances were covered carefully, noted accurately and considered with open eyes as well as open minds.

The Reverend C—— H——, pastor of a Spiritualistic Church, received Joseph Cowan and myself at his rooms.

H—— called himself a psychic scientist. He charged fifty cents a reading—in a group—and used “psychometry.” One could go to perhaps fifty of these readers and go through the same routine. Write three questions on paper, give the medium a personal object. Hear the answers which the medium gave to the questions.

Strangely enough most of the devotees of this type of medium when asked if their questions have been

answered satisfactorily eagerly say that they have. Since the answers are ambiguous and can be applied to numberless questions this is not surprising. They want to believe and so they fit the answers to their wishes concerning the questions.

Two skeptics like Mr. Cowan and I, however, have a different reaction. Rev. H—— was no exception to the usual medium. He replied to all our questions erroneously. A very poor guesser.

I have no sister; yet H—— assured me that although she was extremely nervous, and on the verge of insanity, I need not worry about her. It would all come out all right.

I have not invented anything but H—— assured me that my “invention” would prove profitable.

I have appeared in a couple of movie shorts exposing fake mediums. H—— was sure that I was a moving picture actor and wove a long tale about my successes.

Cowan borrowed an ancient Arabic coin from me, to use as his “personal” contribution to the “psychometrist.” Apparently, his vibrations had been transmitted instantaneously and mine wiped off as quickly, although I had carried the coin as a pocket piece for years. Reverend H—— never knew the difference.

Mr. Cowan’s “poor sick aunt” would recover, despite the fact that she was “very ill” and “quite old.” Cowan

looked a bit quizzical when he heard that statement from H—. Afterward, Cowan assured me that if his aunt did recover from her present condition it would have to be through a resurrection.

The next day we called upon the Reverend M—W—, who was pastor of another Spiritualistic Church. She varied her offering slightly. She gave us a ten minute prayer and phonographic music. Her message reading followed. The spirits told her the answers and she relayed them to the clients.

For fifty cents apiece, Cowan and I heard a medley of incorrect information. Nothing of consequence was told us. The only new piece of information we received from the Reverend W— was that spirits would not arrive if anything were “crossed.” So Mr. Cowan was requested to make himself less comfortable by uncrossing his legs.

This, to me, was merely a veiled admission that the medium knew she was getting nowhere and needed an alibi in order to begin a new start and have us forget the previous misinformation. But later results were as hopeless as the original.

It was after this séance that Cowan asked me why so many practicing mediums called themselves “reverends.” I replied that it was an old mediumistic custom. Four years later, he discovered for himself how

it is done. A description of the amazing speed in acquiring "orders" will be found later in this chapter.

We attended a séance by Madame E—— D——. We seated ourselves and prepared for the usual reading. Madame started in the approved manner with a prayer. It was simple and unaffected. So far so good. Looking at the people around us we noticed an air of expectancy. All faces were turned eagerly toward Madame who had now seated herself at a piano. A short period of silence; suddenly a lovely voice, a delightfully full voice, sang an aria to the subdued accompaniment played by Madame D——.

Cowan and I were startled. We agreed that Madame D—— possessed one of the finest operatic voices that we had ever heard. But our greatest surprise was yet to come. After a hushed and appreciative interval another song, a difficult selection calling for distinguished technique and ability in control, issued from Madame's throat. But how strange—it was a different voice, in a lower register. It seemed to carry behind it another personality. Cowan nodded to me with enjoyment. He was not easily impressed but this performance had aroused him.

Madame then returned among us and sat in a chair. She mentioned that her two controls, Sonia and Redwing, had sung for us. Then the regulation readings be-

gan. She made very little attempt to guess at her client's backgrounds or problems. If a thought occurred to her she offered it for what it was worth. If it proved incorrect she accepted it as if she felt that her development had not yet reached a point where spirits were able to help her sufficiently. Undoubtedly in this house the atmosphere was different. Madame D—— was sincere. Here was no trickster. Her singing, she felt, belonged to the spirit world. It was a gift to her.

I decided to test her reactions to phenomena. I materialized the signature of Thomas A. Edison for Madame D—— on the back of one of her business cards. One of my little tricks. Her unfeigned amazement proved that I had analyzed her correctly. She said naïvely: "You're marvelous. I never saw anything so marvelous in my life. I wish I could do that." No suspicion on her part that this was performed artificially. Perhaps she thought I had developed further than she!

Since that time I have heard that Madame has become a lecturer on spiritualism. This is the work she is best fitted for. Spiritualism, to her, was a religion.

Our next visit was to Madame J—— A——, another psychometrist. She opened with prayer, ended with a benediction. She went into her trance clasping articles to her chest.

Her guide was an East Indian, but Madame A—— talked for herself. She rubbed her hands, snapped her fingers and chanted: "I see alligators. Have you ever been in the tropics?" We admitted that we had been. Madame turned her attention to me. She assured me that David Belasco had told her that I should become a spiritualistic medium and continued with the suggestion that since I had great psychic "forces" I should think seriously about the matter.

The very nature of this statement indicated that Madame A—— was relying upon intuition which she regarded as some genuine gift. The Belasco incident was entirely erroneous. But it proved that Madame A—— was relying upon thoughts as they came to her.

This was proven again in the same séance. She advised Cowan to sell bonds which he never possessed and also to get married. Cowan was already married; his wife was actually at that very séance, but she had come alone and had not joined us after her arrival.

But Madame A—— seemed to feel that she was giving real advice. She could have found out about Mrs. Cowan's presence had she tried to do so. Hence, her avoidance of any subtle questioning caused me to classify her somewhat as I had Madame D——;

namely, as a person who felt sincerely that she had a genuine psychic gift.

This concluded the more important séances that I covered with Mr. Cowan. A few years later, in December, 1934, Cowan learned of one Charles E. Kelso, who titled himself Archbishop and Founder of the Spiritual Psychic Science Church of Los Angeles, California. Cowan was informed that for ten dollars he could become a minister; for fifteen a Doctor of Divinity. He took the offer. It required just ten days for him to receive his ordination.

Checking the New York penal code, Cowan discovered that a layman ordained in this manner has the same standing and his acts the identical force and effect of a preacher ordained in any other church.

This meant that the ten day certificate, obtained only for money and not by virtue of study or character, permitted the recipient to unite persons in marriage, to bury the dead and baptize children, with the right to collect money. Another cheerful, but less serious aspect, was that he became entitled to special rates on railroads.

The California organization is generous in its scope of activities. It describes itself as an "international, liberal organization, devoted to religion, philosophy, psychic science and astrology."

The ministers are encouraged to consider their functions as follows: "to preach, teach, lecture, do psychic readings, and circle readings. To give private information on astrology, psychology, spiritual psychic science, the Bible or any subject that will interpret the intelligence and knowledge of the Spirit of God within us."

Very noble! And the money making possibilities practically limitless. Kelso also admits that all ordained ministers are allowed fifty percent commission of all fees collected from new ministerial customers.

Mr. Cowan had received a direct answer to his earlier question as to why so many of the "mediums" were "reverends."

Among the numerous séance rooms that I have visited with persons other than Mr. Cowan, was that of Madam Tefarosa. A reporter wanted me to visit this particular medium; so he and I made the trip together.

Perhaps it was because I wanted to try out that acting ability so many of the mediums had mentioned as part of my make-up, or perhaps it was because the reporter wanted a story, and life was dull. At any rate the evening I set out to visit Madam Tefarosa I went disguised.

Madam, who was one of the ranking mediums of the big town, was owner of a studio, done in the mod-

ernistic manner, perfumed heavily with incense. She called it the "Unified College of the Attuned Impulse."

"This," said the reporter, as we rode along, "ought to be a honey."

I was now Abner Brown, of Majinica, Indiana, a retired hay, grain and feed merchant, seeking spiritualistic culture. The young reporter was a law student bent on the same errand.

We found upon our arrival about thirty adherents at the meeting. Madam and they were indulging in a conversation filled with thought waves, ectoplasm, Conan Doyle impulses and much more of the same.

Since we professed our interest in Spiritualism, Madam proceeded to give us a sample of a developing class routine. She kindly offered it free of charge, since I, as the retired merchant, had murmured that if it didn't cost too much to learn to be a medium I might take a few lessons.

The lights were ordered out. A half hour of silence. Then someone saw a green light, and someone saw blue shadows, and someone heard whispers and thumping on the floor. I saw and heard nothing. The percepts were taken to another room where, according to a returned devotee, there were flickering lights, moaning voices and a whizzing noise.

Since I was obviously dejected because of my failures Madam brought out a tin horn. About a foot long.

“This,” she told me, “is a spirit trumpet. It is indispensable for séances. You may have it for \$5.00 if you want it. If you place it here beside you on the floor and listen very carefully, you may hear something this time.”

In ten minutes I became enthusiastic. I had heard somebody whispering inside the horn. Struggling to maintain the role of an inquisitive and uninformed outlander, I picked up the trumpet and poked my finger into it. I blew through it. Then, nasally, I remarked: “Speerits.” Muttering to myself.

I had an inspiration. Why not amuse Madam and the Thirty Unified Impulses? I rose and picked up three glasses from the Tefarosa instrument table. I looked in the horn, tilted it, and started pouring a lovely foaming liquid from its mouth. I am sorry to say that at this point the law student broke down and giggled. Madam’s face was too much for him. Gravely handing a glass of beer to Madam, who took it in a trance, and one to the reporter, revealed now as not quite what he seemed, I drank the third myself. Taking a few swallows I hastily put down my glass and taking my companion by the arm, suggested leaving—immedi-

ately. I have often wondered what would have happened if we hadn't.

The reporter got his story and I had a little fun. It is so seldom that one can do sleight-of-hand tricks for so thoroughly amazed a group. Theater audiences are made of sterner stuff.

CHAPTER XIV

MEDIUMS IN THE HAUPTMANN CASE

THE MOST PERNICIOUS PHASE OF SPIRITUALISM is the direct harm that it works upon human affairs. Fraudulent mediums have a law unto themselves. This is their practice of selfish quest for cash and fame, irrespective of the detrimental effects that they may produce upon their dupes or the world at large.

