

# The Expert Escamoteur's Equipment



**Tony Shiels**

**An Exploration in Three Parts  
of Various Aspects of  
Cups and Balls Conjuring**

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## Introduction by Quentin Reynolds

If you associate the name of Tony 'Doc' Shiels with weird, strange and bizarre magick, you will, no doubt, be surprised to discover that in his professional work, the Linking Rings and the Cups and Balls effects, were the stable part of his repertoire.

As you read through this manuscript, and bear in mind it was written in 1966, you will be inspired by his enthusiasm for the subject.

In more recent times the Cups and Balls has had a revival back onto the streets and is the featured effect by many of magic's leading street performers.

At the rear of this manuscript I've listed some recommended further reading, published since Tony's articles first appeared in The Linking Ring.

As publisher of one of Tony's other books, **The Shiels Effect** <http://www.TheShielsEffect.com> I was delighted to discover some of his older writings lost in the files of magazines. As these come to light I will post them on the above website.

There you will find updated information on 'Doc' (now retired from performing, living in a remote part of south-west Ireland, painting and exhibiting his works) as well as his writings.

Enjoy this manuscript and I hope it inspires you with your study of the trick of tricks...the Cups and Balls.

To your success,

**Quentin Reynolds**

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## Part One - The Apparatus

*"Note also that you must have none of your trinkets wanting, least you be put to a nonplus: besides it behoveth you to be mindful whereabout you go in every trick lest you mistake and so discredit the Art."*

**(‘The Art of Jvngling or Legerdemaine’ 1614.)**

ONE fateful night, some fifteen or sixteen years ago, I sat in a large theatre and witnessed the most amazing man perform the cleverest feat of conjuring I had ever seen. The magician was Galli Galli and his trick was the Cups and balls ... It was magic . . . magic . . . MAGIC ! ! !

Indeed, he was ". . . *A most dexterous fellow; and even beyond Eurybatos of OEchalia, of whom we have heard so much*" . . . and the Cups and Balls was, and is, the classic trick of tricks. Its many variations are endless, complex and eternally fascinating. I was securely hooked that night and remain so today.

The actual equipment, the props, the cups and the balls themselves are of special interest to the student escamoteur. Leaving aside such related trifles as walnut shells, thimbles, Chinese Marbles and notes under teacups . . . let us take a look at some of the predilections of prestidigitators past and present: and thus attempt to justify the rather ponderous title I have tacked onto this series of meanderings!

The Greeks had a couple of words for it, ‘acetabula et calculi’ . . . the cups and pebbles. Pebbles are talkative objects”; most dexterous fellows those Greek acetabularii must have been. Victor Farelli was highly suspicious of the whole business and suggested that the pebbles were, in fact, switched for soft pellets of bread.

But what of Conus, the great nineteenth-century escamoteur *"He used balls of solid brass, did then nor cause a loudish clatter"*. Well according to Robert-Houdin, Conus met this difficulty by means of a special sleight, consisting of a ‘check’ given to the ball in the act of introducing it under the cup, which made it stop dead ..." (*Secrets of Conjuring and Magic, P. 347*). Anyway, the brass balls should not have been too much of a problem to a magician who advertised that he could conjure his wife from under a cup! All the same, the brass ball and pebble puzzle is worth pondering over.

Have YOU ever tried the trick with pebbles? It can be done, though your moves are rather limited. The Greeks (and Conus) may have performed at a lively speed, as the Egyptians do, with much banging and clanging as part of the routine. The general din would help to cover up the occasional 'talking' pebble. I really don't know the secret, but a most logical solution is that suggested by Eddie Joseph in his Advanced Lessons in Cups and Balls.

He writes. *"I may warn you that the balls announce their arrival when dropped in cup to those close to the table. This may be overcome by lining the roof of the cup with felt."*

He then describes a routine using cups and balls studded with Rhinestones; a case in which a lined cup would be useful not only to avoid un-welcome noise, but also to protect the bejewelled balls. A similar difficulty arises when wine-glasses are loaded for a climax. Senor Mardo states that Max Malini's prowess in this direction was the result of lifelong practice ... and advises the use of small livestock, fruits or larger balls instead!

