

## WAS ONCE GREAT- EST TRICKSTER

HARRY KELLER HELD THAT  
THAT DISTINCTION:

Always Popular.

Spiritualism and Like Only Tricks.  
Easily Understood By Those Who  
Have Capacity to Understand.

Although it was an American showman in the last century who enunciated the celebrated dictum, "The public likes to be humbugged," that principle has been known and acted upon since the dawn of history. Under such various names as magic, black art, necromancy, illusion, medicine-making, faking, sleight-of-hand, wizardry and spiritualism, the art of the trickster has been practiced in every age and in every clime. The ancient priests used it as an aid to religion, primitive people of all lands have had their superstitious instincts quickened by their medicine men and even in these modern times we find clever fakirs taking advantage of our awe of the unknown world through what is known as spiritualism.

Truly an ancient art compounded one-half of natural quickness of wit, manual dexterity and inventive ingenuity, and the other half pure nerve and assurance. The magician pits his wits against the public and wins invariably for several reasons. His audience is prepared to be fooled and he is prepared to fool them. He is in the advantageous position of a salesman whose customers want his goods. He knows perfectly every move that he is going to make while his audience is placed at the disadvantage of the unexpected. In addition to the native quickness of wit which he must possess to be a success in his profession, he is constantly making it sharper and keener by daily brushes with the public. Like a trained athlete he attacks and defends by instinct and he has the same advantage that a trained athlete has over a man of equal strength who is not in condition. A fourth advantage is in the fact that he seldom has to fool the same audience many times in succession. The most clever magician could not hope to face the same audience day after day with the same tricks and not be detected by some one.

### Keller Now in the Seventies.

The art of magic or illusion is one that is constantly growing in possibilities. Compare the paraphernalia that the old-time performers had to work with and that of the modern illusionist. It is like comparing the stage of Shakespeare's time with the spectacular productions of today. With all the devices of electricity and other inventions of modern science at hand it is small wonder that the illusionist can baffle his audience. But in the old days it took something more than ingenious appliances.

There is a man who has bridged the gap between the days when a magician was but a sort of sublimated juggler, depending entirely upon his sleight-of-hand and his quick wit and the illusionist of today with his elaborate apparatus and mechanical paraphernalia.

Harry Keller, or Keller as he is known on the stage, is now in his seventies. Ten years ago he retired from the stage and purchased the beautiful home in Los Angeles where he resides. He had well earned his retirement after forty-seven years of active service as a magician and illusionist, during which time he had appeared in every country on the globe. But the old master three years ago proved that he had lost none of the cleverness which entitled him to be called "Kellar the Great" when he appeared at a benefit performance for the Antilles sufferers at the Hippodrome in New York. The ovation he received on that occasion is still the talk of the theatrical circles.

Although retired, Mr. Keller is far from being a recluse. He still retains that quickness of intellect and vigorous energy that kept him for years in the forefront of entertainers. Los Angeles is second only to New York as a theatrical center and few are the stars of stage and screen who fail to renew their acquaintance with this well-beloved comrade.

### Best Illusionists Are Americans.

Not only has Mr. Keller known every prominent member of the theatrical world but his acquaintanceship embraces statesmen, diplomats, financiers, sportsmen, authors, editors, musicians and ministers. It is difficult to mention a great man of the past sixty years whom Keller has not met. The walls of his home are lined with autographed photographs of celebrities ranging from Theodore Roosevelt, Queen Victoria, Mark Twain, Lillian Russell to Billy Sunday and Raymond Hitchcock. His library is filled with scrapbooks containing clippings from nearly every city and town in both the civilized and uncivilized world. Hand-

bills in every tongue, some printed on silk, testify to the wanderings of this American magician. And speaking of Americans, Mr. Keller was asked who were the best exponents of his art. He answered, "Americans."

Further questioning elicited the fact that practically all the present top-notch illusionists are American born and bred. The foreign-sounding names of most of them are assumed for advertising purposes. Even the Hindoos, famed as fakirs, he says, are children compared with an American magician, their tricks being so simple that they are regarded as only in the primary stage of the art.

