

MEDIUMISTIC READING OF SEALED WRITINGS.*

BY DAVID P. ABBOTT.

I.

IN response to a request from the editor of *The Open Court*, accompanied by a letter from Mr. I. G. Bartel of Nelson, New Zealand, I have decided to give to the readers of this magazine (in so far as I am at liberty to do so) the methods which I use in reading sealed writings, to which I alluded in the paper entitled "Some Mediumistic Phenomena," which appeared in the August number.

Perhaps, as Mr. Bartel says, it is somewhat inconsistent in me to say, "An explanation of the methods used would be out of place here," while at the same time explaining other things of a similar nature. But, the fact is, when making this statement I was looking at the matter from the magician's point of view. While magicians frequently publish or allow to be published many valuable secrets, yet the secrets of their very latest and best work are jealously guarded from the public. The reason for this is because if the secrets become too generally known, it lessens the value of the experiments for purposes of entertainment, by rendering them common. Consequently, from the magician's point of view, it is regarded as out of place to allow such secrets to become public property through publication.

In some instances secrets of this class are sold by certain dealers to performers, and to professional mediums, at prices that might astonish an outsider. If the secrets are regarded as exceptionally good and a high price placed upon them by the vendor, so few will buy them that the performance of the experiments will be very rare, and the performer can well afford to pay the high price asked.

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When such sale is made, it is generally accompanied by a request that the purchaser faithfully guard the secret from the public.

The fundamental principles of these experiments are not new, but the details make them useful for practical purposes. I purchased them from dealers who place considerable value on them; as they are catalogued at prices which, for the four I am about to describe, make an aggregate of some seventy dollars.

As received by me from the vendors, I found some of them impracticable until I had added certain improvements to the ideas. In the improved form I assure the readers of this paper that they are thoroughly practicable, as I have performed them some hundreds of times with such success as would astonish one who has not seen them. I have never yet made a failure in performing them; nor have I found even one person, among the many who have witnessed their performance, who could even remotely guess at the methods employed. There are many methods of reading such writings, but the ones I am about to describe are the very best of which I have ever even heard.

Still, my readers must not expect me to explain a miracle. Miracles are never performed. The experiments are pure trickery; but if properly performed, have the appearance of being produced by some occult or psychic power. However, all that is necessary is a few simple articles, and *their proper manipulation*. When one reads the explanation of a trick before seeing it performed, the value of the trick is seldom realized. It would be much better, were it possible to do so, to see it performed first and then read the explanation afterwards. However, as this is impossible in this instance, I will first give the effect, or appearance of the experiments as I perform them, and follow this with an explanation of the methods employed. Performers who may read this paper, will notice that most of the articles employed have been previously used in such experiments; and they may not at first sight attach the importance to these experiments which they deserve, owing to the fact that as used heretofore such tricks were by no means a decided success. The ideas have gradually been improved upon, and the perfected tricks are the result of a process of evolution. A few little improvements will frequently make a poor trick one of the best and most difficult of detection.

Each of the four is performed on a different principle, and is fine when performed singly. They should first be practiced in this manner; but as I produce them, I work them as one experiment, or rather as a combination trick. I have performed two of them

singly from the stage with the greatest success ; but worked in combination, I generally give them in a double parlor. Here the effect is so great, especially on the more intelligent class of persons, (owing to the fact of all being done under the very eyes of the spectators,) that I prefer this method ; and I shall describe the experiments as I perform them in my double parlors.

I would suggest that those who desire to easily grasp the explanations should pay close attention to the following description, as it is given with a view to making the explanations intelligible. Each little detail should be remembered ; for all is for a purpose, and must be just so.

I have the audience seated in the front parlor, and facing the back parlor which opens into other apartments, through a folding door. I have a writing desk in the rear parlor in which there is a drawer containing the articles I use ; and to which I frequently go to get new articles, sometimes getting rid of others at the same time.

There is also in the center of this back parlor an ordinary table, on which I place a porcelain skull, open at the top. This same skull, I might remark, is what I use instead of a hat, for collecting the billets in the experiments described in my former article.

