

THE SPIRIT PORTRAIT MYSTERY

ITS FINAL SOLUTION

BY
DAVID P. ABBOTT

REPRINTED FROM "THE OPEN COURT" OF APRIL, 1913

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PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

WE are greatly pleased to be able to make public a secret of mediumship which has puzzled the world of believers and unbelievers in spiritualism for many years. We are especially interested in its publication because we have been a party, albeit in a passive character, to its gradual disclosure.

Mr. David P. Abbott of Omaha, Nebraska, a genius in mediumistic lore, the author of the remarkable book *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums*, was for a long time puzzled at the marvel of some well-known mediums, two sisters, who made the pictures of dead relatives appear in colored painting before the eyes of their sitters. We need not repeat reports of spiritualists who were often overwhelmed at the spectacle, and even skeptics became convinced that here was true evidence of spirit life which would prove the immortality of the soul. From time to time Mr. Abbott communicated to us the gradual progress of his work including his disappointments when his theories proved incorrect, but he never lost the conviction that the mystery could not be a miracle and that because the trick was so effective it must be very simple.

Any one who is acquainted with Mr. Abbott's great work *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums* will grant that there is no one more familiar than he with the subtle methods of deception by which telling effects are produced upon believers in spiritualism—effects which will frequently remain a puzzle for the staunchest skeptics.

We may here mention that Mr. Abbott is also the inventor of a mystic teakettle which can be carried all around the room in one's hand and is without connection either by pipes or wires with any external object, and yet its mysterious little spout will intelligently answer questions to the inquirer while he holds it in his hands. The ghost whom he makes inhabit the teakettle speaks in a tiny whisper, not unlike the voice of the famous nun of Lübeck who has dwindled away to nothingness and is preserved in a bottle hung up in the cathedral of her native city.

We congratulate Mr. Abbott on the great success he has achieved in solving the great mediumistic mystery, although we regret that it was not he who reaped the pecuniary rewards.

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THE SPIRIT PORTRAIT MYSTERY.

I.

IT is now about four years since I made a discovery that finally cleared up one of the greatest of mediumistic mysteries. For about fifteen years the feat of producing spirit portraits has baffled all of the investigators that have studied the problem. Through its agency some of our most prominent men have been converted to spiritualism, and conjurers have universally acknowledged it to be the most miraculous phenomenon that ever confronted them. Meanwhile two famous lady mediums of Chicago have continued to produce these wonderful portraits as the work of the spirit world; and while some have disputed the genuineness of this claim without being able to substantiate their view, the large majority that were conversant with the subject have continued to be believers. Editor Francis of *The Progressive Thinker*, a leading spiritualistic journal, for years kept a standing cash offer to be given to any one who could explain this wonder; but there were none who could do so, and he finally died without any one claiming the reward.

Since the discovery of the secret of these productions, the illusion has been presented from the theatrical stage as a magical creation. The English conjurer Selbit, under authority of Dr. Wilmar of London (to whom I had sent the secret), first toured England and France with it, and then presented it on the Orpheum Circuit in America at a large salary. The great American magician, Mr. Howard Thurston, under direct authority from the writer, has now presented it in his programs for two years, and is still doing so; while Henry Clive, the English conjurer, and W. J. Nixon, known as the "Master Mind of Modern Magic," both are now presenting it in vaudeville houses in the east. I am informed that it is also being presented in Australia. The *Pittsburg Post* of Jan. 1, 1913, contained an offer of five hundred dollars made by Mr. Clive for any chemist who would chemically analyze his canvases and find them

prepared in any way. These two last-named gentlemen have had a controversy recently through *Variety*, as to who has the American rights, etc., and it has developed in this that salaries as high as five hundred dollars a week are now being paid in vaudeville for it. But this amount is small when compared with the sums paid to mediums for this work.

In the summer of 1908 the two Chicago mediums above mentioned visited Kansas City, Mo., for a few months. It was said that their expenses were paid by a noted "healer" of that city, who usually had some fifty patients at his doors each morning awaiting the "laying on of hands." He was said to have an income of five hundred dollars daily, and was Kansas City's heaviest individual bank depositor.

Mr. C. F. Eldredge of Kansas City, Mo., in a letter speaking of this healer and these mediums, said: "I hope you will expose this work, for it is the greatest mystery in the world. One man of this city spent perhaps ten thousand dollars with these people, and he is to-day just as certain that his pictures were painted by spirit artists as that he lives. He has just published a big book on the subject,¹ all full of these pictures, which he claims was written by his dead wife through their mediumship. He is only one of hundreds who are ready to stake their lives on this work."

Mr. Eldredge is a very intelligent man, and is teaching the mysteries of the human mind, how to effect certain marvelous cures, and how to perform other mental miracles—if I may be allowed the word. It was through a description furnished by him that I was able finally to work out the solution of this mystery, and to settle definitely the extravagant claims of the mediums, besides making the stage illusion possible. Mr. Eldredge had the privilege of witnessing one of the Kansas City seances, and I here give his report:

"Having met by appointment at the residence of the mediums, my doctor friend and myself were ushered into the studio where the sitting took place. The object was to secure a portrait in colors of the doctor's sister who was killed some six years ago in a run-away accident.

"The doctor was requested by the mediums to select two can-

¹ The book is entitled, *Through the Valley of the Shadow and Beyond*. It has an introduction by "The Supreme Divine Ruler of the Spheres." Among the psychic portraits reproduced in it are one of this dignitary, one of "The Divine Jose," one of "Rose the Sunlight,—one who walked through the Valley of the Shadow, etc.," one of "Emma the Starbeam" and others. See also the book, *Two Years in Heaven* by "Rose the Sunlight."

vases from a dozen or more that were leaning against the wall. This he did from near the middle of the pile, holding them up to the light and rubbing his hand over them in order to determine if there was any coating or film over them. I also examined them very carefully, and was satisfied there was not. One of the mediums now took the two framed canvases and placing them face to face, stood them upon a small table in front of a window which looked out upon the Paseo, one of the great boulevards of our city. The canvases were leaned against the window which faced the south.

"One of the mediums stood upon a chair and pulled down the blind to the top of the canvases, and then each of them drew a soft, dark curtain from the side of the window to the frames, thus darkening all of the window except where light came through the canvases.

"The light from the window passed directly through the canvases and they appeared clear and white. My friend held a picture of his dead sister in his hand, being requested to fix the expression of her face in his mind. We were seated immediately in front of the window, not more than three feet from the canvases while the mediums stood at the two sides of the table holding them and talking to us.

"After waiting possibly five minutes, one of the mediums said, 'You will observe how the canvases are drawing. They are being sized.' The front canvas did seem to be stretching on the frame making a slight noise, as if the thumb were being drawn upon the side of the frame. Presently the noise stopped, and there appeared on the outer edge of the canvases, or rather between the two, a slight shadow. I did not notice it until our attention was called to it by the mediums. It continued to darken while the center remained white and clear. In a few minutes I noticed a pale pink, almost directly in the center. It seemed like the glow of sunrise, but there was no form. Next we noticed an outline. The face was forming. We noticed two dark blurs that grew more distinct, and we saw that they were eyebrows and eyelashes of closed eyes. The lines of the mouth appeared, and the outlines of the head became visible, while the shoulders were distinct; and then the eyes opened out, giving a life-like effect to the portrait.

"Was I dreaming? I felt like pinching myself to see. A woman's face was looking at us from between the canvases, beautiful in form and feature.

"My friend had been told to suggest any changes he wanted during the formation of the picture. He now said that he would

like the face turned a little more to the right giving more of a front view. Almost immediately the picture began to fade from the canvas, and it grew fainter until it lost every detail. The outlines of the head became indistinct. The eyes went out into mere dark rings. Presently we saw the face coming as before. The face seemed turned a little this time, though I am not positive that it was. I imagined that it was, and the doctor seemed better satisfied; however, the change was very slight if any. We were so carried away with the marvel of the performance, that reason gave place to sentiment. The very marvel was inspiring. This time the development was more rapid. The eyes opened again as before.