Today, balls of sponge, cork and crochet-covered rubber are generally employed; and each performer has his own individual ideas on the matter of which is best.

Laurie Ireland's famous routine probably helped to make sponge-balls so popular with many Cups and Balls experts. Claude Rix, the brilliant French manipulator, lists Ireland's pamphlet as one of the three best works on the Cups and Balls. Burtini, another well-known expert escamoteur writes, "I have tried various materials for the 'Balls'. I found that sponge-rubber suits me best, easy to handle, silent, easy to obtain."

George McIntyre, one of Britain's top Cups and Balls men, writes, *"I do not like cork balls and use only American Sponges; they are quite large and real sponge, NOT latex foam. I feel if one uses a large cup and very small balls the whole effect looks silly."*

Brian MacCarthy says, *"The sponge-rubber balls are very easy to palm, never talk, and two of them can be squeezed together and held as one ball a distinct advantage."*

But, there are those who beg to differ . . .

Dai Vernon uses solid rubber balls about an inch in diameter and crochet-covered. He is anti-sponge ball as the collapsible nature of the sponge may lead the audience to suspect that this has something to do with the trick.

And Senor Mardo writes, *"The man who becomes attached to the sponge balls is still a lover of the semi-mechanical means by which a trick works; he should break this habit at once and convince himself that the best gimmicks in the world are his fingers and his misdirection."*

Medjid Kan Rezvani, 'King of the Tomatoes', strikes an original note by employing sponge discs, two inches in diameter, half an inch thick and sometimes covered in red silk gauze.

For all 'Bowl' routines (such as Rezvani's, Roy Benson's, Don Alan's, etc.), sponge-balls would appear to be ideal. And for the classic Cups and Balls, sponge-rubber is certainly the most favored modern material; with crochet-covered balls running a close second and increasing in popularity all the time.

Kapok and horsehair are on the wane as is cork, the favorite stuff of the old school of prestidigitators. One reason for this decline of the cork 'muscade' is, one supposes, its tendency to talk a little.

But the main objection (my own at least) is in handling. As a child, I began to learn the trick using small candle-blackened balls of smooth cork. My principle mentors were Professor Hoffmann and W H. Cremer (unusual for one of my generation . . . but I happened upon them in a musty and dusty old second-hand bookshop!) and after long hours of butter-fingered practice, I despaired of ever emulating the easy manner of that smiling Egyptian who had inspired me so much.

I could not, and still cannot, 'conjure' the ball as Cremer and the Professor asked me to, with it pinched between the second and third fingers. My hand could not be *"opened and closed with perfect freedom"* and I was most definitely *"hampered by the presence"* of that slippery little object.

Oh, I could manage it for short periods but the stupid thing would eventually decide to misbehave at just the wrong moment; so I honestly believed that I would never be a real magician as the Cups and Balls was *"the groundwork of all legerdemain!"* Luckily, after months of suffering, I tried Hoffmann's 'Third Method' of palming, using a larger ball like *"the*

*celebrated Bosco*" . . . a simple, relaxed finger palm in fact and just the same as Dai Vernon recommends.

It was years later that I discovered Vernon's routine and learned just how delightfully and ingeniously simple the old Cups and Balls could be. This, my friends, is something of a confession from the heart ... I suspect that more than a few magicians have suffered as beginners when juggling a small cork ball!

BUT let us return to the expert escamoteurs, those who CAN handle cork and anything else you care to think of. John Ramsay was one of the real masters of the art, and he began his famous two-cup routine with FOUR cork balls palmed in one hand! Admittedly, they were not actually round; as Victor Farelli states, "*in reality they are polyhedrons.*" Ramsay's 'cups' were a pair of paper ice-cream cartons, no Rhinestone-studded goblets for that dexterous Scot . . . though his wand was tipped with silver!