The history of Spiritualism teems with such cases. Guided by "spirits," believers have gone to incredible extremes in their conduct of business and personal af-

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fairs. Sometimes the "inspiration" begun by mediums passes beyond control. A remarkable example of this sort was the construction of the Winchester house in California. In that instant, a vexed believer began the perpetual construction of a huge and utterly useless house. Wing after wing was added, until the building occupied acres of ground. Construction ceased only with the death of the builder.

Beneath the surface, in most cases of individual credulity lies the motivating effort of some fraudulent medium. In their efforts to reach the heights of grandeur, fake psychics carry on a ceaseless quest for information. When facts reach their knowledge, they preserve them with the hope of convincing victims. They divulge facts only by degrees; when "inspired" by the "spirits."

Mediums are consistent in this procedure. They follow their game of personal gain, with no thought of duty to society. If individuals are driven to insanity or suicide; if the public is blinded to important facts, it does not matter to the medium. His own purposes come first, last, and always.

The inside stories of such campaigns are sordid; particularly when they link up with crime. Hence I shall relate the details of an unfinished case which I investigated; one which concerns the most cruel crime that

America has known: the kidnaping of the Lindbergh baby.

One week after the kidnaping of the child, in March, 1932, the Rev. Peter J. Birratella, pastor of a spiritualistic cult, went to New Jersey. With him, he took his wife, Mary Cerrita, a trance-medium who gained messages when in a hypnotic condition.

Claiming psychic influence, Mary Cerrita told authorities that the Lindbergh child was dead; that the body would be found upon a certain height near Hope-well. Two months later, the body was found in almost the exact location that she had predicted.

Mary Cerrita also prophesied that a ransom letter would be received by "Mr. Breckenbridge." On the next day, Colonel Breckenridge, the Lindbergh attorney, did receive such a letter. It was addressed to "Mr. Breckenbridge." The name "Breckenbridge" was incorrect in spelling; it fitted exactly with Mary Cerrita's pronunciation and prediction.

During her séance, Mary Cerrita was said to have uttered the initials J. F. C.; these were the initials of Dr. John F. ("Jafsie") Condon, who at that time—March 6, 1932—had not publicly become connected with the Lindbergh case.

Upon questioning her on this point she said to me: "Yes, I saw them like a light."

When I further questioned her if she were quite certain what they were, she appeared somewhat uncertain and said: "I can't remember just what initials they were. I think they are right, but I am not sure. I was in trance and it is hard for me to remember."

Some time later, the Rev. Mr. Birratella, described by a newspaper writer as "a wiry little Italian with bushy hair and a hard eye," had this to say about the visit to New Jersey:

Certainly I took Mary to New Jersey. I said to her: "You have the truth. Tell it and you will be famous as a medium."

But they would not listen. They arrest us—for fortune telling. We are fined two hundred dollars, and I have not paid back yet what I borrowed. They arrest us so they could get our finger-prints.

It was learned later by the United Press that the Rev. Birratella and his wife were kept under surveillance after they made their startling declarations to the New Jersey authorities.

Lost in the medley of events which concerned the Lindbergh case, the Birratella-Cerrita episode received none of the exploitation which the spiritualistic cultist had expected. For a time, it held no great significance, except as a study in matters psychic.

Viewed impartially, the statements made by Mary Cerrita must have come from one of two sources:

either from the inspiration that Birratella claimed; or from human beings who knew inside facts concerning the kidnaping of the baby.

It was more than two years later, following the arrest of Richard Hauptmann on the charge of kidnaping, that Rev. Birratella and Mary Cerrita crashed the front pages that they had sought. News concerning them and their séances began to pop; and with good reason.

Interest was centered upon the district where Hauptmann was trapped. One block from the filling station where he cashed a ransom bill was the former home of Isador Fisch, the man whom Hauptmann claimed had given him the ransom money and where he (Hauptmann) was reported to have spent much time. Across the street from Fisch's earlier residence was the "temple" of the Rev. Peter Birratella.

Then came the revelation that Violet Sharpe, maid in the Morrow household who killed herself at the height of the investigation of the Lindbergh case, was linked with the spiritualistic cult conducted by the Rev. Birratella.

This was learned through Professor Robert L. Hector, member of a recognized spiritualistic congregation, who said that Mary Cerrita had come to him for advice. When asked from what source he thought Mary Cerrita had gained her previous information, Hector re-

plied: "From the spirits—I'm sure of that." The Rev. Birratella and his wife admitted knowing Miss Sharpe, but denied that she was a member of their "psychic" congregation. However, a news report of January 10, 1935, gives the answer thus:

The United Press confirmed reports of Miss Sharpe's affiliation with Birratella's group by interviewing the Rev. Birratella in the presence of Joseph Dunninger, noted exposé of fake spiritualists.

Quoting further from a United Press despatch, we find an excellent summary of important circumstances involved:

Stranger still is the location of the church of the "psychic" group. It is directly across the street from the former home of Isador Fisch. . . . The church is less than a block from the filling station where the ransom note that finally trapped Hauptmann appeared. Only a few blocks away was a speak-easy in which Septimus Banks, Morrow butler, known to be friendly with Miss Sharpe, spent much time. "Open meetings" of the Rev. Birratella's flock were held on Thursdays, Miss Sharpe's day off. When Miss Sharpe swallowed poison a few days after the baby's body was discovered, police disclosed she had been nervous when first questioned. Had she heard the prophecies of Mary Cerrita or had she information she feared she might divulge, was the question arising to-day.

One odd factor of the whole case presented itself to me. Mary Cerrita's ability to make accurate predictions was confined only to matters which concerned the kid-

naping. In company with Theon Wright, United Press staff correspondent, I visited Birratella and his wife.

We found both to be somewhat talkative. Birratella pounded the table and declared:

“We will be on top. They would not listen—but in two years it will all come out. Maybe less. There are more than Hauptmann in this case.”

“How many?” we asked.

“Not more than this,” replied Birratella. He held up four fingers. “Four—and one of them is dead.”

“Was that Fisch?”

Mary Cerrita entered the discussion following our question.

“No, no, no,” she said, shaking her head. “Fisch had nothing to do with it. It was a woman. She committed suicide.”

I asked her:

“Was the woman Violet Sharpe?”

Mary shrugged her shoulders and replied with this cryptic remark:

“If a person is not guilty, they will not commit suicide.”

In seeking interviews with Peter Birratella and his wife, we utilized tact. Newspaper men were not welcome at the Birratella residence. One representative of the press had been forcibly ejected prior to our visit.

I managed to gain Birratella's confidence to some degree. He was a dapper, mysterious looking person, well posted on hypnotism, spiritualism, and kindred phenomena.

Birratella told me that his wife was the greatest medium in the world and that his only purpose in taking her before the authorities was to prove her powers were psychic. He further told me that he was in possession of other information—obtained from the spirit world, of course—but having been given a raw deal by the police, he was not interested in divulging it.

Inasmuch as predictions made by Birratella had proven correct so far as the Lindbergh case was concerned, I was anxious to witness a séance wherein Mary Cerrita brought through spirit knowledge under her husband's guidance. Mary Cerrita, a plump young woman, had confidence in her husband's powers as a hypnotist and spiritualist. She said that she had gone into a trance soon after the Lindbergh kidnaping; that when she awoke Birratella told her that she had made the statements which were later given to the authorities.

Since my identity was not known to Birratella and Cerrita, I managed to persuade them to deliver a sample of their powers. In a private séance, Mary Cerrita gave me a reading that consisted generally of episodes

that never occurred. She described an operation that I had never experienced.

In a later séance, she told me that I had received an arm injury. This was *after* she had gained opportunity to learn who I was. The arm injury was one that I had experienced more than four years before; but which had been heralded in front page stories within recent months. I had instituted a damage suit; and correctly predicted, though not through supernatural means, the exact amount that the jury would award me.

The fact that the arm injury bobbed up after Mary Cerrita had opportunity to guess my identity was the very best evidence to prove that she was not psychic. It was the most conspicuous of recent incidents that concerned my personal affairs. Moreover, my photograph had accompanied the newspaper stories; and could have served as the very means whereby Mary Cerrita identified me.

Rejecting this one statement because of its definite invalidity as a proper test, I can affirm that Mary Cerrita's "facts" concerning myself were one hundred percent wrong. But in the facts that pertained to the Lindbergh case, she appeared one hundred percent right.

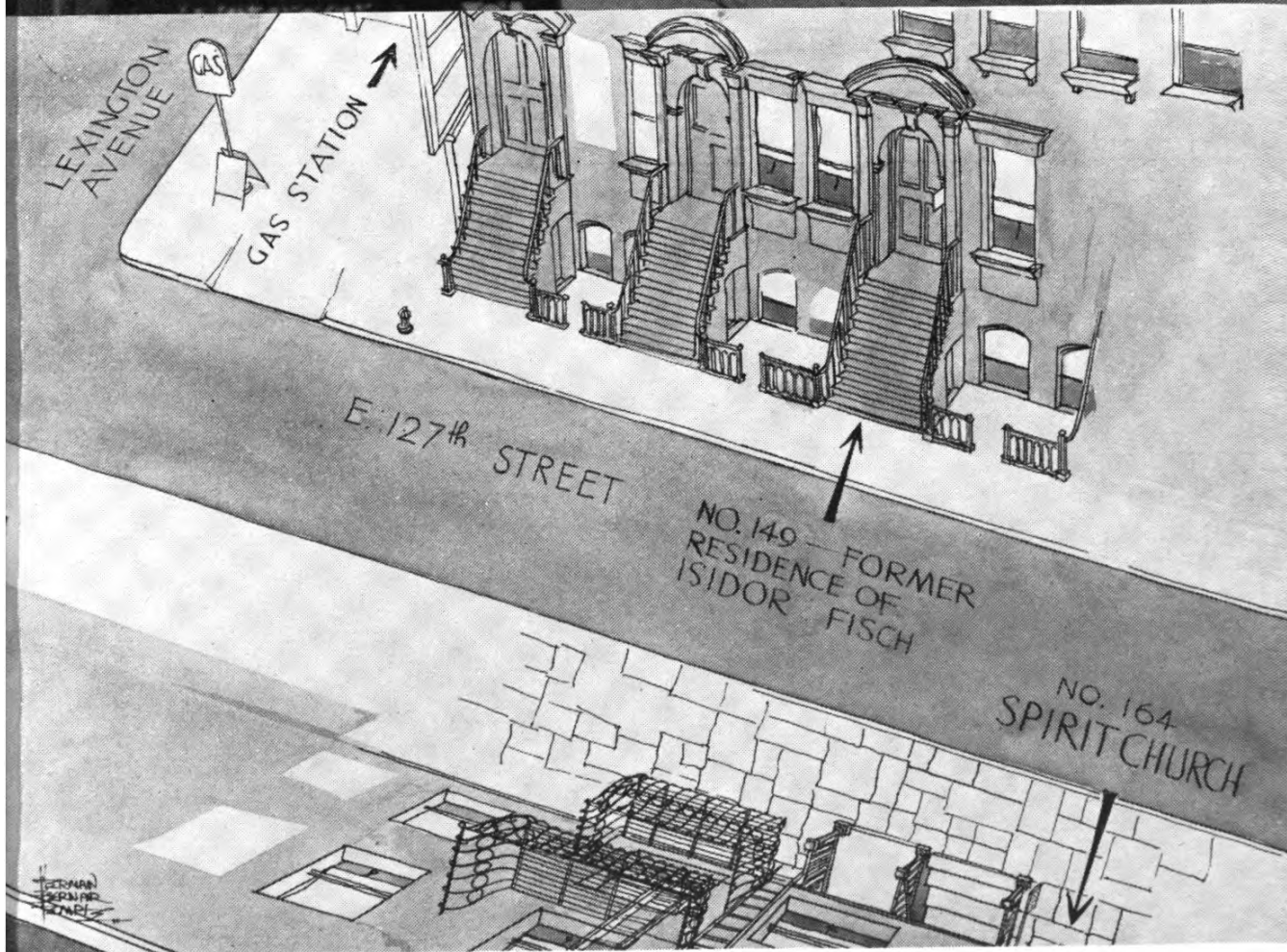
Singularly, also, to my knowledge, *nothing* of remarkable predictive value has ever been attributed to