Briefly stated, when I perform this combination experiment, I first prepare the three sealed writings that I am to read ; and I then proceed to read first the one prepared last. I next read the one prepared first ; and then, after a slight wait, give a slate writing experiment, producing a message signed by the name of the person which the second writer has written on her sheet of paper, sealed, and kept in her own possession. After this I read the writing of the second writer, and answer the question asked therein.

There is some little time taken up in the preparation of the different writings ; so in order that the spectators may not grow restless, and also to give them some food for thought during the wait, (and incidentally to render my task more easy to accomplish,) I first perform Yost's "Spiritualistic Slate and Dictionary" test.

This is a very fine spirit slate trick in which three slates, a flap, some other articles and some excellent manipulation each play a part. Its effect upon the more intelligent class is very marked. This experiment convinces the spectators that the performer can "do things" and that they are not wasting their time in what is to follow. It thus does not allow the interest to lag during the little time required in the preparation of the writings. It also occupies the

minds of the spectators to such an extent that what is to follow is much more easily accomplished. I will not take up space here in explaining this trick, as persons desiring it can obtain the articles and explanation of Yost & Co. of Philadelphia, for what the articles alone would cost.*

II.

I now proceed to prepare the first writing. This, however, I shall read second. I request some lady to be seated in a chair in one of the front corners of the front parlor. This places her rather in the rear of the other spectators. I state that this is to prevent the others from seeing what she writes.

I now step to the writing desk and bring forward some envelopes and slips of paper. I hand an envelope and a slip of paper to the lady, asking her to write plainly on the slip of paper some question about her future which she would like to have answered. I ask her to hold the paper in her left hand, in such manner while writing that neither the audience nor myself can in any manner see what she is writing. As she thus holds the back of her hand which contains the paper towards us, it effectually conceals her writing. I pay no attention to her while writing, except an occasional glance to see that she complies with my request.

As soon as she finishes writing, I request her to fold the paper in half. This she does. I now request her to fold it in half the other way and when she does so, I ask her to place the same in the envelope herself and to seal it herself. When she has all ready, I direct her to place it in her own pocket and keep it there until after I have read it. I in no way touch it.

When I desire more questions written, I pass to other ladies with the remaining envelopes and slips of paper, and have others prepared. I always do this when performing from a stage; or have my assistants pass to four or five persons each, thus preparing some eight or ten questions for me to read mentally. I, however, rarely prepare more than one question when performing in parlors, as the time taken up delays the experiment.

I now proceed to prepare the second writing which, however, I read last when I have begun the reading.

I ask the lady, whom I shall call Lady Number One, to exchange seats with some other lady; and this lady I shall call Lady Number Two.

I next bring Lady Number Two an ordinary writing tablet, and

* Yost's number 128.

ask her to write on it some question about her future which she would like to have answered ; and also to write below this question the name of some person who is now dead, from whom she would like to receive a message. I also request her to hold the tablet while writing in such a manner that no one can see the writing, and to use care that no one in any way may know what she writes. I ask her to leave a margin around the sheet free from writing, to be used for folding purposes ; and when she is through with the writing, to tear off the sheet, fold it several times, then seal it in a small envelope which I have previously given her, place the same immediately in her own pocket and keep it there until I have read it. When she has all prepared, I direct her to lay the tablet on a table that is convenient, and there it remains throughout the evening in full view. When she lays it on the table I do not go near it or pay any attention to it ; and it can be examined thoroughly, as there is no carbon paper or any similar thing about it. I do not especially call attention to this fact, as the suggestion of any possible trickery weakens the effect. However, on several occasions I have noticed certain wise persons examining it quietly. This is all the preparation for Lady Number Two's writing ; and I now proceed to prepare the third writing, which when prepared I read as the first reading.

I now bring from my drawer a small card about one-thirty-second of an inch in thickness, red on one side and white on the other. These are cut from ordinary cardboard, obtainable at any printing office. I ask some gentleman whom I regard as particularly intelligent, or as hard to deceive, to kindly take his seat in the center of the front end of the front parlor.

I ask him to write across the card the name of some great man, statesman, or politician, any one of whom he can think, living or dead ; only I ask him to write the name plainly in a bold hand, and to be very careful that no one sees what he writes. I also give him some article, it makes no difference what, (usually one of the slates used in the "Spirit Dictionary" trick,) on which to place the card while writing. I ask him when through to turn the card over face downward on the slate, turning it over *towards himself* and not towards the audience, as otherwise they might see the writing. This he does. While he is preparing this card I return to the rear parlor to the drawer to get some other articles, and pay no attention to him until the card is written and turned over, and until he informs me of that fact.