As Senor Mardo says, "*The cups could be made out of aluminum, brass, copper, crockery, onyx, paper, earthenware, glass, gold, marble, tin or wood.*" Plastic too if you just don't care about such things! What do the experts use?

Ireland advises large size cups of heavy spun brass, nickel plated and with the insides painted white. Tom Osborne also advocates painting the insides and even suggests decorating the outsides 'barber pole style' for use under a strong light. The traditional shape ... a truncated cone, with a shoulder to leave a space between two nested cups ... is still the commonest, though the sizes vary somewhat.

The type of metal used is important not merely for the sake of appearance, **different metals mean different weights of cup.** Some performers like a light weight cup of plated aluminum; these are available at most dealers and are usually quite inexpensive . . . but **heavier cups are generally considered better for the job.** The heavy cups sold by Carl Brema were very highly regarded by the connoisseurs of quality equipment. Brema, by the way, was one of the first performers to use rubber balls instead of cork. Other American makers of high-class cups include Petrie-Lewis; the Petrie cups are copper, plain or chrome plated.

George McIntyre writes of them, "*I consider that the Petrie-Lewis cups are the best one can buy ... I got two sets over ten years ago and would not part with them for a 10 pound note.*"

Harry Stanley, the well known English dealer, used to sell a similar type of cup . . . gold plated if you so desired.

Among the best of the top quality cups were those made in England by Bill Burtini; he describes their manufacture as follows ... "*A set of Double Rimmed Cups spun from High Quality Copper Circles, these are then Polished and Nickel Plated (Heavy Nickel). They are again Polished and Heavily Chrome Plated after which they receive a final High Polish.*" That's how all Burtini's Quality Props were made. I know of no better method. As a matter of interest the thickness of the copper sheets from which the circles were cut was .028". Now you know.

A slight departure from the classic profile was the 'Stubby' cup introduced by Tannen's; three and a half inches high with a wider top and bottom and a deeper recess than usual.

But the first real break with tradition was the cup designed by Paul Fox. This very fine cup, so deceptively small when compared with the load, was kept pretty exclusive at first and used only by very few magicians such as Dai Vernon, Danny Dew, Faucett Ross and Paul Fox himself. Dai Vernon made the Fox cups famous on his lecture tours, and they are now available to all. In America these cups are spun in steel and chrome plated; in England, Harry Stanley sells a similar cup in copper or chrome. Dai Vernon's own set is Sterling Silver, beautifully engraved . . . enough to make any sensitive escamoteur's mouth water!

My own first set of cups was very old and made of soldered tin. I think I paid five shillings for them, not expensive for genuine antiques!

I practised every move with enthusiasm and managed to split the seams of these poor goblets during a spirited rendering of the 'Galloping Post'. So much for soldered tin! But, say the experts, you should be able to use anything . . . coffee cups, dice shakers, cigarette tins, glasses wrapped in newspaper, etc., etc. . . . and of course they are right.

This is modern, Malini and after, post-servante philosophy. The Cups and Balls can be done in many different ways and with many different objects. As a postscript to this particular article, I will leave you with a detailed list of some of the equipment and routines used by one of Britain's most expert escamoteurs, Canadian-born **John Gilliland**:

