

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.*

FOREWORD

Ingrained in me is a love of mystery and marvel. As a child, *Red Riding Hood, Ali Baba, and the Arabian Nights* found as much favor with me as the stories from the Bible. All were read to me by my mother. Stories of the weird and wonderful exercise a surpassing charm over my imagination. I feel there are many thousands like me and from these I will be delighted to hear. Who knows but that this department may be the means of bringing to light another Poe or another Hawthorne? Only by writing can you learn to write. By throwing off restraint, the greatest pieces of literature have been produced. This department is yours as much as mine.—HOUDINI.

No. 1

Terre Haute, Ind.

Houdini,
c/o *Weird Tales*,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

Years ago there traveled around the country a man named Samri S. Baldwin, known as the "White Mahatma." Could you tell me if he is still living, and if so, where a letter could reach him.

Were there any other White Mahatmas that did the same kind of work?

Yours very truly,

H. L.

Answer to No. 1

There were a number of White Mahatmas, all imitating Samri S. Baldwin, who is still alive and now resides in San Francisco, California. A letter addressed to the Golden Gate Assembly

**Hundreds of letters have been received by Houdini since the announcement of this department in the March issue. Time does not permit taking up as many of these as desired on account of the rush to get the April issue on sale on time. This department bids fair to become an interesting feature of WEIRD TALES and the publishers assure you that sufficient space will be allotted it to cover all worth while subjects.*

of the Society of American Magicians, care of the Tiffin Studio will reach him.

Detroit, Mich.

Houdini,
c/o *Weird Tales*,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading your expose of spiritualism in the March issue of *Weird Tales*, and can assure you that I am very anxious to read the next installment.

I was born in a section of England, where it is the custom for those who wish to sink a well, to employ the services of a "dowser."

A "dowser" is a person who travels around with a forked twig, jabbing it in the ground, and when this twig moves, turning suddenly in his hand, he states that water will be found below. Experience shows that in this practice, he is usually though not invariably correct.

Now these "dowsers" are not as a rule scientific or learned men, nor have they any special local knowledge. Very often indeed, they are merely laborers.

Sometimes this man dispenses with the use of the "dowser" being able to tell by his own sensation that he is over water. So common is this custom in this part of England I refer to, and so great is the belief in these "dowsers" that few people indeed would think of sinking a well without the aid of one of these men.

Many explanations have been offered of this practice and I am anxious to hear your opinion regarding same.

It is very true that in sticking this twig in the ground, it will move at times "just as if it were alive" in this particular section of the country where I come from, but a large percentage of people are great believers in spiritualism, and people who have faith in this sort of phenomenon insist that it is a spirit manifestation.

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Thanking you for any attention you may give this,

Yours very truly, J. H.

Answer to No. 2

This is not new; in fact, it is centuries old and you will find any number of books in your library regarding same.

The fact remains that these "dowsers" or water diviners were not always accurate, and in view of this infallibility, it is unwise to believe that they were capable of locating water or metals.

The Psychical Research Society have gone thoroughly into this class of humans, and I would advise you to look up their literature on this subject.

Houdini, Peoria, Ill.
c/o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

Some time ago I attend a seance in this town, at which quite a few people were present and the manifestations were really wonderful.

I went there, purporting to be an ardent believer in spiritualism and was well received and was made the object of quite a little attention by the medium.

Now as a matter of fact, I am an out and out skeptic, but confess I do not know how to explain some of the phenomena I have witnessed.

During one of the sittings or seances, the medium sat directly in front of me, held both of my hands in her right hand, and placed her other hand on my shoulder. Then I could see by glancing upward a trumpet moving around the room, then a guitar and then a mandolin. This instrument would float over the heads of the sitters, and I have never been able to discern how this was accomplished. Can you explain?

Yours very truly, H. W.

Answer to No. 3

There are several ways of the medium getting one hand free when you are supposed to hold both. It is one of the best known ruses used by fraud mediums.

In order to guard yourself in the future, when you go into a seance room, insist on holding the medium's hand in your own. You do the holding, and do not allow the medium to hold you. See that there is no confederate to produce the manifestations, which is frequently done.

Houdini, Springfield, Ill.
c/o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

You are answering all questions on spiritualism. Do you consider yourself

a human encyclopedia on the subject? I know you will not dare to answer this.

