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FIRE MYSTERIES  
OR  
DOING TRICKS WITH FIRE  
BY  
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THE SECRETS OF FIRE EATING AND FIRE TRICKS,  
AS GATHERED FROM VARIOUS SOURCES, EXPOSED.  
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Those exhibitors who gain their livelihoods by fire-eating often burn themselves, sometimes seriously, though they show no sign of pain. Consequently, most all of them previously prepare their mouths and hands for the unnatural exhibition with certain compounds in order to make it safer and easier. A tough mouth is necessary for the performance of many of their feats, for they are dangerous and unhealthy, and constant and painstaking repetition hardens the parts that come in contact with heat. The exceptionally hardened skin of the true laborer will enable him to take up lighted coals and red hot iron without suffering severe burns. The writer performed publicly on the streets of New Orleans throughout the day the trick of blowing enormous flames of fire from the mouth while in the costume of Mephistopheles during MARDI GRAS (Carnival) without ill result. This is explained in No. 41.

The following sections give the secrets of old as well as new fire tricks, and should enable most anyone to entertain at home or in public. First learn the easiest experiments, and when they have been mastered, try those more difficult. Prepare yourself with a table, candle and candlestick, and on the floor always have a pail of water in event of fire.

FIRE PROOFS.

A. It is claimed that if the soles of the feet are rubbed with a mixture of powdered red stone and salt water (three-quarter cupful of strong salt water and 2 ounces red stone), a few steps taken on red hot iron will not injure. Alum and soap make the hands better suited to handling fire, and a thick mixture of soap and powdered sugar assists in making the tongue insensible to heat. It is also said that when articles are soaked in alum water they become somewhat fireproof.

B. FIRE PROOF FOR FACE AND HANDS. Mix together well a quarter-pound each of the following: Fine lard, Rock oil, mutton tallow, Oil of Petroleum and Quicklime. Distil this substance, collecting the resultant liquid. With this substance (liquid) anoint the parts.

C. LIQUID MIXTURE FOR THE HANDS AND FEET. The following is said to be good: In two ounces of aqua vitae melt one-half ounce of camphor; add an ounce of quicksilver and an ounce of liquid stryax, a myrrh product. Two ounces of powdered Hematis is put in with the rest. The

whole being well mixed, bathe the fingers and inside of the hand several times with it, permitting the preparation to dry in. This done, a hot glass chimney may be held in the hands or the hands passed in a flame without getting burned. Applied to the feet, heat will not effect.

D. PREPARATION FOR THE HANDS. A professional performer gives the following as a good recipe to use on the hands while doing all fire tricks: Sal-ammoniac, 1 part; Ourin Juice, 1 part; Diluted Supphine Acid, 3 pts.

E. FIRE EATING SOLUTION FOR THE MOUTH. The following solution is given by Carrington: Mix together and dissolve well, one ounce of pure water, one ounce bicarbonate of soda, one ounce powdered alum, one ounce castile soap; then add a pint of strong vinegar, all of which is let stand for two days. When ready to perform, the mouth is rinsed several times with the mixture until it is coated well. With its use many fire tricks may be performed without danger.

F. FIRE PROOF PAINT. Mix thoroughly one-half pint of Asbestos paint and three drops of Nitric Acid.

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G. FLASH PAPER that is white and will burn without leaving ash, as given by a distinguished chemist. Prepare in open air.

Place 5 parts of strong nitric acid in a jar, and pour into this 4 parts of sulphuric acid as you continually stir with a glass rod. It becomes hot and must be laid aside for at least 24 hours to cool. Cover the jar with a plate.

Into a flat porcelain dish deposit some of the liquid, and into this lay, one after the other, about 3 or 10 sheets of fine quality white tissue paper. Glass rods in each hand are used to press down as each sheet is put in dish. Let the sheets soak for ten minutes; then take out one at a time and place in a large tub filled with water. If insufficient water is used the sheets will spoil. Next place sheets in some container that has fresh water continually running through it. Leave sheets in this water for about two hours, then place between clean blotting paper to dry.

H. FLASH TUBES: Obtain some thin glass tubes about the diameter of a darning needle and one inch long. One end is closed by melting over a flame. Fill with Sulphuric acid and by the same means close remaining open end. Mix half and half of Chlorate of Potash and powdered sugar, place a little of this powder and a Flash Tube in a 3 inch square of Flash Paper and fold the paper into a parcel so as not to spill the powder. Holding the paper at the fingertips, press thumb down and break tube, which causes the acid to act on the powder and Flash Paper. Throw the paper parcel in the air and it will explode with a flash.

