



Hereward Carrington, Recently Assistant to Professor Hyslop, Shows That the Achievements of Oriental Wonder Workers Are the Result of Skilful Trickery

MYSTERIES of Hindu magic, of those bewitching and impressive feats which hold the attention of the beholder in thrall, are revealed as common trickery in a remarkable brochure by Mr. Hereward Carrington which has just been published in London in the Annals of Psychic Research.

Travellers from time immemorial have told wonder tales of the performances of the fakirs which baffled the Occidental mind and left the impression that they were genuine supernatural manifestations which could not be explained in the light of the knowledge of the Western world. All these ideas, or most of them, at least, are sent glimmering by the exposure of the methods of the supposed thaumaturgists of the Orient, most of whose achievements are now proved to be merely the trickery of adept charlatans.

Mr. Carrington until recently was assistant to Professor James H. Hyslop, of the Society of Psychical Research, of this city, and has had a wide experience as an investigator of psychic phenomena of all kinds. He recently returned from Italy, where he examined into the claims of the noted medium Eusapia Paladino, and he has also made first hand studies of the work of Spiritualists.

This last volume, "Hindu Magic," is gathered from his own experience and also from that of his father, an Anglo-Indian, who made extensive studies of the methods of the fakirs of the Far East. Mr. Carrington, before he devoted himself exclusively to psychic studies, was a conjuror and his own facility in legerdemain peculiarly fitted him for the rôle of a deliver into the mysteries of the Yogi art.

He is now a resident of New York, where he is engaged in independent research. He sets forth in his introduction that he will describe the chief tricks performed by the picturesque practitioners, although he does not by any means deny that there are certain of them who have powers beyond the ken of ordinary men. He strips most of the performances of which the returning tourists tell with bated breath of much of their enshrouding mystery.

The Mango Tree Trick.

One of the star performances of Hindu magic is the mango tree trick. It is thrilling in the extreme, as all eye witnesses of it agree. There is first presented for the inspection of the spectators a seed, which, after solemn incantations, the fakir buries in earth and waves a cloth over it. In the twinkling of an eye he causes it to sprout, to grow a plant, and finally to evolve a tree which before the eyes of the assemblage is seen in rapid growth.

Inch by inch the plant is seen rising out of the earth and unfolding its leaves in the light of day. The observer is certain that he has seen the laws of nature set at naught, and many is the tale told, in all sincerity and wonderment, of this remarkable sign of the power of the human will.

The traditional method of performing this trick—and it varies so little that it may be considered that there is a standard method of procedure—is described by Mr. Carrington. The performer comes forward almost nude. He has a small loin cloth, which would not permit of anything being concealed. He has no cuffs in which objects might be hidden, because he has no shirt to which they could be attached.

The very sturdily apparently of the properties used by the fakirs disarms suspicion. They use, no stage. They perform in the open air, in some grove, on an open plain or even on the deck of a ship. There is nothing to create a suspicion of prearrangement. The fakir approaches bearing a little earthen pot or a tin vessel filled with water and another containing a fair sized measure of loam or sand, perfectly dry. Carelessly he shows in one hand several seeds of the mango tree.

Simple Equipment.

Across one bare arm is hung a cloth about four feet square, which he shakes out before the spectators, showing one side and then the other. Nothing but the fibre can be seen. So simple are the poor and cheap equipments that the fakir seems to have that the spectators look at him in good natured indifference at first. Would anybody, like to look at the mango seed? He passes them around, and surely there is nothing remarkable about them.

The fakir makes a mud pie or a pyramid of mud, for as he squats on the ground he has mingled together a little earth and water and moulded the mass into form. And the mango seed! Which one would mem sahib have planted? This one? It makes no difference. He places it in the top of the little pyramid and presses the mud all around it. Then he throws the cloth over it and places his bare arms under the little tent so formed, and is seen going through the motions of patting the little mound more tightly about the mango seed.

As the arms of the performer are entirely bare it seems to the spectators to make no difference what he does. Sometimes he murmurs weird incantations or causes a beating of drums. Then off comes the cloth and there, quite naturally, may be seen two tiny green leaves showing above the mound.

If there be any one who doubts that the seed is actually growing the fakir pries the seed out of the top of the mound and shows him the tiny roots which are growing out of the bottom of it. After everybody is satisfied the fakir puts the cloth back again over the seed and the mound, manipulates a little more with his hands and presently withdraws the covering and again reveals a mango sprout several inches in height.