"The doctor now asked that the eyes be made a little darker blue, more of a gray; and while he was speaking I noticed that the eyes were changing to a blue gray, or else my imagination was playing me false. He now suggested a slight change of the nose, which was made, and the lines of the mouth were altered at his suggestion. He now suggested that the face was a little too full, and it seemed to narrow slightly. The picture seemed to follow the doctor's thought. He was asked if he would have, as a hair ornament a crescent, a star or crown. The doctor suggested a crescent, and immediately a crescent of gold with gems of white appeared. Up to this time the shoulders seemed bare. He was asked to choose whether there should be a high or low collar. He suggested one of medium height and it at once appeared. On looking at the photograph, the doctor now saw a string of beads around the neck. Without speaking, the beads came into view about the neck, one bead at a time. They changed in color from white to amber then to gold. He seemed to conjure the picture. As a dream follows the will, so this picture followed the doctor's thought. Meanwhile the background had changed in color several times, from white to light yellow, then to dark yellow or brown, and then to green with a tinge of red, after which it mottled beautifully until the effect was superb. The changes took place like waves of light passing upwards over the whole picture. The two canvases were now laid flat on the table, and a third canvas was then lifted from the floor and placed over them for a cover. We were then asked to place our hands on this, so as to 'set the colors.' Soon the portrait was uncovered, and I found the paint was a kind of greasy substance, as I rubbed some of it on my fingers.

"My friend had enclosed a photograph of his sister, together with a letter to her spirit, between slates for a time, in the presence

of these mediums, some three days before this sitting. It was then his appointment was made.

"I have heard of the Hindu magician who plants a seed and grows a tree before your eyes, and of the turning of water into wine, but here was a phenomenon even greater; one that seemed to contradict every known law of nature; and now as I record this the day after, I am more bewildered than when I saw the work done. I do not believe the picture was painted before our eyes, for that is beyond rational belief, and by no process of reasoning can such an idea satisfy my mind. Where did the colors come from? How did they get between the close fitting canvases, and by what miraculous power were they intelligently spread over one of them?

"We compared the portrait with the photograph; the psychics asked to see it, claiming never to have seen it before. The likeness was perfect. Any one could recognize it. There seemed to have been no opportunity for trickery or fraud, and everything was open and above-board. We could see all over the room at all times, under the table in front of us, and everywhere. Yet the work was contrary to natural law and all human experience.

"One of these mediums said to me when speaking of their marvel, 'We are the only people in the world to-day, who positively and absolutely prove immortality.'

"I expect to work out this problem somehow, somewhere, sometime. But there is no hurry. It will be the result of patient effort.

"Another lady here had quite a large portrait made. It came in about five minutes. She said it seemed like a rain-storm on the canvas, the colors seemingly being pelted on in waves."

I also have a report from Thomas Grinshaw, the spiritualist lecturer, and President of the Missouri State Association of Spiritualists. He saw a portrait produced on a stage in the auditorium at Camp Chesterfield. An attempt was made to produce a portrait in the afternoon, but it resulted in an accident and nearly caused a fire. The attempt was repeated in the evening with more success. Clean canvases were selected by a committee and faced together, and placed in front of an ordinary wooden soap-box.

The box was first placed on a little table near the front of the stage. It had neither front nor back, and an ordinary kerosene lamp was placed in the box to shine through the canvases. A black cloth was then hung over the rear of the box so as to darken the room, and cut off all light except what passed through the canvases. A medium stood at each side of the box holding them. The portrait gradually materialized, then dematerialized, after which it again re-

appeared. He was particularly impressed by the making of the lace work around the neck. A large audience witnessed this production, and a large committee was on the stage and helped to select the clean canvases.

This is a very brief summary of his report. It will be seen that all of the main features are about the same as described by Mr. Eldredge.

I also have a report from a gentleman by the name of Odell. He saw a portrait produced in the center of a room with the canvases held upright on a table, and an ordinary incandescent lamp hung behind them to shine through and show the formation of the likeness. Also in a report I have from Dr. Funk, a production is described where the canvases were set on an easel, and he was permitted to walk between them and the window while the picture was coming and going.

These reports are of great length but I have given here in the briefest possible manner such of their contents as I think will best describe what I think it is safe to say is without exception the most remarkable mediumistic performance ever given in the world.

After studying these reports, I decided to begin experimenting to discover the secret of the process, always assuming that nothing but natural means were employed.

Readers of my book *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums*,² will remember some correspondence I had through *The Open Court*³ in regard to some spirit portraits produced by certain famous mediums. At that time the descriptions of the act, as furnished me, were very meager and incomplete; and this fact misled me. Naturally, I thought of the old spray method of developing a prepared canvas, and elaborated on the method, thinking that I surely had the principle upon which the act was performed. However, as at a later date, I was furnished the above accurate reports of this remarkable performance, which showed entirely different conditions from those the first reports conveyed to my mind, I soon discovered that the spray method was impossible; and I freely confess that the explanation given in my book is not the correct one.

I now experimented with a graduated gauze screen, as there were rumors that such was used. I soon found this impossible; but after a short time I made a most startling discovery of a subtle principle by which I could cause a portrait to materialize between canvases, and also again to dematerialize at will. This I worked in

² Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Co., 1909.

³ January and May, 1907.

my windows and showed it to a number of magicians, spiritualists, and other friends, among them my magician friend, Mr. Gabriel Rasgorshek, and I explained the principle to him at that time. I may say that it is not a spray method, neither is it any principle of developing a picture, from light, chemicals or otherwise. Also it is no system of projection such as the stereoptican idea advanced by Rev. Osborn of Kansas City, Mo. It is something absolutely new up to that time and entirely unknown to every one excepting those using it publicly and possibly a few of their most intimate friends.

Mr. Rasgorshek and I both decided that I had discovered the principle by which this thing was done, and that the famous secret was at last brought to the light of day; but owing to the "over-enthusiasm" of some parts of my reports, we thought there was some other thing used with it as an accessory for producing the after effects, such as the lace work, and hair ornament. Neither had I solved the problem of the composition of the colors. So, for that reason, I did not publish my discovery at the time, but waited until opportunity should enable me to verify whether or not my discovery were the only principle used in the production.

On August 11, 1909, which was nearly six months after my discovery, Dr. Wilmar (William Marriott) of 84 Bushwood Road, Kew, London, S. W., psychic investigator and lecturer, wrote me a letter of inquiry, which I still have and of which I have furnished the editor of *The Open Court* a photographic copy. He stated that two of these paintings had arrived in that country, and he asked me to furnish him the fullest report possible of one of these productions. He did not know I had been working on the case and asked the probable expense of having me see a portrait produced.

I replied to this letter on August 25, 1909, and gave him all of the reports on the work then in my possession, and I also *freely explained to him the principle which I had discovered for causing the portrait to materialize and dematerialize.* After this a number of letters on the subject passed between us. Dr. Wilmar then asked me not to publish my discovery for a time, and I dropped the matter.

This was the last I heard of Dr. Wilmar for a long time. Meanwhile I occasionally exhibited the act in the windows of my office to certain magician friends when they happened to call.

On January 31, 1911, Mr. Eldredge again wrote me, requesting me to see the spirit portraits which were being produced upon the Orpheum Circuit, and which would arrive in Omaha the following week. Amongst other things he said, "The whole work is exactly as performed by the mediums, and the paint was not dry when the

pictures were finished. The miracle was repeated twice. There was no switching of canvases, no tables, everything right before the eyes of the committee on the stage. The canvases were handed out to be examined by the audience. The man conducting the work here offered five hundred dollars to any chemist who could tell what substance the colors consisted of. He offered the same amount to any one who could come on the stage and explain how the work was done. This challenge was good all week. The work was exactly like the spirit portrait work performed by the mediums I wrote you about in every detail. There can be no question whatever that it is the same thing as any one who has seen both must admit. If you could solve this you could easily get one thousand dollars a week on the legitimate stage. The mediums made ten times that amount while here. This is certainly as claimed for it—"the riddle of the century."

He also enclosed a program which I here reproduce :

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| <p>PROGRAM</p> <p>MR. P. T. SELBIT</p> <p>Offering a Wierd and Wonderful European Sensation</p> <p>SPIRIT PAINTINGS</p> <p>DR. WILMAR'S RIDDLE OF THE CENTURY.</p> <p>Famous Paintings Reproduced by Spirit Artists in Full View of the Audience, Upon Ordinary Canvasses Chosen by Themselves.</p> <p>(Continued on Next Program Page.)</p> |
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As soon as I saw the name "Wilmar," I felt assured that my principle was the foundation of the illusion. My wife and I then attended the Orpheum Theater, and, naturally being so familiar with the act followed everything in minutest detail. Not a thing escaped us.