<b>Type Of Cup</b>	<b>Type of Ball</b>	<b>Routine</b>	<b>Climax</b>
Unique 'Shortie' Cups in heavy copper	1" crochet-covered rubber balls	Standard 3-cup routines (Vernon, Brooke etc.)	1.5" sponge 2.5" rubber balls
Ice-cream tubs (paper)	5/8" cork balls	Ramsay routine	1" cork balls, 1.5" sponge balls
Large paper cup	1" wooden balls, wads of paper etc.	1-cup routines	Various
Small brass 'pots', 1" high x 2.25" wide	5/8" cork balls. small sponge balls, balls of aluminum foil etc.	2-cup routines; combination with large paper cup	1" crochet-covered ball. Large dice etc.
Plastic mustard pots, 1.25" high x 2" wide.	5/8" glass marbles, aluminum foil balls etc.	Miniature 2 & 3 cup routines	5/8" dice, silks
Depot-made plastic cups, 2.25" high x 2" wide	Small sponge balls, curtain tassels etc.	Miniature three cup routine (Kort)	Balled note, large balls etc.
Plastic salt pot bases, 1" high x 1.4" wide.	Sponge balls	Modified 3-shell routine (Trixer etc.)	Small dice, coins
Chop Cup	Various types of ball	Several different routines (Jennings, Miller, Brooke, my own etc.)	Fruit, large ball, Figurine etc.
Brass bowl	1.25" sponge balls	Roy Benson routine (& variants)	Various

*"Concerning the ball, the plaies and devises thereof are infinite, in so much as if you can handle them well, you may shewe therewith a hundred feats."*  
**(Reginald Scot. 'Discoverie of Witchcraft'. 1584.)**

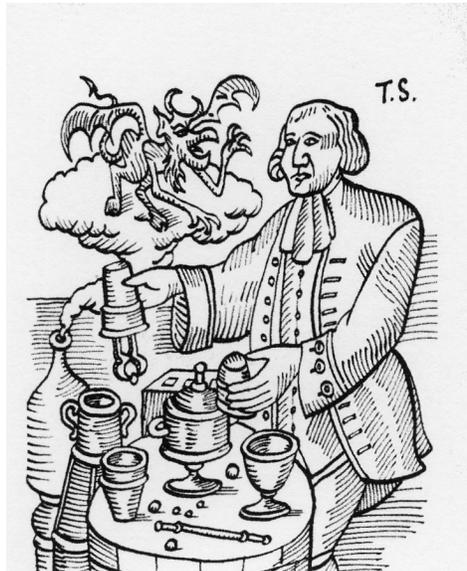
## Part Two - Different Cups

*"Those who have seen the real Gilly-Gilly man, such as perform for you on the streets of Port Said, will acknowledge that their presentation of the classic has never been equalled by the Westerner."*

**(E. Brian McCarthy: "The Chameleon Cups and Balls")**

*"During my residence in the land of the Pharaohs, which lasted over seven years, I saw dozens of native performers, and in my opinion they were... with a few rare exceptions . . . extremely clumsy in their methods."*

**(Victor Farelli: "John Ramsay's Cups and Balls")**



The Egyptian escamoteur, expert or inexperienced, seems to have been the cause of much controversy among magical historians. Opinions as to his skill (or lack of it) continue to vary. . . and as the only Gilly-Gilly man I have ever seen was, in fact, Galli Galli, I do not intend to enter the argument. It may be worth noting, however, that the title of **T.W's. G.M.** (*The World's Greatest Magician*) was at one time, fought over by Galli Galli and John Scarne . . .P. C. Sorcar (Author of "Manipulations of the Indian Cups and Balls") was no doubt biding his time!

The main subjects of debate, from the historian's point of view, are the origins of the classic trick and the Egyptians' use of the classic 'truncated cone' type of cup. It is widely believed that both the trick and our conical cups were invented by the ancient Egyptians; actually, both

suppositions seem unlikely in the light of research by Farelli and others.

But it is a fact that, of all the Oriental versions, the Egyptian presentation (apart from the live chick production) is closest to our own; and their cups, though slightly larger, are very similar to the ones we use. The Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Turkish and Persian Cups and Balls are quite different and their equipment deserves closer inspection ...

The Chinese magician uses crockery tea cups or small basins, and gelatine 'berries' as balls. John Mulholland recalls seeing a Chinese conjuror produce two mice, a frog and a goldfish as a startling climax to the trick. In Japan, shallow saucers are used, and wads of cloth or paper.