I. THE OAKUM BALL. A wonderful improvement over the usual sponge because the breath passes through much easier. It will be found that balls made of oakum, of suitable size to be held in the mouth give more gas and a larger flame.

#### SIMPLE EXPERIMENTS.

1. THE DEVIL'S SMOKE TRICKS. (A). Just before the trick is shown a few drops of Muriatic Acid are placed in an ordinary clay pipe, and a few drops of strong ammonia in the palm of your hand. Exhibiting the pipe and hands apparently unprepared, the stem of the pipe is placed in mouth and the palm of your hand over the mouth of the bowl, uniting the chemicals and producing a thick vapor which looks like tobacco smoke

(B). WITH TWO PIPES. The above may be accomplished with two pipes, each previously prepared with a few drops of the above liquids. Both pipes placed in the mouth as though smoking also produces a thick vapor, or one pipe bowl may be placed over the other.

(C). THE SAUCER AND TUMBLER TRICK. An effective trick may be done with a glass tumbler and a saucer, instead of pipes. Each one must be prepared as above, inserted over one another and immediately covered with a handkerchief. You may now stand at a distance, smoke a cigar and blow the smoke towards the tumbler and saucer. Upon uncovering them a moment later a thick vapor is seen in the glass tumbler.

2. SATAN'S BUBBLES. Fill a clay pipe with cotton, keeping the latter in place by inserting a wire screen at the mouth of the bowl. Saturate the cotton with gasoline, and dip the pipe in strong soap-suds that contain a little glycerine. Blow easily in the stem as you hold the bowl down. Touch off the bubbles with a lighted candle and they will explode and disappear in a brilliant flash.

3. SOAP BUBBLES THAT EXPLODE. Place a small ball of Oakum, which has been dampened with gasoline, in the mouth and proceed as given in number 2.

4. THE EXPLODING TOBACCO PIPE. Mash separately into a powder the following: 2 ounces cream of tartar, 2 ounces saltpetre and 1 ounce sulphur; then mix together thoroughly. If a small quantity is placed in a piece of paper and lighted, loud reports will be made. A grain of this placed into a tobacco pipe and lighted will produce a very loud report without damaging the pipe.

5. THE BURNT AND RESTORED HANDKERCHIEF. Touch a match to the corner of a handkerchief that has been freshly dipped in brandy and it will apparently burn. When the alcohol has been consumed, the flame will go out due to the remaining moisture, but the handkerchief will not be damaged.

6. LIGHTING PAPER OR CLOTH WITH THE BREATH. One part of phosphorous to six parts B.-Sulphide of Carbon in a large necked bottle with glass stopper. Always have bottle well stopped. Gently dip paper in, take out and replace stopper. Hold out paper while blowing upon it. When carbon has evaporated paper will burn.

7. IGNITING A HANDKERCHIEF WITH THE BREATH. A small piece of phosphorous, half the size of a green pea, is placed between lower lip and gums of mouth. A handkerchief, borrowed or otherwise, held near the mouth is blown upon, and while so doing the piece of phosphorous is spat into it unperceived. Rub the handkerchief in the hands a few moments, and when the chemical becomes dry it ignites the handkerchief. Always keep phosphorous under water.

8. Lighting lamps with the fingertip or a stick. Mix together thoroughly equal quantities of loaf sugar and Chloride of Potash. A little of this is placed on the wicks of several lamps, and on the tip of a stick a drop of Sulphuric Acid. By touching the powder with the prepared end of stick the lamps will ignite. A drop of the acid may be placed on fingertip with the same result, but you must wash the finger as soon as the trick is done.

(B). Another method. A very small piece of Potassium is beforehand placed on the wick. Now by having a drop of water on the end of your finger and touching the potassium, the wick will light. Care must be exercised in using Metallic Potassium, and only a small piece, about half the size of a green pea, is required to light. It is with the aid of a small bit of potassium that is secretly placed in a sheet of newspaper that performers apparently ignite the newspaper by simply wetting it. When the potassium on the paper comes in contact with liquid it ignites.

9 THE DEMON FIRE BALL. Drop a small piece of potassium into a saucer filled with water. With a little detonation the chemical will take fire and burn brightly on the water, shooting quickly from side to side.

10. TEARS OF FIRE. Fill a metal bowl two-thirds full of water, then on the water pour 2 or 3 teaspoonsful of gasoline. Attach a small piece of potassium to the end of your wand or spoon. If the wand or tip of spoon is placed in the bowl the benzine ignites and burns until there is no more.