I now come forward with an envelope into which the card will fit nicely ; and presenting it to him open, flap side toward him and

face downward, I ask him to insert the card himself, keeping the writing downward while so doing. I merely ask the privilege of touching the card with the tip of my finger as he is passing it into the envelope.

I next request him to seal the envelope himself, to place it on the slate sealed side upward, and to make certain marks across the sealed parts so that he can tell if I should tamper with the same. I now bring forward a seal and some sealing wax. I give him the seal previously moistened, and proceed to melt the wax, allowing it to drop on the center of the envelope. At the same time I request him to seal the envelope doubly, and to examine the seals so thoroughly that there can be no possibility of substitution. When all is prepared I am ready to begin the readings.

III.

I now take the gentleman's envelope in the tips of my fingers; and, stepping to the center table of the second parlor, I lean it against the skull previously mentioned, so that the wax seal faces the audience, while all is in the brightest light.

I instantly return to the front parlor; and, seating myself facing the spectators, I pay no attention to the sealed envelope resting against the skull in the back parlor. This requires not over two seconds of time, there being no pause whatever in my movements.

I proceed to make passes over my own face in a manner similar to those which the early mesmerists made over their subjects. I simulate considerable nervousness, allow my shoulders to be convulsed a time or two, gaze toward the ceiling as if looking into infinity, and begin my attempt to read. I first request the writer not to answer any questions I may ask, except those I may ask him directly. This prevents him from answering the first questions I ask and which I am directing to some unseen being.

I hold my hand to my ear, *à la* Schlossenger. Allowing it to tremble violently, I ask the unseen spirits if the name written on the card is the name of a person living or dead? I apparently hear an answer which the spectators do not hear, for I turn to the writer and with great solemnity inform him that he has written the name of one who is now dead. This of course is supposing that he did write the name of a dead person. If the person should happen to be living, I with the same solemnity announce that fact to him.

Let us now suppose that the name written is that of Aaron Burr. I again turn to the spirits and ask if the person whose name is written died more than one thousand years ago. When they an-

swer me I turn to the writer informing him that the person whose name he has written died less than one thousand years ago. I then ask the spirits if this man died in the last five hundred years and get the answer that he died in the last century. This I also give in a dramatic manner. I then say, while gazing into emptiness, "I see before me a man who is 'small in stature and slight in figure, but with a face finely cut and almost classic in its mold.' He wears no beard, his hair is brushed back from over a wide forehead, and he regards me with a pair of beautiful eyes. There is a look of ineffable sadness on his face, as if there were something he would have undone. He wears a coat of black velvet, with black velvet knee breeches, black silk stockings and shoes with silver buckles. I see behind him a beautiful lady who regards him with a look of infinite tenderness and pity. She appears to be a daughter."

The effect of this is very fine, as the writer corroborates my statements, or else states that he himself is not familiar with the personal appearance of the one whose name he has written.

I now attempt to read the writing. I begin by looking into space and repeating the letters of the alphabet. I finally get the letter A. I repeat the process. When about to get the second letter a, and while making great efforts to get it and seeming rather uncertain, I request the writer to be so kind as to step to the table and bring his envelope and hold it on the top of my head. This he does, while I close my eyes, and proceed with slight effort to read the complete name.

I offer him a knife and ask him to open the envelope and see if his card is still within untouched, which of course it is. I also ask him to examine the seal and the envelope, and to hold the same close to the light and see if it is possible to read the writing through the envelope. This he and the spectators do, and of course find everything as it should be and the writing perfectly invisible. When he returns the envelope to me, I offer it to him to keep as a souvenir, which generally is accepted gladly by him.

I am now ready to read the writing of Lady Number One and answer the question she has written. I ask her if she still has concealed about her the writing which she sealed and retained herself. She replies in the affirmative. I then ask her if any one in the world knows what she has written. Upon her informing me that no one knows, and of the impossibility of such a thing being the case, I ask her what she will think if I can now succeed in reading her question without going near her, while she retains the same in her own pocket. The spectators generally express their incredulity as

to the possibility of such a proceeding, upon which I inform them that I will make the effort.