The traditional Japanese handling of the Cups and Balls requires great skill, but the basic loading 'move' is fairly simple and is employed in several Western bowl and sponge-ball routines. As a change from the saucers, saki cups are occasionally used and the technique is not unlike the Indians'. The Hindu Jadoowalla (described at length by Eddie Joseph) has cups turned from wood with a knob or handle at the top of each . . . The performer grips this handle in the thumb-crotch and goes in for a lot of clever loading and stealing with his third and tittle fingers. Balls are generally made of cloth. In Turkey the native escamoteur uses large wooden cups of a conical shape.

The 'muscades' are corks or, sometimes, olives. It is just possible that the Turkish magicians may even know something about the ancient problems of pebble manipulation! The Persian cup is also made of wood, in the shape of a small bowl with a hollowed foot.

The rim of the foot is gripped between the thumb and forefinger and the handling is similar to the Hindus'. Balls are usually of cork, though the famous Rezvani uses sponge-rubber.

OUT of all these Oriental versions of the Cups and Balls, a Western adaption of certain techniques (Japanese, Hindu and Persian in particular) has produced the 'Bowl Routines' made popular by Roy Benson and Don Alan (who began his successful television career by doing the trick with a brass bowl, sponge-balls and a bagel). Where the trick . . . with cups, bowls, shells or whatever originated, no one seems to know; but like so many things of a magical nature, it was probably performed in the Orient long before arriving in the Western World.

John Mulholland has written that, *"The Chinese also use a number of*

*extremely cleverly devised mechanical cups, which they substitute for the unprepared cups. It is an idea which is quite practical for the parlor performer of other countries to copy."*

Mulholland himself does a neat substitution in one of his liquid-climax routines: whether or not he got the idea from a clever Chinese I really cannot say. Mechanical devices and gimmicked cups have often been employed by the artful Occidental, though the practice is frowned upon by purist escamoteurs.

Senor Mardo is very much a purist in this matter. He writes: "*Mechanical Cups . . . There are hundreds of them. They are not only an insult to a man's skill but each and every one that has been placed on the market failed to meet the requirements as a substitute for the hand.*"

Nevertheless, gimmicked goblets and other pieces of mechanical trickery have often been a part of the escamoteur's equipment.

Quite a few old-timers caused a number of balls to disappear with the aid of a cunning device, fitted inside a cup, consisting of several sewing machine needles which impaled the muscades as the cup was rammed down over them.

Another trick cup is the type designed to produce liquids; this has a double lining and the wine begins to flow when a wax seal is scratched away from a small air hole inside. A cup specially made to hold locked spring goods is a further example of gimmickry.

One clever device which I remember reading about enabled the performer to actually multiply or vanish the cups themselves, nine in number, which were nested together at the start and/or finish of the routine. Burtini, I believe, made a set of these for Victor Farelli; he also produced many other special examples of superb quality craftsmanship.

False bottoms and secret compartments all have their place in the complete catalogue of mechanical cups, and it would take a far more diligent researcher than I to list them all. One type I had early experience with . . . and can, therefore, write about with some authority ... is Frank Taylor's Autokups'. Dr. Taylor's invention enables the inexpert escamoteur to give a fairly interesting performance without any difficult sleight of hand.

In the original version, the cups were cardboard which, according to

Bruce Elliott (who described them in the Phoenix and Classic Secrets of Magic) ..."*... because of their ordinariness, are silent proof to the audiences that nothing need be suspected about the cups used.*"

Mine were made of aluminium, and sold by Max Andrews . . . complete with a set of green wooly pom-poms as the puppet balls. They were, to me, a great disappointment and I soon cut the strings; but they must have pleased others so maybe it was an act of youthful arrogance!

THE best of all the tricky devices is, to my mind, the famous Highball or Chop Chop Cup; a simple but ingenious idea which has found favor with many expert escamoteurs. Al Wheatley's beautiful invention is wide open to future adaptation and application and, if used wisely, is the most 'ungimmicky' in appearance of all the gimmicked cups.

Leaving the subject of cups, two more examples of magical engineering deserve the attention of the student escamoteur, the 'Muscade Vase' and the special Cups and Balls table.

