

Ask Houdini

THIS department is open to all readers of WEIRD TALES who have some question to propound. Houdini will attempt to answer any logical question on subjects relating to physical or psychic phenomena. Readers are requested not to duplicate questions that have already been answered by Houdini in these columns. Questions pertaining to the future and personalities will receive no attention. They must have a general interest, otherwise they will not be considered. All correspondence will be handled by Houdini personally and he is especially interested in hearing from those having unique experiences not easily explained.—*The Publishers.*

No. 1 Cumberland, Md.
My Dear Houdini:

What is meant by a clairaudient? I have heard this word mentioned among spiritualists, and have never had an explanation I could understand. K. L.
Answer

"Clairaudient" is French for "clear-hearing," and "clairvoyant" is French for "clear-seeing." A clairaudient, in the parlance of the spiritualists, is a medium who hears spirit voices, and a clairvoyant is one who sees spirit forms. The word "clairvoyant," however, usually includes both meanings.

No. 2 Madison, Wis.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

I am indeed interested to learn that you are taking up the subject of spiritualism and other matters of a bizarre nature in WEIRD TALES. It is not my intention to discuss the subject of spiritualism with you, but I wish you would answer frankly the question below.

Believing that most people approach the hour of death with fear and apprehension, regardless of the scientific proofs of the existence of psychic phenomena, don't you think that belief in the religion of spiritualism is to be encouraged if only that it helps to relieve this fear and that it would, too, assuage the grief of those who mourn for a departed one? C. A.

Answer

No, I do not think the belief in spiritualism ought to be encouraged until it is definitely proved to be honest, unless you wish to take the viewpoint that we ought to believe there is a Santa Claus. I would like to believe in a Santa Claus, I think, but you don't find fraud mediums who look upon their work as of a Santa Claus nature. I believe that one ought to face the inevitable with all the courage possible, knowing full well that we must face the great disintegration.

No. 3 Shelbyville, Ind.

Dear Houdini:

I have before me a well known spiritualistic publication which devotes a lot

of space to your activities in the world of magic and especially to your remarkable escapes. In view of your present stand on the subject of spiritualism, I am curious to learn what you have to say concerning the following:

"The controversy raging round the performance of a lady entertainer who, posing as a 'medium,' recently mystified an audience composed of people well known in spiritualism and psychical research, re-opens the question as to the possibility of conjurers doing some of their sensational tricks by means other than normal.

"My friend, Harry Houdini, the famous American 'escape' artist, has more than once been credited with psychic powers by means of which he is supposed to perform some of his miracles. Though Houdini would be the last person to pretend to powers he does not possess, he has confided to me the fact that there have been occasions when he has been helped in his performances by some unseen and unknown force; an intangible 'friend in need' who has rescued him from many an awkward dilemma. Two of these incidents I will relate. I will add *en passant* that Houdini is not an adherent of the spiritual philosophy, but, like the majority of people, is 'willing to be convinced.'

"A favorite advertising 'stunt' (that is the only word for it) of Houdini's is to allow himself to be locked up in the strongest cell of the local prison of the town in which he happens to be performing. In the presence of witnesses he then 'escapes' by manipulating the locks and freeing himself.

"Houdini was once 'playing' a big town in one of the Western States, and had undertaken to escape from the exceptionally strong cell of the local jail. He was stripped, placed in the cell in a nude condition, and the heavy door was then closed. The key of the modern and complicated lock was then turned upon him in the presence of witnesses; the door tested; the keyhole sealed; and the key handed to the Governor of the jail who was taking a lively interest in the proceedings. The signal was then given

to the occupant of the cell that all was ready. Houdini immediately approached the door, placed one hand upon it, and to the accompaniment of a sharp 'click' as the bolts shot back, the door slowly opened. In something under three seconds, Houdini was out of that cell. It would be difficult to say who was the more astonished—the Governor or Houdini, who at first thought that some mistake had been made and that the door had been prematurely opened by a warder. But the seals were intact, and all the witnesses vouched for the fact that no one was near the lock. The question as to *what* opened the door is still unanswered.

"The second incident is equally strange though of a different character. Houdini besides being able to break out of places, can break into them. A favorite feat of his is to open a safe or strong-room secured by complicated locks.

"A large banking corporation, with headquarters in New York, had recently installed a new strong-room, secured by the latest time-locks, in its chief office. At a board meeting, soon after the completion of the room, a director jokingly remarked that they ought to test the security of the room by challenging Houdini to open it. Though the remark was made in jest, the directors decided to act upon the suggestion, and Houdini was invited to test his skill upon the new locks, whose kinematic elements were the last word in ingenuity. Houdini accepted the challenge without knowing exactly the type of lock with which he had to deal.

"The mechanism of the lock in question was the application of watch or time 'movements,' so as to regulate the period during which an obstructing bolt was to be kept in its locked position. In a suitable case, mounted on the inside of the strong-room door, were four distinct chronometer 'movements.' Each 'movement,' instead of having ordinary clock hands, possessed a simple dial divided into seventy-two hours, or three days, and was arranged to make one revolution in that time. Each disc had a pin pro-

jecting from it, so placed as to move or slide a simple rod when the time had come for unlocking, the rod in its turn releasing the obstructing bolt; this then fell down by its own weight out of the way. In setting this lock, it was only necessary to wind up each 'movement' for the pre-determined number of hours and minutes that the strong-room door was to remain shut. Any one of the 'movements' was capable of alone putting the clock 'off guard' but four were provided in case of a possible breakdown on the part of one or two. There was no keyhole or the slightest aperture in the door, the large main bolts that kept it shut being worked by energy stored in springs, and these were tripped up and allowed to come into action by the 'timer' at the pre-determined hour.