How do you explain Jacoby, who in his autobiography said he saw a number of musicians in his room and they played until early morning? Jacoby was a brilliant man and a gifted scholar.

How can you, at the present time, explain how this happened?

I do not think you would care to answer this question, but am sending it to relieve my mind.

Yours truly,

H. W.

Answer to No. 4

No, I do not consider myself a human encyclopedia, but I have been delving in mystery ever since I could walk and talk, and if there is anything in the line of mystery I do not know, I certainly am going to try and find out.

Any time you see me billed anywhere, drop around and have a chat.

I am not prejudiced, as I keep telling people. I am perfectly willing to believe, but I have not been convinced or converted as yet.

Jacoby did write that he saw and heard musicians in his room. He called in his servants, if you remember the incident, but they were unable to see them.

After I am suspended from the top of a building by my ankles and make my escape from the restraint and come down to earth, the whole population and the houses whirl about me, but that does not signify it is true.

Therefore, I claim that he might have thought he had seen the musicians and heard them, but that does not necessarily make it true, although in his own mind, it was true.

You go to any insane asylum where you are permitted to go by the authorities, and you will find a lot of poor mortals who hear voices and see forms. I think that Jacoby simply had hallucinations at the time this happened, and that is all there is to it.

No. 5 Louisville, Ky.

Houdini,
c/o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

Am glad to see that you are writing for *Weird Tales*, as it is my favorite magazine, and I am sure many other readers will bear this same opinion.

In this city, which is a hotbed for spiritualism, you are confronted by believers and non-believers at every turn. I have attended many seances, and probably never get a "kick" out of any, on account of my pronounced views against this sort of stuff. I have been told be-

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cause of the fact that I am a non-believer, I will never be visited by any real manifestation.

The only thing I could never understand is why do all mediums employ various paraphernalia in conducting their seances. For instance, why is it necessary for the departed one to speak through the medium with the aid of a trumpet or horn? If there is such a thing as communication with the dead, can you advance a logical explanation of why a trumpet or horn should be used?

Yours very truly,

H. M.

Answer to No. 5

The aid of trumpets, tambourines and musical instruments used in seances, to the best of my knowledge and belief is simply to give auricular proof that the spirits are present, and in speaking through a trumpet, it is the simplest thing in the world to muffle your voice and make it difficult to recognize.

At one seance which I attended in New York I distinctly detected the odor of the departed spirit, the medium having indulged in the brand of spirits which are prohibited.

I have known mediums who could talk through trumpets almost any time or place, depending upon how they were seated at the seance.

I did one seance with Mrs. Wreith, the celebrated Detroit trumpet medium. Dr. Wallace being friendly with both of us, made an appointment, not telling her my name. This was in London. It was very difficult to get a seance, and when I did, I went in unannounced, but after an hour the seance was blank.

As I left, she merely said, "I am sorry Mr. Houdini, that we could get no results." I was startled. She said, "You did not think I knew you, but we traveled together on the 'Mauretania'" —so you see had Mrs. Wreith not recognized me, we might (?) have had results. She evidently was afraid of taking a chance with me.

No. 6

Buffalo, N. Y.

Mr. Houdini,
c/o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

I attended a spiritualistic seance recently presided over by a lady medium. There were some fifty odd people in the audience. Slips of paper were passed around with the request that each one write on the slip of paper and ask a question that he desired to be answered. We were requested to fold the paper with the writing inside. The questions

were collected and placed on a table, the medium paying no attention to them whatsoever. The medium then invited someone to blindfold her. As I was sitting in the front row, I volunteered. She requested a kid glove from some lady in the audience and, receiving this, placed it over her eyes while I tied it securely over her eyes with a handkerchief. I am positive of her inability to see.

All were requested to speak right out and identify their message when read. She said that she would make no attempt to answer the questions asked, or read them, but that she would give them the impressions which she would receive from them. Then she took a seat at the table at the side opposite the audience, facing the audience with the table between her and the sitters. She opened several of the questions, smoothed them out and laid them on the table. Then she took one of them and pressed it to her bandaged forehead and began.

