

THE SECRETS OF SECOND SIGHT.

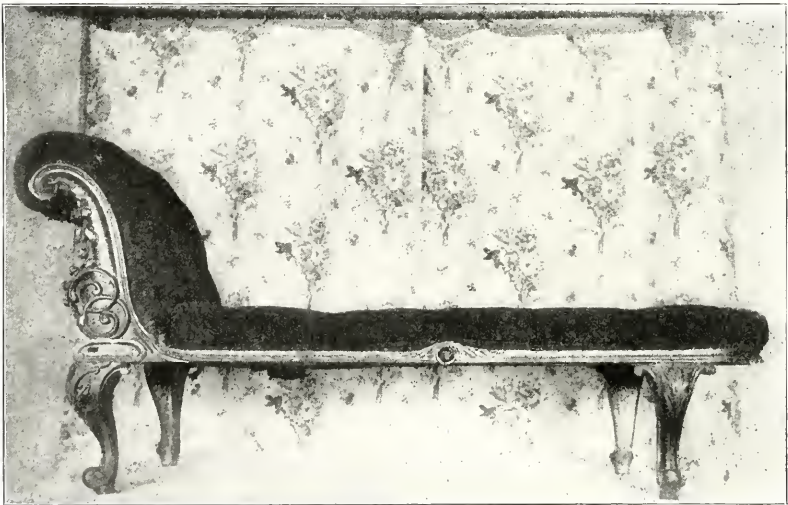
BY HENRY RIDGELY EVANS.

“Then a second-sighted Sandy said,
‘We’ll do nae good at a’ Willie.’”

—*Child’s Ballads*, VII. 265.

I.

I WENT on one occasion to dine with Mr. Francis J. Martinka, and while waiting for the repast to be dished up, seated myself upon an old-fashioned sofa in his dining room.



ROBERT HELLER'S MAGIC SOFA.

“Pardon me,” said my host, gaily, “while I put a bottle of wine on ice. I will be back in a little while. In the meantime, you may amuse yourself looking over these photos of eminent conjurers.

And by the way, you are seated upon the very sofa which Robert Heller used in his second-sight trick. Examine it carefully and you will see where the wires and electric battery were located. I came into possession of the relic after the death of Heller."

So saying he went out to look after the wine.

And so the piece of furniture I was seated on was the veritable up-to-date tripod of that High Priestess of Delphi, Miss Haidie Heller, who assisted Robert Heller, acting the part of clairvoyant. It called up a flood of memories to me.

The magician of the Arabian Nights transported himself from Bagdad to Damascus upon a piece of carpet. In imagination that old sofa carried me back thirty years into the past. I was seated in the gallery of the old National Theatre, Washington, D. C. at a *soirée magique* of the famous Heller. I shall never forget his second-sight trick. It was the most wonder-provoking, the most mysterious experiment I have ever seen. In his hands, it was perfect. Robert Heller saw Houdin give an exhibition of this feat of mental magic in London. His acute mind divined the secret, and he set about devising a code for working the experiment. He added many new effects. Nothing seemed to puzzle him and his assistant.

At an entertainment given in Boston, and described by Henry Hermon in his work on Hellerism, a coin was handed to Heller. He glanced at it and requested Miss Heller to name the object.

"A coin," she quickly answered.

"Here, see if you can tell the name of the country, and all about it?" he next asked.

Without a moment's hesitation she replied: "It is a large copper coin—a coin of Africa, I think. Yes, it is of Tripoli. The inscriptions on it are Arabic; one side reads 'Coined at Tripoli;' the other side, 'Sultan of two lands, Sultan by inheritance, and the son of a Sultan.'"

"Very well," said Heller, "that is correct. But look, what is the date, now?"

"The date is 1-2-2-0, one thousand two hundred and twenty of the Hegira, or Mohammedan year, which corresponds to 1805 of the Christian year."

Tremendous applause greeted this feat.

