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PLAYING THE MEDIUM GAME

Searchlight Turned on the Tricks of Seers and Seeresses.

EASY MONEY FROM THE GULLIBLE

Available Information About Sitters Turned to Good Account by Fakery and Deceit.

The end of Will Irwin's papers in Collier's, dealing with mediums and clairvoyants, relates these things in the interest of the game.

In professional lore there are two of these queer stories about beginnings. One is told in that extraordinary anonymous book, "Revelations of a Spirit Medium." At eight o'clock the author was the agnostic member in a family of spiritualists. A wandering materializing medium both converted him and persuaded him that he had "powers" which he could develop if he would. For three months, then, the boy sat in the cabinet one night a week, while his family and friends formed a dark circle outside. Nothing happened. One night a temptation came upon him. He would give the circle a run for its money. With his hand he produced a series of raps. Tremendous sensation in the circle. The next time he rubbed sulphur matches on his fingers and thrust them through the curtains—"spirit

lights." From that he went to a long and glorious career in materializing.

Stages of Disillusionment.

A well-to-do fish merchant lived in Boston in the early seventies. He went wild over spiritualism; and a gang of the enterprising mediums peculiar to Boston took him in hand. With the help of a "spirit affinity," they bled him of everything he had about the time that he went into bankruptcy some cost opened his eyes. He determined to spend the rest of his life exposing mediums; and to that end he made a study of fraudulent methods. When he had become an expert temptation arrived. Why not pull back his money through the very hole into which he had poured it? He went boldly into the business and gained a name which still lives. He is now passing his old age on a farm in New Jersey which he bought with the proceeds of his "mediumship." A keen young British sailor came into the port of San Francisco ten years ago. With a party of shore-leave men, he went to an independent slate writer who charged them a dollar apiece. This Briton tar caught the medium slipping a siltstone slip. "It looks easy," he said to himself, "I think I can do that." He deserted from his ship, secured the medium into a confession, and was taken into the craft. He is the best independent slate writer performing today.

The medium is launched now. What has she learned in her preliminary studies? Simply that shrewd guessing, combined with systematic observation, will turn the trick in four cases out of five. It is wonderful how the mere amateur can learn through systematic observation to recognize spirits. If you do not believe it, try it some time—at dinner, say. Listen as you never listened before, to the table talk. Try to remember it all; to combine some little thing which you have just heard with something that you heard three minutes ago. Study the peculiarities in dress, appearance, manner. If you do not discover hidden facts about mere acquaintances, you are a dull person. Last spring I went to a professional clairvoyant in Warren avenue, Boston. She had a sitter; I was asked to wait my turn. I had three Boston papers with me; and after I had selected them, she cut from each the news items concerning a woman suffrage banquet. Having done this, I folded up the papers and left them on the rack. The medium was a long time about it, and I had an appointment; I called her out of the trance state to tell her that I would be back that afternoon. When, at last, I selected them, she cut from each the news items concerning a woman suffrage banquet, and then asked: "Your business has to do with woman suffrage, hasn't it, chief?" Of course, she had examined those papers, compared them with whole copies, and made her deduction.

Women is the Majority.

Four sitters out of every five are women, and four women out of every five want to tell their troubles and rehearse their griefs. The medium does not hold them

back. A small hint here, a slight reference there, the application of a little practical shrewdness in combining the two—and behold, a wonderful revelation. The hopes of the sitter, too, are always with the medium. She is ready and eager to grasp at the slightest semblance of truth. The medium adds a sauce that makes it all go down—an optimistic prophecy of a bright future. Conditions are always going to improve. The sick child will get well the lover will come back. The sitter goes away desiring, with all the hope in her foolish heart, to believe.

This Sherlock Holmes method of observation and deduction is the basis of the medium's art. It is not enough, however, for a real success. The confirmed sitter usually visits more mediums than one—the thing is a habit. Her steady patronage goes to that medium who shows the most accurate and minute knowledge of past relatives and present troubles. Our rising young medium, therefore, begins to revise her methods and to take in confederates either from inside or outside the profession.

Methods Employed.