Sure enough it was my principle upon which the act was based, and the whole illusion was built around it, and depended upon it entirely, and was utterly impossible without it.

Later, Mr. Selbit called upon me with a letter of introduction and proved a very fine gentleman indeed. Naturally, I told him how

the act was done and of my share in making it possible; and he was courteous enough to take me over to the theater where he worked it for me a number of times at close range. He also presented me with one of the portraits as a souvenir.

He told me that he had contracted with Dr. Wilmar to produce it on the stage, and to pay for such rights enormous royalties. He said that Dr. Wilmar claimed to be the originator of the idea, and when I showed him the letters of this gentleman, stated that this was his first knowledge of where the doctor had obtained the secret. He asked me to keep the secret private for a time, as he had invested heavily in the act, and as an exposure at that time would cause him heavy financial loss. I promised him to do so. He continued to produce the illusion in the name of Wilmar, and I have lately seen a letter wherein he stated, that up to the time of its date, he had paid over ten thousand dollars in royalties for the use of this illusion, and which he said, according to his information, was the highest price ever paid for a single illusion. Since the above date, Mr. Selbit has visited me and he stated that the royalties he has paid, now aggregate about twelve thousand dollars. He said he would furnish me with the dates and amounts of his payments.

Spirit portraits can now be produced in vaudeville all over the world, and will materialize between canvases that are selected from a number of clean ones by the audience, just as has been done in the private seance for a number of years by two of the greatest mediums the world has known.

A number of large, clean, white, unprepared canvases are on the stage. A genuine committee is invited up. They select the canvases that are to be used. These are faced together before every one, and placed in a nice gilt frame, which is then stood upon an easel. The committee is allowed to pass all around this easel, at any time before the frame is set upon it or afterwards during the materializing. They are also permitted to examine it and the frame thoroughly. The body of the easel is some two feet above the floor, and the legs of the committeemen can be seen beneath it when they pass behind. A large arc light is placed just back of the canvases, and they are illuminated a most beautiful white. The performer then places his arm and hand behind the canvases and they are distinctly seen through them. The committee now selects the name of the portrait desired from a list of some forty which are printed on a screen.

Soon the shadows begin to appear around the margin, then comes the rosy glow like sunrise in the center. Later, the eyes grad-

ually appear as dark rings, and the outlines of the mouth, nose, and head appear. The background is at the same time working in most beautifully; and, lastly, the eyes open, and lacework appears around the neck,—if the portrait asked for requires it. The canvases are now taken down, and the beautiful, finished picture, about forty by fifty inches, is passed down the aisle. The act is then repeated, and at any time one requests it, the light is turned off to show that the picture develops independently of the light. The committeemen can pass all around the canvases during the materialization, and can be within two feet of them.

There surely could not be two principles in nature, that would produce exactly the same results, in a case of this kind, although those who do not understand the secret cannot of course fully realize this as I do. For myself I am confident that the famous secret has at last been discovered, and I feel gratified that I was able to work it out from a mere description of the act without ever seeing the thing done.

Selbit related to me that the night King Edward died he was producing a spirit portrait of him, and that the audience went wild with enthusiasm, the orchestra played "God save the King," and the demonstration lasted twenty minutes. This was in London.

I was refraining from publishing the secret of this act, at the request of Dr. Wilmar, but as he put the act on the vaudeville stage without notice to me, I feel released from further obligation to him to keep the matter secret.

II.

Mr. Selbit having long since finished his tour, and Mr. Thurston, who holds his rights directly from me, having graciously consented, I shall now proceed to relate the history of my discovery, and to explain the long-sought secret.

It will be remembered that in my early reports but one canvas was said to be used, and this was set in a window; but as soon as I learned that two canvases were used and faced together, I knew that a spray developer could not be employed, and I began to search for some other means. I first devised an elaborate system of projection and window traps upwards and downwards, with concealed assistants above and below, etc., by which the effects might be duplicated. I had Mr. Eldredge examine the building used in Kansas City, and he found it to be solid brick with no chance for window traps and no chance for assistants above or below to give any help. So I knew that this could not be the principle.

Mr. Rasgorshok, who has had much experience with mediums, kept insisting that I would find it to be some simple thing that required no apparatus, and that I surely would find a substitution somewhere. He often said: "Abbott, mediums do not dare use apparatus, for the danger is too great. It must be something so simple that if a sitter 'grabs,' nothing can be found to use as evidence."

I also knew that in tricks every little thing is for a purpose, and that nothing superfluous is used when the art is perfect. I analyzed and re-analyzed the problem, and I decided that there was certainly a good reason for using two canvases. Why did the mediums invariably use two faced together? Surely it would be much more simple as well as conclusive if but one were used. Also, if it were possible to produce a portrait when using but one, we certainly would hear of their doing it that way sometimes. Yes, there was a reason for using two canvases; and it surely was merely to have the front one conceal from the sitter what happened to the one behind it. When both were in position in the window, and the side and upper curtains drawn and pinned to the front frame, anything could happen to the rear canvas and the sitter would know nothing of it. Again, there must be a reason for laying the canvases over on the table and covering them with a third canvas under pretense of "setting the colors." What could be the real reason of this? It will be seen later why this is. I was entirely satisfied that a painting was made in advance; and that somewhere before delivery of the portrait at the close of the seance, it was substituted or introduced in some way. I knew that in magic, substitutions always take place early in the performance—much earlier than one imagines—and hence the real trick is always executed sooner than is thought.

Now, evidently the portrait was really produced on the rear canvas, and it surely was in the window at the time the two were laid over on the table. So it must have been substituted before this time. Then it must really have been in the window during the entire coming and going effects. Laying them over on the table would bring it on top to be handed out first. How did it get in the window, and above all, *how was it made to appear and disappear at will?* Window traps permitting substitutions being impossible, and projection ideas and developers being out of the question, what subtle principle could here be involved? The more I thought, the greater the mystery became; and I finally decided that to take the advice of my friend, Mr. Rasgorshok, and experiment, was the only thing to do. I secured a portrait and a blank canvas, and as I had heard

rumors that a graduated silk gauze screen was secretly introduced gradually between the canvases for screening off the portrait, I decided to try this. I made a rectangular frame that was only one-eighth of an inch thick and placed on it rollers and a windlass, so that I could reel up many thicknesses of silk on it. This I placed between the two canvases in the window and began reeling. I did not decide where I would conceal my assistant, or how get rid of the frame or substitute the portrait; I simply wanted to discover how to materialize and dematerialize the latter.

I found that by reeling up many thicknesses of silk the portrait was gradually cut off: but that the canvases were at the same time darkened so that their beautiful transparency was ruined. I saw that this could not be the secret, for the light had to be entirely screened out before the portrait utterly disappeared. As long as there was any light the portrait was visible. I next unreeled the silk and I found that the portrait was indistinct even when it was all withdrawn—that it appeared “out of focus” as it were. I then removed the frame from between the canvases and crowded them closer together; and the portrait, viewed from the front through the blank canvas, immediately became clear and sharp. I again moved the portrait backward, viewing it through the front one. It grew indistinct, more and more “out of focus,” until it became an indistinct cloud, then merely some dim shadows; and finally it vanished utterly leaving the canvas clear and white. I brought it forward slowly, and it gradually made its appearance, the dark lines first appearing, then the rosy glow at the center; and finally the features began to form; and at last the eyes changed from dark shadowy rings, to open, bright eyes.

I looked on in awe. Here was the very thing for which I was searching, and without screen of graduated gauze, or apparatus. Here was the long-sought subtle principle, the famous secret that had baffled scientists and the investigators of the world; and it was a thing so simple that it staggered me. When the canvases were separated, the rays of light passing through the portrait began to diverge and spread evenly over the blank canvas, until, as the distance was sufficiently increased between them, the illumination became evenly diffused over it. This distance was about three inches. At the same time, as the canvases were separated, side light was being admitted between them which helped to illuminate the front canvas evenly, and to obscure the portrait. The greatest portion of the effects were within a distance of a quarter of an inch, and nearly all of them within a half-inch.