Amazing Growth.

Half a dozen times this process is repeated, and a mango tree two or three feet high is shown. This is substantially the feat as it is usually performed, although there are reports of the tree apparently growing to greater heights and developing from the seed until it bears fruit. Several sojourners in the Far East have told stories of trees of such size that a boy was seen climbing them, although the camera did not reveal the presence of such an object. Among the

explanations which have been urged concerning this trick were that the observers were hypnotized or that nature was really made by some occult means to nullify her own laws.

The trained investigator refuses to believe that the phenomenon is anything else than a clever trick. He observes that no other form of vegetation is ever used for this performance but a mango tree. The reply of the fakir to a question as to why he will not try the experiment with a tea plant or a palm or a banana tree is:—"No, sahib, cannot do. Mango tree the only one can make."

The reason for this choice lies in the fact that the leaves of the mango are quite easily manipulated and when rolled up they will gradually return to their original shape.

"The mango seed," to quote Mr. Carrington, "that is placed in the mound of earth is especially prepared before the performance by the fakir. He splits the



Diagram Showing How the Basket Trick is Done.

seed open, scoops out its contents, dries it somewhat so as to fit into the seed. It must be remembered that the mango seed is no small thing, but is two inches long or more by an inch and half broad. It resembles slightly the mussel shell found on the seashore. It would be obvious that a seed of this kind would contain a good deal of material and if the mango leaves were folded into small compass would hold a good sized tree. The leaves are folded very carefully and are done in a special manner. The upper surface of the leaf must be folded on itself, and that surface, skilfully treated and watered, will scarcely



THE BIRD AND SERPENT TRICK.

After some more manipulation the basket is raised again and this time some ten or fifteen little birds walk out from underneath it.

Working the Deception.

With this preparation the fakir can proceed blithely with his work. When his hands are beneath the cloth he manipulates the seed enough to permit some of the leaves to emerge. There is time for him to dig the seed out, arrange the end of the sprout to suit himself and to return it to its cone of mud. The attention of the beholders, if the fakir has an assistant, may be distracted by the beating of the tantom or by singing, otherwise he must depend on his own incantations.

The process may be kept up until all the shoot is worked out of the seed. The fakir permits the examination of only such seeds as he has not treated, and he cleverly substitutes one of the prepared seeds for the one which has been handed to him by any of the spectators.

When the fakir has a comparatively large tree to grow out of the seed he must have an assistant to help him in the management of the cloth or shawl. When he has worked out all his surplus stock of "vitalizing influence," or whatever it may be, he makes a secret sign to his aid, who deftly substitutes a new shawl in which is concealed a larger shoot.

The Trick Shawl.

The shawls are constantly shaken and shown first on one side and then on the other, but at the seventh or eighth time after that the onlookers have become accustomed to seeing nothing and to suspecting nothing as far as these fabrics are concerned. The manipulation of them is very languid and the second cloth is scarcely handled at all.

"This second cloth," continues Mr. Carrington, "is double and contains a very large mango shoot, more or less doubled up in the form of the first mango shoot that was placed within the seed. A slit in the cloth enables the conjurer to extract the second shoot and to place it in the mound of earth, and he then works

it out to its natural size with his fingers. When this large shoot is worked out to its full limit it is quite a large tree, and the conjurer has only to remove the cloth to display it to the astonished onlookers. The cloth just employed is exchanged for the original while the eyes of the spectators are fascinated by the huge tree just exhibited to them. When the trick is concluded the cloth is handed to all for examination and, of course, no trickery is discovered. The whole performance is a pretty chapter in the history of deception."

As to the mango tree actually bearing fruit, Mr. Carrington says that he has never seen such a feat performed, nor has he by diligent inquiry ever been able to learn of an authentic instance. He is of the



THE BASKET TRICK.

The Performer Proceeds to Run the Basket Through and Through with a sword.

opinion, however, that fruit could be added to the tree by means of sleight of hand work, but does not know of any fakir having actually performed such a feat. He thinks, however, that if it were done it would not be any more than a magician of the standing of Kellar would be able to accomplish.

Another method of doing the mango seed trick is to have a seed with counterfeited roots concealed beneath a small tent. The fakir uses what appears to be a rag doll as a wand, and at the proper moment smuggles the mango shoot beneath the improvised tent.

Startling Basket Trick.