Mary Cerrita outside of events in that same case. Furthermore, in the course of newspaper investigation it was disclosed that Mary and her husband opened a *new* spiritualistic church the same night the Lindbergh baby was kidnaped. The enterprise was abandoned, as were Mary's trances, after their experience with the New Jersey authorities and later arrest for fortune telling.

Everything that they said came from the "spirits" could have been gained from persons whom they knew. But they reserved enough—Birratella himself stated that he could tell more—to cover the links that they might have held with any persons concerned. The facts concerning Violet Sharpe, for instance, were not discovered until long afterward.

It would be preposterous to assume that anything psychic could be involved in Mary Cerrita's famous predictions. She was right in this one isolated case. Nor can we allow that her prophecies were merely guess-work. They were too numerous; moreover, she proved herself a hopeless guesser in the readings that she gave me.

Once the names of Hauptmann, Fisch and others were brought into the Lindbergh case, it became obvious that the Birratella-Cerrita combine had an ample source of information in their own neighborhood.



Photograph Taken from the Entrance of the Reverend Biratella's Spirit Church Showing the Building Diagonally Opposite in which Isidor Fisch Lived. Hauptmann Was a Frequent Visitor Here.

Note Gas Station at Corner Where the Ransom Bill Was Passed That Resulted in Hauptmann's Arrest.



A Sheet of Cardboard Marked for Identification by a Spectator Is Placed Inside a Cretonne Bag.

The Bag Is Tied and Sealed and Then Is Taken Inside the Medium's Cabinet

Later, a Spirit Message Is Found Written upon the Card. None of the Bindings on the Bag Have Been Tampered With.

This Shows How the Trick Is Accomplished. The Medium Forces the Point of a Pencil through the Coarse Fabric of the Bag and Writes What He Chooses. The Size of the Bag Allows Ample Leeway for Any Message.



A Series of Stills Made from a Feature Motion Picture. The Illustration Shows How Dunninger, in Spite of Complicated Rope Ties and Bindings, Waves a Phosphorescent Cloth in Front of the Cabinet. It Is Attached to the Indispensable Collapsible Reaching Rod. It Will Be Noted the Arm of the Chair Is Removable.

The Illustration Below Shows a Daylight Seance. A Cloth Is Held in Front of Tambourines, Bells and Trumpets Resting upon a Table Top. The Hand at the Left Is False. The Free Hand Concealed Behind the Cloth Manipulates the Instruments.



There is a chance that they could have cracked the crime wide open had they talked in mundane terms instead of “spirit” predictions.

There is one phase of the situation that presents an interesting speculation. Dropping the subject of where the information came from, who—we ask—received it? Peter Birratella or Mary Cerrita?

The question can not be answered. Birratella states that he heard Mary babble it while in a trance condition; therefore, he denies contact with any persons concerned. Mary Cerrita, contrarily, claims no knowledge of what she actually said while in a cataleptic state. She relied upon Birratella’s report of her utterances. Therefore, she denies personal discussion with people who were involved in the kidnap case.

Since there is nothing that implicates either party in the actual kidnaping, both Birratella and his wife are securely situated. Their business of spirit communication, however, has not benefited. It has reached a standstill due to an overabundance of unhealthy publicity.

It would seem poor judgment on Birratella’s part when he insisted upon presenting Mary Cerrita to the New Jersey authorities. It was a back-fire at the time, a warning better than any that the medium might have

received from the spirit world. It required no psychic ability for Birratella and his wife to predict trouble for themselves. The bombshell arrived with the arrest of Richard Hauptmann.

Circumstances bring us to a definite conclusion. Had the case been less important; had Birratella and his wife presented fewer facts; had they lived farther from a neighborhood that later became a hot-bed of investigation, they would have gained fame that they might easily have used.

They would have been in a position to create a wide circle of followers, consisting of believers who would point with pride and listen in awe to the story of the marvelous predictions that Mary Cerrita had gained from communication with the spirit world.

Of such stuff are psychic circles made. Mediums have capitalized upon publicity in the past; they will continue to do so in the future. The Birratella case stands out, however, as one wherein it would appear too much of the machinery was exposed to view.

Therefore, it deserves to be recorded; that it may remain as a yardstick whereby other claims may be measured. When one hears of new instances that presumably depend upon facts that the spirits alone could know, we must remember the case of Birratella.

Sources of information are many upon the earthly

plane. In the Birratella instance, such sources came into the limelight. The fact that they have been kept hidden upon other occasions is no proof that they should be acceptable.

I profess to an "open mind" in psychic matters. But my definition of the "open mind" is far more logical than that given by persons who believe in spiritualism. They would have us accept spirit control as a plausible explanation for anything that a medium claims.

My viewpoint is more definite. Suppose a crime is committed. We know that crime has been done. We know that someone performed it. If the criminal is never found; if the crime remains totally unsolved, the only answer is that the perpetrator managed to avoid discovery.

The same applies to the "wonders" performed by mediums. Something definite occurs—be it voices, materialization, or prediction—and that occurrence points to a physical solution. If evidence happens to be missing, that does not change the status of the manifestation. Experience has shown me that in every case where an investigation is thoroughly and competently pressed, the physical solution has eventually been gained.

Pursuing my analogy, we observe that accidental

happenings sometimes look like crime. A case of supposed arson may turn out to be a chance occurrence of spontaneous combustion. Similarly, there are rare psychic happenings that involve no premeditated action by a fraudulent medium.

We do not, however, live in a world where fire constantly strikes down from the sky. Nor do we inhabit a plane that is flooded with wraiths who materialize at call and whisper predictions into the ears of chosen listeners.

If we did, such psychics as Peter Birratella and Mary Cerrita would be riding in important limousines instead of holding trance séances at fifty cents a throw.

Some mediums do ride in expensive cars. But the payments were provided by their physical clients. Not through future predictions—such as stockmarket quotations—provided by friendly spirits.

When speculative ventures are voiced through from the spirit world, mediums kindly pass them to their customers and let the latter take the chances.

The Birratella-Cerrita messages did not figure in the trial of Richard Bruno Hauptmann. Testimony there was restricted chiefly to witnesses who dealt in physical subjects. To bring in two evasive exponents of psychic subjects might have been regarded as superfluous.

That, however, does not alter the facts so far as they

concern the meddlesome methods of mediumship.

As it has done before; as it will do again. For psychic fakers think little of the troubles in this world, except as they can profit from them. Theirs is the psychic realm of which they draw fantastic pictures, that the deluded may believe.

MEDIUMS AT WORK

IN THE COURSE OF MY SPIRITUALISTIC investigations, I have visited certain pretended mediums whose work proved unusually startling to the believers. The explanation in each case lay in the fact that trickery was almost one hundred percent present.

These were not cases of persons who felt that they had some claim to psychic powers. They were instances wherein fakery ruled. When detected, the methods themselves proved the character of the frauds. I am, therefore, including these cases in this single chapter.

Madam Beiderman, a supposed widow, posed as a medium in Milwaukee. She worked without a cabinet, seated amid her clients. When the room became pitch-black, ghosts appeared, supposedly under the medium's influence.

The ghosts were floating heads that shone like visions in the darkness. Sitters thought they recognized them as spirits of their departed friends. The floating heads spoke, in various voices. When the séance was over, two factors were apparent. One, that Madam Beiderman had not left the circle; the other, that there were no secret ways of entering the room, whereby confederates could have joined the throng.

Although the floor was heavily carpeted, I had, however, detected footsteps by placing my ear against the floor. Checking up on the medium's history, I learned facts that revealed the imposture.

Madam Beiderman was not a widow. Her husband was a former circus ventriloquist. He appeared at the séance room nightly, in the capacity of an ordinary "believer."

The spirit faces were painted, in luminous paint, on the back of his vest. Rising from the circle, he had only to remove his coat and turn back toward the spectators. He could make the "ghosts" come and vanish as required. He produced the uncanny vocal effects, thanks to his ability at ventriloquism.

One of the cleverest stunts of fake mediumship was performed for my benefit by a slate-writing medium who called himself Professor Kima; but who had previously gone under the name of Professor Omar. When I called at his studio, I was ushered into a reception room by a curious, hunchbacked attendant. After the servant had gone, the professor arrived and invited me into the studio itself.