"The timing mechanism of the door was set to a different hour each day, two persons only being in the secret: These were the President of the bank and the chief cashier, who consulted his principal as to the time of opening.

"It was arranged that Houdini should be at the bank at 2:30 p. m. on a given afternoon and one hour was to be allotted him for his trial. A distinguished company of prominent New Yorkers was invited to meet the wonderworker.

"At the appointed time the wizard appeared, and he at once started to inspect the strong-room door, the exterior surface of which was merely a massive sheet of steel. Houdini at once realized that he had a difficult proposition before him, and began considering how he should tackle it.

"Suddenly, across the strong-room door, the figures "4:37" appeared to Houdini in luminous characters. That the figures were purely subjective there can be no doubt as no one except the magician saw them. After a while, the figures disappeared, but they were fixed indelibly in his mind, and he could think of nothing else. Everywhere he looked, he seemed to see the cryptic numbers, which impressed him so much that he became convinced that the figures were meant for his guidance; so he determined to make a test. He asked permission to take the remainder (fifteen minutes had already elapsed) of his test hour between four and five o'clock the same afternoon. The small committee arranging the experiment agreed, and he then informed his audience that he would return at 4:36, at the same time synchronizing his watch with the bank clock. Houdini could not help noticing the puzzled looks exchanged between the President and the cashier, the only living persons who knew at what hour the room could be opened.

"Punctually at 4:36 Houdini arrived; walked straight up to the door of the strong-room; placed his back against it and said: 'Gentlemen, within one minute I will be on the other side of this door!'

"It can be imagined with what breathless interest the spectators counted the ensuing seconds. Some pulled out their watches to assure themselves that Houdini would be literally as good as his word.

"Almost on the tick of the sixtieth second, there was a whirring noise from the interior of the room and the bolts could be heard being automatically withdrawn. It was the work of a moment for Houdini to swing open the door and enter the strong-room—to the intense amazement of the spectators, and to the no less astonishment of the President and his cashier, who are probably wondering to this day how Houdini discovered the exact time the lock would function. The secret was divulged some years ago to a select few. My readers have the choice of telepathy, coincidence, or some unconscious psychic power on the part of Houdini to explain the curious incident I have just recorded."

Answer

As my work consists of a willing acknowledgment of manipulation, and as I accomplish it by my knowledge of the construction of locks, I do not believe you would ask me to expose my secrets. However, any time that you meet me personally, I will explain how I opened the time lock, but I do not care to broadcast this information at the present time.

No. 4

New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

Perhaps you are familiar with the story of the play, "Outward Bound," now running in this city. I saw the play and enjoyed it very much. I quote you the comments of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on this play:

"In the main, it was a remarkably accurate presentation of one aspect of the life after death. On the narrow stage of the steamship were shown a number of people who were dead, but who did not know that they were dead. That sometimes happens. Another correct feature was the absence of change in personal appearance. There is one bad line in the play, and that is where Scrubby, the wonderful steward, on being asked if there is any wireless on board, replies, 'No, we have no wireless.' He should have said, 'The receivers are all out of order.' That would have been true. Those who had passed over could send to us, but too often we had not

sufficient knowledge to receive or to understand their signals."

Now, I am thoroughly satisfied in my mind that Sir Arthur is sincere in his work. I do not distinctly remember the lines from the play quoted above, but I am of the opinion that Doyle is right. I have read all of his works on psychic phenomena and kindred subjects, and must say that he is almost invulnerable to attack, except from the point of veracity as to his actual experiences, and I would not accuse him of misstating what he actually thinks he has seen or heard.

Invariably the name of Doyle comes up during a discussion of psychic phenomena or spiritualism. The "anti's" generally say, "Doyle is wrong." But why don't they say "Doyle is wrong as are Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Crookes, Lombroso, and others"?

Despite every conceivable effort to kill it, spiritualism lives and will continue to live. The religion of spiritualism is an ideal one. Its followers are legion, and this religion offers the one and only solution to the end of religious and race hatred. I do not deny that there are a great many charlatans and frauds practising under its cloak, and this is deplored by the many honest and sincere followers.

I am curious to hear your views on sleep. Do you think that when you lie down and fall asleep (you cannot remember the moment you do) that you pass from one state of existence into another?

Thanking you for any attention you may care to give this, I am, cordially yours.

C. D.

Answer

You are mistaken when you suggest that the "anti's" generally single out Doyle, for they do say that the rest of the scientists who support spiritualism are also mistaken. Look up the mistakes made by Sir William Crookes; read the "Quarterly of Science" for 1874; read Prof. Zollmer's description of his seance with Dr. Henry Slade (there is no doubt that Slade misrepresented, and I hold his written confession, which has never been published, but which you will find in my new book, "A Magician Among the Spirits"). Read Prof. Richet's book, just off the press, "Thirty Years of Investigations." He speaks of clairvoyants, and ranks as genuine some mediums whom I have personally investigated, and whom I found cheating. They could never pass a legitimate test.

I agree with you that the religion of spiritualism is an ideal one. I do not say that there is no such thing. I am perfectly willing to be converted. My

mind is open, and I am not attacking spiritualism as a religion, but only attacking the fraud mediums and the miracle mongers.