So, to precipitate a portrait and erase it, it was but necessary for the two psychics at each side to move slowly—very slowly indeed—the rear canvas forward and backward with the most steady and slightest motion possible. This was easily done with the fingers through the slit in the soft side curtains; and were any one to violate all rules and “grab,” he would only find a portrait “just about finished by the spirits.” An ideal scheme, just such as mediums would use!

This principle, then, would account for the materializing and dematerializing of the portrait at will; but it necessitated a substitution early in the sitting, just as most magic tricks require. Naturally a substitution for professionals is an easy matter; but for non-performers it seems a great difficulty. Now suppose the portrait really made and finished in advance of the sitting, how was it gotten into the window behind the blank? It will be remembered that after the selection and thorough examination of the two blanks, they were faced together and placed by a table near the window, from where later on the third blank or cover canvas was lifted. Meanwhile one of the two mediums removed the discarded blanks from the wall, taking them out of the room.

Now the mediums undoubtedly use various means for making this substitution, varying them to suit the occasion. But I think that in most cases they have the finished portrait in the room all of the time. It could be left standing on the far side of the table from where the sitter enters the room, and could be leaned with its face against the wall, or more probably facing into the room. If the soft black side curtains reach the floor, one of them can cover the portrait completely; so that should the sitter happen to get in a position to look on that side of the table, he could see nothing. In this case, one of the mediums would take the two chosen canvases and carry them over to that side of the table, and stand them on the floor in front of the portrait. Now, while the other medium seats the sitter at the end of the table in front of the window, the first one has but to lift into position on the table, the front blank and the rear canvas with portrait, leaving the discarded blank on the floor to be used for the cover canvas later. I think this method, being the simplest, is oftenest used; but more complicated means may be employed at times. For instance, the medium who carries out the discarded blanks may bring the portrait back unobserved when she reenters.

Here is how I should do it if I were a lady medium. I should wear a skirt that was really open in front but lapped over in a fold; and I should suspend the portrait on a hanger between my legs under

my skirt. If I were quite large I could carry a good-sized portrait here unobserved by all. Of course it would not have to be in this particular position, and in fact could be hung on the outside of the skirt, if the medium keeps that side away from the sitters. But under the skirt would be much safer; and I have always found that female mediums do not hesitate to take advantage of their sex and the sacredness of their skirts, to cover deception.

As the medium returns from carrying out the blanks and advances to the window to lift up the two blanks and place them in front of it, her person hides them from view and her back is toward the sitter. She now has but to draw out in front, from under her skirt, the real portrait; and this move is invisible to the sitter, as will also be the act of bringing it behind one of the blanks; and then she visibly lifts both to the window while her person hides the discarded blank that will later on be used for a cover canvas. Since the portrait behind the blank *is hidden by the latter from the view of the sitter*, the deception can not be discovered. The blanks have been examined so thoroughly by the sitters that they are tired of examining them, and are really ashamed to exhibit further incredulity. So the psychics, acting simultaneously, pin the soft black curtains at the side of the window to the front frame, and at the same time allow the back canvas to tilt back out of focus. The top curtain, still being very high, lets so much light into the room, that it helps to obscure what comes through the canvases, when the two are separated but an inch. But before the top curtain is drawn, completely darkening the room, the portrait must be moved or tilted further back. It must be remembered that the bottoms of the canvases stand on a table end directly in front of a window, with a psychic at each side holding the canvases and discoursing and gesticulating, so as to take and direct the attention where desired. The sitter sits in front of the end of the table facing the window and canvases, and the person of one of the mediums is between him and the third or discarded cover canvas on the floor near the window. The sitter naturally thinks that his two chosen blanks are now in the window, and he seems to be seeing right through them and they appear clear and white. He does not dream that his portrait, all finished, is already in the window behind the front canvas, but merely moved back out of focus.

The psychics have previously watched with sharpest eyes for any marking of canvases, and the one bringing in the portrait has a chance when out of the room to duplicate the markings. Or, if the portrait be already in the room, then one medium must divert

the sitter's attention by a slate test or otherwise, until the other medium gets the portrait marked. As to the sitter buying his own canvas, as often reported, it is remarkable that the ones so bought correspond exactly with the ones furnished by the mediums, even to the number of threads per inch in the cloth and the thickness of same, etc. Queer, isn't it? Dr. Wilmar had the canvases of two psychics and the other the sitter claimed to have bought down town; but they corresponded as above described.

Next, everything being in readiness, the psychics have but to manipulate the rear canvas very slowly to get the effects. Meanwhile they skilfully employ suggestion announcing in advance each effect as it is to appear. The eyes seem to be dark blurs until the tops of the canvases are crowded together very closely, whereupon they appear to open. That is, the dark blurs dissolve into open eyes, giving them the appearance of opening out. This is particularly apparent when the eyes are colored a beautiful sky-blue. The use of suggestion before this effect, by the psychics announcing that "the eyes will now open," impresses this effect upon the sitter's mind. By crowding together the top of the canvases first, the eyes open when the shoulders are still indistinct enough to appear indefinite or bare—that is, mere dark outlines. As the majority of the effects appear the last quarter of an inch, and nearly all of them in the last half-inch, if it be remembered that four or five minutes are used in this amount of motion, one can realize how very slowly the rear canvas must approach the front one. Also the use of so much time greatly adds to the effect when a miracle is supposed to be in the act of performance. The psychics seem to be trying so hard to hurry it up, and the stress of desire is so great, that the slowness of production produces the effect on the sitter's mind of great effort on the part of the spirits.

After the eyes open, if one psychic crowds up the bottom of the canvas on her side, the lace work will begin to form on her side and the beads, etc., to appear. Then if the other psychic slowly crowds up the bottom on her side, this causes the lace work to finish and the beads to come one at a time. There is also an apparent change of color as each object takes on clear-cut detail. Naturally during this movement the background is working in most beautifully like waves of light, etc. The changes of color are, however, to a certain extent imagination; and this occurs easily among so many confusing details all coming at the same time. The hair ornament can be made to appear by skilfully pulling off a patch on the back

of the portrait which has been stuck on with wax and with a thread attached, but I hardly think this necessary. The choice is undoubtedly "forced" by suggestion; and if this occurs early in the performance, before the ornament appears, the psychics can announce its appearance when the right time arrives and thus produce that effect. For instance, one psychic would say to the other, "She ought to have a hair ornament. I think a crescent would be beautiful, don't you? Or would a star, or crown, be better?" The other would say, "Oh, it should be a crescent by all means; for I think a crown or star would be out of place and not at all artistic. Which do you think would be best, Mr. . . .?" Naturally he would choose a crescent, and would afterwards think he had free choice. Should he choose a crown or a star, it would only be necessary to explain to him that a crescent is much more artistic, and he would be sure to yield to "superior persons who wield supernatural powers."

The effects of narrowing the visage, or of slightly turning it, or of altering the lines of the nose or mouth slightly, can be apparently effected by a slight jostling of the rear canvas and the use of suggestion at the time. Thus, if the sitter request the visage to narrow, the psychic can say "all right," and at that instant cause the portrait behind to move sidewise the slightest amount. The sitter will see the portrait move, and construe it to be a slight narrowing, for the vision being at the time concentrated on the point in question, will see only its movement. The same will apply to the lines of the nose or mouth. Also, at any time, a slightly tighter crowding of the canvases so as to make any feature come out brighter and clearer, coupled with suggestion, will carry the effect of an alteration of the portrait in response to the sitter's request. All of this is the real art of the performance, and what makes it "strong." It is not what you do, but how you do it. The strong way this has been dressed up and presented to believers, is the secret of the marvel and has made it what it is. The principle alone was not so much, but embellished with this incomparable art of presentation, it has been one of the wonders of the world.

Any time that the sitter expresses dissatisfaction with a portrait, the psychics say, "All right, the spirit artist will erase it," and instantly it begins to fade from the canvas. They slowly recede the rear canvas until every vestige of the portrait is gone, and then again slowly materialize it.