For a fee of twenty-five dollars, he began his slate writing manifestation. I examined slates and wrote my signature upon them. The professor took each slate in turn and laid it upon a victrola, near the table where I was seated. Two slates alone were used of the six that I examined. The professor placed the pair of slates together. I tied them with my own handkerchief.

When opened, the slates showed messages, signed by names that I had given the professor as those of persons in the spirit world. There had been no opportunity for the professor to switch the slates or to remove them from my view. Nevertheless, he had, unwittingly, revealed his method.

Either he had no second attendant, or such a person had taken a day off; in either event, the professor slipped when he allowed the hunchback to usher me into the reception room. I looked that fellow over

very carefully; and estimated his approximate dimensions.

The assistant was small enough to squeeze into the interior of a dummy victrola. That was why the professor had laid the marked slates upon the talking machine. The dwarf had opened a trap beneath the slates, as each was casually placed in its position. Hearing my conversation with Professor Kima, he had simply written messages and signed names to the underside of each slate.

Madame Vesta, a Boston medium, used a similar scheme; but with a variation. When I attended her séance, she sat in a cabinet, bound to a chair, surrounded by various musical instruments: violin, tambourine, trumpet, and a large bass drum.

Soon after the curtains were closed, spirits operated the different instruments. When the curtains were snatched away, at intervals, the medium was seen still bound and in a trance.

The secret of the séance was simply a midget, concealed in the bass drum. Being inside the cabinet, he had every opportunity to come from his hiding place, for the big drum had a trap working on a double spring. Hence he could slide out of sight again, before the curtains were drawn open.

One of the neatest parts of this performance was the

playing of the violin. No bow was provided with the instrument. The spirits presumably could play without a bow. The midget, accomplished as a musician, had the needed bow with him in the bass drum.

One of the cleverest table lifting tricks that I have witnessed was performed by a Greenwich Village medium, who called herself Madame Denton. Her séance was held in the sitting room of an old house. Two of us seated ourselves on opposite sides of an oblong table. While the medium remained distant, we pressed our hands against the table top.

Suddenly, raps came from the table. They were sharp in sound and startling. Then, despite our pressure, the table began to levitate itself. It raised completely from the floor, tilted slightly at the medium's command; then descended. More taps were heard; they responded to our questions. After a brief interval, the séance ended.

I knew where to look for the source of the miraculous proceeding. Close observation proved that my solution was correct, although the medium did not know that I had discovered the trickery.

The rug on the floor masked a small trap. A design in the center of the rug was attached to the trap itself. While we sat at the table, an assistant operated from below. He attached a pole to the under surface of the

trap. When he pushed the pole upward, he gave the taps, which were sharp despite the cloth surface of the trap.

He used the same implement for the levitation. Powerful upward pressure raised the table. The broad surface of the flat piece from the floor kept the table balanced, for it came against the center of the table and we steadied it by pressure at the ends.

Motions of the pole accounted for the tipsy behavior of the table, which was practically clamped in its position, thanks to our helpful pressure. After the table had descended, the assistant added additional raps; then drew the trap down into place.

A Cincinnati medium, called Madame Bowerman, produced remarkable manifestations with a weight suspended from the cork of a sealed bottle. This appliance was prepared in the presence of myself and other sitters. It was placed upon a table in the center of the seance room.

As we grouped ourselves about the table, we asked questions. Soon the spirits began to answer. They operated the weight in the bottle. It swung back and forth, clicking the inside. One rap meant "yes"; two raps meant "no"; and the swinging weight always obliged with one answer or the other.

The medium ordered the answers, by simply signal-

ling to a confederate; for he—one of the sitters—was the person who did the work required from the “spirits.” He was a very inconspicuous gentleman. But he chose the proper chair in the circle.

Beneath the rug was the old device known as a “plate lifter.” It consisted of a rubber bulb, a rubber tube, and a smaller, thinner bulb at the other end. The heavy bulb was beneath the confederate’s foot; the small one, under a table leg.

By pressing the large bulb, the confederate forced air through the tube. It caused the table leg to rise and fall, so slightly as to be almost imperceptible. That produced the sway of the weight within the bottle. It could be controlled completely by the expert effort of the practiced confederate.

Being entirely covered by the rug, the apparatus was unseen. Moreover, the confederate used another idea to hide his foot motions. He wore shoes of an over-large size. Hence he did not have to fully move his shoe. All the foot pressure was exerted within the heavy shoe itself.

Since I recognized two factors in the performance: one, the ease in which the swinging weight could be controlled with little pressure; the other, how the plate lifter had frequently been used in pretended spookery

of bobbing plates upon a dinner table, I naturally formed the connection between the two.

From then on, my observation, directed at the table and at the suspected member of the group, was sufficient to give me the entire answer to the fakery.

Madame Amelia Bosworth, a medium in Portland, Oregon, performed a series of varied wonders during a séance which I attended. She seated herself upon a raised throne; then was covered with a black cloth. Her hands and feet, however, were always in view.

Objects were placed in her lap: bells, slate, chalk. Soon manifestations began. The bells rang. A Japanese maid reached beneath the cloth and brought out the slates. Messages were found upon them. Other slates were placed beneath the cloth. The medium produced more messages.

To the sitters, the feats seemed amazing, because the medium's hands were visible all the while. Naturally, if one of her hands had been out of view, she could easily have accomplished the wonders herself. That was why I particularly studied Madame Bosworth's hands.

Had she used a dummy hand to keep in sight, the fraud would have been obvious, for the séance room was not dark. She had a better scheme than that. Real

hands were the ones that we saw; but one hand did not belong to Madame Bosworth.

A girl was stretched in the dais upon which the throne stood. It was her hand that extended in place of Madame's right. The girl's hand came up through an arm of the throne. The cloth hung over the end of the arm; the girl's hand, pushing through a trap, worked itself into view.

The nervous motions of the medium's hands—intended to indirectly convince all skeptics that the hands were real—were the give-away that made the explanation certain. The hands did not quite correspond in their gesticulations. They indicated, time and again, that they were hands of different persons.

A Chicago medium, Madame Brockman, claimed the unusual ability to materialize rabbits, flowers and doves, after both her cabinet and surroundings had been examined. She performed while attired in a one-piece bathing suit, which proved that she could not have such bulky objects upon her person.

I attended one of Madame Brockman's seances and detected the method that she used. It was a development of an old mediumistic trick; but she handled it more effectively than her predecessors.

After the medium was tied to a chair in the cabinet, a committee inspected the knots. These persons left the

cabinet; the last to go was a woman who happened to be a confederate. She stopped at the door of the cabinet, just as the lecturer who introduced the medium was about to draw the curtain.

Hidden by a special skirt, the woman confederate carried a strong bag of black silk, which could be detached by a simple tug of a supporting cord. As the curtain closed, she released this bundle; then emerged from the cabinet. The curtain, sweeping shut behind her, hid the package that had been left in the cabinet.

Madame Brockman had merely to free one hand, reach for the bag, and handle the zipper that closed its mouth. One by one, she produced the rabbits and doves, which began to make their prompt exit from the curtains. The medium strewed the flowers all about her; then tucked the flattened silk bag within her bathing suit.

Replacing her hand in the ropes, she called for the opening of the curtain. When the curtain was drawn, Madame was seen wreathed with flowers while the last of the live-stock followed their companions that had previously gained egress from the cabinet.

Physical manifestations almost always denote unadulterated fakery on the part of the so-called medium. Persons who believe that they have some psychic

power may babble in voices, make raps of a minor sort, or produce automatic drawings and writing.

But more elaborate phenomena can not be gained, even by persons who are self-deceived. Slate writings, materializations and the production of solid and living objects require previous preparation. They must be arranged with malice aforethought.

The séances which I have described are simply representative of many others that I have attended. They stand as examples of the trickery which has been and is used to delude and pluck the public.

CHAPTER XVI

WHERE THE TRUMPETS COME FROM

SPIRIT TRUMPETS ARE MUCH LIKED BY mediums. They form one item of paraphernalia that can be bought ready-made and openly. Phosphorescent cheese-cloth and click-clack table rappers must be prepared secretly, in the dark of the moon. Not so the spirit trumpet. It can be had on open market. It may be bought by mail.

In fact, we find it listed in a mail-order catalog, under the head of "Occult Accessories." A recommended trumpet, with three rings. In four styles:

—(191)—

fiber at \$4.00; aluminum at \$4.50; nickel-silver at \$5.50; brass at \$6.00.

Which is preferable? Even the advertisers do not claim to know. They admit that some uphold the brass and nickel-silver as having a clearer voice power. But there are others, so the advertisement states, who swear by aluminum; and others are pleased with the results obtained from fiber trumpets.

All that is certain is that the maker of the trumpets has spent years closely observing the séance rooms of noted mediums; and he has studied the Spiritual Vibrations of both the Positive and Negative forces of material and Spiritual Planes. Yes, he must know his Trumpets; and when he says the three-section trumpet is best, it probably must be.

The prices are not high, considering that the purchaser receives a luminous ring free with the trumpet. This band shines forth in the dark and lets every one in the circle know the exact location of the trumpet. It fits on the large end of the trumpet and is visible during the entire séance.

A very nice improvement; but the advertiser does *not* state something that many mediums know. That good old luminous band can work two ways. Pulled loose from the trumpet end and extended on a reaching rod, it floats way up by the ceiling while the

medium—the trumpet in his grasp—pipes *sotto voce* messages through the helpful horn.

The advertiser probably knows nothing of this matter. It is not mentioned in the two pages of closely crowded type that give advice on trumpet work. What he *does* say is that Trumpet Mediumship is surrounded with a great deal of mystery.

You must, says the advertiser, select your trumpet medium and have him—or her—sit with back to the East. Hymns will help magnetize the medium to gain clairaudience. Of course the medium must be able to hear by the inner or spiritual voice. That takes longer for some persons than others, just as in music, singing or the like—according to the advertiser.

It's something like a telephone. That's all. You wouldn't move a telephone all around the place—out in the yard, down cellar, in the parlor. No! You want the telephone in the best place for it. The same with the trumpet. Learn to use it in a given place. If you have trouble with it, burn some incense before you go to bed. Write out what you want to know. The spirits may talk through the trumpet after the lights are out, or if you go to sleep too soon, they will appear in a vision.

That's the system for money matters, or business. As for love affairs, it is better to burn two candles for

an hour or so. When you go to bed, have the large end of the trumpet near your head.