I ask the lady, in order to remove the idea of mind-reading or telepathy, to keep her mind entirely off what she has written. I then make the second effort, assuming an air of great earnestness. I slowly read her question letter by letter, and give a full and minute description of the writing, the style of letters used and any peculiarities of any of the letters. The effect of this can well be imagined.

I now ask her to open her envelope, to examine it carefully and see if I am correct, and to exhibit the same to the spectators. This she does, while I stand at a distance repeating the peculiarities of the strokes of the letters, etc., for their verification. I never look at the writing at all even after reading it. I simply pay no attention to it, as my mysterious power of vision is now superior to the sight of mortal eyes.

I now tell Lady Number Two to continue to keep her writing concealed, and that I will use it shortly; whereupon I frequently have a selection of music; or if not, I allow the spectators a minute or two of time in which to consider and talk over what they have just seen.

I am now ready to produce a spirit message for Lady Number Two, signed by the name which is written below her question on her concealed paper; and to read and answer her question.

I arrange a table just inside the back parlor, sidewise to the spectators, placing a chair on each side of the table and two slates on the table. I ask Lady Number Two to come forward, take the chair next the audience and to clean the slates. As she does this I seat myself at the opposite side of the table.

As soon as she cleans them, we place the slates under the table; and I ask her to hold them while I place my hands on the table top. In a few moments, under my instructions, she brings from under the table the slates, on which is a fine spirit message of philosophical import, to which is signed the dead person's name which she has written on the sheet of paper and which she still retains sealed. The effect of this upon her, and upon her friends who may have known this person, is very great; especially as it is some one of whom I have never heard. I have very frequently known some of the spectators, who happened to be acquainted with the person whose name is signed to the message, to identify the writing and sometimes to identify the language as that of the dead person.

I next, with some little effort, proceed mentally to read her question, minutely describing the writing, etc. I then ask her to

bring out the envelope, exhibit the writing and verify my statements, which she does. I now proceed to answer her question; and if I have not previously done so, to answer the question of Lady Number One. Let us suppose the question asked is, "Will I ever be wealthy?" I first consult the "Mystic Oracle of the Crystal Spheres." I place on the table a highly polished crystal globe three inches in diameter, such as is used for experiments in "Crystal Gazing." This globe is supported by a bronze griffon. I have the lady gaze into the globe while I intently look into it from the opposite side. I then with solemnity inform her that she will never be wealthy but that she will be "well-to-do."

I assure my readers that the effect of this all is just as great as if I really performed by some occult power that which in reality I have but performed by trickery of the simplest kind. I would have no trouble in passing it off on the majority of my spectators as the work entirely of spirits. The experiments are so superior to those usually employed by mediums, that the audience is simply confounded. Also, there is abundant opportunity after reading the dead statesman's name, to call him up in the manner so common with mediums and give the audience an elaborate message from him, which will have much weight with them, owing to the manner in which his spirit has been summoned from the land of shadows. However, I will say that while I use these things in the manner outlined, after all is over I assure my audience that it is not spirit power which I use; but I do not tell them it is trickery, as that would detract from the effect. I simply let them speculate and think what they please; and I not infrequently find them determined, notwithstanding my statement to the contrary, to believe that it is the work of spirits, or else some occult power which I possess. I have had intelligent and wealthy business men of Omaha and other places question me, afterwards, about the apparently marvelous power which they seem to think I possess.

At one time I gave to the sisters of a Catholic school, or convent, one of my entertainments. I had the Mother Superior write and seal the great man's name. The name she wrote was "Hannibal," which of course I read for them very successfully. I was some time afterwards informed, privately, that one of the sisters ever after insisted that I was in league with His Satanic Majesty. This was notwithstanding the fact that in this particular instance I had assured them that it was nothing but trickery. I knew the teachings of the Roman Church in regard to anything like sorcery, or necromancy, or even modern spiritualism; and not desiring to

give offense, I stated in advance that I was merely illustrating what might be done by trickery and how good people might be imposed upon by impostors. I stated that such things were never done by spirit power; and the Mother Superior remarked that she was sure, if spirits did such things, they were only "evil spirits." In this case I only gave the single reading of the statesman's name as described above. I do not know what would have been the result, had I performed the complete combination experiment, with all the dramatic play I usually employ.