Frikell commences his description of the 'Multiplication Pass' with the words, "*If there's any one among the party who believes in witchcraft, I very earnestly advise their retiring; since I am about to perform much more surprising wonders than any you have yet seen.*"

He goes on to explain the use of, "*. . . a vase of tin, at the bottom of which is a false bottom, on hinges, which can fall at pleasure, when turned over on the table, by means of a small trigger, placed at the lower part of one of the handles. You have previously put a dozen or so of balls between the false and the real bottom.*"

A later adaptation of the trick vase, for use in conjunction with the 'Multiplication Pass', was a faked bowler or top hat, which was in favor up to what I like to think of as the 'Post-Malini-Period'.

Max Malini was one of the first escamoteurs to do away with the 'Servante' which, in its turn, had replaced the old 'Gibicere' or 'Budget' bag. A table fitted with a shelf, net, or hooks is a mechanical aid; Malini, Dai Vernon and others scorned its use and performed the trick impromptu, relying on pure skill and good misdirection. But tables with holes, traps, wells and the like have also contributed to the escamoteur's arcana.

There have been many designs over the years but one of the most recent is the 'Lunlift', a table invented by Robert Lunn and described in ***Abra***

(No. 930) about three years ago. This, according to the inventor, is a "*Multi-Climax Version of Cups and Balls Without Body-Loads or Worry*", and enables one to produce three apples, three lemons and three glasses of liquid. As well as a table with a box-like sloping top, and fitted with six lifting arms, 'Lunlift' requires a set of gimmicked cups and all manner of threads, pins, strips of celluloid and whatnot ... all to avoid the bulging pocket!

To me, it is a rather complicated alternative to the normal servante and, though it probably works quite well, 'Lunlift' is certainly not the simplest solution to the big-loads-without-bulging-pockets problem.

Well, that's about as far as I feel prepared or qualified to go into either the more out of the way examples, or the various accoutrements and impedimenta, of the escamoteur's craft.

I could have taken a look at the thimble-riggers and shell-gamesters, ball-and-conesters and Chinese-marvellers; but I plead ignorance and laziness as reason or excuse for my omissions. It would have been nice to delve into, say, the Balinese Coconut Shell and papaya trick or, perhaps, Lewis Ganson's 'Bags of Everything' . . . but my time and scholarship are sadly limited. In the third and final section of this somewhat tortile treatise I hope to browse around some of the literature on the subject of Cups and Balls; a most important part of the escamoteur's equipment.

*"Give us a large enough table, and strong enough traps, and we will make the Balearic Isles disappear and transform Skye into Asia (you see? Asia - azure! We warn the reader, that he must twist syllables as well as ingers, before he can excel as an expert in the weird science.)"*

**(W. H. CREMER, "The Secret Out", 1871)**

*"Have YOU always wanted to do the Cups and Balls? No time for practice? Then this IS for you. Now the Cups and Balls are almost completely mechanical. A few minutes, and you can be an expert."*

**(Tannen 'Magiclog')**

## Part Three - A Warm Look at Various Tomes of Trickery

*"I take good care not to preform the boring series of 'passes' explained in the old books of Ozanam, Guyot, Decremps and others. These out-of-date descriptions are enough to discourage even the boldest of those who have taken the trouble to read them."*

**(E. Raynaly, author of "LES PROPOS D'UN ESCAMOTEUR".)**

*"Many a scroll and tombstone of ancient Egypt describes the trick and the original library of Alexandria had shelves on the subject."*

**(Senor Mardo, "THE CUPS AND BALLS", p. 7.)**



BE warned, student escamoteur! As originator of the timid-approach-to-billet-switching, I am an untrustworthy guide when we come to educative works on sleight of hand and the veritable labyrinth of Cups and Balls literature. But hardly moreso, it would appear, than several of the time-honoured and respected 'authorities'.

