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THE BLACK ART.

What Herrmann Has to Say of Magic and Magicians.

A Wizard's Witcheries at His Own Fireside.

How Every Man May Become His Own Spiritualist.

St. Louis Post Dispatch.

It is a lucky thing for Alexander Herrmann that the America of 1882 is not the America of 1682. Had he lived then instead of now, earning his bread in the same delightful profession, he would have figured as the chief mourner at a grand magician-bake. There would have been a grill, a fray, a smell of overdone meat, and exit Herrmann. But the times have changed, and we have changed with with them. Instead of burning our wizard, we pay them tribute in oil and wine, we house them in our best caravansaries we go to see them nightly, and like the daughters of the horse leech, we cry "more," "more!" These highly moral and eminently proper reflections gathered in the folds among the gray matter in a Post-Dispatch reporter's cerebellum as he sat in room 188 at the Southern hotel, and watched the elusive Herrmann bending down into the inner cavernousness of a mysterious trunk for some proper cigars, which he had brought with him from the outlands. The cigar was accepted with some inner misgivings. Who could say whether Herrmann, to keep his hand in, might not practice upon the guilelessness of the innocent and ingenious scribe. It was a real cigar, however, and it did not evanish into thin air, neither was there a sulphurous smell about it, nor anything but an undeniable odor and taste of good tobacco. Then Herrmann sketched himself back for a quiet chat. His face is so familiar from the portraits which adorn every space of dead wall in the city, that no pen picture of him is necessary. His eye, however, cannot be depicted. It is the most restless orb which ever was made. He is always doing something with his hands, caressing one with another or tying the fingers into double bow-knots, or affecting other mysterious and inexplicable processes to this deponent understood. He is still in the golden thirties and he has the energy and enterprise in him of a steam engine.

"How did you come to take up the profession of sorcery!" queried this affiant.

"Well," said he, "it is a long story. To begin with I must go back to my father. He was a homœopathic physician with an amateurish taste for parlor magic. He was really quite an expert, and I remember the manner in which he used to delight the little audiences at home with his legerdemain. My elder brother, Carl Herrmann, also inspired from this source, went upon the stage as a magician, and soon became very famous. My family opposed his choice as a profession. When I was nine years old, however, without the knowledge or consent of our parents, he induced me to join him. I was then a boy at school in Paris, and he was in St. Petersburg, but I made the trip alone to him, and stayed on the stage with him until I was 16; then I left my brother. We were at Madrid, in Spain, then, and I set up for myself."

"You are a citizen of the world?"

"No; I am a citizen of the United States. I was naturalized at Boston in 1876, but I have made the circuit of the world three times, and soon I am going around it again. I speak seven languages fluently."

"I wish you would explain the art and mystery of your trade to me?"

"My dear sir, it is a fact that there are tricks in all trades, but mine, sorcery, is the only calling in which there are no concealments. My efforts has been all my life long to get along without apparatus. In every feat which I have invented my idea has been to make it so simple that a child could see through it—if it looked in the right place—and that is the secret of all successful magic. When I talk about magic I mean, of course, sleight-of-hand. I do not like those tricks that depend upon the mechanic's skill to make them interesting. The most incomprehensible things are those done with the hands alone. The mystery of my calling is to do one thing while I am making you think I do something else. But of course, I need apparatus. I have $2,800 worth of it. That cabinet which I use in my cabinet trick, cost me $1,000 alone. Still the best tricks are those done with the least machinery, that glass globe filled with gold fish, which I make appear and disappear, has been explained in fifty ways by the wiseacres who think they have discovered how I do it. The truth remains that all the machinery necessary for it is a common glass globe and an ordinary piece of cloth. I could do it here now with your handkerchief and that water carafe the darkey is bringing in."

"This was not the case with the older magicians; they all used machinery.'

"Yes. Take Cagliostro, for instance. He was the greatest wizard of his time, and a man of undoubted ability, but he used a tremendous lot of machinery and had not the deft manipulation which we have now. Then there was Bosco, a great artist, but look at his advantages. He came out on the stage with an old-fashioned wizard's robes on him big enough to hide a wheelbarrow full of coal. I must come out with a dress suit tight fitting and unfavorable for concealing things. No, sir; I have to depend on the extreme rapidity of my hands for the delusions which I effect. And it takes years of training to get that deftness."