The description given above is the exact appearance of the experiments as seen by the audience. This is exactly what the spectators see or think they see; and it is all that any of them do see. However, things are not always just what they appear to be.

IV.

And now to tear down the structure I have erected—to shatter the idols, and return from the romantic land of mystery to the commonplace things of earth.

I will proceed to explain the principles and the methods I really employ in reading these writings. The readers of this article who desire to fully grasp the explanations I am about to give should either memorize the description of the experiments, or else refer to each one separately when reading the explanation of that particular one.

I will give the explanation of the different tricks as far as I am at liberty to do so, and in the order in which I read them. I will explain each one separately beginning with the reading of the statesman's name, which was the third writing in the preparation.

The reader will remember that after this envelope is properly sealed with wax, I take it in my fingers and carry it to the table in the back parlor, and lean it against the skull. The principle used consists in this instance in rendering the envelope temporarily transparent, and instantly reading the writing in it unseen by the spectators, while on my way to the table.

I use, for this, "Colonial Spirits," which is a kind of odorless wood alcohol manufactured in this country. If a sponge saturated with this be rubbed across any piece of paper, it is rendered instantly transparent, as soon as moistened; and any writing under it can be easily read. In a few moments the alcohol evaporates, and the transparent condition of the paper disappears. This principle has been known for some time in the world of magic, but not in

the particular way in which I use it; and therefore it has not usually been worked so successfully.

I accomplish my object in the following manner. I have in the drawer with my paraphernalia a half ounce round tin box such as druggists use for vaseline and similar articles. I have crowded into this box a small silk sponge which fills it a little above the edges like an envelope moistener. I have soldered to the bottom of this box on the outside, a circular disk of tin for the purpose of "palming." This box I prepare in advance just before the experiment by saturating the sponge in it with colonial spirits. I leave the lid on the box to prevent evaporation until I am ready for it.

When I have the envelope sealed with wax, I return the sealing wax and the seal to the drawer in the writing desk; and this gives me the opportunity to palm and go forward with the box containing the saturated sponge. I allow my right hand, which contains it, to hang carelessly against my right side. This effectually conceals it, and I avoid looking toward my right hand in any manner. I advance leisurely to the writer and ask him if he is sure he can be certain of the identity of the wax seal, and if he could tell if the same should be broken. I now take the envelope from him with my left hand, and turn around, carrying it to the table. On the way, as soon as the envelope is out of the angle of view of the spectators, I raise my right hand, and, passing the sponge over the face of the envelope a couple of times, quickly read the name under the bright light of a gasoline pressure lamp with which for such occasions I have my parlor lighted.

Having the writer choose the name of a statesman or some great man, greatly facilitates the reading; as the names written are usually so familiar that the merest glance is sufficient to read them. I then, as soon as I reach the table, turn half around so that my left side faces the audience; and with my left hand still holding the envelope with the seal towards the spectators, I stand it on the table against the skull, asking the spectators if they can plainly see the seal from there.

The envelope has only been out of the view of the spectators a fraction over a second; yet I now know the name on the card. Meanwhile, with the right hand I secretly drop the moistener into my right coat pocket, or preferably into a small bag at the back of the table behind the skull. If I use the bag at the back of the table, I have it suspended open from a pivoted wire, so that I can quickly swing it under the table out of view with the fingers of my right hand. This I do, after dropping the moistener into it; and

at the same time with the left hand I place the envelope against the skull, and direct the attention of the spectators to the seal by my discourse, and by my looks. I in no way look toward my right hand. Swinging the cloth bag under the table, makes it safe for the writer of the name to go to the table and get the envelope when I request him to do so. I make all of my movement leisurely, throughout the entire experiment; as by so doing I can have a little more time when walking to the table with the envelope, and yet not attract the attention of the spectators to this fact.