You ask for my views on sleep. Strange to say, we spend almost a third of our lives in this peaceful state. Some humans require more sleep than others. I rarely take more than six or seven hours out of the twenty-four. I use sleep as a necessity; others as a luxury; and still others as a life-waster. There are a number of books on the subject. I believe that sleep rests the energy of life, and that the tenant (yourself) who occupies your body permits the landlord (nature) to make repairs in your abode while you sleep. If human beings would realize that they hold only a limited lease on their bodies, then they would not abuse them so unknowingly.

No. 5

Columbia, Mo.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

Do you believe that a person who suddenly lost a very dear friend would naturally be in a better position to communicate with the departed than one less acquainted, if there actually is such a thing as communication with the dead?

H. J.

Answer

Yes, I positively believe that any person who has lost a dear friend or relative would be in a much better position to communicate with the lost one. I think that is why the shock of suddenly losing beloved ones often causes persons to imagine things.

No. 6

Erie, Pa.

Dear Sir:

Have you ever heard of John Slater, whose home was in California? I think he is the man who comes to Lilly Dale, N. Y. every summer and lectures and gives readings. What do you think of his work?

D. W. N.

Answer

You ask my opinion of John Slater. What do you mean, as a human being, as a clairvoyant, as a spiritualistic-evangelist, or as an impossible lecturer before a high-grade audience?

No. 7

Harrisburg, Pa.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

In the first installment of your story, "The Spirit Fakers of Hermannstadt," you state that you were playing Vienna at the time. If I am not mistaken, I had the pleasure of viewing one of your performances, though it might have been in Berlin. I was very much interested in the story, and, knowing as I do the

superstitions of those people, I can appreciate the predicament you were placed in. I await your further experiences with interest.

V. L. Deb.

Answer

Yes, I have appeared in Berlin a number of times. My first appearance there was at the Berlin Winter Garden about twenty-five years ago. I played there consecutively for almost fifteen years, and was then brought back as a feature of the Hippodrome Circus by Director Busch. As a matter of record, I have played almost every principal city in the world, except in South Africa and South America.

No. 8

Montreal, P. Q.

Dear Sir:

It seems a trait peculiar to magicians to make war against the religion of spiritualism. Despite the incessant warfare it has lived through, it stands today on firm foundation, and has marked a steady growth.

The writer is a native of Scotland and has had the pleasure of seeing you perform on several occasions abroad. I want to relate to you the facts of a "so-called" exposure of spiritualists in Glasgow in February, 1878. Some of them are a trifle vague and for this reason I refer to the book of James Robertson entitled "Spiritualism, The Open Door of the Unseen Universe," for authenticity. This experience I have found to be general among so-called "exposers."

"No man was ever more liberal in speech and condemned intolerance with a louder voice than Professor Huxley, who certainly was one of the strongest forces of the age. Notwithstanding his clearheadedness, he became the dupe of a vulgar American showman, and for a time allowed prejudice to dominate his reasoning faculties. Though he had said that 'no event is too extraordinary to be impossible,' yet he would never open his mind to the possibility of spiritual phenomena being true. It was beyond the extraordinary. He had refused to investigate the subject when the Dialectical Society called for his presence, saying, 'If it is true, it does not interest me.' He had repeated the same sentiments to Alfred Russel Wallace; yet, when he heard there was a person in America who was prepared to expose the whole matter, he opened his arms wide to receive him. The clever American played his cards well—so well as to dupe the most intellectual man in the country. The story he fabricated was greedily accepted. He said he had had a dear friend who, while in a state of feeble health, had fallen into the hands of the spiritualists and

become insane. Roused by the wrongs done to this friend, his sole mission was to execute vengeance by exposing the arts by which the imposture was practised on the softheaded and credulous portion of the American and British public. He had succeeded in discovering the vulgar but skilfully veiled secrets, and now stern virtue called upon him to lay bare to the world the full explanation of the frauds. Robert Dale Owen had been a credulous fool, Professor Crookes a weak-minded dupe, Professor de Morgan a person without brains, and Alfred Russel Wallace and Cromwell Varley were blinded and incapable observers. The great American high-souled gentleman of independent fortune was mightier than all the scientific and literary men who had attested the truths of spiritual phenomena. He had grappled with the mystery, and for humanity's sake alone had come out into the open with a clean soul to do the world a great service.

"No one thought of asking for his credentials. So hateful was the word spiritualism that they swallowed his story without questioning about the dear friend who had been caught in its toils, and the independent means of the high-souled and spirited exposé. The opponents of spiritualism were only too overjoyed to find a missile to hurl at it and its supporters. Huxley was delighted, and patronized the arrant quack in London. Genuine phenomena could not interest him; the spurious claimed his attention at once. The crafty American, who could not impose on the spiritualists of America, found a fruitful field on English soil. Huxley wrote to some of the professors of the Glasgow and Edinburgh universities, asking them to take this great champion of truth under their wing. How much the showman did to pull the strings himself is not known, but in February, 1879, the Glasgow newspapers were flooded with long advertisements to the effect that Washington Irving Bishop, 'B. A.'—which I should read 'Bold Adventurer'—had been invited by the prominent men of Glasgow to give a startling exposure of spiritualism, an exposition by human means of all the startling manifestations claimed by spiritualists to be done by the spirits of the dead. The man of ordinary capacity could scarcely have read the flaming announcements without seeing that here was a showman pure and simple, who knew his business, knew how to bring out telling headlines so as to draw the public.