From all I can learn, all of the objections offered by the sitters are invariably at the psychics' request, which shows they are the result of suggestion. Mr. Eldredge in a letter said: "The psychics

kept insisting that we ask for changes in the portrait, and seemed very anxious to please us in every detail." The psychics cause the sitters to think certain things should be changed, and then apparently make the change. The sitter thus thinks every detail was altered to suit his will. As an example: One fine portrait of a beautiful girl was produced for a wealthy farmer of my acquaintance. It was supposed to be his daughter, now twenty years old in the spirit world, but who died when but two. He said: "When the portrait started to come, the hair seemed to be 'done up on a rat'; and I said, 'Hold on! I don't want the hair like that,' and immediately it faded out." Now I saw this portrait, and the hair was hanging over the shoulders in the most beautiful and artistic golden ringlets and curls; but the top of the head with the hair thereon was much more deeply colored, or rather covered with the paints; as these portions of the picture must be heaviest. As a result they appeared as dark shadows before the curls were visible, and the mediums had but to say: "Do you like the hair that way? It seems to be coming done up on a rat;" and naturally he would say "no." If not, they would advise him to change it, but there would be no trouble in getting him to take the suggestion; and then the psychics would fade the portrait and cause it to reappear, with the beautiful curls coming out as it progressed. Naturally the old gentleman thinks the portrait was actually changed at his request. Thus the reader can see how adroit are these psychics at the art of suggestion. They always manage to change a portrait to some form more beautiful and artistic, knowing a suggestion will be readily taken that way. They never attempt, for instance, to change beautiful ringlets and curls to an old-fashioned mode of dressing the hair.

When the portrait is finished, naturally the extra canvas would be discovered and would arouse suspicion. But if one of the mediums lifts it for a cover, as if it had been there all along for this especial purpose, its existence is thought nothing of, and hence it does not have to be "got rid of." Of course every one could not put this act on in so "strong" a manner; but ladies with plenty of "nerve" and years of experience and practice, coupled with a natural aptitude for such work, can do so. It must be remembered that suspicious persons get no portrait. Witness Carrington who was sent by Dr. Funk, and who tried for hours with no success. The ability to choose whom to work for, is part of the art of the psychic. This is why some of them are so successful for so many years. They are so cunning at judging the dispositions and mental characteristics of

persons that they make no mistake, and only get results for persons whom they are sure they can "handle."

Readers may doubt the possibility of this great effect by such simple means. Let them try it with good light, and nicely colored portraits on transparent canvases. If still in doubt, I will wager that if anyone who is not under the ban of suspicion, goes for a portrait and suddenly grabs the canvases as soon as placed in the window, he will find the finished portrait in the rear, right on the start.

An observer trying to catch the psychics would doubtless (if he took notice) see no third, or cover canvas, near the window before the lifting of the two to the window by one of the mediums; but should they see him directing his attention there he would be under the ban of suspicion at once, and might get no portrait. The psychics control the situation, and their task is to see that the sitter does right, and that his attention is constantly taken and concentrated; and they are both talking and gesticulating so as to take it. If they observe that the sitter is not giving attention where they direct, but looking elsewhere, "where he has no business to," then look out. They will immediately be suspicious and something may happen.

Of course it is unnecessary to explain how the photograph can be extracted from slates, or from pockets of coats which were left out in the hall, etc., so as to enable the mediums to get a "snap shot" of it. Any one reading the many slate tricks in my book will not need further enlightenment on this point. Where a portrait conforms to a photograph, an interval of a day or so is taken after the first sitting, before the psychics will give the portrait sitting. If forced to try for a portrait at once no results will be obtained, and it will have to be tried again later. This gives them time to make the portrait.

Probably it might be well for me to give some extracts from a very accurate report I have of a sitting which took place in the year 1909, and which shows the nature of this part of their work very well. The gentleman making this report seems very intelligent, and the report is remarkably accurate for a non-performer. He seems to have remembered a large portion of the details very well, and to have forgotten but little which would at the time have seemed to him to be unimportant. Here is part of this report.

"Jack went in first, and when he came out just before I went in, he remarked to me that he would like to have a portrait. He said that the artist had told him that it would be better for the party who

sat for the portrait *to have a picture of the subject on his person*,⁴ and handed me his watch, on the lid of which was an etching of his wife's face. I put it in my pocket and went into the room. After I had received my letter from the slate, the artist remarked to me that Jack wanted to have a picture made of Minnie. I said, 'Very well, I will sit for it.' She asked me whether I had a picture of Minnie on my person. I said, 'yes.' She called her sister, and they produced two framed canvases, which they placed face to face and set up before me, placing them on a table close to a window. They pulled the window shade down to the top of the canvas and draped the curtains along the two sides of the two canvases, and one sitting on one side and the other on the other at the two ends of the table, they held the canvases together while I in front of the table waited for developments. Some shading presently appeared on the canvases but nothing satisfactory resulted. While one of the artists left the room for a few minutes, leaving the canvases in their positions on the table, the artist who remained again said, 'You have a picture, have you?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'What is it?' I said, 'It is an etching on the lid of a watch.' She said, 'Let me see the watch.' I handed it to her without opening it. She took it in her hands a moment, but did not open it. *She put it in an envelope*, and sealed the envelope, and placed the latter with the picture in it between the slates; and she and I held the slates pressed together for a few moments. Still nothing resulted on the canvas. We then opened the slates and *she handed me the envelope* containing the watch which I took from it and returned to my pocket. I do not see how it is possible that she could have seen the etching, and it would be almost impossible to convince me that the watch left the room even for a moment. I sat a little while longer before the canvases, but nothing resulted. I left the studio. When I reached the hotel that evening I returned the watch to Jack. So much for the first day. I returned to the studio the next afternoon, etc., etc."

This reminds me of a lady in South Omaha who a few years ago allowed a medium to seal two thousand dollars of her money in an envelope in her presence. He handed it to her *without its leaving her sight*, and she wore it on her person for thirty days. This woman insisted that nothing could convince her that this money left her sight; yet when friends induced her to open the envelope nothing but pieces of paper were found in it. The police of Omaha are still looking for the medium, but he has dematerialized. This lady believed in the spiritualist philosophy that "like attracts like";

⁴ Italics in all these reports are the author's.

and the medium had no trouble in convincing her that our wealthy men possess "the money influence and that money is attracted to them because of the vast sums they handle or carry on their persons." She was to wear this money after the medium magnetized it in order to obtain this "money influence."

Now in the case of the gentleman above, why did not these mediums place the watch between the slates *without sealing it in the envelope*? There could then have been no question but that it was between the slates. What he saw was an envelope resembling the one with the watch in it placed between them.

Here is how I would make the substitution if I were the lady doing the trick. Just as I dampen the flap of the envelope and seal it, I would leave it in my left hand and reach with my right for the slates on the table. I would follow my right hand with my eyes. This is called "misdirection." The sitter's eyes would involuntarily follow mine, and my right hand; and during this instant I would allow my left to drop below the level of the table top, and leave the envelope with the watch in my lap, and instantly withdraw from a pocket in the fold of my dress, a duplicate envelope made up in advance for the purpose. When the medium went out to call her sister she could easily explain to her, and that sister could slip her the "dummy" when she came in to do what in the language of the profession is called the "stalling" with the canvases, wherein the rear blank was slipped sidewise far enough for its solid frame to make the shadow effects by the advancing and receding motions.

At the instant that the right hand grasps the slates, the left comes forward with the "dummy" and inserts it in the slates. When the time comes to take out the envelope I should remove it with my right hand, and ask the sitter to "see if there is any writing on the slates"; and at the instant he is looking at the slates again drop the hand and change the "dummy" for the watch envelope. During the holding of the slates the canvases were evidently watched for developments, which was simply "stalling for time." Now the other sister could come in and hold the canvases for a short time, standing close to her sister, and finally leave the room after secretly receiving the watch from her hand. By coming in again after photographing the etching, she could return it to her sister's lap in the same way. Or they might have a small floor trap through which the second lady opening it, could reach up and get the watch and return it from below. In this case she would have overheard the conversation about the watch, and would have prepared the dummy and handed it up without any conference with her sister. Having this same work

to do so much they must have a thorough understanding of the method to be pursued in all cases. Of course many methods can be used for these substitutions, and to tell the exact method used I should have to see them done; but the matter is very simple for professionals.