Incense and candles?

They are in the catalog. It will take you a while to find them, for this catalog has more than five hundred pages. There are more than a dozen pages advertising incense alone. Temple Incense is particularly good. It induces the clairvoyant state at \$2.00 for the large size package; \$5.00 for the extra-large size. The catalog takes time out to include a page of daily recitals to be used with Temple Incense.

Oriental Incense comes in an extra-large size package for \$4.75. It is high-grade and slow-burning. It works well with Invocations and Occult Rites of the Orient. In addition, for \$5.50, the Mystic Rites Incense is on the market. It is a private brand; with dreamy, Oriental odor. It is good to burn when taking exercises for the development of Higher Spiritual Powers.

Black Incense, a dead-black compound, is the kind that is always used by those who practice the Rituals of Black Magic. Then there is the brand known as The Master's Oriental Incense; and another compound of Ceremonial Incense with secret preparations that were used by those old Arabian Chemists. . . . It makes an exquisite suffumigation, so the page advertisement informs us.

A leering face glares from the catalog. It represents a Black Magic Incense Burner, stated to be of hideous appearance, with which we agree. The catalog says that it is shocking and dreadful to look at. That, according to the Old Ancients is to drive away Evil Influences. The Old Ancients are not quoted, of course. The catalog specifies that they *claimed* it, so it is said. A belief prevailed among the Ancients to that effect. In fact, something is written down in an Ancient Manuscript to support it.

The incense burner, as depicted, has a rather horsey look; tusks add adornment to its equine teeth; and it is shaggily maned and bearded; all finished, as advertised, in Oriental bronze. We are informed that when black incense is used in this burner, a magic wand is also essential. In fact, to quote the catalog, persons have paid \$50, \$100, and as high as \$250 to people who claimed they could remove an Evil Influence and drive away an Evil Spirit.

After a page of chat on this subject, the famous French polished wand is ballyhooed. It is a useful article, being sometimes spoken of as a Mysterious Wand, Destroying or Blasting Wand; being ebony black colored, French polished and tapering, it usually sells for \$5.00. This brings us back to the Incense Burner, which represents \$6.00 in value. But the com-

bination is being sold at a very low price because there are hundreds of deserving people who wish something which they can use as protection against Evil Spirits, Enemies and Bad Influences. So the knock-down price—in black type—is \$5.50. With a reminder that you can purchase a box of Black Incense at the same time.

There are other incense burners listed on the succeeding pages; and then we come to candles, which are introduced by a half-tone illustration of a hand materializing from a candle; and, in turn, holding another candle which is burning at both ends.

This picture, referred to as a “*materialized hand*” has an inner or allegorical meaning. Since we see that a candle can burn at both ends, we know that life exists both in spirit and material worlds. The talk turns to a Hypnotic Brand of Invocation Candles. We learn that the Hindu Hypnotist is a Soul who uses the right kind of candles. They come in boxes, at \$2.25 a dozen. Two styles: Oriental Yellow and Pure White. One for male subjects; the other for female.

Hindus, when they study hypnotism, usually sit in seclusion burning candles. So we are told, at least. That is why Western hypnotists do not come up to Hindus. Buy plenty of candles; burn a few dozen. Such is the inference. Of course, there are candles of divers colors—all listed in the catalog—for other pur-

poses. All sold by the dozen. Then come candle-sticks, the natural accessory.

After that, Gazing Crystals. They run at various prices; they have stands, or brass crystal holders (extra); and are amplified by the use of a Hindu Magic Mirror, listed later in the catalog.

A person inclined to levity might remark that all the purchaser now needs is a Hindu costume. Quite true. The catalog is ready to supply it. Page 234 offers a complete rig: tunic, turban and girdle of silk. With these are provided a star and crescent pin for the purple tunic; and a pin of sparkling brilliants for the turban. Total price, \$30. To soften this, a free premium is added: candles, incense, burner and Oriental perfume with which to anoint the tunic. These premiums are valued at \$25; but they are a gift to those who buy the Hindu togs.

Without invocation of spirits; in fact, with practically no effort, one can protect himself mightily by purchasing other items in this catalog. The best bet for the uninitiated appears to be a talismanic ring. Here, also, is room for choice, with rings running from a few dollars up to much higher prices.

Each ring has a virtue all its own. There is the Coventry Ring, a famous talisman of the Fifteenth Century. Next, the Ancient Pentagram Ring, with a

five pointed star engraved upon it. The Swastika Ring is a good old reliable talisman. It appears to have high standing in India, where it "is liked by the banking and moneyed class." But no one should be without the Egyptian Signet and Seal Talisman Ring. This is made from virgin gold, exclusively for occult students. It is supposed to preserve its wearer against ill luck and evil influences.

Having equipped all four fingers of the left hand, we consider the right. The King Solomon Ring, with its Chaldaic inscription stands as a reminder to the wearer that no matter what his troubles and difficulties may be, they will soon pass away. The inscription on the ring means: "This Shall Also Pass."

Next in line is the Three Headed Snake Ring. This is the sacred ring of the Magi, the ring of strength. The Ancients, being fond of Divination, were wont to place confidence and belief in this particular type of ring. But there is another Ancient Talisman Ring that must not be forgotten. According to a work on Ceremonial Magic, this ring gives invisibility, even to the eyes of the genii. It has to be used from finger to finger during the ritual, while the possessor recites the magic words: "Benatir, Carakau, Dedos, Entinarmi."

Last for the right hand is the Chinese Good Luck Ring. It puts its wearers "in the money." Stage stars

have found it lucky; and one purchaser has testified that a Chinese Spirit visited him in a dream because he wore the ring. This chap has a hunch that wearers of the Chinese Rings might be lucky enough to have an Oriental Guide on their constant trail.

One thing is certain. Any one who buys the eight rings mentioned and wears four on each hand may find himself fortunate in combat. Brass knuckles would be unnecessary to fists well-weighted with these talismans.

The main function of this bulky catalog is to introduce Occult and Spiritual Books. Most of the talismans are listed in the later pages, giving preference to the book lists. Three pages are devoted to emphasizing the importance of printing one's name and address plainly; not surprising, when one considers the mental caliber of some of the customers to whom the catalog would appeal.

It is puzzling, though, to learn that this mail order house would ever be troubled about reading names and addresses. It boasts the services of "the greatest adept living to-day." It has stacks of crystal balls, magic mirrors and spirit trumpets, always on hand. One would suppose that even a shipping clerk could be easily trained to get a spirit answer when stumped with a scribbled name and address.

One of the books sold is called the "Old Book of Magic" and eight pages of the catalog are given to reproducing illustrations from that impressive work. One picture shows "an awful appearance of a spirit," which is pointing to a clock and telling a conscience-stricken man the very hour at which his doom will strike.

Another interesting volume is "India's Hood Unveiled," which covers the subject of Hindu Levitation. The catalog states that all cases of levitation performed on the stage are accomplished by using piano wire and that throwing the hoop around the body is an old Yankee trick—the wires are there all the while. The real handlers of the levitation act are the Hindu Sages. A yogi or faquir needs no piano wires.

Following that blurb appears a picture, an artist's rendering of "Vayusthambam," explained as a Hindu term meaning levitation. It shows a seated Hindu observing a girl in white, who is floating corpselike in mid-air, with a bunch of roses resting upon her.

This happens to be a close reproduction of the old "Levitation of Trilby" as performed by Herrmann, the famous magician. The bunch of flowers was used in that illusion in order to hide the supporting rod that extended through the curtain in back of the "levitated" form. Thus the advertisement that speaks of

“genuine” Hindu levitation uses as its illustration one of the methods which it describes as a mere trick.

The same advertisement talks of the “Samahdi” or Living Burial and alleges it to be a genuine Oriental miracle that can be learned from “India’s Hood Unveiled.” As testimony to this fact, it reproduces press clippings of a vaudeville performance in which the marvel was presented. This form of “miracle” has been thoroughly exposed; there has never been a genuine, sustained living burial shown on *any* vaudeville stage.

The catalog offers three books on Hypnotism. One in its *fiftieth* edition; another in its *seventieth*; the third in its *ninetieth*. It prints a crude pen and ink sketch by “an expert artist,” who “understands the great and wonderful possibilities” of Hypnotism. The picture shows a hypnotist, whose eye is throwing a glare like a searchlight, bowling over a rigid victim by hypnotic power.

The catalog states that this shows how Hypnotism “could be used by a detective, should he understand this science,” illustrating how a thief might be “instantly hypnotized and not only made to confess his crime but also forced to return the stolen article.”

In addition is a photograph of a man rigid between two chairs with two boys standing upon his body.

This is supposed to be a wonderful hypnotic feat learned by studying one of these books.

The first case named—that of the electric eye—is an impossibility, not within the range of hypnotism. The latter case—the rigidity test—is an old stunt of hypnotism. Any confederate, or “horse” as they call them with the “hyp” acts, can brace his body to receive the weight of two or more persons.