"In case all who were interested might not have a chance of seeing for themselves how feeble minds could be im-

posed upon, two nights were to be devoted to this noble attempt to save the world from credulity and folly. The prices of admission were 5s, 3s, 6d, 2s, and a few 1s seats; but as money was far from the object in view, it was reiterated in every corner that the vindication of truth and the saving of the weak-minded was the sole aim this gentleman of independent means had in coming to Glasgow. All the proceeds were to be devoted to the Western Infirmary.

"It will scarcely be credited that amongst the names of those who signed the requisite document which brought this adventurer into our midst were John Caird, the venerated principal of the university, and his scholarly brother Edward, now master of Balliol College, Oxford; Professor Berry, afterwards sheriff of Lanarkshire; Professors Blackburn, Buchanan, Clelland, Cowan, Dickson, Veitch, Grant, Jebb, Nicol, and Sir William Gardner, who had said clairvoyance came from a diseased condition of the faculty of wonder, whatever oracular meaning this might have. The most prominent advocate and supporter of the man Bishop, however, was Sir William Thomson, now Lord Kelvin. A few years later he acted even more ridiculously than that opponent of Galileo, the professor of philosophy of Padua, of whom I have spoken. Mr. Stead had asked Lord Kelvin to interest himself in borderland subjects, but he replied: 'I have nothing to do with borderland. I believe that nearly everything in hypnotism and clairvoyance is imposture, and the rest bad observation.' Mr. Stead very aptly says: 'This oracular dictum will probably live in the history of the progress of mankind side by side with the equally positive assertions of the Lord Kelvins of their day in condemnation of Galvani and of Harvey, whose discovery of the circulation of the blood exposed him to the ridicule of the leading scientists of his time.'

"It was not the university professors alone who interested themselves in Irving Bishop's beneficent work of exploding what they considered—if they considered the matter at all—a hurtful fallacy, but all sections of the church, the defenders of ancient superstitions, were determined that no new claimant should ever enter the field. So we had Archbishop Eyre and the Father Munro, as representatives of that church which has ever sought to stifle everything new. The Established Church had its representative in Dr. Burns, of the Cathedral, while the Free Church had its liberal Marcus Dods, Ross Taylor and others. Episcopalians and United Presbyterians had also their share in the great honor

of extending the invitation to the marvelous, self-sacrificing and truth-devoted man of independent means who was to put an end to the existence of spiritualism.

"The night came when the so-called spirit manifestations, which had for so long eluded the detection and imposed upon the credulity of men, would be laid bare. Lord Kelvin, who never, I suppose, attended a genuine spirit circle in his life, was in the chair, and helped the magician just as boys carry out the instructions of the showman at juggling and mesmeric entertainments. He had crowds of his educated colleagues with him, who seemed to enjoy what was presented. Those in the audience who had seen good conjuring thought it a most tame exhibition of legerdemain, but the prominent names on the committee carried it through. There was no exposition of clairvoyance, materialization or rapping, only an exposition of the folly of learned professors. The spiritualists present laughed at the clumsy performance, and if it had been repeated for years it could not have affected the beliefs of a single spiritualist. There had been many conjurers who, with the aid of machinery, had done some clever things which caused people to wonder; but Irving Bishop was a man who had not even well learned his business.

"I wondered what the newspapers would say the next day, and for once I was ashamed of the press. I recollect reading a leading article in the 'Evening Times' of the period, and saying to myself, 'This leader will be quoted some day as an example of the ignorant and bigoted spirit which prevailed.' I recently took the trouble to hunt it up in the Mitchell Library, and there it was, as I had remembered it. In these days when men like Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor Richet, F. W. H. Myers, and others, have spoken out so clearly as to the objective reality of the phenomena, it looks as if it had been dug out of some ancient manuscript.

"Maniacs, illusions, and impostures are difficult to kill. It is doubtful whether the startling exposure which Washington Irving Bishop is giving of the thing called modern spiritualism, the silliest delusion and wickedest imposture of our time, will be its death-blow in Glasgow. With few exceptions, the immense audience assembled did not require to be convinced of the supreme humbug of spiritualism. They want to see the barefaced lie exposed by a clever man, who has sounded all its miserable shallows, pretty much as they would go to see an infamous scoundrel exposed in a court of law. Mr. Bishop is an Amer-

ican of independent means, whose dear friend, while in a state of feeble health, fell into the fangs of the spiritualists and became insane under their precious trickeries. He has succeeded in discovering their vulgar but skilfully-veiled secrets, and is engaged in laying them bare to the world.'

"Then we had a description of the tricks which had been the stock-in-trade of the regular conjurer for years. Lord Kelvin's appropriate remarks regarding the pernicious influence of the delusion are quoted, as being masterful and conclusive, and the leader concludes with these words: 'A few presumably strong men have had their brains softened by seriously touching the imposture.' (I suppose Sir William Crookes, Wallace, and Varley were meant?) 'Mr. Bishop's crusade may help to clear the noxious vapours from the eyes and minds of a few.'

"There were two nights of the show, and at the conclusion the Western Infirmary naturally waited for the proceeds with which the benevolent American was to dower them; but professors and infirmary had alike been sold. Mr. Bishop was needy, and had made sure that his own people would draw the money, and that he would keep it, once it was drawn. He coolly pocketed the entire proceeds, several hundred pounds, less some twenty pounds or so as their share of the spoil. All had been duped alike. It was a clever swindle. The professors and clergymen, and the potent assertion of independent means and avenging his dear friend's wrongs, had the desired effect with the public, and the modern Cagliostro rushed away with the 'takings,' leaving his silly dupes lamenting. It had been sufficient for Mr. Bishop to seem good and excellent, and although his credentials would not have stood any test, the eager desire on the part of the learned to believe anything unfavorable to spiritualism made them liable to fall into the net which he had prepared.