These mediums always, or nearly always, frame and pack a portrait before delivery. At such times they very frequently retouch it or add some new thing which the sitter afterwards reports as having appeared on his way home. I quote some more of the above gentleman's report, which illustrates some work of this character:

"We spent a good deal of the forenoon sitting for my father's picture without obtaining any result excepting some shading of the canvases. . . . Nothing however resulted, as I have remarked, during the forenoon interview; so I retired for lunch and came back early in the afternoon and went into the studio and went through the same process as on previous occasions. In twenty minutes from the beginning of the afternoon sitting, my father's face appeared upon the canvas; and it was indeed a most exact reproduction and conformed more exactly to his face in life than even to the photograph. During the first part of the afternoon sitting the face alone appeared on the canvas without any background, neither did the first result reproduce his clothing, simply his face and beard. They then in my presence *placed the picture in a dark closet that opened off the room*, left it there a few minutes and brought it out, at which time all the background was completed, as well as the clothing. They then had the portrait framed.

"I was so profoundly impressed with this result that I acceded to their request to sit for a picture of my daughter which was made in the course of fifteen or twenty minutes. They remarked to me *before framing and packing the portrait* that the work would be retouched by the mysterious artists who were doing the work, after leaving the studio. The lady who accompanied me told me, in the absence of the artists from the room, that she was making a very careful study of the face so as to be able to detect any changes. The picture was then framed and I carried the two with me to the hotel. *On opening*, the lady remarked that there had been a change, viz., that the hair falling back over the shoulders had been curled. I could not corroborate this point; and if I could *it would not be very satisfactory*. As you know, *I had no picture of my daughter who died in her early infancy*. All I can say in regard to the picture is that it sustains a close resemblance to her mother's family. I had it inspected by a prominent scientist, who has lectured occasionally for

the purpose of exposing the work of mediums. When he first saw it, he asked me instantly whether there was any peculiarity about the eyes of my child, calling my attention to the peculiarity referred to. My wife, on being questioned by him, affirmed that such a peculiarity marked the eyes of more than one member of her family.

"The purport of some messages my friend and I received was that my daughter was very anxious to have me know that she did this portrait work for me, or at least her teacher did with her help.

"I had at least half a dozen interviews with as many different psychics in New York and Chicago, within a few months after the painting of my daughter was made. It was utterly impossible that I should have been known to these psychics or that any one of them should have known that I had interviewed any other one. In every case something was said to me about my daughter's painting."

It is quite evident that on the opposite side of the dark closet is a second door which permitted the sister or an assistant to withdraw the portrait on that side, fill in the background and clothes and replace it. Professionals naturally fix their houses to suit the work by which they make their livelihood.

I have known cases in Denver and elsewhere when a "rounder," as the mediums call a believer who visits various mediums, was, in the language of the profession, "tipped off" by telephone to the various brothers of the profession. Also, by adroit conversation his interest was always aroused in some other medium before leaving the home of a medium with whom he would be finishing a sitting. This was professional courtesy on their part to their fellows. These stories were related to me personally by mediums who took part in the deception.

Some very large portraits have been made; but from all I can learn these are not made in a window, but are covered with a curtain in some way. They are made evidently for the "dead-easies" only, who have been thoroughly converted by small portrait production in windows, and who now merely want a large portrait made and are willing to pay for it. Hence the psychics in such cases can use such means as may be required in these larger productions. One of these of which I heard was a very large portrait of the "guide" of the sitter, who wanted his guide's portrait made large and was not bothering about the method of production. An analysis of the paints used proved them to be pastels mixed in a vegetable fat. The canvases are thin and transparent. Some of them seem to have a coating of thin paper and the base of some of the paintings is a solar print.

Readers may feel in doubt that such a marvelous performance as these mediums gave is effected by such a simple principle as a moving rear canvas which contains a portrait; but they need only remember that this same principle enables magicians to give stage performances at big salaries. If it is good enough for that, and for critical theater audiences, it is also capable of the other use when in the hands of expert mediums. Let no one dispute this fact until he "grabs" the canvases at the instant the first shadows appear; and then let him say whether or not a finished portrait was at that instant on the rear canvas. But the psychics take good care that they are not grabbed at such a time; for they particularly remarked at the Eldredge sitting, "If you were to touch the canvases now the picture would instantly fade out." This gave them a good excuse to resist physically any attempt at touching or "grabbing." A bolder investigator might grab and search the mediums' persons and canvases just as they go to lift them up; but there would be the chance of this being a case where no portrait is to be produced.

For myself, I am confident that I have given the correct solution of this mystery; and although I have never seen the work personally, I could hardly be more certain of anything than I am that I have solved this mystery in its principal details.

The mode of substitution may be different, *but substitution it is, and that is certain*; and beyond any doubt the materializing and dematerializing is produced on this principle of the moving rear portrait canvas viewed through a blank canvas by transmitted light. Readers who doubt, and sitters who assert that there is no substitution, are cautioned to remember that in every magic performance they have ever seen there were substitutions right before their eyes which could not be detected. Remember how deftly the great performers of the stage make their substitutions, and how impossible they are to discover except by an expert. Did not Mr. Eldredge assert in his letter to me about Selbit's performance, that there was no substitution? Yet we know there was and I will further on show just how it was made, but it escaped the eyes of that theater audience. That was Selbit's business; and unless he could make substitutions that are undetectable, he could not successfully run the business.

I turned to my wife when I saw this performance and told her when the substitution occurred, because I understood the trick; but I could not see it, for it took place in such a way that no one could. I simply knew it because it was his only opportunity. I afterward proved I was right. So let not the believer think substitutions which

he can not see are impossible in his presence. The thing is, to know when and where to look for them.

But all believers in spiritualism are not ready to acknowledge the work of their mediums to be trickery, even when the trick is thoroughly explained to them. Frequently they will insist that the conjurer uses one means and the medium another for producing identically the same effect. They are not all so reasonable as is their President, Dr. George B. Warne of the National Spiritualist Association. I revealed this secret to him early enough to enable him to witness a stage performance in Chicago, and to make it possible for him to follow every move and trace the trickery. He said it had been very educational to him, and had opened his eyes to possibilities of which he had never before dreamed. He said that he felt it now to be the duty of the mediums to admit the trickery, or else to give a test sitting, under conditions that would positively disprove the fact that they use the method I have discovered.

Now, in order to assist in making this conclusive, I make the following offer to these mediums, good for one year, and I shall faithfully keep my obligation: If these mediums will produce a portrait under the conditions given below, I shall pay them the sum of five hundred dollars for it, and shall publicly acknowledge that they do not use the means I have published.

This portrait must be produced either for me or for any one of three others chosen by myself. I offer this, so that if the spirit artist shall refuse to paint for a skeptic like myself, there will be an opportunity for him to paint for others who are not so hard-headed. This portrait must be produced in my home, or in a room or house selected by myself, and prepared in advance under their directions by myself, with a suitable table, window curtains, etc. I shall retain the key to this room, or have my assistant remain in charge of it until their arrival. This is to prevent the smuggling in of a portrait in advance. On arrival of the mediums, they shall permit two ladies, chosen by myself, to examine their persons and clothing for the purpose of disproving that they bring any portrait or canvas with them. This portrait shall be produced in the day-time on one of two canvases faced together and stood in a window as previously described. These canvases together with a third one shall be furnished by myself. I shall keep them in my possession until time to stand them in the window. I shall then stand them there myself; or, if I allow the mediums to do this, shall require the privilege of separating the canvases when in the window, at the beginning of the sitting, so that I can see that no portrait has been substituted. The third canvas

which I shall furnish must be used for the cover canvas, if any be used for such purpose. The portrait is then to be materialized upon one of the two canvases in the window, in my presence and in the presence of at least two others selected by myself who shall have been present during the preparation. I do not refuse the right of a believer to be present, if he submit to the same conditions and examination to which the mediums are to submit.

The portrait produced must be a reasonable likeness of a photograph which I shall have with me at the time; but which—if there be a requirement to place it between slates, or to seal it in an envelope—I shall have the privilege of sealing it myself and placing it in the slates and helping to hold them. Or, if it be necessary for the mediums to seal and place this photograph, I require the privilege of occupying any position I desire, so that I may satisfy myself that the photograph, envelope, or slates are not substituted. I require both mediums to remain in the room during the entire sitting; and if a second sitting be necessary, I shall retain the photograph and canvases myself meanwhile, and shall have the same privileges as outlined for the first sitting. Of course I shall prepare the frames with special tools, grooving them in certain ways impossible to duplicate in a short space of time, and I shall stain the wood certain tints so I can follow them easily. Also, I shall make upon the canvases certain markings so that there can be no question of identity.