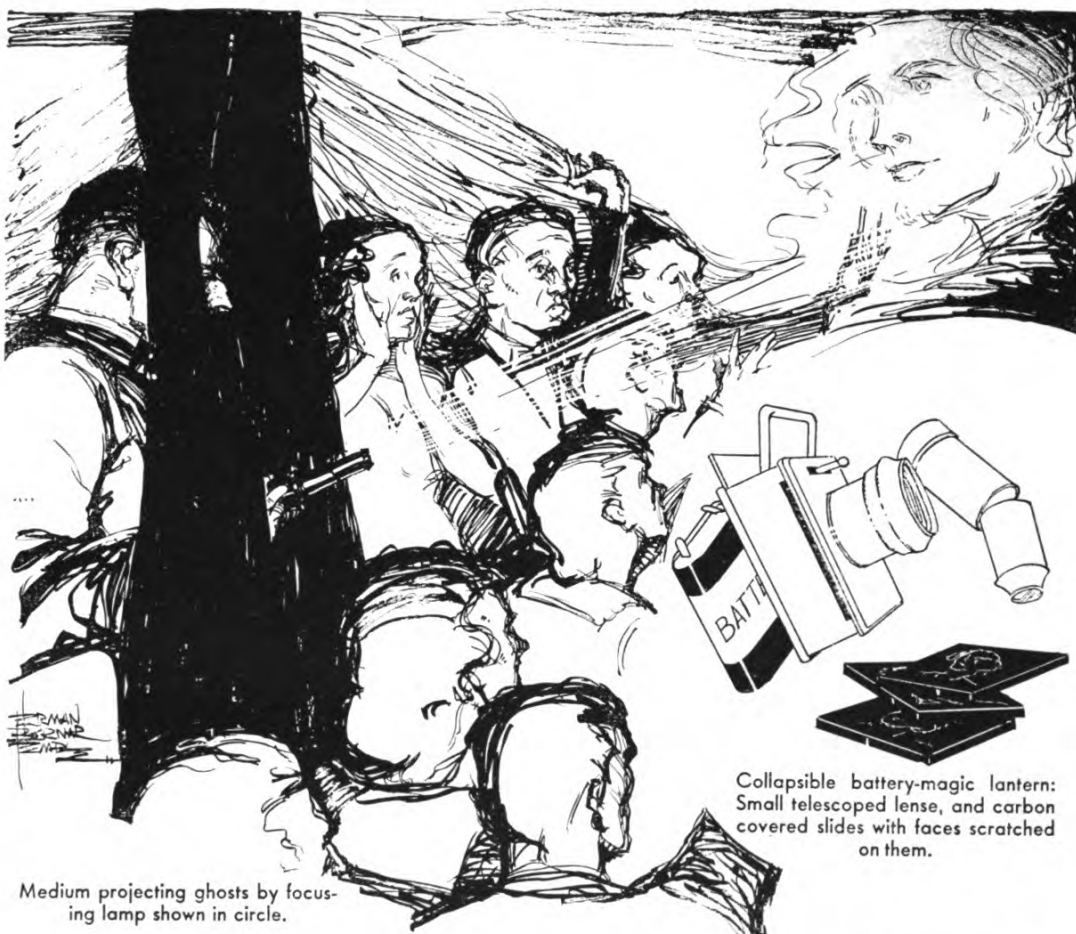
The most advertised book in the catalog is the “Great Book of Magical Art” which covers about every form of occult mystery, spiritualistic development, witchcraft, psychometry, astral auras, vampirism and what-not that can be called to mind. It is supported by a batch of printed testimonials, in the form of affidavits from purchasers who bought the book more than thirty years ago.

Once a new student has mulled through this colossal volume (leather bound at \$10.75 and \$12.75), he should be due to order a carload of incense, burners, crystals, candles, talismans, scrolls, and Hindu tunic. For the book covers all those magnitudinous subjects and constitutes, according to the blurb, “A Veritable Literary Macrocosm.”

Any one who buys from the book list—most especially those who have studied the “Great Book of Magical Art and East Indian Occultism”—is ready for



Dunninger under Test Conditions Produces, by Mechanical Means, the Ghost of Harry Houdini which the American Press Pronounces Superior to Any Materialized by So-called Spiritualistic Mediums.



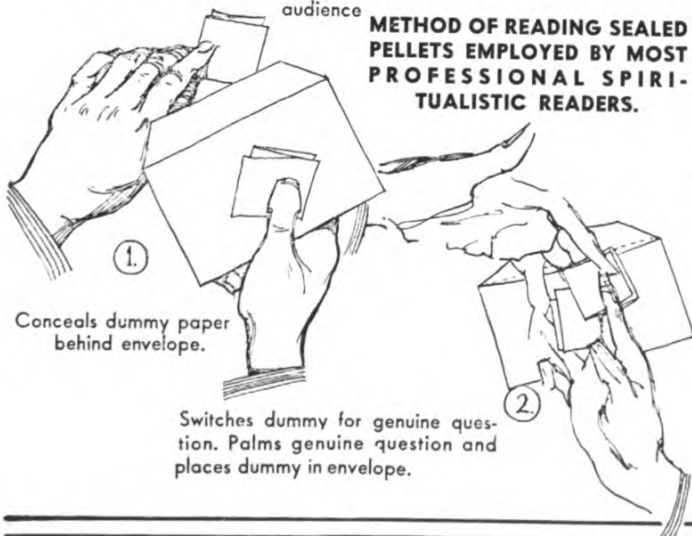
Medium projecting ghosts by focusing lamp shown in circle.

Collapsible battery-magic lantern: Small telescoped lense, and carbon covered slides with faces scratched on them.

Holds actual question up to view of audience

METHOD OF READING SEALED PELLETS EMPLOYED BY MOST PROFESSIONAL SPIRITUALISTIC READERS.

Holds envelope against forehead—(spirit reading). Reads question in other hand, while attention of audience is on envelope.



1. Conceals dummy paper behind envelope.

2. Switches dummy for genuine question. Palms genuine question and places dummy in envelope.



a diploma. This commends them to the attention of the public. Persons who have received it consider it priceless. Professional people—the ones specified are “Clairvoyants, Mediums and those consulted by the public”—apparently like to frame this diploma and hang it on view.

These diplomas are free. Absolutely no charge. But of course there is a charge for the services of the artist who traces the name of the recipient upon the diploma and attaches the seal. Plus shipping expenses, etc. The charge is three dollars. In black ink. Gold ink looks better. Being more expensive, it costs five dollars.

Among the many “free” gifts listed in the catalog—they are listed by the dozen and come with orders for various books—is the “world-renowned” Kavacha Talisman. You must use one of these to learn what it is.

Worn about the neck, the Kavacha frees its bearer from a paragraph of woes. It prevents untimely death and early decrepitude. It bestows perpetual youth; and is a charm against all “spirits, ghosts, constellations, etc.” With this talisman, a man gets rich within the shortest possible time.

The Kavacha Talismans are imported from India. None sold for money. Given away—with orders, of course. Five pages of testimonials (all written from

India) praise the merits of the Kavacha. It has cured malaria, insanity, toothache and writer's cramp. It has brought success in litigation, horse races and lotteries.

With the advertisement of the Kavacha Talisman is printed a quotation—one *Sloka* from the *Sastras*: "Sarvagraha Prasamani Nishesa Bishanasini Jayam Sarbatra Kurnte Dhamada, Sumatproda."

Beneath this, in big type: REWARD FIVE HUNDRED RUPEES, with the special notice: "Above we have quoted a Sanskrit Sloka. It is not composed by us but quoted from the Holy Sastras. If any one can prove that this Sloka is not quoted from the Holy Sastras but is a bogus verse, we are prepared to pay him at once Rupees Five Hundred as a reward."

You couldn't win that award if you had a pocket-full of Kavacha Talismans.

A perusal of this occult catalog is perpetually interesting; but wearisome. Being limited to five hundred pages, it has been crammed with pages of fine type that produce as woozy an effect through constant reading as any crystal ball or Oriental incense.

It illustrates to what extent belief in a hodge-podge of superstitions can be fostered and promulgated. It reminds one of a spirit medium's lecture. It is filled with long paragraphs of psychic propaganda that fits the customers whom it reaches.

Apparently, this one mail order house has been successful. The size of the catalog testifies to that fact. Moreover, there are others in the business. This catalog warns against competitors. There seem to be too many rivals, selling books that are not authentic; peddling incense that will attract evil spirits instead of good ones.

All of which shows the extent of credulity and superstition as they exist in this enlightened age. It is small wonder that séance rooms are filled to capacity while this sort of propaganda is at large.

A SUMMARY OF SPIRITISM

THE TERM "SPIRITISM" MAY BE AN UN-familiar one to many readers of this book. That is not surprising. Every effort has been made to forget the word; by those to whom it definitely applies, namely, the Spiritists. They are the persons whom we know as Spiritualists; who call their chosen cause "Spiritualism."

Technically, all believers in a divine influence are "spiritualists" as opposed to "materialists." But within the past century, a single group has chosen to grasp

—(206)—

the title for themselves. They are the persons who believe that disembodied spirits fluctuate between another plane and this one. They base their precepts entirely upon the supposed statements of those “controls” and “guides.” They are, therefore, *spiritists*; and their doctrine, *spiritism*, is a barren one; for it can be changed or twisted at the whim of any one who claims contact with the spirit world.

For mere convenience, we shall refer to Spiritism by the term which its exponents prefer: Spiritualism. We are dealing with mediums and their ways; and they have managed to force acceptance of the term Spiritualism to define their cult. With this concession, we can briefly summarize Spiritualism and its growth.

Spiritualism is the outcrop of superstition. It existed in past centuries, as the chief support of every belief that balanced the incredible with the preposterous. Alchemy, astrology, and other so-called sciences were the antecedents of Spiritualism.

Bottled genii, werewolves, warlocks, wizards, witches—every fantastic type of superstitious being was promoted as a reality by the legitimate predecessors of the modern Spiritualists. When reasoning men forced old beliefs into oblivion, new superstition was required. Modern Spiritualism supplied it.

Pseudo-science became the chosen method. When

the Fox Sisters, in 1848, began their historic “rappings,” they not only delighted the superstitious of their day; but they commanded the interest of scientists of the period. Thus they gained notice and distinction; and showed that physical manifestations of a psychic nature could be turned to profit.

It chanced that the sisters attributed their manifestations to “spirits”; and following their success, they produced other forms of phenomena. New exponents of the psychic came immediately into the field. Thus Spiritualism had what it would term an “awakening.” The facts, however, speak otherwise.

The Fox sisters were simply fakers. Their methods were guessed by others of their ilk. The mediumship racket was born. By the time the Fox sisters were completely and decisively exposed, the field was filled with a horde of new claimants, who stoutly professed that they were genuine.

Truth cannot grow from fraud. Every form of physical manifestation that immediately followed the experiments of the tricky Fox sisters was based directly upon their efforts. It was the sponsorship of sham—not the inspiration of genuine manifestations—that began the era of mediumship.

Devotees of Spiritualism have therefore proceeded upon a false groundwork. They have recognized the

fact; but in their blind belief, they have counted upon time to bury the recollection of the frauds perpetrated by the Fox sisters. Remembering only the early successes of the famous spirit rappers, they ignore the exposés that came later.