For the dramatic play, it is necessary to have a previous knowledge of the personal appearance and history of the great men of the country whose names are most liable to be written. The time required in the dramatic play before the reading allows the alcohol to thoroughly dry; so that there is no trace of it when the writer of the name goes to the table after it. By using colonial spirits there is no odor noticeable. It is safe to say that in a few seconds after the sponge is passed over it, the moistened side of the envelope could be turned towards the audience; and nothing would be detected, as the alcohol evaporates so quickly. I use a small envelope of *wove* paper of sufficient thickness to effectually conceal the writing in the strongest light. I found it necessary to use a card, the white side of which is not glazed and which has a slightly dirty color; as otherwise the writing would be slightly visible through the envelope, and thus mar the effect of the experiment. If a thicker envelope is used, a whiter card may be used also; but a thick envelope is not rendered so transparent as a thinner one. I use two styles of envelopes,— a thin one where the lights are not strong, and a thicker one if the lights are strong. I like to use stationery that can afterwards be inspected by daylight; so, therefore, at my home I use a gasoline pressure lamp on such occasions, as a strong light in the room permits the use of an envelope of sufficient thickness. I also select a style of envelope, that does not expand or pucker from the effects of the alcohol, and thus arouse suspicion.

When I have the writer turn the card over on the slate *towards himself* and not towards the spectators, this is in reality to insure having the writing right side up when I afterwards pass the moistener over the envelope. I present the envelope to him open, flap side towards himself, face downward, and hold it until he has started the card into it. When I ask permission to merely touch the card on its way into the envelope with the tip of my finger, I do this to insure the card going into the envelope with the writing

towards the front side. When I afterwards pick up the envelope I notice which is the flap he has just sealed, and I have this flap uppermost. This brings the writing right side up in my hand, and saves the time necessary to turn the envelope when reading it.

I furnish the writer with a large-leaded soft lead pencil, not too sharp, to write with, though any pencil will do. However, a pencil of above description makes the writing plainer and in a larger hand, which is of considerable assistance in reading the writing so quickly. The reader will remember, that I also request the writer to write the name in a bold hand plainly.

Should one reach the table before succeeding in reading the name, it were better to make a slight pause than to fail with the trick. However, after a few trials this will never happen.

Immediately after leaning the envelope against the skull, I return to the front parlor and proceed with the readings as given in the description of the appearance of the experiments.

While considerable time is required in reading this article, much less time is required in giving the readings. Only fifteen or twenty minutes is required, for the entire combination experiment.

The principle of using odorless alcohol on a sponge has been published before, but as heretofore described I have never found the trick practicable. As furnished by the vendor, the instructions are for the performer to prepare, or have his assistant prepare, several of these envelopes; and have them placed flat on a table, at which the performer seats himself. He now partly closes his eyes; but in reality he can see the envelopes all the time. Then he slowly passes the hand with the sponge over the different envelopes, reading aloud the writing therein. It is intended to convey the idea to the spectators that by passing the hand over the envelopes the performer gets *en rapport* with them. This method is obviously for the stage only, as in a parlor the spectators could see the effect of the alcohol. I have never found this method very practicable; and I assure my readers that in the method I have described, less time is taken up and a much finer effect obtained. It is also much more certain of success, and leaves the spectators absolutely in the dark as to the method employed.

I have frequently performed these readings^s in audiences where are persons who have seen me perform them before; and in such cases they invariably inform me that they are more mystified than they were in the first place.

The secrets of the remaining experiments, so far as I know, have never been given to the public. The principle that is used in

the production of each of them is entirely different; therefore, if a spectator should ever surmise the principle used in one of them, the moment he should try to explain the others by it, he would see that it would not work; and he would conclude that he was entirely wrong.

And now in regard to the principle which I use in reading the writing of Lady Number One, I am sorry to say I must here disappoint my reader. I am under a promise to the dealer not to reveal this secret and can not do so. Those who desire to use it, however, can obtain it from George L. Williams & Co., 7145 Champlain Ave., Chicago, Ill. I regard this as one of the best tricks extant, and regret my inability to give its secret to my readers.

After the preparation of the writing for Lady Number One, I immediately go ahead with the preparation for Lady Number Two. I will now give the secret of this reading as completely as my promise permits me to do.

In this experiment the secret lies in getting an impression of the writing, but *not* a carbon impression. This impression can not be seen by the eye at all, but has to be "developed" afterwards. This is really a very fine idea and was originally intended for professional mediums to use in tests with their subjects at private sittings. The tablet is apparently unprepared and would stand the most thorough inspection, yet there is a preparation.

I will first describe the preparation of the tablet, and then I will describe how I obtain possession of it and how I develop the writing.