11. PRODUCING FIRE WITH A DROP OF WATER. Pour a small quantity of sulphuric acid into an individual butter plate and on it deposit a piece of Sodium. If a drop of water is placed on the Sodium it will produce fire.

12. MAKING A QUICK FIRE ON ICE. A Bit of potassium dropped upon ice will produce a flame.

13. SPARKS AT THE FINGERTIPS. From a sheet of tin cut a disc about 1 1/2 inches in diameter. To the center of this disc solder the end of a small tin tube, about 1/2 inch long as shown in A of the drawing, so that it will hold a short length of wax tape. Obtain a hollow rubber ball and a 2 foot length of small rubber tube. Partly fill the ball with minute iron filings and to it attach one end of the rubber tube. The ball is placed under arm and the free end of rubber tube runs down the sleeve to the hand. The tin disc is palmed in same hand and the wax taper secretly lighted by casually passing hand over a lighted candle. If the arm is suddenly pressed down on the rubber ball, air will force some of the iron filings down the tube and through the flame of the taper, causing them to take fire and apparently fall from the fingertips in a pretty shower. Some performers use an ordinary band finger ring, on the outside of which is soldered a small piece of tin to hold the taper---see B.



14. THE FIRE FLASH. Done by letting iron filings fall from a sheet of paper about half a foot above a candle flame.

15. BEWITCHED LIGHTING CANDLES. THE TIPS OF THE WICKS of WAX candles are prepared with recipe given in No. 6. The candles, in candlesticks, are placed in different parts of the room, and attention is called to them as you make mention that you will cause them to light one at a time. With a mysterious wave of the hand over the candles, pretend to magnetize them, and in a little while the candles will smoke and take fire.

16. MAGICAL CANDLE LIGHTING. A secret lighter as explained in No. 13 is used. Candles may be blown out and relighted.

17. MARVELOUS SCROLL OF FIRE. Take a sheet of cardboard on which you have made a fancy stencil design, lay it over an ordinary sheet of paper and daub over the crevices with "Fire Proof Paint." Let the painted paper dry thoroughly. If the paper is ignited, all but the design made will burn, the design remaining intact.

18. BAFFLING FIRE WRITING. Dissolve saltpetre in warm water, making a strong solution. Take a small brush and, dipping it in the solution, write a name or word on a sheet of paper. Make a mark where the word begins for future information. When the sheet is dry, apply the end of a cigarette or cigar against the marked spot on the paper and the fire will slowly move along the lines you have written with the preparation in a mysterious manner.

THE BLAZING CORNUCOPIA. Performer forms a cornucopia from a sheet of newspaper, blows his breath on it and it bursts into flame. HOW: A previously lighted wax taper, set in a ring on the third finger is the means of ignition--see No. 13, and the sheet of paper is beforehand sprinkled with a little alcohol. When the cornucopia is formed, secretly light with taper.

## EASY FEATS.

20. DRINKING BOILING WATER. For this experiment a tin cup having a double bottom is employed. A small slit of sufficient size to permit liquid to run from the "faked" bottom to the actual bottom is made at the side. Any liquid that is poured into the cup runs into the lower compartment. To perform, pour a little water or other liquid from a bottle into the cup, and hold it over an alcohol lamp until the water which is now on the real bottom boils. A little of the water is poured on the floor from the side that has the opening, proving it to be hot; then lifting the cup, place the opposite side to your lips and make believe to drink contents; the water stays under the false bottom.

21. LIVE SPARKS AND SMOKE FROM THE MOUTH. The exhibitor places handful of cotton in his mouth, masticating and apparently swallowing great quantities. When this is finished, smoke in small quantity, which gradually becomes greater and greater in volume, is blown from his mouth; and this is followed by hot sparks issuing from the mouth.

HOW: A handful of loose cotton is chewed into a small wad. In the act of placing another handful in the mouth, the chewed wad is extracted, the performer never having more than one handful in his mouth at a time. This is continued until the artist finally places a wad of cotton, which has in its center a piece of lighted, but smoldering punk, tow or jute. The punk was lighted before commencing the trick. The smoke and sparks are created by blowing, which livens the punk and ignites the cotton. The mouth is closed as soon as the cotton commences to catch fire, serving as a sort of "damper" in preventing a flame to materialize.

If the mouth was kept shut for a short time, the smoldering punk and cotton would extinguish. The mouth, then is soon opened and the demonstration repeated. The process of opening the mouth and blowing, then closing it when a flame may appear, is repeated until the punk is used up. Always inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth. Some performers pad the mouth with the wet cotton they have chewed, lessening the danger of injuring the mouth. Other performers previously prepare more than one wad of lit punk.