It was remarkable the effect she created with those present. Women cried aloud at the questions and answers the medium gave out. Finally she came to my question and said:

"I get the influence of a young man. His name is Henry. I get the vibration of a young man who has suffered continual illness."

Then the medium addressing me asked, "Is that correct?" I replied that it was. Then she stated that Henry was well and happy and not to worry about him as he was beyond all physical suffering.

Now, Mr. Houdini, I am convinced that this medium was a fraud. I have attended a number of seances with poor results and have little faith in them but this medium puzzled me a lot. The question I asked on the slip of paper was, "H*—, have you any relief from your suffering?" My handwriting was purposely bad and I wrote the proper noun in such a manner that it would be hard to distinguish whether the word was Harry or Henry. I did this to discover if the medium actually read the questions or not. I am convinced that she did but how? Perhaps you can offer an explanation.

K. H.

Answer to No. 6

The method used by this medium is very simple and is not new. It has been greatly improved upon recently. If I am not mistaken it was first used in the early '70's. When you tied the handkerchief with the gloves over her eyes, she simply frowned as much as possible. Then by raising the eyebrows she was

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 enabled to see enough to suit her purpose.

You understand I am not exposing a legitimate performer's efforts. When a medium resorts to trickery, I feel that the deception should be explained to prevent their playing upon the gullibility of the public as much as possible.

No. 7

Evanston, Ill.

Houdini,
 c/o Weird Tales,
 Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

When modern science dawned, the world was dark with superstition. Fantastic notions fettered the human intellect. Witches, with their bony hands, wove a spell of death and ruin. Sorcerers, with their magic signs and incantations cast enchantments over the reason of men. Astrology, with its tradition and dogmas, held the common mind in thrall.

Against these ideas, the learned voiced vigorous opposition. The belief in the transmutability of one element into another was opposed to its fundamental conceptions. The transmission of thought through leagues of barren space was cried upon as impossible. The casting of spells was sneered at as unworthy of discussion. The notion of a world of reality, interpenetrating the natural world, yet defying the grasp of the natural senses, was brushed aside as a poetic fancy. The idea of physical matter being rendered invisible at will was laughed away.

It is noticeable, however, during the past century, although the philosophers have remained steadfast in their attitude of resistance to the claims of the mystics, that the march of discovery, has been tending more and more to the occult. Scholars of the old school have given more attention to beliefs they once sneered at.

Surgery and medicine today attest to the favorable results obtained by the use of hypnotism. There is a marked difference between the early and present attitude of science toward the phenomena of telepathy. There was no law known to physics which would lend probability to the claim of telepathists. The advent of wireless and radio-*phone*, pulsing their messages through vacancy have aroused thinking people to the possibility of psychic phenomena. Those advanced in science, tend to pave the way for those eager to pursue the doctrines of spiritualism, and the trend is not against, but toward spiritualism, de-

spite the efforts of a dominant resistant force and such men as you.

It is interesting to learn what you have to say against the ability of those persons commonly said to possess mediumistic powers. I do not deny that the spiritualistic movement is attended by some who practice fraud, but, Houdini, do you know of any movement of scientific research or otherwise, in which quackery does not, at some time, or other, make its advent?

Is it possible that your mind may be influenced against spiritualism by reason of the fact that in your efforts to entertain or instruct the people before whom you appear, you may find it necessary to be somewhat studied or in other words, unreal?

I do not mean to say that you are not a practical man, for I believe you are, but I am inclined to think that your life as an entertainer does not lend itself to the proper mental condition to take up the subject of spiritualism, in the frame of mind that you really should have, to become an honest investigator.

I am sure you are seeking for the truth in this great subject, and I am indeed sorry to see you take the decided stand you have against such learned and sincere men as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge and others.

It is possible that you may be doing your fellow men a great service, but I really feel that in your capacity as a public man and a man who enjoys the following you do, that you may be committing a grievous error.

I trust that in the conducting of this department, you will leave it open to both sides of the controversy, if such you may call it.

In closing I wish to say that I am pleased to see your appearance in *Weird Tales*, for I am sure you will be adding quite a little to this publication, which is blazing the trail of a literature loved by men, since childhood.

Yours very truly,

S. T.

Answer to No. 7

I have carefully digested your letter, and it might interest you to know that for the past 30 years, I have been a mystifier, not only of the public but of magicians.