"The press had little to say about the robbery when it was found out. The matter was never fully opened to public gaze, and was soon forgotten. Professor Huxley would be blamed, no doubt, for introducing such an arrant knave to respectable Glasgow society." McN.

Answer

You are wrong. Magicians do not war against the religion of spiritualism, but against fraud mediums and miracle mongers. I do not deny that there may be honest mediums, but in my investigations of more than a quarter of a century I have never found any medium who stood the acid test of a legitimate in-

vestigation by experienced men who have met all qualifications to be justly termed investigators.

A scientist is not always qualified to be on the investigating committee; in fact, I believe that his trained mentality really disqualifies him until he has been initiated in the general manipulation of fraud mediums' tricks. I could name a number of our brilliant men who have been deceived and cheated by the simplest tricks; therefore it does not surprise me that the scientific men you mention were fooled, or rather taken advantage of, by Bishop.

I know the history of Bishop, the mind reader. He met his death in a peculiar manner in New York City some thirty years ago. If I remember correctly, it was in the Green Room Club, and he had just given a demonstration of locating hidden articles when he fell into a cataleptic fit. Despite the fact that he carried in his pocket letters of instruction that his mother was to be notified in case of his sudden death and that under no circumstances was any operation to be performed upon him without permission, the surgeons held an autopsy on his living body. Bishop's mother went to court when all this information became public, and you will find the entire proceedings in an article which I wrote for "Conjuror's Magazine," wherein you will find reproduced the photograph of the casket, with the body of Bishop, and his mother standing alongside. You can plainly see the incision, showing the complete upper part of his skull separated from the lower part. His mother stooped over to kiss his forehead, when the entire upper portion fell away. This must have deranged her mind, for she became somewhat eccentric. As she was in want, several of my friends supplied her with the necessities of life, until she passed away in Rochester.

The Countess Nicholas, Bishop's mother, had in some way befriended a man whose property was seized during the Civil War, and who claimed immense property in the South, with accumulated interest that amounted to more than a hundred million dollars. Countess Nicholas claimed this was given to her by this friend, and at her death I was willed thirty million dollars. Unfortunately, up to the present day I have been unable to find out how substantial or mythical this fortune is. Upon investigation I have found that the fortune part of the story is true, but it has been outlawed by the years.

Bishop was never looked upon as a genuine mind reader, but purely and simply as a muscle reader and imitator of J. Randall Brown, who is still alive.

Stewart Cumberland was the best known of the muscle readers, and I knew him intimately. During Bishop's visit with the Czar and Czarina of Russia, Bishop found out their willingness to believe in spiritualism, and he received valuable jewelry as a token of their esteem, and for his entertainments. He had a controversy with the editor of the "London Truth," in which he came out second best, but he audaciously advertised that he had won.

You mention Bishop, but you overlook the splendid service rendered by the English magician Maskelyne, who exposed every charlatan in the past forty years and never once failed to show the deception. Mediums do not like magicians at their seances, claiming that they are a disturbing element, but what could ten thousand magicians do in front of a radio machine? Nothing, except express their amazement at one of the great inventions of our time.

No. 9

San Francisco, Cal.

Dear Houdini:

You say that you want to expose fraud mediums. But are there not also legitimate mediums, who can stand every test imposed on them?

Answer

Perhaps there are such, but I have never met any. To show you how difficult it is to find a genuine medium, let us go back to 1857, when the "Boston Courier" offered \$500 for a medium who could successfully meet the test. Such offers have been repeatedly made since, and a similar offer was backed up by the \$60,000 willed to the University of Pennsylvania by Henry Sybert. In rough figures, during the past sixty years there has been offered almost one hundred thousand dollars for a medium who could meet a genuine test, yet no one has ever been granted any bonus for meeting such a test.

No. 10

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

Perhaps the question that I have in mind does not come under the category named in WEIRD TALES as psychic, but, knowing of the extensive library that you possess pertaining to magic and kindred subjects, I am confident that I may obtain from you what I am unable to find elsewhere. In Eliphas Levi's works on transcendental magic and other books of similar character I meet with frequent references to the ritual of the "Black Mass." Nowhere can I find a detailed description of that ritual, and as I am attempting to compile a history

of human superstition, I am desirous of obtaining the entire ritual, rather than attempting to piece together such fragments as I have been able to glean from the New York Public Library. I enclose postage for return answer if I may hope for a personal reply, otherwise allow me to thank you very cordially for the answer through the medium of WEIRD TALES. May I, as a constant reader of your magazine, offer my appreciation as such for your contribution to that periodical.

R. G. R.

Answer

Rarely will you find reference to the "Black Mass." My opinion is that it is a sort of convention of devils, and there the witches, wizards and sorcerers confess. This is supposed to take place on the Devil's Sabbath.

I have never seen a complete description of their rituals. Spence, in his "Occult Encyclopedia," gives very little information on this subject.

I remember reading a description of the "Black Mass" and the rituals. Some of it, if my memory serves me right, was photographed in Sweden, and was of such a nature that the picture, which cost a fortune, has never been seen by the public. It was called, I believe, "Superstition of the Ages." I saw this film run, but up to the present time it has never been seen outside of a private projection room. It took more than two years to make it.

According to Funk & Wagnalls, "Black Mass" is a burlesque on the Christian mass.