In case the photograph must be sealed or placed between slates, I shall furnish the envelope and slates myself, and shall mark or stain them in any way I desire. If a second sitting is necessary I shall require the privilege of changing slates, canvases, and envelope for this sitting.

I shall select the house to be used in my own city, providing my own be objected to, and the mediums must give the sitting there.

I make this offer in the friendliest spirit and assure the mediums of the most courteous treatment if they will only respond. If I can prove that natural means are not employed, I can well afford to pay this sum; and I shall be only too glad to do so, and to give the public a statement of the facts that will be worth many times more to the mediums. In view of the benefit this will be to science and to an inquiring and longing world, I sincerely hope that these mediums will accept my offer.

Nevertheless, I feel sure it will be ignored, even though I double the price. I am so confident that my explanation is correct, that I feel sure my readers will never have the pleasure of hearing

that the mediums have proven that they do not use this method. If they ignore this fair and sincere offer, I feel that my readers will be justified in assuming that they dare not give a sitting under these fair conditions, and that my explanation is tacitly admitted to be the correct one.

III.

Now the stage illusion. The difference between the mediumistic and the stage production of this illusion is merely the difference between hand-work and machine-work. In one case only the hands are employed to execute the movement; while in the other a mechanism is used.

Soon after my discovery, I designed a mechanical easel to use in my parlors with electric light, intending to use a floor trap to effect the substitution, but having but little use for it, I did not build it. However, but little of this idea was original with me; for the use of an easel upon which to stand the canvases was suggested to me by Dr. Funk's report of a seance where the mediums used one. Only the idea of a floor trap was my own, but this has been in general use in many illusions for many years.

Mr. Odell's report describing a seance where an electric light was placed behind the canvases, suggested the use of the same for an illusion on the stage, or in parlors when not using a window.

Thomas Grinshaw's report of the use of a box without front or back, just behind the canvases, suggested to me the idea of using a box-like affair without front or back, to be placed on the easel just back of the canvases, for the purpose of concealing the motion of the rear canvas. I designed a sliding affair to use in this, and to move the portrait canvas backward and forward. After delaying in building this mechanical easel, I decided to use a sliding mechanism in my windows; and I partly completed it, intending to use a worm screw from my stereopticon light for executing the movement. If this could not be concealed, I intended to use threads or wires for the same purpose. These were secretly to pass through the floor to an assistant.

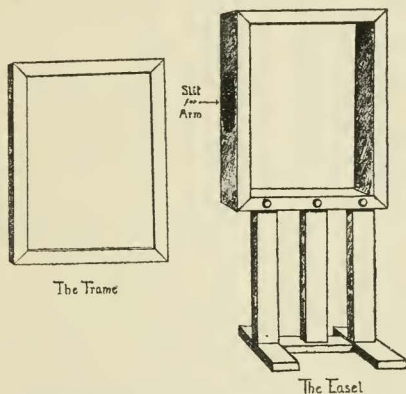
On receipt of Dr. Wilmar's earnest inquiry, in August 1909, thinking he was an investigator like myself making research for the satisfaction of acquiring knowledge, and not knowing he was interested in stage work for professional purposes, I sent him all of these reports describing these things and ideas, together with a plain explanation of the secret I had discovered. Also, I sent my various ideas for making the substitution, including floor and window traps,

nested canvases, slitted skirt, etc. In the construction of the stage easel, most of these ideas were utilized.

The first working model of this easel was built by Mr. Selbit, after he secured the secret and information from Dr. Wilmar by agreeing to pay this gentleman a royalty for its use.

Mr. Selbit was quite ingenious; and he presented the illusion very well indeed, but he only produced a portrait. He did not dematerialize it, probably because he used cords instead of worm screws and cog wheels for executing the movement. Also he did not change the colors of any of the parts at request, as my original design calls for.

It is evident that, if the rear or portrait canvas is to be mechan-



MECHANISM USED IN THE STAGE PRODUCTION.

ically moved to and from the front one while the big gilt frame rests on a kind of easel, this motion would be visible to parts of the theater unless concealed by something. Accordingly this portrait has to move backwards into a kind of hollow box *without front or back*. This box is a mere skeleton frame covered with dark cloth, and is larger than the canvas, but smaller than the big gilt frame; so that the latter can be attached to its open front end and so that the portrait can be attached to a sliding carriage within it. This carriage with the portrait can be slid backwards away from the front canvas and gilt frame into the hollow box-like affair, which is also open at the back to admit the powerful light.

Therefore the easel is really such a box-like affair set on suit-

able legs to hold it some two feet above the stage floor. The skeleton frame of the box-like affair is about one foot or more wide, and has the sliding carriage within it. There are buttons for attaching the rear canvas to this carriage when the big gilt frame containing the canvases is buttoned on to the front of the easel.

The sliding carriage has strings or wires running over little pulleys and down through the legs of the easel through the stage floor to a drum under the stage which at the right time an assistant slowly winds up. These strings then slowly draw the picture up to the front canvas permitting it to gradually materialize. The performer announces that the box-like contrivance on his easel is for concentrating the light from an arc light on a stand which is directly behind it; but he does not explain how black cloth and black paint that do not reflect, can concentrate light.

His committee is genuine, and blanks clean. The blanks are usually on the left side of the stage viewed from the audience. The committee first thoroughly examine the easel and large gilt frame that is to hold the blanks. The large gilt frame is made of quite wide material. When it is set upon the easel front, it is buttoned to it in some way. The cloth sides of the box part of the easel have a slit so that the performer can introduce his arm in between the canvases when the rear one has been slid backwards after the frame is put up with the canvases in it.

The manner of presentation is like this. The curtain goes up on a fully lighted stage with the easel in the center and an assistant standing on each side of it. The performer now enters, and taking a number of blank canvases, exhibits them and invites a committee from the audience to examine them. The committee comes on the stage, and selects three that they are sure are unprepared.

The easel being on castors is now shifted to the front of the stage and turned all around so that all can see its simplicity. The committee are invited to inspect it and they do so, walking all around it. The arc light on a stand is also brought forward and shown. These are now shifted to the rear of stage on the left and the big gilt frame is taken down by the assistants and carried to the right center of the stage where it is stood upon the floor facing the audience, and supported by an assistant holding it at each side. There is a narrow trap in the floor of the stage just behind the big gilt frame, but it is concealed from view by the carpet. This however is slitted and held in position by suitable springs. An assistant is directly under this trap with the portrait that is to be produced. The performer now steps through the big frame from the front and

comes out from behind. This is apparently to show that there are no mirrors, but it is also later on to convince any spectator who may be thinking it over, that there was no floor trap behind the frame. Of course when passing through this frame, he steps over the opening.

The performer now hands one of the selected canvases over the top of the big frame down into position behind it, and the assistants instantly button it in. But just at that instant, the assistant under the stage shoves up the portrait, and in reality both are buttoned in at once. The audience sees the front canvas go down into position, but can not see the portrait come up behind it immediately after for the reason that the front canvas, the wide frame, and the assistants' persons conceal from view what happens behind. Next, the performer hands over the top of the frame the second selected canvas, and the assistants make a pretense of buttoning it in; but in reality it goes on down under the stage in an assistant's hands which had been shoved up through the trap waiting to grasp it.

The big frame, containing one blank and the portrait, is now carried to the committee who puts marked stickers upon the edges of the canvas frames to prevent substitution. As the painted side of the portrait is next to the blank canvas, the committee thinks that it is also a blank, and the one they have just selected and examined.

The easel is now shifted to the center of the stage with its center leg directly over a small "pull trap" in the floor, and the big frame is lifted upon the easel and apparently buttoned to it. During this process the rear or portrait canvas is secretly released from the big frame, and buttoned to the sliding carriage of the box-like contrivance; and then it is slid backwards six or more inches, out of focus.