Mr. Fred Hunt, who was for a number of years Robert Heller's assistant, revealed the secret of second sight soon after Heller's death. The performer has first to be initiated into a new alphabetical arrangement, which is as follows:

A is H; B is T; C is S; D is G; E is F; F is E; G is A; H is

I; I is B; J is L; K is Pray; L is C; M is O; N is D; O is V; P is J; Q is W; R is M; S is N; T is P; U is Look; V is Y; W is R; X is See this; Y is Q; Z is Hurry. "Hurry up" means to repeat the last letter. For example, the initials or name in a ring is wanted. Say it is "Anna." By the alphabetical arrangement H stands for A, D for N. The exclamation "Hurry up" always means a repetition of the last letter, and again H will give the answer when put as follows:

After the alphabet we have the numbers, which are arranged as follows: 1 is Say or Speak; 2 is Be, Look or Let; 3 is Can or Can't; 4 is Do or Don't; 5 is Will or Won't; 6 is What; 7 is Please or Pray; 8 is Are or Ain't; 9 is Now; 10 is Tell; 0 is Hurry or Come. "Well" is to repeat the last figure. Now for an example: The number 1,234 is needed; attention must only be paid to the first word of a sentence, thus—*Say* the number. *Look* at it. *Can* you see it? *Do* you know?

Suppose the number called for is 100:

"*Tell* me the number. *Hurry!*"

So much, dear reader, for the spelling of proper names and conveying numbers to the clairvoyant on the stage. In regard to colors, metals, precious stones, countries, materials, fabrics, makers of watches, playing cards, society emblems, coins, bills, jewelry, wearing apparel, surgical instruments, etc., etc., Heller had them arranged in sets of ten. The first question he asked gave the clue to the set; the second question to the number of the article in the set. Thus but two short questions were necessary to elicit the proper reply from the assistant. Miscellaneous articles were divided into nineteen sets. I will give examples of two:

FIRST SET.

What article is this?

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Handkerchief. | 6. Basket. |
| 2. Neckerchief. | 7. Beet. |
| 3. Bag. | 8. Comforter. |
| 4. Glove. | 9. Headdress. |
| 5. Purse. | 10. Fan. |

SECOND SET.

What is this?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Watch. | 6. Necklace. |
| 2. Bracelet. | 7. Ring. |
| 3. Guard. | 8. Rosary. |
| 4. Chain. | 9. Cross. |
| 5. Breastpin. | 10. Charm. |

Supposing a spectator handed a *Rosary* to the conjurer. He would call out to his assistant. *What is this?* (Clue to second set.) Then he would exclaim: *Are you ready?* The word *are* would give the clue to number 8. And so on.

The clues to the sets were worded very nearly alike, so as to



ROBERT HELLER.

make the spectators believe that the same questions were being constantly asked.

Evoking the aid of electricity, Robert Heller was enabled to convey the cue words and numbers of the sets to Miss Heller *without speaking a word*. It was this wonderful effect that so puzzled everybody. A confederate sat among the spectators, near the center aisle of the theatre, and the wires of an electric battery were

connected with his chair, the electric push button being under the front part of his seat. Heller gave the cue to the set in which the article was, its number, etc., by some natural movement of his body or arms; and the confederate, rapidly interpreting the secret signals, telegraphed them to the clairvoyant on the stage. The receiving instrument was attached to the sofa upon which Miss Heller sat. The interchangeable use of the two methods of conveying information—spoken and unspoken—during an evening, completely bewildered the spectators. It was indeed a sphinx problem.