In fact the work I do appears so easy to duplicate, that up to date four human beings have lost their lives imitating some of my hazardous stunts, and the reason they apparently seem so easy is because I have been at this so long, that it seems to be second nature to me, or possibly a sixth sense.

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In this way, I have the advantage of everyone attending a seance, as I know how things must be done or must start, to be accomplished successfully.

I admit that mediums claim that some seances must be genuine in order to have imitators. I am willing to grant that, but I simply make the statement that I have never attended a seance which was genuine, in my 30 years of investigation, and I believe I have attended the seances of the best known mediums of our times.

Some mediums object to magicians as investigators, but one thousand magicians could not stop the advance of the radio or telephone, irrespective of who or how many would be present. Therefore, I believe that mediums' objections to real investigators is entirely out of place.

If, at any time, you feel that you have something of interest to me in the way of actual proof of psychic phenomena, I promise you that I will make an honest effort to witness same. The very fact that I am constantly before the public eye should give me some opportunity to study the public. Knowing something of the gullibility of the public from a performer's standpoint, I feel I am doing a service in rendering my honest opinion to as many as possible.

A man was giving a lecture on the subject of "Honesty."

He related that when a boy he saw a cart laden with melons outside a shop and nobody about. On the spur of the moment he stole a melon and darted into a passage.

"I soon got my teeth into that melon," he said, "but instantly a queer sensation assailed me, and a shiver ran through me. My resolve was taken at once. I went back to that cart. I replaced the melon [loud applause]—and took a ripe one!"

A famous bishop had the trick of pronouncing "o" like "u" thus: "I am fund of hut cuffee." Once he was giving advice to a working girls' club and impressed on the members the necessity for arranging full occupation of their spare time. "Above all, girls," he said earnestly, "try by all means available to cultivate a hobby!"

DEATHS OF LANGOIRAN AND THE ABBE DUPUIS

AT the entrance of the court-house of Bourdeaux, the Abbe Dupuis received a first wound; others soon leveled him to the ground. A young lad, of about fifteen or sixteen, cut a hole in the cheek with a knife, to hold up the head by, while others were employed in haggling it from the body which was still in agonies. This operation not succeeding in such a crowd they took hold of the legs, and drew the carcass about the streets and around the ramparts.

Mr. Langoiran had but just set his foot on the first step of the stairs, when he was knocked down. His head was hacked off in an instant, and a ruffian held it up, crying aloud: "Off with your hats! long live the nation." The bare-headed populace answered: "Long live the nation." The head was then carried round the town in signal of a triumph, gained by a tumultuous populace and ten thousand soldiers under arms, over a poor defenseless priest.

A visitor to a lunatic asylum was approached by an inmate, who begged that his hard case might be laid before a magistrate and his release obtained. The visitor promised to take the necessary steps immediately.

"You will not forget?" said the lunatic.

"Oh, no."

"You are sure you will not forget?"

"Certainly not."

As the visitor turned to go he received a kick that laid him in a heap a few feet away.

"That," said the lunatic, "is in case you should forget."

Little Tommy Truffe had made a discovery and, being of a very generous disposition, was eager to share it with others.

"I is—" he began.

Teacher swooped down at once, that superior smile, so irritating to the sensitive mind of youth, upon her lips.

"I am, not 'I is,'" she corrected.

Tommy looked a little pained; almost, perhaps, a little doubtful. But he was an obedient little boy.

"I am the ninth letter of the alphabet," he announced.

The maiden was pretty and charming and young.

Coquettish she stood where mistletoe hung—

He was fondly intent upon kissing the miss

But only succeeded in missing the kiss.

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An English motorist was stopped by a policeman on account of poor lights.

"I'll have to take your name, sir."

"John Smith," was the reply.

"Don't try that on me, sir," warned the man in blue. "I want your proper name and address."

"Then if you must have it, it's William Shakespeare, Stratford-on-Avon."

"Thank you, sir," said the policeman, jotting it down. "Sorry to have troubled you."

"Don't mention it," said the motorist, driving on.

Ribs of the ginkgo tree are roasted by the Chinese, and being similar to almonds, are served as a confection or an appetizer at banquets and dinners.