I use for this experiment a finely finished and highly glazed paper. I take one sheet of it and prepare one side of it by rubbing it over thoroughly with a material common enough to be within every one's reach; but the vendor of tricks might deem it a violation of my promise if I were to give its name, although the secret to this part of the trick has been well known for some time, and has even been published. It leaves a perfectly smooth surface. Only one in the secret could discover that there is a preparation. Even I am frequently puzzled to tell which is the prepared side, and can only do so by holding it so that the light strikes it at the proper angle.

This sheet is now to be placed on the tablet, prepared side down; but, before doing so, I first touch the two corners of the top two sheets of paper on the tablet with library paste. I do this so that they will adhere to each other a trifle, as this prevents the lady from tearing off by accident the sheet which bears the

record, when afterwards she tears off the prepared sheet bearing her question.

I now place the prepared sheet in position, prepared side down, and paste the top in position with white library paste. However, I allow this sheet to protrude at the bottom about one-thirty-second of an inch. This is to make it so easy for the lady to get hold of it, that she will be in no danger of tearing off more than the one. Of course, when she writes, the writing is transferred to the second sheet, *but it is entirely invisible*.

After she has written, I direct her to lay the tablet on a table which is convenient; and it apparently lies there throughout the evening. This is the point where I begin the preparation of the writing of the statesman's name, immediately thereafter giving the first two readings. I, only *after the first two readings* obtain possession of this tablet and develop the writing.

I do it in this manner. I bring forward two slates, which I shall soon use in the slate writing experiment, and leave them on the center table in the front parlor. Under one is a duplicate tablet, which I also leave on the table, unnoticed by the spectators. I remove the slates used in the dictionary trick, carrying away under one of them the original tablet. Meanwhile, the spectators are deeply engaged in a discussion of the two readings I have just given them; and I inform Lady Number Two that I will read her question a little later, and for her to keep it in her possession until I have done so.

I now go to other apartments for a few moments to develop the record. I use for a holder for the sheet of paper while working with it, the frame of a slate of proper size with the slate portion removed. I fasten the sheet in position on this frame with a couple of pins, using care to keep the side with the record on it upwards; because if it gets turned over, I can in no way discover the fact until it is too late.

The writing may be developed in several ways; the best way and the one I generally use, I can not reveal on account of my promise of secrecy to the firm before referred to. I will, however, give a method which is well known to many mediums, and which has been used by them for a number of years.

I merely dust a little powdered plumbago, or a little lampblack on to the sheet of paper, shake it around and then turn it over a vessel and dust it off by striking the paper very lightly with my finger nail. The writing will appear on the sheet plainly and may be

read. The method furnished by the above named firm, however, is much superior to this method.

I quickly memorize the question; and on a slate close at hand, where I have a message already prepared, I sign the name of the dead person. This slate is an exact duplicate in appearance, of the two slates which were left on the table in the front parlor.

I now proceed to prepare the Spirit Slate experiment, and give the final reading; but before describing this, which is the finest slate trick of which I know, I will give a little additional information relating to the last reading experiment.

I was told to use a tablet with every sheet prepared, but I first prepared only every alternate sheet and left the rest unprepared. This worked nicely; but as soon as the tablet was used a few times, I found that all the questions that had previously been written on the tablet were copied for several sheets down. This caused so many words to appear, that I was compelled to discard all prepared sheets, excepting one, as I have above described. A tablet could be prepared with two prepared sheets on top and an unprepared sheet between them. There would then be two impressions on unprepared sheets in the tablet, but it would be necessary to discard all these top sheets after each reading.

This trick, however, was originally intended for the use of professional mediums at private sittings with a single person. In such cases, after the sitter has written and sealed his question, he is directed to proceed to the mantel and clean and examine some slates. While he is doing so, the medium takes the tablet from the table and places the same quickly in a large pocket on the inside of his coat, taking therefrom and leaving on the table a duplicate. He then advances to the sitter and begins a lecture, when his door-bell rings. As his servant fails to answer the bell the medium excuses himself for a moment, and attends to the matter himself, engaging in a discussion with the servant while out, for not properly attending to the door. This he does within hearing of the sitter. Meanwhile he is rapidly developing and reading the record.