Robert Heller, or Palmer, was born in London in 1833. At the age of fourteen he won a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music. In the year 1852 he made his debut in New York City at the Chinese Assembly Rooms. On this occasion he wore a black wig and spoke with a Gallic accent, believing that a French conjurer would be better received in this country than an English magician. He failed to make a success, and eventually drifted to Washington, where he taught music for a number of years. All this time he was perfecting himself in legerdemaia. Finally he reappeared in New York and won unbounded success. He visited Europe and India, returning to the United States in 1875. He died in Philadelphia November 28, 1878. Soon after his death an absurd story went the rounds of the press that he had directed his executors to destroy his automata and magical paraphernalia. Such is not the case. Mr. Francis J. Martinka, of New York, possesses a number of his tricks. Heller was a magnificent pianist and always gave a short recital of his own compositions and those of the masters during his entertainment. He used to append the following effusion to his posters:

“Shakespeare wrote well;
Dickens wrote *Weller*;
Anderson was—
But the greatest is Heller.”

II.

A curious exhibition of silent second-sight was that of the Svengali trio. The effect as described by the *New York Herald*, August 11, 1904, is as follows:

“Two persons (lady and gentleman) are on the stage, both with their backs toward the audience. A third one goes into the auditorium, with his back towards the stage, to receive the wishes of the audience. If the name of any international celebrity is whispered to him, with lightning rapidity the thought is transmitted.

The gentleman on the stage turns round immediately and appears in features, bearing and dress as the desired personage—with wonderfully startling resemblance.

"One can likewise whisper to the gentleman in the auditorium the name of an international opera, operetta or international song. The thought flies like lightning and the lady sings what is wanted, instantly accompanying herself on the piano.

"The secret of this trick is as follows: When the curtain rises, the master of ceremonies walks to the front of the stage and in a pleasing voice begins: 'Ladies and gentlemen—I have the pleasure of introducing to you, etc., etc. I will call your attention to the fact that the spectators must confine their whispered wishes to international celebrities, names of well-known personages, songs and operas of international fame,' etc.

"This limitation of choice is the key to the performance. They have lists of these 'international celebrities,' rulers, statesmen, diplomats, great writers and musical composers; songs of world-wide reputation, popular selections from the operas, etc. And the secret of the evening is that all of these carefully selected names, titles, etc., are numbered, as in the following examples:

STATESMEN AND RULERS.		OPERAS.	
1. Bismarck.		1. "Faust."	
2. King Humbert of Italy.		2. "Lohengrin."	
3. Napoleon Bonaparte.		3. "Bohemian Girl."	
4. King Edward VII.		4. "Lucia di Lammermoor."	
5. Paul Kruger.		5. "Carmen."	
120. Lincoln.		120. "Trovatore."	
POPULAR SONGS.		GREAT WRITERS.	
1. "Home, Sweet Home."		1. Thackeray.	
2. "Last Rose of Summer."		2. Victor Hugo.	
3. "Marseillaise."		3. Dickens.	
4. "The Jewel Song in Faust."		4. George Elliot.	
5. "Walter's Prize Song."		5. Shakespeare.	
101. "Comin' Thro' the Rye."		101. Dante.	

HOW THE SIGNALS ARE CONCEALED.

"The manager reiterates that if only names of international reputation are given the responses will be correct nine hundred and ninety-nine times in a thousand. Then he descends from the stage, and, smiling right and left, inclines his ear to catch the whispered wishes as he moves slowly up the aisle, generally with his back to the stage. An auditor whispers to him, 'Bismarck.'

"Herr Svengali, gesticulating freely but naturally, pressing his

eyes with his fingers for an instant as if going into a momentary trance—only a second or two, just enough to impress the audience—then thrusts a hand into the air, wipes the moisture from his face with his handkerchief or leans toward a spectator, seeking his attention, when a voice from the stage says, 'Bismarck.'

"'Right,' responds the man who whispered that illustrious name. Then there is a craning of necks and crushing of programmes, all eyes fixed on the stage, where the impersonator, standing before a cabinet of costume pigeonholes, with the aid of an assistant has donned wig and uniform in his lightning change and whirls around disguised as Bismarck, while the girl at the piano plays 'The Watch on the Rhine.' It is all the work of a few seconds and makes a great impression upon the spectator.

"The next man calls for an opera air, 'Bohemian Girl,' and the piano plays 'I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls,' etc. Another man suggests the magic name 'Sheridan.' It is echoed aloud from the stage, while the audience applauds and the girl plays 'The Star Spangled Banner.'