As instance, I give this quotation from Conan Doyle's "Our American Adventure." The book contains this observation, inspired while Doyle was riding through New York State:

We passed classic Rochester, most honored of all towns, and blissfully unconscious of it. It is much more proud of being the seat of the kodak industry than of the fact that on its outskirts there came the first systematic touch between the plane of mortal and of spirit. It occurred to my mind as we passed what a fine thing it would be if I could now at once start a movement here for building a fine commemorative obelisk upon the spot, as a visible sign of our gratitude. If every one who has had comfort from the revelation were to subscribe some small coin we could put up one of the greatest monuments in the world.

Thus does a recognized authority on the pro side of Spiritualism *establish* the Fox Sisters as the originals. The facts of their various exposures are not mentioned. The Fox sisters were not only shown to be frauds; one of them, Margaret, made a *signed confession* in October, 1888, wherein she stated:

I do this because I consider it my duty, a sacred thing, a holy mission, to expose it. I want to see the day when it is entirely done away with. After I expose it, I hope Spiritualism will be given a death blow. I was the first in the field and I have a right to expose it.

Instead of mentioning the event of 1888, Doyle jumps to 1903. Speaking of the house which the Fox family occupied, in Hydesville, near Rochester, he declares:

The original house was removed by pious hands and reconstructed, as I understand, at Lily Dale. It is not generally known that when it was pulled down or it may have been before, the bones of the murdered pedlar and his tin box were discovered buried in the cellar, as was stated in the original rappings. The rappings were in 1848, the discovery in 1903. What have our opponents to say to that?

There is one simple answer. If the finding of the bones was actuality, not mere rumor, we can conceive that "pious hands" were at work some time during the fifty-five years between 1848 and 1903; but most likely during the thirty-five years between 1888 and 1903. The latter period covered the time that followed Margaret Fox's confession.

The "planting" of false evidence—even human bones—is quite a common procedure in the racket of false mediumship. With modern psychics staking their

game on the shattered reputation of the Fox sisters, the “finding” of bones on the premises would be a most obvious step.

Speaking further of New York State, Doyle remarks:

For some reason unknown, this corner of the world was a scene of great psychic activity in the middle of the last century. If the experiences of the Foxes had not established spiritualism in Rochester, those of the Davenports would have done so in Buffalo, only ninety miles away, in 1851.

The Davenport Brothers were more thoroughly exposed than the Fox Sisters. They used a cabinet to produce manifestations. The secret of their phenomena lay in their ability to slip out of ropes and return to them.

The work of the Davenports was detected by the British magician, John Nevil Maskelyne, who saw them in action through a chance opening in their cabinet. Maskelyne reproduced all the phenomena of the Davenport seance.

Harry Kellar, the American magician, was in his early days associated with the Davenports. He knew their methods; the famous Kellar “Rope Tie,” which he presented as a trick, upon the stage, was based upon the Davenport ties.

Years after the Davenports had retired from public

life, Houdini met Ira Davenport in person. This was in 1911. In his book, "A Magician Among the Spirits," Houdini states:

Ira Davenport positively disclaimed Spiritualistic power in his talk with me, saying repeatedly that he and his brother never claimed to be mediums or pretended their work to be Spiritualistic. He admitted, however, that his parents died believing that the boys had superhuman power. In this connection he told me of a family by the name of Kidder in which the boys faked Spiritualistic mediumship. The mother, a simple woman easily misled, became a firm believer. After a time the boys got tired of the game they were playing and confessed to her that it was all a fake. The shock of the disillusion almost drove her insane and Ira said it was the fear of a similar result which kept him from confessing to his father the true nature of their work.

When Conan Doyle called it a "reason unknown" that so many manifestations should have developed in the corner of New York State, he applied the usual Spiritualistic procedure of rejecting the obvious. The Fox Sisters had become the talk of all the northern counties. Other juveniles, like the Davenports and the Kidders, wanted a share of the limelight. Faking manifestations that would amaze the simple burghers of that day became a regular juvenile pastime in that section of the state.

History has repeated itself with absolute regularity in the mundane affairs of Spiritualism. Almost every

form of phenomenon introduced by a newcomer has eventually been exposed, along with its author. Yet the particular phenomenon itself persists, through later mediums. It is the same story: truth claimed, with fraud as its foundation.

Slate writing was an example. It was practically unthought of until Dr. Henry Slade began to produce his messages in the sixties. Slade traveled; he was exposed abroad. He finally reached Germany, and in 1877 deluded Professor Zollner, who at that time was deep in a subject which he termed "Transcendental Physics." Zollner wanted to prove the existence of the fourth dimension. In that mood, he took Slade's trickery to be genuine.

The medium's downfall came when he encountered other investigators. In Philadelphia, in 1882, he was detected in his slate-writing fakery by Remigius Weiss, an ardent anti-spiritualist. Threatened with arrest, Slade signed a confession in which he declared that all his work was trickery.

In 1888, Slade appeared in Philadelphia again, along with other mediums, to show his wares before the Seybert Commission, which had been founded by Henry Seybert, a deceased Spiritualist, to study impartially the problem of psychic manifestations.

Of Slade, the Commission's report stated:

However wonderful may have been the manifestations of his Mediumship in the past, or elsewhere, we were forced to the conclusion that the character of those which passed under our observation were fraudulent throughout. There was really no need of any elaborate method of investigation; close observation was all that was required.

The Commission also noted:

As a rule, Mediums assert that they invite investigation. Our experience has been . . . that as soon as an investigation, worthy of the name, begins, all manifestations of Spiritualist power cease.

After sittings with mediums of various types, the Commission produced this summary:

In conclusion, we beg to express our regret that thus far we have not been cheered in our investigations by the discovery of a single novel fact; but, undeterred by this discouragement, we trust with your permission to continue them with what thoroughness our future opportunities may allow, and with minds as sincerely and honestly open, as heretofore, to conviction.

It appears that mediumship, in 1887, was wisely kept beneath a bushel basket. It was later due to seek the light. Mediums kept pace with the advancing times; they developed newer and surer methods of accomplishing their frauds. With the World War, they found great opportunity.

Interest in Spiritualism always ripens at a time when many persons have suffered loss of relatives and friends. There was a call for mediums during the years of the War; and a greater demand afterward, when persons had more time to think solemnly of those who had gone.

Yet mediumship is still the same. It depends upon the old clap-trap as its basis. Mediums have increased in number; they have added to the types of their manifestations. But they still depend upon raps; messages on slates; luminous materializations; and all the old reliable "gags" upon which the profession has thrived.

A question is frequently propounded: "How is it—considering Spiritualism to be based entirely on fraud—that so many men of prominence are inclined to believe in it?"

There are two answers. One is that very few such men do believe in Spiritualism. Counted individually, they form a fair-sized number; but compared with the total men of equal caliber, the number is insignificant.

The second answer is that the comparative few who do believe have either been deceived or deluded.

Conan Doyle stands as an example. I have quoted him several times in this book. Numerous quotations can be cited which stand as proof that he was not com-

pletely qualified as a competent investigator in psychic matters. Once a person approaches Spiritualism with the conviction that it is genuine, he can not help but believe. Conan Doyle had that attitude.

Doyle indicated that the Zancigs, who did a clever code act in pretended mind reading, were possessed of "powers" that enabled them to accomplish thought transference. He was impressed by a slate-writing séance the first time he attended one, alone, under conditions that allowed for trickery. He believed in fairies as existent beings; and wrote a book about them, illustrated with photographs of supposedly elfin shapes.

What of scientists, who have endorsed psychic manifestations?

This question takes us back to Zollner and carries us through a long period to the present. It brings an answer which all mediums can supply: namely, that intelligent, sincere investigators are more easily deceived than ordinary persons. Once a loop-hole is found for fraud, the medium can more than offset all precautions. The very existence of supposed test conditions offers great advantage once the faker has discovered the weak point.

Indeed, fraudulent mediums have so effectively misled scientists in the past that their bugaboo of avoiding investigation has ended. The timidity that existed

in 1887 was gone by 1923. At that time, and subsequently, awards were offered by different scientific magazines for genuine mediumistic phenomena. More claimants were found than in the days of the Seybert Commission.

The general character of every test, however, proved true to form. Clever claimants sought to pit their skill at fraud against the analytical ability of the investigators. The net results matched those of 1887. Fraud predominated and was repeatedly exposed.

True, there have been novelties in psychic swindles; but they were of slow growth and development. The faking of paraffin casts of spirit hands was merely an endeavor to prove materialization as a fact. Spirit photographs became a popular item in the medium's trick box; but its growth can be attributed to the amazing strides made in cinematography. When motion pictures produced "ghosts" upon the screen, it was not surprising that spirit mediums should decide that they could capitalize upon new and ingenious systems of faking photographic plates.

Ectoplasm was an ingenious idea; but it was scarcely more than a novel form of materialization. Its development was furthered when certain mediums discovered that such drug store merchandise as Dioxygen and Kolynos could produce a mysterious-looking foam.

The case of Margery, the Boston medium, represents a modern case wherein scientific investigation was invited. Margery was highly endorsed by Spiritualists; but her manifestations brought too much investigation. Houdini's books exposed enough of Margery's methods to show that the phenomena could not be regarded as genuine. The medium's later efforts to gain scientific status were unconvincing in their results.

In concluding this brief survey of mediumistic phenomena, I wish to impress one point upon the reader. The success of any séance is dependent upon the impressionistic qualities of the sitters. That fact accounts directly for many of the so-called marvels that have been produced.

We can concede that there are many mediums who are skilled enough to produce clever tricks. But trickery cannot awe the trained investigator. It may puzzle him; that is all. It takes the exaggeration that only a believer can supply to build a trick into the seemingly miraculous.

Hence we find that the marvels of the séance room are marvelous only as they exist in the minds of the believers. Here, again, we find that intelligent believers are the best from the medium's standpoint. In their impressions of séances; in the recollections that they

carry, persons of intelligence commit what we may term a systematic or methodical exaggeration. As a result, their impossible descriptions of the séances which they have attended carry weight when reported in detail, if persons are unwise enough to accept the statements without the substantiation of skeptical witnesses.

The human tendency is to exaggerate a marvel. Every one versed in the art of deception can testify to that fact. We hear of the marvelous feats of magic performed by the Hindu faquirs. They are marvelous only to unqualified observers. Every magician who has visited India has come back with true reports of tawdry tricks that possess very little merit. The same applies to the wonders of the séance room.