No. 11

Daytona Beach, Fla.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

I would appreciate it very much if you could tell me if Swami Bhakta Vishita, Hindoo master and author of "The Development of Seership, Hindoo and other Oriental Methods" (and I believe other books), has or has not been found to be a fraud. If he has not been found to be a fraud, I would thank you very much to let me know the titles of his other books, and in what order they follow each other and where they can be had. I accidentally got hold of his book on seership and became greatly interested. In fact I am making a study of his methods, and if he is not a fraud I would like to get more of his works; but if he is known to be a fraud I will waste no more time on him. Hence my questions.

Now another question. A lady came here this winter from Lilly Dale, N. Y., and has been conducting a spiritualist church in the Moose Hall in Daytona, Fla., all the season. I have attended it,

and she professes to be a medium, or mediumistic. I would like to ask if she is a fraud.

Any works that you could recommend to me on the occult or psychic order would be appreciated very much (I mean reliable ones, of course).

N. S. J.

Answer

Hindoo psychics in all branches are the most to be guarded against. I do not know what good it will do you to read their books, unless you are able to read upon them and eventually refute their teachings. If anyone of them possessed one-third of the power the Hindoo psychics all claim to possess, he could come forward and claim the huge rewards awaiting true psychics. This applies to all who did not come forward for the public test. Incidentally, you mention Lilly Dale. That is the breeding place for psychic fanatics, who are consciously and subconsciously frauds.

No. 12

Lewistown, Mont.

Dear Sirs:

I am writing you one of my actual experiences.

One day when I was in the age between seventeen and eighteen I was riding a horse on my uncle's ranch and I had an experience I shall never forget. It was late in the evening. I was riding around a bunch of pine trees, when my horse shied and just about threw me. I looked into the pine trees and saw a figure which resembled a human hanging on a limb of a big tree. Its hands were tied behind its back and a rope was around its neck.

The air seemed funny all around those pines. It seemed moldy. I spurred my horse closer and got off. I walked nearer and the thing vanished as if it went into thin air. Chills began to run up and down my spine.

I lost no time in getting to my horse and galloping for home. When I got home I told my uncle about it. He would not believe me. So several days later he was riding by there about dusk and he saw it also. When he got home he was all excited about it and asked the hired men if they had seen it, but all of them said they had not.

One day our neighbor rode over to the ranch and said there was a dead man hanging over in a group of pines. All the men at our ranch went over there, but it was gone when they got there.

One day when I was riding around, I went over to the cabin of an old trapper who went by the name of "Big Dick." His right name was Robert Holt. I told

him about it, and he said that he would wait till dusk and then go over there.

When dusk came we went over and it was there. He walked up to it and was going to touch it with a stick when a dog jumped out from a clump of bushes and made a snap at Dick's hand. Dick jumped back and screamed. Out of the dog's mouth came a tongue of fire that burned for a moment and went out, but the dog continued to show its teeth and snarl. Its eyes glowed like fire. But the body of the man vanished, then the dog seemed to leap into the air and vanish.

I had stood there all the while watching with my mouth wide open and chills running up and down my spine. After a while I came out of it and began to talk to Dick. Then he asked, "What do you think of that?" I said that I did not know what to think. He caught his horse and said he had seen enough of that thing for a while.

I learned afterwards that a horsethief had been caught and hanged there about thirty years before, and that he had a dog with him, and that a cattleman had said, "We might as well kill his dog, too, so we will be rid of all of his relations forever." They left him and his dog both dead by the tree. Neither he nor his dog was ever buried.

J. P.

Answer

Your narration seems like the creation of the fertile mind of fiction. It savors strongly of "The Hound of the Baskervilles" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

I should say that time, place and general environment were favorable to vivid imaginations, and that no better field for action could have been selected than a pine grove on a dark night. It is not difficult to conjecture that witnesses such as you cite are of the type most susceptible to superstitious influences.

I have slept in cemeteries, I should say at least two dozen times; and my imagination caused me to think that the place was peopled, and every moment I expected to have a host of the shadows come up and mock me.

My father, who also investigated phenomena, and who was one of the pioneers in 1848, related a story that in his student days one of the boys in his class had to drive a nail in a wooden cross at midnight in the local cemetery, and as he turned to flee, a hand reached out and held him fast. He shrieked and shouted for help, screaming out that he was held by a ghostly hand, but by the time assistance arrived, he was dead on the grave. It appears that in driving the nail in, he had accidentally, in his excitement, nailed down the coat. His mind had conjectured a hand reaching out from the grave and securing him.

There is no doubt that your mind conjured up the things you write in your letter.

My father also told of a hazing, at which a man was going through a certain ordeal, and he was supposed to have his head cut off, so his hazers struck him with a towel soaked in ice-water, and he was worked up to such a pitch that he died of the shock.

About six months ago a man was arrested in Berlin for a "thought murder." Every morning he had called up his rival, a butcher, who had consumption, and asked him if he were not dead yet. This preyed so on the butcher's mind that it actually hastened his death. The man who had harassed him was put on trial, as witnesses claimed that the sick man was really killed by the very thought of expecting this call every morning.

No. 13

Grand Rapids, Mich.

Dear Sir:

Propaganda, what misery is created in thy name! Having read your department in WEIRD TALES, I want to say that I consider it propaganda, because, why not attack Catholicism or the Jewish religion or some of the other isms also, whilst you are out on this campaign? But no, it must be spiritualism!