22. EATING LIGHTED RAISINS. Several raisins are placed in a saucer, after which a tablespoon of grain alcohol is poured over them and the

alcohol lighted. The raisins are actually chewed and eaten, one by one, because the slight flame from the alcohol is easily put out in the act of placing the fork, with which they are taken up, in the mouth.

23. EATING A BURNING BANANA. A banana may be dipped in burning grain alcohol and eaten without ill effect, the fire being extinguished as soon as the fruit is placed to the mouth and the breath expelled.

24. EATING GLOWING COALS. In a saucer small pieces of burnt cotton, saturated with grain alcohol, appear to be live coals when the alcohol is burning. The artist eats (?) them with a fork. When the bits of cotton are placed in the mouth they will be extinguished due to the moisture of the tongue and immediate closing of the mouth.

25. THE PIPE AND GOLDEN SHOWER OF SPARKS. Blow into the stem of a clay pipe that has been partly filled with Licopodium as you hold a candle near the mouth. A pretty shower of sparks will result.

26. BURNING PITCH. A small piece of cotton that has been impregnated with melted resin is made into a ball the size of a dime, taken up with a fork and lighted. Swiftly place in mouth where it will hide. Close mouth and wipe lips with handkerchief, secretly removing from mouth.

27. PRODUCING FIRE BALLS FROM THE EAR OR ELSEWHERE AFTER SWALLOWING THEM. Small pieces of lighted Camphor placed in the mouth will be immediately extinguished when the mouth is closed quickly, and there is no danger. To apparently reproduce them from the ear, use the Flash Paper, powder and Flash Tube as described under Flash Tubes. This small parcel may previously be placed in the ear, or palmed.

28. THE LIVING GAS JET. Obtain a 15 inch glass tube, shaped like the letter L, and an ordinary gas tip. Affix this tip to one end of the tube. Now, if you have a gasoline saturated sponge or Oakum ball in your mouth, place the unprepared end of the tube in your mouth and blow slowly and steadily, the gas tip may be lighted. The light will last as long as the breath is expelled. Read No. 38.

29. THE LIVING CHANDELIER. This experiment is performed in the same manner as No. 28, but with a light, metal chandelier having two or three burners. As you blow, assistant lights the burners.

30. FIERY GLASS TUBE. This is done in the same way as No. 28, but a straight tube is employed instead of the L shaped tube with tip.

## ADVANCED TRICKS.

31. THE FIRE CHAIN. Soak a 10 inch length of candle-wick in kerosene oil and squeeze out the surplus oil. With a pair of fire tongs grasp one end, light over candle or furnace, throw head back and lower into mouth, being careful that the end is firmly held with tongs, because if it dropped, the face would be burned. When all the tape is in mouth, close lips and take out with handkerchief.

32. EATING RED HOT COALS FROM A FURNACE FIRE. Barnello gives the following: A good charcoal fire is made in a furnace. Just before the performance 4 or 5 pieces of soft pine are placed in the fire. Soft pine wood burnt to coals look like charcoal, and only by sticking a fork into it can it be told from charcoal. Charcoal, being hard and brittle, will break before the fork goes into it, but burnt soft pine coals may be readily picked up with the prongs of the fork. Charcoal will burn the performer, but burnt soft pine will not.

33. SWALLOWING BURNING OIL. The performer pours about two teaspoonsful of kerosene oil into an iron ladle and ignites it over a furnace. Into this burning oil he dips an iron teaspoon with long handle, and bringing it out with flames all around, puts it into his mouth. This action is continued several times, until the oil is all consumed, and the performer turns the ladle upside down, it being empty.

All is fair until the performer dips the teaspoon into the ladle. In reality he only wets the spoon, and what little oil is on it blazes. The flame is extinguished by blowing on it as the performer throws back his head and lifts the spoon to his mouth. This maneuver is repeated several times, until the oil in the ladle has been consumed, the artist turning the latter upside down.

34. LICKING SEALING WAX. Shaw says: Take a stick of common express sealing wax in one hand and a candle in the other, melt the wax over candle, and put on your tongue while blazing. The moisture of your mouth cools it almost instantly. Care should be taken not to get any on your lips, chin or hands. Carrington claims this is done with a preparation resembling sealing wax which melts at a low temperature.