Darkness, plus desire, accomplish the same effect upon the willing believer as do the fifes and tom-toms of an Oriental setting. The person who wants marvels in a medium's parlor will find them just as certainly as will the person who seeks them upon the street corners of Calcutta.

The huge majority of all so-called psychic manifestations can be studied best from two definite angles: the physical and the psychological. Human methods of producing raps, articulations, and other phenomena belong in the physical study of the subject. The reasons

why impostors continue in their efforts; and why other persons are willing to believe in them—these are matters which come into the psychological classification.

In passing, I may refer again to Remigius Weiss, the man who forced Dr. Slade's confession in 1882. There was a reason why Weiss was so ardently opposed to Spiritualism at the time when he encountered Slade. For several years, Weiss had attended séances for first-hand information, in order to offset the efforts of mediums whom he believed were deluding persons of his acquaintance.

In 1881, he had become known to various believers whom he had met in mediumistic circles. One day, on a Philadelphia street corner, he happened to meet a man who recognized him. Considering Weiss to be a fellow-believer, the man began to recount visions that he had recently experienced.

Spirits of importance had talked with this believer. They had ordered him to accomplish a great mission. The time would soon come; all that the believer awaited was final word from the spirit world. He was vague about the nature of the mission; he simply promised Weiss that it was so great that when it was accomplished, Weiss and every one else would know of it.

Thinking that the believer's vagueness marked him

as harmless, Weiss forgot the matter until some weeks later. Then came a tragedy that stirred the nation; the assassination of President Garfield. Reading the newspaper accounts, Weiss was horrified when he saw the name of the assassin. It was Charles J. Guiteau, the spiritualistic believer whom Weiss had heard describe his "great mission."

In amongst the cases of so-called psychic phenomena are unquestionably those which cannot be covered by ordinary physical or psychological treatment. These are cases which certain investigators are willing to regard as the truly supernatural. The term is not justifiable. They are actually the super-normal.

If thoroughly and competently studied, these cases would enable scientists to either classify them into simple, existing divisions; or they might produce a new understanding of physical or psychological facts that are as yet unrecognized.

Cases of haunted houses, wherein supposed manifestations have occurred spontaneously, are those that demand proper physical inspection. Instances of peculiar trance conditions, auto-hypnosis, possible telepathy, are those that involve the psychological. In some, both elements may be interwoven.

It is apparent that whatever phenomena may exist, they will be found completely independent of medium-

istic activities. Spirit séances were spawned in fraud; they have survived through that same device. Mediums claim connection with the detached events which have occasionally startled mankind. Though they have no knowledge of the causes of such events, they claim such understanding and frequently gain a hearing because their listeners are as ignorant of the matter as they themselves.

The so-called supernatural—when it occurs in the manners that I have mentioned—should first be properly considered as the super-normal. Then it should be investigated by scientists without the interference of meddlesome mediums. Unfortunately, the tribe of fakers is too large and too quick to arrive upon the scene. The “pious hands” are always ready to help out as soon as they learn that a study of the super-normal is about to be undertaken.

More than that, they frequently provide cases that seem to be *bona fide*, so that they can capitalize upon them later. Unless a case of “haunting” proves to be without weight. Then the instigators lie low and say nothing.

Obviously, if the super-normal is to be properly investigated, the fraudulent mediums should first be curbed. Their elimination constitutes the essential pre-

liminary to any sensible study of occurrences which at present constitute the unexplainable.

When Spiritism, alias Spiritualism, has been properly relegated to its deserved obscurity, science will be free to delve into the few facts which may then be correctly classed as the unknown.

APPENDIX

CITY MAGISTRATES' COURTS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
SEVENTH DISTRICT, BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

—against—

EMERSON GILBERT, JOSEPH LYNNETTE
and ROSE McDONALD

Defendants

Complaint No. 1

PRACTICING MEDICINE
WITHOUT A LICENSE

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

—against—

EMERSON GILBERT and JOSEPH LYNNETTE

Defendants

Complaint No. 2

PRETENDING TO TELL
FORTUNES

—(224)—

GOLDSTEIN, C. M.: "Dr." Emerson Gilbert was arraigned on two charges:

1. That he, Lynnette and McDonald practiced medicine without a license, in violation of the State Education Law; and,
2. That he and Lynnette are disorderly persons in that they pretended to tell fortunes.

As to the first charge, the court can sit only as a committing magistrate, and if a *prima facie* case has been made out, hold the defendant for trial in the Court of Special Sessions.

On the second charge, the court has summary jurisdiction and must determine the guilt or innocence of the defendants. The defendants cannot and should not be found guilty unless the facts establish their guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

By stipulation, the hearing on the first charge and the trial of the second were held at the same time.

The pertinent facts, briefly, are as follows: Pursuant to appointment, Policewoman Dolan went to an apartment on the 10th floor of premises 200 West 54th Street. She told the defendant Gilbert that she suffered from aches and pains in her back. She was told that he treated such ailments, that a nurse would undress her, rub her with alcohol, and after such preparation, he would appear in the nude so as to permit of better contact with the spirits.

Miss McDonald, dressed in a nurse's uniform, assisted in removing part of the policewoman's clothing, and placed her on an examining table, such as is used by physicians.

Lynnette sang hymns, and Gilbert appeared to go into a trance behind a curtain which separated an alcove from the "séance room" in which the treatment was given. The policewoman testified that then "Dr." Gilbert appeared draped in a luminous gauze veil over his nude body and placed his hands on her back to soothe her suffering, aches and pains; that as "Dr." Gilbert entered the room, covered with the film of white gauze, the defendant Rose McDonald said, "Here's Dr. Walker."

The officer further testified that the person in the gauze attire was none other than the defendant Gilbert and that he, Gilbert,

manipulated "his hands over her back and shoulders for the treatment of said aches and pains."

The defendant Gilbert denies that he was the person attired in the white gauze, and contends that if there was any rubbing of shoulders and back, it was done by a healing spirit, "Dr. Walker," called into existence by his "mediumistic" ability. The gauzy attire was produced by the arresting officer and marked in evidence.

The exhibit is white gauze and not ectoplasm. By strange coincidence, the opening in the garment fits the head of defendant Gilbert. No one has ever claimed that spirits appear in hem-stitched white gauze capable of being marked in evidence.

On examining the gauze in a dark room, I found it to be luminous.

There is no doubt in my mind from the evidence in this case that "Dr." Gilbert and "Dr. Walker" are one and the same person. The name changed as the attire changed. Gilbert claims that he never saw this luminous gauze. If his testimony is to be believed, then either the police planted this garment, or the spirit "Dr. Walker" played a very shabby trick on the medium Gilbert.

There is no doubt in my mind that the officers did not plant the gauzy attire, and I am convinced that the spirit "Dr. Walker" did not leave this garment behind to embarrass "Dr." Gilbert.

There was introduced in evidence a business card, reading "Dr. Emerson Gilbert." The defendant Gilbert admitted the card was his. The use of the title "Dr." in connection with the treatment of human ills, by one not entitled to use it, is a violation of Sections 1262-3 of the Education Law, and its use is important in substantiating the claims of the police that Gilbert engaged in the practice of medicine.

Gilbert claims exemption under Section 1262 of the Education Law in that what he did was merely the practice of the religious tenets of his church, "The Society of Ethical Science Church," chartered by the Independent Spiritualist Association of the U. S. A. The charter, defendant's exhibit "B", is dated February 16, 1935, eight days after the first visit of the policewoman, and two days before his arrest.

The record establishes beyond question that this church set-up is merely a shield to cover a business undertaking on the part of the defendant Gilbert. The testimony of Mabel Manton, the secretary and treasurer, who testified that there was a bank balance of less than \$90., and the failure to keep books and records, though she herself professes to be an accountant, is ample proof that she was secretary and treasurer in name only; and that the income and expenditures of the alleged church were solely in the control of the defendant Gilbert.

I have the greatest respect for those who have religious faith. I know of nothing more comforting in the storms of life than a spiritual mooring. Likewise, I have the greatest respect for those who, believing in a continuing life, are engaged in psychic research.

Words are inadequate to express condemnation of the "religious racketeer" who preys through prayers on God-fearing, clean-living seekers for solace and comfort. "Religious racketeering" not alone robs the faithful of their money, endangers their health, but what is more important, it destroys the faith of those who could otherwise derive comfort from it.

The Court of Appeals in *People v. Cole*, 219 N. Y., 98, 111, aptly said, "A person should not be allowed to assume to practice the tenets of . . . any church as a shield to cover a business undertaking."

In *People v. Vogelgesant*, 221 N. Y. 290, 294, the court said, "The law exacts no license for ministration by prayer or by power of religion. But any one who heals by other agencies must have the training of the expert"; and at page 293, "The profession and practice of the religion must be itself the cure."

The Attorney-General's office has advised me that for practical reasons it is its policy to prosecute only principals, and not assistants. Because of this advice, the complaint against Rose McDonald (the nurse), and Joseph Lynnette is dismissed. On the facts and the law, I have no choice but to hold the defendant Gilbert for the Court of Special Sessions.

As to the second charge, from all the evidence I am convinced

beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant Gilbert did “pretend to tell fortunes” as alleged in the complaint. I am further satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt from all the evidence that defendant Gilbert is not entitled to the exemption extended under Section 899, Subdivision 3, of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which reads, “But this subdivision shall not be construed to interfere with the belief, practices or usages, of an ecclesiastic governing body or the duly licensed teachers or ministers thereof acting in good faith and without personal fee.”

The defendant Gilbert for a personal fee of \$5.00 told fortunes and in addition rubbed shoulders at \$10. a rub.

There is a reasonable doubt in my mind as to Lynnette's guilt. I find him not guilty.

As to Gilbert, I find him guilty of fortune telling, and adjudge him a disorderly person (Section 899, Subdivision 3, Code of Criminal Procedure).

The case involving the practice of medicine by rubbing of shoulders is a matter over which I have no summary jurisdiction, and it is referred to the Court of Special Sessions.

The circumstances surrounding fortune-telling at \$5.00 a session are referred to the Probation Department for investigation and report. Having adjudged the defendant Gilbert guilty, the law compels that he be fingerprinted, and I direct that this be done. Pending investigation and report by the Probation Department, defendant Gilbert is remanded for sentence to March 22, 1935.

Signed: JONAH J. GOLDSTEIN,
City Magistrate.