I wonder if you realize what glorious wisdom and philosophy may be attained through this same spiritualism. You are looking at the physical and psychic phenomena side of the angle, but I am looking from a spiritual standpoint. Mr. Houdini, I am sure you are committing a grievous error, because I know there are genuine mediums, as well as quacks. Not all resort to trickery, I would have you know. There are frauds in all things, at every turn in life, but whatever ye are seeking, that shall ye also find.

I know of many people with the same turn of mind as yourself, and, knowing the value of thought forces (a knowledge taken from oriental occultism), I know they can produce, whilst sitting in a seance, disastrous results to all concerned. If they would study chemistry, astronomy, physiology and psychometry as well as the human brain, they would not be up to such school-boy pranks.

I can explain that the raising of the trumpet and various articles during a seance is accomplished by a force, electrical-magnetic, thrown out from the medium or the bodies of the sitters, and this produces levitation, and the voices supposed to come from the medium, or confederates, as you so wish to term

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them, are actually from the realms of thought. The entities may control any part of the medium's body by working through, or manipulating, the leading nerve center leading to the part they wish to control. Hence they control the vocal organism and produce voices.

I could explain every phase of mediumship, Mr. Houdini, but it would take up too much of your time and you perhaps would not care to hear it anyway. I know there are positively genuine mediums, gifted with the same spiritual gifts as the prophets of old, for it is only a natural law, and God, dwelling within nature, makes His laws unchangeable. I had a good laugh over some of your explanations, for you explain things about spiritualism about as we would explain the wondrous mystifying tricks you perform.

There is something deep and intangible to it all, if we would only look at things with an unbiased vision. I suggest that the best thing for you to do would be to not dabble in something that pertains to the deeper sciences, if you are so afraid of becoming a victim of hallucinations or a candidate for the insane asylum. J. V.

Answer

Madame, there is \$75,000 awaiting the person or medium who can substantiate your claims to the existence of so-called psychic or odic force, or that "entities" do or can control *anything* of a phenomenal nature.

With all due respect, I would say that my deepest sympathy is extended you, and, if you will pardon me, I would advise confining your thoughts to things of this mundane sphere.

Catholicism, the Jewish religion, and all orthodox religions are established on such facts of spiritual advantage to the human race that there is no comparison between them and a cult. Spiritualism was acknowledged to be a fraud by the Fox Sisters, inventors of the myth.

Must I keep repeating personally that I am not attacking any religion? I am simply giving the facts of my thirty years of experience as an investigator, and showing that up to the present time it has never come to my lot to meet a genuine medium, and you must concede that in thirty years I ought to run across someone who possesses these powers.

No. 14

Pittsburgh, Pa.

My dear Mr. Houdini:

I have read your little leaflet given at your performance on February 21 at Carnegie Hall, Pittsburgh, and will give

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you my impression. I had read press notices and other advertising about the performance (had not seen you before), and was particularly induced to go by the announcement that spiritualistic deceit, treachery and falsehood would be exposed. I must say I was greatly disappointed. While you did ridicule spiritualism to some extent, yet your talk lacked all convincing argument, also any comprehensive exposure of methods employed by the mediums, etc. Your talk impressed me as being irrelevant, and you appeared reluctant in dealing with the subject at hand. There may be some cause for this, and I can readily understand your position from a business standpoint. For the enlightened, your appearance may be somewhat encouraging, but for the ignorant spiritualistic believer you do not demolish any fences. All in all, I went away dissatisfied. This is written in a kindly spirit, and probably I expected a too aggressive lecturer.

E. H.

Answer

I do not understand why you should be disappointed, because during my lecture I permitted the audience to bombard me with questions, and if there was anything you would like to have known, why didn't you hurl it at me?

I want to thank you for the spirit in which your letter was written.

There is no such thing as a comprehensive exposure of fraud. All exposures are admitted by the faithful as being tricks, whereas they insist that the identical effect as produced by a medium is genuine phenomena. If there is any particular phase that you would like to have explained, I think I can give you the explanation.

No. 15

Erie, Pa.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

The writer wishes to congratulate you on the wonderful delivery of your lecture in our town on February 22. I should like to hear from you whether you can conceive such a thing as creation. The writer considers you one of the master minds of the world, and I am therefore appealing to your intellectual knowledge and soliciting your ideas in the pure, naked form. As I am not considered one of the tender-skins, kindly reply openly.

I have an exceptionally intelligent friend by the name of Jacob Lomask, at 1521 State St., Erie, Pa. He is the gentleman that was upon the stage and addressed the audience at your permission. He is an ordained minister of the

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Spiritualist Church, and I consider him a Modernist and a Libertarian. With his efforts, I have come to the conclusion that he is fully correct, but, of course, a modern thinker may change his mind at any moment.

At one time, the writer was a rank materialist, believing that we arrive at the cradle and end completely at the grave; but my friend, Mr. Lomask, has converted me into believing that conscious life is continuous beyond the grave. I am still seeking the supreme ruling powers. Can you enlighten me? I wish to state that you have won a spot in my heart, and I feel as if I know you personally.

H. H. C.

Answer

It was an interesting lecture that I had in Erie, and I was much pleased at the way Mr. Jacob Lomask handled the audience regarding his views.

There is but one supreme Creator. I believe He has no proxies to perform spiritualistic phenomena. Our destiny is in His hands, and we must be submissive to His mandates.

There is a vast difference between a spiritual existence and a spiritualistic existence.

There never has been any proof shown of a spirit having returned to this mundane sphere, that would stand the acid test of scrutiny of investigator or investigation. There are hundreds of books written that spirits had returned, but that is merely conscious or unconscious belief. The "Revue de France" published an article which it would pay you to read.