35. BENDING AND BREAKING RED HOT IRON WITH TEETH. This is rather dangerous, and is given that the reader may learn how it is accomplished by fire-eaters. Good teeth and a strong constitution are necessary. A scrap hoop or rod is beforehand filed very thin about an inch from the end so that it will easily break in two. Or it may be bent back and forth with pliers until nearly broken off. When it has been heated to a red heat in the furnace, the prepared end is placed between the teeth and the bar is bent and broken in two after grimacing as though it is difficult. Do not touch lips or tongue. The broken end



is them dropped from the teeth into a pail of water, or let fall on a plate containing a mixture for producing colored fire.

36. MELTED LEAD IN THE MOUTH. Hot lead pouted into the performer's mouth is kept there until it is cooled and solid, after which he ejects it into a spectator's hand to prove there is no deception, the metal being sufficiently hot to compel anyone to drop it every time.

HOW: In a ladle 2 ozs. block tin, 3 ozs. lead and 5 ozs. Bismuth must first be melted together. This mixture does not necessitate great heat to melt, for even boiling water will liquify it.

A quantity about the size of a five-cent piece is melted in a ladle; from the ladle a small amount of the mixture is pouted into a spoon, the spoon assisting in cooling it. The spoon is then lifted to the mouth which takes the concoction, the dampness in mouth aiding in still further cooling it. When congealed it is taken from the mouth and a spectator invited to step up to verify that it is hot. Hot things, whether liquid or solid, that are too hot to comfortably handle may be placed in the mouth and held there without difficulty.

37. SECOND METHOD. The lead is real, but a ladle with false bottom on the style of the tin cup explained in No. 20 is used. Pretend to drink from ladle.

38. NATURAL GAS. The performer holds a lighted candle about 8 inches from his mouth, blows upon the flame, causing his breath to burn, for a stream of fire, over a foot long, is seen to come from his mouth.

A small sponge or Oakum ball is previously saturated in fine gasoline and the surplus fluid squeezed out. The sponge is then enveloped in a handkerchief which is, in turn, placed in coat pocket. While wiping the mouth with the handkerchief, secretly put the sponge in the mouth, which you firmly close, the handkerchief serving as an innocent assistant. Now part the lips slightly and blow at the lighted match or candle held directly in front and about 8 inches from mouth, and the gasoline fumes coming from the sponge will make the breath burn brilliantly. By closing the mouth, flame goes out; and avoid any inclination to inhale immediately. The sponge is removed when you again wipe your mouth.

39. FLAMING PIPES. Proceed as given in No. 28, substituting a clay pipe for the glass tube. Place mouth of bowl in your mouth, blow and light end of stem; then insert stem in mouth and light mouth of bowl.

40. THE SPONGE FIRE TRICK. Barnello says this is done by placing a couple of small sponges or Oakum balls in your ladle and wetting them by pouring gasoline or oil over them, so they will not drip. Light them and take one with the tongs. Throw back your head, and allow blazing ball to drop in mouth as you expel breath. Close mouth quickly; this shuts off oxygen and flame goes out. Remove ball as mouth is wiped with handkerchief. Do not let ball drop on chin or face.

41. ENORMOUS SHEETS OF FLAME FROM THE MOUTH. Take a mouthful of kerosene oil and carefully wipe the lips. Holding a torch away at arms length, blow sharply, forcing all the oil from your mouth through the torch flame at one time. Dodge the head backwards or to the side immediately the oil is expelled to avoid burning face. Should be done in open air as it is dangerous.

#### STRANGE EXPERIMENTS.

42. WRITING THAT IS LUMINOUS IN THE DARK. With a small piece of solid phosphorous, which has been attached to the end of a quill, write on a sheet of paper. The writing is luminous in the dark.

43. MAKING A PERSON HAVE A GHOSTLY LOOK. Mix 6 parts of olive oil and one part of phosphorous under slight heat. Close the eyes and apply to face. The appearance of the person on whose face this is rubbed will be dreadfully spooky in the dark, the mouth and eyes being black spots, while the rubbed parts seem covered with bluish flame.

44. MAKING FACES APPEAR FRIGHTFUL. Into spirits of wine soak some hay saffron for about 12 hours. Then dissolve in this some ordinary table salt and draw off the resultant liquid. Pour this on some tow and light. Those present with ruddy complexions will seem olive in color and those of fair complexions will appear green. Lips and cheeks will be dark green.

45. DESTROYING COLORS AND MAKING THE FACES OF THE COMPANY DEATHLY WHITE. Saturate a handful of table salt in about a half pint of alcohol for a few minutes and light. This must be done in a room.