"What do you consider the best thing you ever did?"

"The trick which excited the most talk and which has been credited wrongfully to others, was one I performed before the emperor Dom Pedro, at Rio Janeiro. Dom Pedro is a devoted patron of art and artists, and on my arrival at the Brazilian capital I received the imperial command to attend at the palace. The hour fixed for my attendance was 9 o'clock, and quite a number of the grandees were present at the court Nine o'clock came and passed, but I did not appear; just as the clocks were striking 10 I was announced. His majesty came forward in no very amiable mood. 'You are late, Mr. Herrmann,' said he. 'Pardon, your majesty,' said I, but I understood your command was for 9 o'clock—"

'But it is 10 now."

"Nine, sir," said I, taking out my watch.

"'Ten,' said he, taking out his, but to his astonishment his watch stood at 9. The great clock in the audience chamber, which had struck 10 a moment before, was pointing to 9. The Countess d'Eu's watch was at 9—in fact every watch in the room was pointing to 9 o'clock. You can imagine his surprise and delight. Ah, I tell you that little feat cost me some money, but I made it up again afterwards. The emperor gave me a splendid diamond ring, and all Rio Janeiro was made to see me."

"What do you think of your spiritualistic rivals?"

He laughed.

"I will wager any sum that I can reproduce any spiritualistic manifestation that any medium can perform within twenty-four hours after seeing what they do. Why, their work is the merest child's play. Take the slate-writing, for instance—a baby ought to see how it's done. Here—Mrs. Herrmann," said he, turning to his wife, who had been an amused listener to the talk, "is there a slate in any of those trunks?"

"No," she replied, "but I suppose one of those children across the way has one."

In a few moments a slate was found and a bit of pencil, and Herrmann and the reporter were seated a la Slade and inquirer opposite each other, beside a marble top table. "I haven't any machinery to produce the rapping with," said Herrmann; "just leave that to your imagination. Now write a question on the slate." The reporter took the pencil and scribbled.

"What was the maiden name of my Aunt Sarah?"

Not letting Hermann see what was written, the slate was put under the table, the pencil remaining in the scribe's hand. Hermann holding one part of the rim and the reporter the other. The table began to move and the slate to shake in that peculiar nervous way the spirits use, and in a second more the scratch, scratch, scratch of a pencil. Hermann's free was on the table, the other grasping the slate, which was twitching and jerking as though endowed with volition. The pencil rattled and at last the reporter pulled the slate away, to find this remarkable message from the spirit world scrawled on it:

"How the blazes do I know?"

Your maiden uncle,

HERRMANN."

How it was done was a mystery. He had not seen the question, he had no chance at the slate since the question was asked; he certainly had had no opportunity to write the reply, and yet there it was, a piece of self-evident self-contradiction in mica.

"Do did you do it?"

"Thus," said he, holding his middle finger toward the writer Just underneath the nail was a small bit of slate pencil. "You see," said he, holding up the slate and scribbling away on the under side with his nimble finger while he jerked it to and fro, "the spirit takes a piece of pencil between the nail and the end of the finger—and it will stay there very easily—and it scribbles away like a good fellow."

"And mind-reading?"

"Nonsense. I will agree to hide $1,000 and give it to any mind-reader that will find it. I will challenge any of them to the trial."

"What is the real explanation of the disappearing cage of canaries?"

"Oh, that's an easy trick. I had a cage made of very light, flexible wire, which looked very complicated, but but which upon a sudden jerk closed together, just on the principle of those patent hat racks. It was the only sleeve trick I ever used. The jerk of my apparent throwing of the cage towards the audience closed it up and pulled it into my sleeve. And the canary was never hurt by the trick."

There is neither time nor space to tell all that the conjurer said and did to make the afternoon an interesting one, and hence with a good night bow to the wizard, to Mrs. Herrmann and to their singular pet Jimmy, a small South American monkey, about whom a chapter might be written, the curtain may be dropped over the sorcerer at home.

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