This method I never liked, as it requires the assistance of another person. I much prefer the method I have outlined.

And now for the Spirit Slate Message. I use three slates, but the spectators never see more than two of them at one time. I make an exchange of one of the slates, unknown to the sitter or spectators. The table is an ordinary one, and I do not conceal the prepared slate on the person. The secret lies in the chair I sit on. The slate is concealed under the seat on a shelf. Just above this shelf is

another shelf onto which I slip the unprepared slate when I make the exchange. These shelves can not be seen as the chair is one of the variety known as "box seat." One of the sides, the right one, can be raised up to admit the hand to the shelves. This side is hung on hinges at the top, but they can not be seen.

I prepare the chair as follows: I get a nicely finished, box seat, oak, dining chair. I remove the cane seat and replace it with a beautiful leather cobbler seat. This renders what is underneath invisible. I now, with a fine-tooth saw, neatly saw the ends of the box strip underneath the right sight of the seat, where they enter the legs of the chair. I remove this strip, which is some two inches wide. It is too thick; so with a saw I split the piece lengthwise, from end to end, so as to leave it only about one-half inch thick. It remains, of course, full two inches wide, and I am careful not to mar the finish.

I hinge it back in place with three small hinges, at its top, so that I can raise and lower it like a trap door while sitting on the chair. By screwing the hinges on a mere trifle out of line, the strip will move stiffly, and will remain in any position in which it may be left. I now place two, thin padded shelves under the seat, one above the other. These are concealed when the side piece is down, but when it is up they are of course visible and the right hand can easily reach them. As the strip is now so thin it offers no obstruction when up, to getting at the shelves and making the exchange of slates.

I have this chair in the room adjoining the back parlor. As soon as I have developed and read Lady Number Two's writing, I sign the message as stated before, and slip this prepared slate onto the bottom shelf of the chair, message side up. I lower the side piece and all is ready.

I next place an ordinary table sidewise to the spectators, but just inside the back parlor. There is a cover on this table which hangs down some six inches on the side next the audience, and somewhat less on my side. I place the prepared chair with its right side towards the table, at the side of the table away from the spectators. I have in the front parlor another chair just like mine, except it is unprepared. I place this chair for the lady with its left side towards the table, and at the side of the table which faces the spectators.

I place on this table the two slates which I have previously placed on the table in the front parlor. I ask Lady Number Two to be seated at this table. This effectually conceals from her view

and from the spectators, the portion of my person and the prepared chair that are below the table top. We thus both sit sidewise to the table, and face the same direction. I ask her to clean the slates; and just as she is finishing the second slate, I take the first one in my right hand and apparently place it under the table.

Now I have just raised the trap of the chair while she was cleaning the first slate; so, as I bring this slate below the table top, I slip it on the top shelf of the chair silently, quickly drawing out the prepared slate in its place, and lowering the side piece of the chair. I immediately bring the prepared slate up under the table, requesting her at the same time to place her slate under the table with her right hand. Upon her doing so, I immediately ask her to take her other hand and hold my slate also. I instantly withdraw my right hand. This all requires but a moment and she has soon forgotten that I placed one of the slates under the table.

Sometimes I take a small slate pencil and quickly place it on the slates, instantly withdrawing my hand. I now place my hands on the table top, and gradually turn, facing the table. I call on the spectators to come forward and watch the experiment, and the trick is practically done.

At the proper time I direct the lady to bring out the slates, which she does, producing the message. After the effect of this is over, I mentally read her question on the slip of concealed paper; then I direct her to produce the envelope, open it and verify all. After this I bring forward the crystal globe and answer the questions as before described.

After all is completed, I take the cover off the table and turn it over to the view of the spectators, that they may see that there is no trickery, but that the table is an ordinary one. I also offer my person for examination that they may be convinced that nothing is concealed about me. I have never yet had any one suspect the innocent looking chair.

I have performed many experiments in magic and sleight-of-hand, and I have seen the best work of this class in the country; and I can conscientiously assure the readers of this article that I have never seen one experiment of this class, the effect of which could in any way begin to compare with the effect of the experiments I have just described. This is especially true among the more intelligent class of persons, who may regard the very best work in magic as but the result of practice; but who insist on regarding this as something else; as something at least bordering on the occult, and as something very rare.