No. 16

Pasadena, Cal.

My dear Sir:

I have read with great interest your first instalment in WEIRD TALES of your exciting experiences with "The Spirit Fakers of Hermannstadt," and wish to say that your name and work have enlisted my vivid interest for some years.

Gleaning also from WEIRD TALES that you are an authority on psychic phenomena and spiritualistic conjectures concerning same, I herewith take advantage of the opportunity offered by WEIRD TALES to elicit from you, through its columns, or otherwise, an expert opinion as to what could have been the underlying causes of the peculiar psychic experiences which came spontaneously to me, utterly uncalled for.

I am, by nature, a born skeptic like yourself, and for the major portion of my life quite an atheist-materialist, yet,

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A Boston man asked his colored janitor why he was opposed to matrimony.

"Ah ain't zactly exposed to it, sah," said the old fellow.

"Well, why is it you never married? Haven't you seen any one you liked?"

"Lawdy, yessah—but you see its dis way. Ah couldn't resk mah own judgment."

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curiously enough, with a strong leaning toward occultism and a most intense desire for truth in every department of human activity, but particularly as to the claims of our religion and spiritualism, in which, by ardent study, I have discovered a great affinity as to the claims in each of its psychic phenomena, formerly termed "miracles."

I have also, like yourself, acquired quite an extensive psychic and spiritualistic library, embracing the fine work of some of the greatest scientists, such as Sir Alfred Russel Wallace, Cesare Lombroso, Sir William Crookes, Dr. Baron von Schrenck-Notzing. ("Materializations Phaenomene,") which I read in the original German edition and parts of which I translated into English for my good friend, Dr. Lucien Larkin, astronomer at Mt. Lowe Observatory here, who was interested to know of the chemical constituents of the "ectoplasm" or "teleplasm" which issues from the bodies of some mediums, such as Marie Berand, Miss Goligher, Eva C., Francis Klusky, etc., and which was observed and photographed by Dr. Geley of Paris, Dr. Crawford of Belfast, Ireland, Dr. Schrenck-Notzing of Munich, etc., etc.; (this substance, as you undoubtedly know, being the "plasm" utilized by the Invisible Spirit or Intelligence to build therefrom a temporary body such as was worn on earth and for the purpose of identification).

Having such books as Dr. William G. Crawford's "The Reality of Psychic Phenomena" and "The Psychic Structures of the Goligher Circle," von Schrenck-Notzing's big volume with 152 large-plate photo flashlight reproductions of his "Materializations Phaenomene," and many other similar works, you undoubtedly are familiar with the modus operandi of a strict scientific nature to register the progress of the extraordinary phenomena.

I have just finished reading Camille Flammarion's three books, the "Trilogy on Death," No. 3 on "After Death" especially enlisting my attention.

As Mr. Flammarion details hundreds of such extraordinary events (evidently

well-authenticated), claiming to have in his possession something like 7,000 or 9,000 personal letters from all over the world and covering a wide range of phenomena, I am curious to learn from you, how all such phenomena could be duplicated by trick-simulation or by the processes of legerdemain.

I have been following with great interest the "Scientific American's" "test-procedures" under J. Malcolm Bird's chairmanship and under your and others' collaboration, to land into the net of proof and fact under severe "test conditions" the various claims of professional mediumship, and, if I can judge at least approximately correctly, it seems to me they have already encountered some genuine phenomena.

But kindly permit me to ask a specially important question. If all phenomena of that sort were, or could eventually be proved to be, individual or collective hallucination or subconscious mind action, both collective and individual, or based upon other purely earth-born terrestrial and material conditions, how could so many so-called "miracles" have been attributed to "Jesus the Christ," and other biblical supernatural phenomena?

Personally, I regard all such genuine phenomena as spiritistic or spiritualistic in origin, and am quite well posted on the Talmudic Expurgations history of Jesus, and other non-biblical information of an historical character, concerning the "Psychic Medium," as I call him.

I think the Bible will eventually stand or fall altogether as an individual receptacle for faith and hope in an individual, self-conscious future life after death, by just how much, or how far, science can or will eventually be able to prove whether any phenomena whatsoever is or can be due to incarnate intelligence or spirits.

But I am overstepping the rights of communication and will merely say in conclusion that I wish you would consider the mental-telepathy experiment in my clipping, the "Laura, to those coming to be revealed," clairaudient sentence and its sequel, the "prayer for rain" incident, and the terrifying three enormous blows on the bedroom closet door after reading and commenting aloud on "The Revelations of St. John," as these were among the most startling of my California experiences.

However, in Pittsburgh, Pa., my birth and home town, I had quite a number of other experiences equally, if not more, startling, including apparitions of my

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mine. But what I can affirm positively and as fact only is that these things occurred exactly as detailed without an atom of embellishment or exaggeration.

I shall await your response with eager interest and am looking forward expectantly to your next installment of the "Spirit Fakers of Hermannstadt" experiences in WEIRD TALES. L. O.

Answer

I have had a similar experience of rain miracle, by command, etc. In my case it was a mere coincidence, and doubtless it was the same in your case.

All the scientists you name have been deceived by noted mediums, and there is full proof recorded of such being a fact. The whole subject of occultism is frail.

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dead father (two of them), and just at a time when I was most unbelieving, atheistic and leaning altogether to materialistic opinions of being.

How my own mind, whether consciously or subconsciously, could produce any of these results, especially when rebellious against all credulity in such matters, I am utterly unable to say or deter-