Keller was born in Erie, Pennsylvania, shortly before the stirring days of the War Between the States. He attended school and during vacations worked in a drug store as a sort of general roustabout. When he was in his tenth year he heard that the Fakir Ava, a noted magician of that day, whose real name was Henry Hughes, wanted a boy to assist him in his performances. The boy Keller walked to Hughes's farm just outside of Buffalo to apply for the job.

"As I walked up to the house a black and tan dog ran out and escorted me to the front porch," Keller said. "Hughes met me at the door. He noticed the dog jumping up on me and licking my hands. 'That is a good omen,' he said, 'that pup has chased off about two dozen kids who came here for that job. I guess he has elected you.'"

Thus Keller started on the career that was to take him a dozen times or more around the world. Under Hughes he learned all the tricks of the trade and he proved to be an apt pupil. Keller was always blessed with a remarkable memory. One glance at a number, no matter if it runs into the millions, and he can repeat it to you 20 years after.

### Fools His Partner.

He gave an instance of this power in an incident concerning Bill Fray, a former partner of his years before. He had left Fray in London and had not seen him for thirty-five years. Fray, who had quit the stage and settled in Australia, while on a tour of the United States was a guest of the Kellers in Los Angeles.

One evening Keller, who is full of sly humor, said to him:

"Bill, do you know my wife is a clairvoyant?"

Fay, who had been in the game too long to have any illusions about such things, laughed.

"What's the joke, Harry?" he asked.

"I'm not joking. I'll prove it to you. What is your watch number?"

Fay confessed he did not know and started to pull the timepiece from his pocket. Keller stopped him.

"No, this is clairvoyance, not mind reading. What is the number of your wife's watch?"

Fay did not know that either.

Turning to his wife Keller said, "Tell them the numbers, my dear."

Mrs. Keller promptly gave the correct numbers. Fay was dumfounded. Experienced as he was in the game this was something new to him.

"But how did you do it?" Keller was asked.

"Simple enough," he replied. "I remembered the numbers and had given them to Mrs. Keller."

"Suppose Fay had bought a new watch since you last saw him," I objected.

"I would have been stuck," Keller confessed. "But then you see I knew Bill Fay."

Keller had a system of remembering numbers. It is based on the phonetic system each figure having a certain sound. The sounds are associated in a sentence like the key sentences that medical students have for remembering the names of nerves or bones.

Keller also knows all the arithmetical shortcuts and tricks. He can cube any number that you give him under 100 just as fast as he can write the number down. His mind works like chain lightning and after spending a few hours with him you little wonder that he can fool some of the most intelligent men of the world.

"How is it," he was asked, "that spiritualists can deceive smart men and scientists like Sir Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge?"

"The more intelligent the man and especially the more imagination he has the easier he is to trick," he told me. "Such men are always trying to figure out our tricks on a scientific basis and when they cannot do it they are stumped. Their egotism leads them then to believe that it must be supernatural. The hardest people to deceive are unimaginative clods or children, especially the street samin or newsboy. These sharp-witted kids are the bane of every magician."

The story of Keller's adventures would fill the pages of a large book. He has been stranded in a dozen countries. He can sit for hours and tell tales of his adventures in different sections of the globe. And he can tell these stories with every name and date. His mind is like a page in which every

event of his life is recorded verbatim.

### Branded Agent of Devil.

He told how he was stranded in Indiana in the early seventies; how he walked to Chicago, tried to steal a ride on a train and was put off in a cemetery, how he walked to Waukegan, Illinois, and was staked to a bed by a good-hearted bartender who also went good for the town hall the next evening, where Keller gave a show without a single prop except what he himself was able to make during the day. He packed the hall for three nights in succession and was able to make enough to start him out again on the road. He told of another time when he was broke in Brazil and by enlisting the aid of the king, Don Pedro, he was able to fill the largest theater in Rio and took away more than \$5,000 for the engagement.

