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MAGICAL STAGE-CRAFT,

or, How to Face
.. an Audience, ..

^{author} By ^{Play} Charles Medrington.



Author of "Magical Novelties," "The Magicians' Book of Patter,
&c.

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MAGICAL STAGE-CRAFT.

INTRODUCTION.




There may be some who will call the writing of this book—by a man not known as a performer—hard names. To such I can only say: “spend a little time in the auditorium and you will learn a lot about the stage.”

The onlooker sees most of the game, and the conjurer who studies other conjurers at work will see their weak and their strong points, he will see what constitutes their strength, and where the weakness lies.

This book is intended for the wizard who has mastered the manipulative side of his art, but whose style, methods, or deportment on the boards needs polishing up. There is always room for improvement, and I hope that these suggestions will be taken in the spirit in which I offer them. Should anyone take offence at any particularly strong ‘home truth,’ I humbly crave forgiveness!

THE AUTHOR.



Bequest of
Harry Houdini
April 1927

Stage Elocution.



IT is astonishing how comparatively few conjurers have any idea of this important part of stagecraft.

The commonest faults are :—

- (1) **Indistinct Enunciation.**
- (2) **Bad Speed.**
- (3) **Ungentlemanly Diction.**
- (4) **Failure to make jokes clear.**

I will try to show the cures for these in order.

Indistinct Enunciation is generally the result of fright in the beginner, and carelessness or ignorance in the case of the old hand. Let each word be clearly and loudly spoken, so that everyone in the room will be able to hear and understand without effort.

Bad Speed is generally hurry. The performer does not allow the audience time to take in his meaning.

The cure is obvious—don't do it! An easy, leisurely flow of smoothly-spoken words should be aimed at; but if you overdo it you will become a bore.

Ungentlemanly Diction, *id est*: an uneducated style of speaking, is fatal to the wizard who wishes to shine as a drawing-room entertainer. We can not all talk like University men, but we must at least pay attention to the correct placing of our "aitches." When performing in what is known as "good society," the conjuror had better drop a palmed ball than an "aitch." Gentlemen and ladies like to be entertained by people of their own class, or near it, and are likely to smile cynically at the performer who says: "Leddie and Gents., I 'ave 'ere a hordinary glars tumbler." The conjuror who has not had the advantage of a good education, enabling him to speak well, would be wise to put himself under a good teacher of elocution. It will mean £ s. d. to him in the long run.

Failure to make Jokes clear is a waste of good patter. I recently saw a well-known magician who simply talked jokes as though there were none at all. To watch his face when perpetrating a pun was to note the absence of any facial acting whatever.

A mild use of the expressions of the face, a discreet use of emphasis and pausing—all these things make a wonderful difference.

To sum up:—

Speak every word you have to say clearly, sufficiently loud, and at an easy speed. Try and talk like a man of education (but for goodness sake don't 'put on side,') and don't leave the audience to find out when you intend a joke. Make them see the joke without having to search for it.



Manner.



Try to appear at your ease, and confident of your ability to please. This is not to be construed into "look cheeky and conceited;" there is a wide gulf fixed between these things.

"Nothing succeeds like success," and the man who has acquired the air of one who has succeeded will have done much to prejudice the audience in his favour.

If your show is a humorous one, wear a smile. If it is mysterious and impressive don't fly to extremes and look as if you have the toothache. **Remember that the first object of an entertainment is to amuse.** You don't amuse the spectators if you infect them with gloom.

The conjuror who makes remarks "aside," to friends at the wings or in the orchestra, deserves to be hissed off the stage. This is perhaps the most atrocious bad form a conjurer can indulge in, though a favourite with many soi-disant "stars." Young men often think it clever to thus appear careless and "bored" while occupying the stage. They only bring themselves into ridicule, which they thoroughly merit.

Make the audience think you are doing your best to please them, which is your duty. You will certainly not win their approval by any other means.



Showmanship.



One might misquote: "Appearance, performance, and showmanship—the greatest of these is showmanship!"

The latter is an art which makes poor tricks look good, and good tricks look marvellous. When we get hold of a marvellous trick the true showman will turn it into a miracle!

It may well be termed the art of making the most of a show. Let me give an example of its application to magic.

That is how the poor conjuror compares with the smart one in the simple evanishment of a billiard ball by the "pass":—

The weak man merely says: "I will make the ball vanish so," taking about as long over the action as I do over the telling.

The smart man makes more fuss. He probably occupies some little time in showing that his hands are free from preparation, etc., working up the excitement. He then executes the movement slowly and with great care, simulating the greatest interest. The trick at once looks difficult, and its effect is enhanced accordingly.

He does not open his hand suddenly to show the ball gone. After sundry crumbling and crunching movements he opens it, so to speak, "a finger at a time" and then takes his applause with a pleased expression, as much as to say: "it was jolly hard, but I did it!"

In short he has made a lot of the trick, while the poor man has not. This is showmanship in a nutshell. If you treat your tricks as marvels, the audience will probably take them at your valuation. If on the other hand you rush through them as though they were mere stop-gaps, and seem to think nothing of them, the audience will regard them accordingly. Remember that the most simple trick looks clever if you treat it as such.

The Choice and Arrangement of a Programme.



FOR CHILDREN.

Provide plenty of glitter and fun. Spring babies and paper ribbons fill their souls with delight, whereas cards tricks are stagnation.

FOR MEN.

You can select your most complicated combination tricks and card effects. You have the best audience obtainable, and the most attentive and intelligent.

Men by themselves are better behaved (from the point of view of the wizard) than when they are with the ladies.

FOR A MIXED AUDIENCE.

You will require a blend of the above. Plenty of tricks requiring borrowed articles and volunteer assistants will be valuable.

THE MUSIC HALL AUDIENCE is the hardest to please. You must do tricks that they can see from the back, and must not keep them waiting at all.

Sit at the rear of a big hall and watch a conjuror do the "coin palming" or "Back-palm of cards" tricks. A more uninteresting sight from a distance it would be difficult to imagine.

The manipulative magician has gone out of fashion, and the mechanical necromancer is the most popular at present. Select tricks that can be seen at a distance, and if you **must** work in some sleights, let them be with silk handkerchiefs or some objects visible from afar.

Many conjurors believe in starting a "turn" with something "small." Personally I have observed that attention is best secured by a showy commencement. It is also wise to finish with your biggest effect to get the applause for your exit.

The effect of good music at a "hall show" is really remarkable. The conjuror should pay great attention to the selection of a suitably weird piece for the band to play while he is performing. A mysterious creepy piece works on the imagination to a marvellous degree, and the renovation of a torn piece of paper to the accompaniment of a "spooky" air, seems a different trick to the same done while a "stock waltz" is being played.

Finally, look after the accessories well. A dingy stage setting is a bad start, but capital laid out in a brilliant one, is capital well invested. A comparatively poor show well staged often scores over a good show badly staged. It seems unjust, but "such is life."

THE END.

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