"The few experts present pay little attention to the stage. Their eyes are fixed on the man Svengali in the aisle, noting every move he makes. It is observed that his numerous gestures, his frequent use of his handkerchief, the pressure of his fingers on his eyes, as if to hypnotize his assistant on the stage, are natural movements, attracting no attention, yet necessary to hide the vital signals in the cipher code of the show.

"In the programme and show bills it is emphasized that the lady and gentleman on the stage have their backs to the audience, while Svengali, down in the aisle, has his back to the stage, making collusion apparently impossible. This makes a profound impression on the public.

"A CONFEDERATE BEHIND A SCREEN.

"But not a word is said of that curious screen panel, bearing a double headed eagle—the Austrian coat of arms—surmounting a large cabinet of costumes occupying so much space on the stage. The programme does not explain that this screen panel is transparent from behind and that an accomplice with a strong magnifying lens reads every move made by Svengali and repeats his signals to the pretty girl at the piano and the impersonator at the cabinet.

"THE SYSTEMS EXPLAINED.

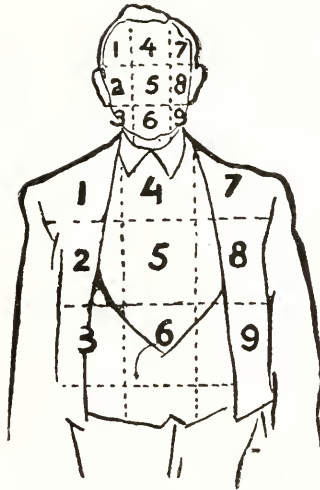
"Here is an illustration of how the figure system can be worked. As explained above, the famous personages, popular songs and

operas are on numbered lists. Svengali in the aisle, with his code of signals, has all these numbers committed to memory.

"When a spectator whispers 'Dickens' Svengali knows it is No. 4, and he signals accordingly.

"But how?

"By touching his head, chin, or breast, or that particular part of his body designated in the signal code of the Svengali Company. The diagram given herewith illustrates the system of communica-



tion by numbers, nine figures and a cipher (o), by which all the wealth of the world may be measured, and any number of words may be communicated without a word of speech. One has but to map out a square on his face, breast or body, and number it with these nine figures, with an extra space for the cipher, to be ready for the Svengali business. That is, when he has memorized the names and the numbers representing them.

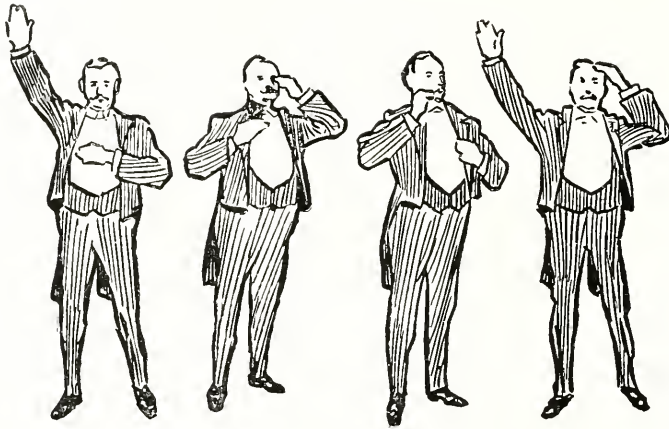
"Say the human head is used for this purpose. Imagine the top of the head, right hand side, as No. 1, the right ear as No. 2, the jaw as No. 3, and the neck as the cipher; the forehead No. 4, the nose No. 5, the chin No. 6, the top of the head on the left side as No. 7, the left ear No. 8, and the left side of the jaw No. 9.

"Thus you have the code system by which operators can communicate volumes by using a codified list of numbered words or sentences.