Here is a typical way: The medium is established near a large factory, employing many girls. Next to bereaved old women, working girls are the steadiest patrons of clairvoyants, fortune tellers, and palmists. Attracted by the sign, one or two girls from the factory drop in. One of them, the medium finds, is morally corruptible. The medium does her best at this "fishing session" and gives a pretty good reading. "How much," asks the girl when the control is passed. "Nothing for you, my dear," says the medium. "I want you to help me. I've proved my power to you this evening because my magnetism and yours are tied up, like. We're affinitier. But I can't always count on it, and when it falls people go away disbelieving and ready to knock. If you help me, there's money in it for both of us"—and she lays out her plan. The girl is to tell wonderful things of this medium in the factory, and to furnish information about every girl who bites. In return, the medium is to give her a quarter of the fees. When the confederate has sent full and unmistakable personal descriptions in advance, the medium may give even the sitter's name, told from the world of spirit. If this confederate shows ability, she may pick up a little extra money by gossiping with the circle before public sittings, and passing the information along. Will the confederate "peach"? Not if the medium knows her business. This girl has revealed in the "fishing sitting" certain secrets which no woman wants known of her. Such blackmail is a sure defense against exposure by confederates or awakened dupes.

Information Pooled.

The best and surest confederates, however, come from the craft itself. Few mediums, after the early beginnings, work alone. They combine constantly to exchange information and to trade those "test books" which all good craftsmen keep

A test book is not a book at all, but a classified list of sitters, giving their personal appearance, the spirits which they have recognized, and such additional and convincing facts as the medium has been able to learn about them.

Such records are traded continually in any given group of mediums. Their uses become manifold. I showed in describing Madame August how these fakery emulate green-goods men, bunco-steerers, and wire tappers by "passing the sucker along." Madame August recommends Mrs. Hayward—"her controls can tell you things that are hidden from mine, my dear"—and ahead of the sitter goes a personal description and an entry from the test book.

Investigating skeptics have proved this collusion again and again. A believer from Boston went to Los Angeles. Elsie Reynolds, the most marvelous demonstrator of immortality in the far west, had just arrived from Oakland, and business was great. The Boston believer, sitting with a psychic whose specialty was reading and answering questions in sealed envelopes, sent up a question addressed to her mother, Margaret Boone. Of course, I am disguising the name.

An Eye Opener.

Either the spirit was careless, or the alcohol sponge was not working well that day, for when the medium saw a "sitter" bringing a mother's influence hovering over the sitter, he caught the name Margaret Booth. The Boston woman did not correct him. The next day she went to a slate writer. He washed and scolded a pair of double slates; there was a sound of writing in the seance room; he opened the slates and showed a message signed, "Your Mother, Margaret Booth." Later in that week "Elle," the famous child control of Elsie Reynolds, spoke from the cabinet to tell this Boston woman that Marg ret Bo ta was there with a mother's influence and hoped soon to be sitting enough for full-form materialization. This notorious "Margaret Booth" was the means of uncovering her daughter. "But it was a long time," said this woman, "before I could believe that people who seemed to be so kind and good would play upon my grief for money." A foreign consul in San Francisco began to follow the medium game for the joy that there was in it. He is the man who nearly put Elsie Reynolds out of business by scattering fine tacks on the floor for the confusion of her barefoot ghosts. After that, the appearance of the first spirit from Elsie Reynolds' cabinet was always preceded by a soft, whirling sound along the floor. The believers said that it was a spirit wind; the skeptics said that it sounded just like a carpet sweeper in action. But I digress. This consul, who had a peculiar appearance, easily recognized from description, gave the false name "Mr. Albert" to his first medium. Thereafter, nearly every medium he visited got the name "Albert" right out of the air for him. When the medium begins to travel, test books become a sure help. In the great

cities, where all kinds of strangers come visiting, it is impossible for any group of mediums to keep track of every sitter. In a town, or a small city, on the other hand, the believers all know each other; at the coming of a visiting medium, they all "sit."

The first medium on the ground goes away with a test book of price. Two of the craft meet in Chicago. "I've just been through Illinois," says one. "Any test books?" asks the other. "Best ever. What have you on Wisconsin?" "Nearly every town in the state." "Suppose we trade?" So they copy records from each other and cross paths, one to Wisconsin and the other to the one-night stands of Illinois, there to give convincing proofs of spirit communication.