Another time when he was landed in a city without any props he had to substitute a kitten for a pig in one of his tricks. The kitten began to mew before it was time for the denouement and to drown out its wails Keller was compelled to mew with it.

He played in Mexico City in 1874 when Mexico was even a wilder country than it is today. The church issued a warning to its members that Keller was an agent of the devil sent on earth to trick men. The result was that the superstitious natives packed the theater at every performance and although every stagecoach that left the city was regularly robbed Keller never had to elevate his hands once while he was in the country.

He took more than five thousand dollars in gold doubloons out of the country packed in asphaltum and after nerve-racking experiences succeeded in evading both the robbers and the government officials.

Keller has played before Queen Victoria, Czar Nicholas of Russia, nearly all the principal rulers of Europe, the rajahs of India, the nobles of China and Japan as well as the big men of South Africa, Australia and South America. He has been staked when financially embarrassed by some of the greatest financiers of the world including the grandfather of the present Pierpont Morgan.

### Successor Works With Inventions.

Keller was never especially clever with his hands. His hands are large and his fingers thick like a coal heaver's as he described them to me. Because of this physical handicap he was driven to invent mechanical devices for most of his illusions. And as a result Keller is today the inventor of the greater part of the modern magician's paraphernalia.

Most of these inventions he has sold or bequeathed to his successor. Keller was the inventor of the famous levitation trick where a body is apparently suspended in the air. The trick while widely imitated has never been done the way Keller does it but by one person to whom the old master told the secret.

Although retired, Keller, true to the ethics of his profession, refuses to explain the thousand and one stunts of the illusionist. He makes one exception. He will expose any person who claims to do his tricks through supernatural aid. He has no use for anyone who uses his art to play upon superstition.

For years he exposed the tricks of so-called spiritualists and other noted fakirs.

"There is nothing a spiritualist can do," he says, "that I cannot do and show how it is done. It is all tricks. Like puzzles they are difficult until you understand them and then you wonder how you could have been so dense. Even an amateur magician can fool me with a new trick for a little while but I will eventually solve it by the process of elimination or figuring out the ways it couldn't have been done."—Dearborn Independent.

### Wow!

"I want you to put up some wall paper I have bought," said the clergyman to the local decorator. "When can you do it?"

"Well I'm rather busy just now," said the paperhanger. "Hung Mr. Smith yesterday, hanging your deacon tomorrow, but if it's convenient I'll run around and hang you on Wednesday."

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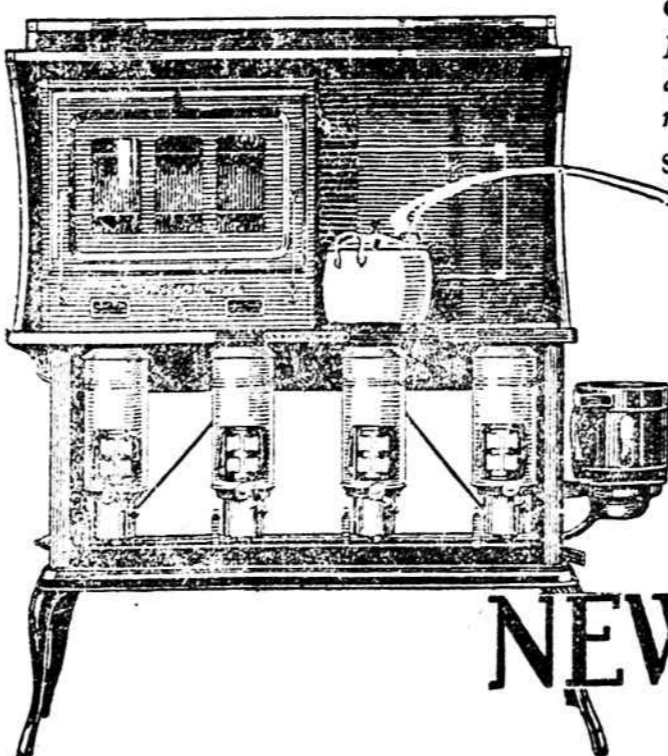
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