"If you label the Lord's Prayer No. 4, and the Declaration of Independence No. 5, you may instantly telegraph the mighty litera-

ture through wireless space—enough literature to save all Europe from anarchy—by two natural movements of the hand.

“You can label your eyes, your movements or even your glances, making them take the places of the nine omnipotent numbers. Again: Glance upward to the right for No. 1, straight upward for No. 2 and upward to the left for No. 3. Repeating, glancing horizontally for Nos. 4, 5 and 6. Repeating the same again, by glancing downward for Nos. 7, 8 and 9, and stroking your chin for the cipher (o).



SECOND SIGHT TRICK—SIGNALLING.

“With your back to the audience, you can telegraph in a similar way, using your arm and elbow to make the necessary signals. Let the right arm, hanging down, represent No. 1; the elbow, projecting from the side, No. 2; elbow raised, No. 3. Repeat with the left arm for Nos. 4, 5 and 6; with either hand placed naturally behind you, on the small of the back, above the belt and over your shoulder for Nos. 7, 8 and 9, and on the back of your head or neck for the cipher (o).”

III.

It is an interesting fact to note that the Chevalier Pinetti was the first exhibitor of the second-sight trick. Houdin revived (or re-invented) it.

On the 12th of December, 1846, he announced in his bill: “In this programme, M. Robert-Houdin’s son, who is gifted with a marvelous second-sight, after his eyes have been covered with a thick bandage, will designate every object presented to him by the audi-

ence." In his memoirs he thus describes how he came to invent the trick:

"My two children were playing one day in the drawing-room at a game they had invented for their own amusement. The younger had bandaged his elder brother's eyes, and made him guess at the objects he touched, and when the latter happened to guess right, they changed places. This simple game suggested to me the most complicated idea that ever crossed my mind.

"Pursued by the notion, I ran and shut myself up in my work-room, and was fortunately in that happy state when the mind follows easily the combinations traced by fancy. I rested my head in my hands, and, in my excitement, laid down the first principles of second sight.

Houdin never revealed his method of working the trick.

Robert Heller's successors in mental magic are Max Berol and wife, and the Zancigs. Among other feats Berol is able to memorize over two hundred words called out by the spectators and written down on a slip of paper by some gentleman. Berol will then write these words backwards and forwards without hesitation and name any one of them by its number in the list. The Zancigs are marvels in the art of second-sight. They were born in Denmark, but are naturalized citizens of the United States. Clever advertisers, they lay claim to occult powers, as the following notice in the *Washington Post*, April 30, 1905, will testify:

"Although Prof. Zancig and Mme. Zancig, who will be at Chase's this week, are naturalized Americans, they come from Denmark. They first developed their transmission of thought from one mind to another—or what is known as telepathy—while journeying through the Orient. They found that quite a number of the Orientals had found it possible to control 'thought waves' and transmit them to the minds of others, just as Marconi, with his wireless telegraphy, controls electric waves and transmits them to an objective point. Prof. Zancig discovered that Mme. Zancig was inceptive, and he could readily transmit to her mind the thoughts of his own. The tests were continued, and became so positive and conclusive that it was decided to give public exhibitions.

"While in India, Prof. and Mme. Zancig saw some astonishing telepathic exhibitions, which encouraged them to still greater efforts. They gave exhibitions before the Maharajah, near Delhi; before the Chinese minister at Hongkong, and before the Japanese officials of highest grades, who took great interest in the mental tests. One remarkable incident occurred at Potchefstroom, South Africa, where

the natives are extremely superstitious. The exhibition had been extensively advertised, and the house was full. The entertainment created a sensation. As long as Prof. Zancig remained on the stage everything was all right, but when he went among the audience and read dates of coins, inscriptions on letters, and performed other remarkable feats, the audience suddenly became panic-stricken, and there was a mad rush for windows, doors, or any other means of exit. In five minutes the hall was empty, and nothing could induce the people to return. After concluding his tour abroad, Prof. Zancig and his wife returned to America, and began an American tour which has been uninterruptedly successful and will extend to every section of the United States."