Next the arc light is turned on, illuminating the canvases to a beautiful transparent white; but the portrait, being back out of focus, does not show. The performer now introduces his arm through the slit in the side of the box-like contrivance on the easel, and it can be seen through the front canvas by the audience, who imagine they are looking through both canvases.

Next the committee chooses the portrait that they desire the performer to produce. Inasmuch as the one that is to be produced is already in the mechanism, this selection must be "forced." This is done in different ways.

One performer exhibits about one hundred post cards of Paris art subjects, and shows them to the audience, showing that they are all different. These are now divided into two heaps and one

given to each of two committeemen to shuffle. When well mixed, the performer takes them and states that he will lift off one card at a time, and for some one to call out when they desire him to use the picture at that time in his hand. This is done and the picture in his hand is of course the one the mechanism is set for. He effects this "force" as follows: In the first place all of the edges of the cards are black and he has them on a little black tray. He takes them up and shows them to be different, which they are, and has them shuffled and returned. Now he has twenty cards all like the one he desires to force, lying on the tray; but the top one of this pile has its top blackened just like the tray; and when he lifts the tray his thumb rests on this black pile and keeps the cards from scattering about. Of course this pile is invisible at a slight distance; and when the shuffled cards are returned, he lays them on the tray, but directly on top of this invisible pile. He now picks up the entire pile with the twenty cards all alike underneath, and as quick as a flash, makes a "pass" well known to magicians which brings about fifteen of these to the top. Now he takes the cards off slowly one at a time, and the impatience of the audience causes some one to choose long before the fifteen are all taken off.

Another method used is a process of elimination. Fifty blocks, all numbers from one to fifty are used. These are separated into two piles and a committeeman asked to point to one of the piles. If the committeeman points to the pile containing the desired number (which corresponds to some numbered art subjects whose names are on a large screen) he uses the pile pointed to; and scrapes off of the table the other pile, discarding them. But if he points to the other pile the performer discards it just as if he had it selected for that purpose. Next he separates the remaining blocks into two or more piles, and asks the committeeman to point to one or two of these piles. If he points to two that do not contain the desired block they are scraped off and discarded; but if he points to the piles containing the desired block the performer discards the other pile. Next he asks the committeeman to point to one of the remaining piles and continues this method of elimination until only the desired block remains on the table, or is pointed to directly.

The performer next commands the spirits to paint the chosen portrait, and the confederate under the stage works either the winding drum and wires (which he has secretly drawn through the pull trap), or rods with cog wheels and worm screws, which causes the portrait to advance slowly towards the blank canvas in front and gradually to materialize. If requested by any one, the spirits will

erase this portrait; or at least it is possible in my original design of the illusion. The confederate under the stage has but to work the mechanism that recedes the portrait, and it will gradually dematerialize beautifully until every vestige of it disappears. The spirits can now paint it over; and when it is finished the performer lifts down the big frame, and unfastening the canvases, adroitly gives them a half turn, so as to bring the portrait to the front; then taking off the front frame, he deliberately turns its face to the audience, and passes it down for examination. A second portrait is now sometimes produced with the remaining blank, and the extra one chosen; but this is of slight importance, so I shall here omit the explanation of the means used in substituting this portrait from the wings.

It may be well to state that it is possible to change the color of eyes, hair, flowers or tie, etc., at the second production of a portrait. If some of the committee object to the color of these parts of the picture, the performer can have the spirits erase it and paint it over in the desired colors. Of course this committeeman must be a confederate. Here the principle of compound colors must be utilized. A thin piece of cloth, preferably white silk, can be dyed or have the colors placed upon it and then be fastened on the back of the portrait with conjurors' wax. In this case it might be necessary to omit the affixing of the marked stickers, as, unless adroitly held, the committee might see this. Now the light, on passing through the double coloring for the first production would be compound. For instance, if the tie is really red and the screen behind is green, then the tie will appear brown; as green and red make brown. If the green screen extend over other parts of the picture they too will appear in compound colors. Upon someone requesting the performer to change the color of the tie to red, he simply has the portrait faded out; and then a cord running through the hollow leg of the easel can be pulled and draw off the piece of colored silk to which it must have been attached when affixing the big frame, and this must then be drawn into the hollow leg of the easel. The next materialization will show the tie red.

The same effect could be produced by a transparent colored screen of small proportions being concealed in the arc light and which should be revolved at the right time into position. This could be done by pulling a string running through its base and the stage. This must afterwards at the right time be revolved out of the way. The screen in the first place would have to be revolved into position just as the colors begin to appear with cloud-like effect. This would look like waves of color passing and changing on the canvas. Then

the portrait should be fully materialized under this colored light. Now when upon request the spirits erase the painting, just as the portrait becomes confused, indefinite, or cloud-like, the screen must be revolved out of the light. The second materialization under white light would then show the portrait in its true colors which are the ones requested. I consider this method preferable to the other. Colored glass or gelatine films can be used for this revolving screen in the arc light.

For the canvases, stage performers use quite stiff white artists' paper pasted on tarleton. This is so thin and transparent that the arc light gives an unusually beautiful effect. The paints are pastels pulverized and dissolved in sweet gin, or some good liquid fixative. This is "the spiritual paint" that "defied the chemists of the world." It works nicely on a paper surface, but can be put on in only one coat like water colors. Pastels show beautiful tints under transmitted light and are well suited for this particular work. In making the canvas frames, their surfaces must be kept absolutely level and true, for if warped the slightest they will not contact with each other nicely, and will not show the portrait clear and sharp. This causes performers more trouble than any part of the illusion. The front surface of the sliding carriage must also be perfectly true, and the portrait must be buttoned to it perfectly tight. The big frame must also be held rigidly and perfectly parallel to the portrait, so that the contact will be perfect.

When in Portland, Oregon, Selbit produced the portrait of a lady's mother, who had died sixteen years before in Germany and of whom no photograph existed; the lady recognized the portrait.

Here is how this happened, according to Mr. Selbit who related it to me. Representatives of the press challenged Mr. Selbit to permit a physician to examine and mark two canvases and then to produce a portrait that the latter should choose on one of them. Selbit accepted the challenge. The physician did not want to use Selbit's list of portraits, so Selbit took a list that had been published in the *Review of Reviews*, and the physician agreed to use this list. Each portrait Mr. Selbit had would fit about three titles, and he secretly arranged and numbered a list in advance to correspond.

Here is how the feat was accomplished. Instead of two blanks, Selbit took six to the physician; and he examined them and then wrapped them, affixing a seal. This was Selbit's suggestion; as he said the audience would feel better if the two were selected and marked in their presence. The physician and Mr. Selbit then deposited these at the box office until evening. This was to prevent

the physician from opening and secretly marking them in advance. When the physician first came upon the stage, Selbit asked him if he had chosen a portrait; and he drew out his list, and Selbit saw which number was checked. Pretending not to have seen the number, he requested the physician to keep the list until they were ready. Meanwhile he secretly sent word to the assistant under the stage what portrait to use, which was a subject that would fit the title of the one selected.

Next the physician opened the canvases and selected one, permitting the committee to select the other. Mr. Selbit suggested that they omit affixing marked stickers in the usual way, but to use a different means of marking these. He then had his assistants place first one canvas in the big frame as usual, and then apparently place the second one in. The assistants then brought the big frame to the physician, who wrote his name on the frame of each canvas. Of course the portrait was already in the frame.

This made such a stir in the press that a gentleman who seemed to believe in spiritualism very strongly, wanted his mother-in-law's portrait made. The next evening Mr. Selbit used the only old lady picture he had; and after its production, it was taken into the box office to see if the gentleman's wife could identify it. The lady and her relatives went in, and she denied its resemblance at first; but her husband and relatives insisted so strongly that it was correct that, by taking a feature at a time and shading off the rest of the portrait, they induced the lady to acknowledge that there was a resemblance in each separate feature when viewed by itself. They then with great emphasis insisted it was the lady's mother; and the lady apparently quite timid, reluctantly acquiesced. Then returning to the theater it was announced from the stage that the lady had recognized her mother's portrait. If a conjurer who lays no claim to mediumship got this effect, what could a medium do?

When the reader remembers what a profound and absolute mystery this illusion was, and then reflects what simple means are employed for its production, it should be a lesson well remembered when dealing with the mysterious performances of mediums.