There is not in all Hindu magic a more startling illusion than the basket trick. The conjurer first presents to the attention of his observers a large oval basket. It is something like a great egg, and on one side is an opening covered with a flap of wicker-work. It is exhibited entirely empty. Then there is introduced a boy wearing some striking object of apparel, such as a red turban or a bright scarlet coat. The youngster is placed in the basket, in which he seems to exactly fit. Over his head is placed the lid. He is seen to sink gradually into the receptacle, over which a blanket has been thrown.

The fakir removes the blanket and runs the basket through, apparently in every direction, with a keen sword. Some of these exhibitions go to the extent of showing what appears to be blood oozing out from the bottom of the basket, and the cries of the boy in distress and pain are simulated. When the life within is supposed to be extinct the juggler shows the blanket over the basket again and removes the basket lid. He puts his hand inside and throws out the bright colored turban or jacket. Where is the body of the murdered boy? It is gone! To assure the spectators that he has disposed of the evidence of his crime the

fever of anxiety and are almost of the opinion that they have witnessed a tragedy. To their relief they see something moving in the basket, and in a moment the boy, clad in the same bright hued turban, leaps lightly from the wicker prison, smiling and happy and showing not the slightest trace of having been run through by the keen blade of the fakir, which had been lunged through the basket.

"I shall now," continues Mr. Carrington, "explain this apparent marvel. The instant that the boy is covered with the blanket he proceeds to divest himself of his jacket and turban, which he deposits in the bottom of the basket. He now gradually sinks into the basket until he is completely inside of it, and the lid is even with the top of the basket. The lower portion of the basket is much larger than the top portion. The boy manages to curl his body around the basket, and occupies the entire outer rim of the basket and leaving the part of the basket directly under the opening, the centre, empty.

Safe Sword Play.

"When the juggler runs his sword through the basket he takes special pains to send it through the unoccupied space. The concealed boy wiggles from place to place, and the juggler is thus enabled to run his sword through every portion of the basket in turn and to give the appearance of its complete emptiness. It will now be seen that the juggler can place his hand inside the basket and remove the discarded jacket and turban at any time. He can also take off the lid and stamp and sit in the basket, since the space he occupies is that left unoccupied by the boy in the basket. So long as the blanket is over the opening in the basket the boy can never be seen."

All the rest is simple enough. The sword passes in the air, the motion of catching, is to distract the attention of the spectators while the boy is dressing. Sometimes the boy is found sitting in a tree after the harrowing performance of piercing the basket. This state of affairs is usually due to there being two boys so nearly alike that the use of some striking article of apparel will at least give that illusion.

One stays in the tree, and the one in the basket makes good his escape under the cover of a blanket and with the aid of a confederate when the attention of the beholders is distracted. Often when only one boy is employed he is enabled to escape from the basket on some pretext or other, and he can then appear in a neighboring tree.

Diving Tricks.

Diving tricks of various kinds are employed by the fakirs. The commonest one is performed with the use of a small toy duck, which floats upon the surface of a bowl of water and recedes whenever a spectator approaches it. The operator has made a minute hole in the bottom of the bowl, through which he has drawn a hair. The upper end of the hair is attached to the duck by means of a small bit of wax. The fact that there is a leak in the bowl is concealed by the juggler spilling a little water as though accidentally from the bowl.

He controls the movement of the duck by manipulating the hair or dark thread which is attached to his leg. The test is usually performed on dark ground. Another diving trick is performed by means of a small rabbit in a pail of water, which is hurled up by means of a spring bent double. The spring is held in place by a piece of sugar and is released when the sugar has melted.

A trick that has from time to time astonished the Western mind consists of placing a stone under a small basket. The basket is removed and instead of a stone is a scorpion or snake. The basket is again taken up and a flock of small birds is revealed.

The substitution of the snake for the stone is merely ordinary sleight of hand—something on the order of the pea under the walnut shell. The birds are in a black cloth bag, which was introduced into the basket when the attention was fixed upon the snake. The bag is then opened and the birds released.

Of snake charming Mr. Carrington says that it appears to be genuine. The often repeated voluntary internment of the Hindu necromancers he finds to be in most cases fraudulent, for the so called grave had a means of communication with a hollow tree, which would serve as a means of escape or for purposes of ventilation. The end of the coffin or so prepared that they may be removed by the fakir, thus enabling him to get much needed repose against the day of his disinterment.



The Fakir Covers the Vessel with a Shawl.



THE MANGO TREE TRICK.

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A Couple of Tiny Leaves Appearing Above the Surface of the Earth.