

a marked unwillingness to submit to serious tests; their 'manifestations' almost invariably take place under the friendly cover of comparative darkness; and, by exhortations, the singing of hymns, and the other 'business' of their craft, they create among their audiences an atmosphere of nervous expectancy, of morbidity, and of credulous emotionalism which are, in all the circumstances of the case, unfavorable in the last degree to cool and keen observation, but which, at the same time, constitute one of the real dangers of the séance. Full many a time have we exposed, to the victims of these cruel forms of deception, the sometimes crude and clumsy, sometimes clever, ruses of conjuring or 'hanky-panky' with which their eyes and minds have been led captive. And we have read with deep pain the ponderous dogmatizing practised upon Catholic readers by men of their own faith who have been, in like manner, innocently imposed upon by the ways that are dark and the tricks that are vain, for which the heathen Chinese is not alone 'peculiar.' In the books and magazine and other articles on the subject of spiritism by Catholic writers we find the ring séance and the galvanometer test commonly, but improperly, appealed to as crucial and scientific and final evidences of the reality and 'honor-bright' of the preternatural character of the manifestations there produced. Yet (as remarked above) any really good conjurer could perform the same feats in the same circumstances, and Mr. Maskelyne could probably far surpass them. The most convincing experience of so old and (we may add) almost life-long an observer of spiritistic séances as Mr. Trowbridge (related in the October *North American Review*) was a piece of smart conjuring trickery, referred to in some detail by us in our last issue. This we have many a time performed as an exposure of spiritistic methods, and, to our certain knowledge, it has been in the possession of the illusionist fraternity for at least over twenty-one years. It has even impressed so exceptionally able and gifted a writer as our valued friend the editor of the *Ave Maria* (October number, p. 570). And it is not surprising that such earnest and well-intentioned writers as Mr. Raupert and Dr. Lapponi should, through their utter lack of even an elementary knowledge of this or any other department of conjuring, attribute to preternatural sources large classes of spiritistic phenomena that were brought about by more or less clever or more or less clumsy sleights and artifices of the illusionist's deceptive craft.

We set down here at random a few other of the deceitful phenomena of this sort that we find credited to a preternatural origin by a number of Catholic writers: (1) Giving connected answers to secretly written questions enclosed in sealed envelopes or in locked boxes or drawers. (2) Receiving 'spirit messages' in the open day on bits of paper, or on slates, placed upon the table or the floor, while the medium's hands are securely held, and no one but the medium and his client is in the room. (3) Receiving, in full daylight, connected answers to questions secretly written on pieces of paper or cardboard placed face downwards on the table and covered over by the writer's hand, or by a book or by any opaque object. (4) Receiving connected answers to questions, the answers appearing on the inside faces of two common slates that have been carefully washed, tied together, padlocked or sealed. The slates may even be placed entirely beyond the reach of the medium, his hands held, all windows and doors securely sealed. (5) A client, bringing his own slate, securely sealed, visits a medium. Medium and visitor clasp each one hand over the table. With the other hand, they hold the sealed slate under the table. The noise of writing is heard upon the slate. When the noise has ceased, the slate is placed upon the table; the seals are broken; and a message is found on inside of slate. This was, for years, one of the cleverest tricks of Slade. (6) A horn, placed beyond the reach of the medium, or of any other person in the room, is sounded. (7) The doors and windows of the medium's séance parlor are carefully sealed. The medium is surrounded by all the clients or investigators present, who also clasp each others' hands and take such precautions as absolutely to prevent any person in the circle acting as the medium's accomplice. We assume that all present in the apartment are perfectly honest investigators. The lights are turned down. Immediately the

furniture in the room is thrown about, or lifted to the ceiling, clammy hands touch the faces of the visitors or tug at their coats or tweak their noses, unearthly voices are heard round about. And so on. Then the lights are raised; the scared clients survey the disordered apartment; they find the seals intact; and, with nerves a-tremble and, perhaps, in some instances minds partly unhinged, they go their separate ways and describe as a portent of preternatural energy or of outright diabolism what is, from beginning to end, nothing more or less than a cunning and heartless imposture and fraud by the medium and his 'pals.' The professional conjurer looks down with contempt upon the methods of this clumsy but cunning fraud, which is not for a moment to be compared, for real cleverness, with the 'spirit writing' and 'spirit photography' illusions of our time. But the horse-play and the crude energy of the 'manifestations' described above, occurring in darkness or semi-darkness, naturally present grave perils to impressionable and neurotic subjects. And they have captured the ready fancy of numerous well-meaning and unsuspecting Catholic writers, who have thrown a halo of mystery and of occult power around a tribe of adventurers and charlatans, and (as we regretfully know) been the means of sending many a woman, and not a few men, of our faith to the undesirable influences of the séance parlor.

What a simple and childlike faith most of these writers place in locks and seals and gummed envelope flaps, and in the presence of detectives at séances, and in the opinions of non-conjurer scientists in regard to spiritistic phenomena! It is very touching. But it is neither scientific nor wise.

'Love laughs at locks and locksmiths all.'

That clever wizard who calls himself Houdini performs those most amazing feats which have won for him the name of 'the handcuff king.' And the smart conjurer defies ordinary policeman's 'bracelets,' has his 'open sesame' through seal and lock, can in a moment read the writing that is within the closed envelope without opening the same (so long as the envelope is of any plain and unpatterned color and the writing is not folded in—and he takes care that these conditions favor him). As regards the scientists and the detectives: Any conjurer can honestly declare (and we know the opinion of some of the most eminent in the profession) that, where it is a question of detecting the sleights of the illusionist, one smart boy of the 'nipper' variety is worth more than a whole barnful of scientists and detectives. For he has a keen eye—and be it specially noted that he disregards 'patter,' his attention is not nearly so readily directed away from critical or 'covering' movements, and he has no theories or prepossessions to mar his observation. Not that he will detect much, or anything, when a 'clean' performer occupies the boards. But the chances are greatly loaded in favor of the 'nipper,' as against the non-conjuring scientist and detective. In mediumistic 'manifestations,' as in certain other things, you must set a thief to catch a thief; you must set conjurer against conjurer, and the first-class conjurer against the first-class medium. You don't invite a horse-shoer, merely because he is a first-class horse-shoer, to detect the flaws in a city electric installation, nor a uni-lingual English-speaking child to pass a verdict upon a question of Chinese classics. It is, we believe, just as great a folly for a writer, bereft of all knowledge of the art of conjuring, to dogmatise round about the phenomena of mediumistic spiritism. Nay, in its results, the folly may easily be far greater. What, for instance, do our standard Catholic book-writers and magazine-writers on spiritism know of the means by which the seven typical impostures mentioned in a previous paragraph are perpetrated? What do they know about the important part played therein by deodorised alcohol; by thin, electrically heated wires for dealing, where necessary, with seals; by the hundred arts of substitution; by mirror-reading and so-called forehead writing; by the minute and (to the medium's clients) invisible thumb or finger pencils and pencil-carriers; by caustic trick-pencils; by the clever feats of magnetic writing; by the little wedges and umbrella-rib pencils for writing messages inside

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