In every large city certain men make a business of trading test books on commission. I talked this spring with W. D. Le Roy of Boston, a dealer in conjurers' supplies who sells trunks and paraphernalia for "spirit efforts" as a side line. He took me for a professional medium, and we gossiped as two fellow craftsmen. "By the way," I said as I was leaving, "You don't do any business with test books, do you?" "No," he said, "I'm not in that line. There is a fellow, though, who gets up books and runs down information for mediums." He was in here three or four months ago. "What's his name and where can I find him?" I asked. "Why don't you ask some other medium?" said Le Roy, grown suddenly suspicious. That was as near as I ever got to this level of heavenly revelations.

A Set of Knockers.

These traveling mediums who choose to work without confederates know another way of getting test books. "Mediums," said one of the gull to me, "are a set of knockers. Half the exposures is started by other mediums that is jealous. Women especially." He who would dispense with confederates and work by this method must have a little capital; and it is not practicable for a female medium.

The operator lets his whiskers grow and gets a job selling books, blacking or washboards—anything that takes him into a great many houses. Having laid out the circuit of small cities which he is to play later, he canvasses at his leisure. He engages the "lady of the house" in talk, encouraging her to gossip about herself and her neighbors. He draws from the drug clerk and the grocery man the record of town happenings. He gets at back files of the local newspapers. From these stitched things, he prepares a test book, which he supplements by meditations among the tombs in the town graveyard. A graveyard is a test book in itself. After he has made a careful record of eight or ten towns, he shaves, puts on his other suit, and goes over the circuit again—this time as a medium. That which was hidden is revealed through his marvelous powers, and many are converted. This method—known as "planting towns"—was common before the traffic in test books began.

The test book business grew into the

Brotherhood of Mediums, a league of mystery from which the veil is lifted now and then, revealing a bizarre fraternity whose great secret is the fact of its own existence. In such an inquiry as this, one is struck with the repetitions of history.

What is this Brotherhood of Mediums but the Eleusinian mysteries or the Egyptian priesthood in greasy replica? Indeed, the connection is closer than a chance resemblance. Many tricks now practiced in physical manifestation come down in unbroken line from the pyramid builders. According to general report, this brotherhood admits only the best professionals. Its object is mutual protection and the exchange of methods and information. Especially is it the center of the trade in test books.

About fifteen years ago, some captain of spirit industry—"controlled" perhaps by a great organizer gone before—conceived an idea for systematizing the test book business. He and his fellows established in Chicago "The Medium's Blue Book." It was not really a book—it was more like a Bradstreet commercial agency. They kept in the home office full, classified test books for every big city in the union. A brotherhood medium might write from Boston, Cincinnati, Des Moines, New Orleans, and get the full local list or special lists covering certain districts and certain lines of business. The fees varied with the importance and extent of the service. It is

Not Quite Clear.

A well known clergyman of Boston once was talking to some friends with reference to the desirability of chronological coherence in ideas. In the form of written statement when he observed that there are times when this method becomes a trifle too suggestive.

"For instance," said the speaker, "I once heard a minister in New Hampshire make his usual Sunday morning announcements as follows: 'The funeral of the late and much lamented sexton takes place Wednesday afternoon at 3 o'clock.' 'Thanksgiving services will be held in this chapel on Thursday morning at 11 o'clock.'—Lippincott's Magazine.

said that the Boston chapter of the Blue Book comprised 7,000 names.

Messages of a Cyrie.

Love is a lesson we always learn by heart. The younger the man, the more he thinks he knows about women.

When we take a man's word for a thing, we expect him to keep it, too? The truth is mighty and will prevail; but some men would hate to have it told about them.

Poverty is the soap that protects us from filthy lucre. Some fellows are so full of hot air that they ought to wear stove pipe hats to let it out.

When a woman announces that she has nothing further to say, she manages to say it at great length. Many a chicken lives to regret that it hadn't been hard-boiled before it was born.

In spite of the fact that a woman's teeth may chatter, she doesn't do her chattering with her teeth.

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