Reginald Scot, though often quoted as one of the earliest tutors, wrote, *"I professe rather to discover than teach these mysteries."*

*"The Discoverie of Witchcraft."* -The Art of Jvgling or Legerdemaine," *"Hocus Pocus Junior," "Hocus Pocus or The Whole Art of Legerdemaine,"* and the other ancient and hallowed grimoires of the conjuring bibliophile are pretty useless as books of instruction . . . not that we could afford to buy them anyway!

Victor Farelli ... on "Hocus Pocus Junior" . . . has written, "The anonymous author of this book professes to teach his readers how to perform the Cups and Balls, but, I doubt very much if anybody has ever succeeded in learning that particular trick from a perusal of the vague instructions given."; and ... on Henry Dean's "Hocus Pocus" . . . "It would certainly be well nigh impossible to learn how to do the Cups and Balls from Dean's instructions,"

So, who else should we look to for instruction in this, the oldest trick in the book?

Book! Which book? Well . . . there is, for example, "Nouvelles Recreations Physiques et Mathematiques" by Gilles-Edme Guyot; published in 1749. This book has forty pages on the Cups and Balls and is commonly regarded as the original source of later explanations by Decromps, Ponsin, Cremer, Hoffmann, etc.

But... if you will allow me to indulge in a little historiography . . . Professor Hoffmann suggested (In "Modern Magic," p. 278) that Guyot borrowed his material "from a German source"!

Roy Short, (in the "Magic Circular," July, 1953. p. 327) suggests that this source could be a certain Herr Kopp, whose instructions for the Cups and Balls were published in a "British Encyclopaedia" during the eighteenth century. I do not know if this work was a Scottish edition of the "English Encyclopaedia" which, in turn, was a copy of the French "Encyclopedique Methodiques" (mentioned in the Stanyon and Farelli Cups and Balls Bibliographies) which contained a fairly detailed description of "Le Jeu des Gobelets": but ... whether this is fact or fancy . . . the French Encyclopedique was published twelve years after Guyot's book first appeared.

Still . . . Kopp, "*whose performances are deservedly preferred to those of former artists,*" could have had his routines published in the fatherland long before Gilles-Eame arrived on the scene. I'm rambling again aren't I? No matter.

I give you fair warning! Another point, Roy Short states that Kopp's description was the first to mention the use of a wand in Cups and Balls magic . . . "*a small rod, called Jacob's staff.*" But what about Henry Dean's "*black sticks of magic to shew your wonders with . . .*"? Sorry. I'm stretching this paragraph beyond all reason; I'll stop rambling and leave such matters to the historians.

WHERE were we? Ah yes, books of instruction. Although many of the older books are rather too vague to be of much use, some of them are quite valuable reference works as far as 'passes' and sleights are concerned. Dr. Jules Dhotel (in "Magic with Small Apparatus," p. 275.) writes "*I have selected eight passes from forty which have been explained up to the present time.*" Guyot explained twenty seven of these 'passes,' the other thirteen crop up here, there and everywhere.

In more recent times Eddie Joseph has described about thirty! How many of these 'passes' do we really need? It all depends ... a pretty good performance can be given with just three or four; and if you can do a convincingly smooth French Drop, you are well on the way to becoming an expert escamoteur. But, obviously, the more sleights you know the better equipped you are. Therefore, read what you can find of the better eighteenth and nineteenth century writers; they will do you more good than harm.

Two books which are still fairly easy to come by are Cremer's "The Secret Out" and Hoffmann's "Modern Magic." As most of Kopp's material was copied by Cremer (or Frikell) and Guyot's by Hoffmann, these two volumes contain most of what you need to know. Just as a by-the-way ... I mentioned in the first of these articles how 'difficult' I found the cork 'muscade' to be when following Cremer's instructions; I later discovered that many of the old professors soaked the balls in glycerine for several hours before using them, and this process makes a world of difference.

A classic nineteenth century work is Robert-Houdin's "Secrets of Conjuring and Magic," which devotes twenty-nine pages to the Cups and Balls, and includes descriptions of the methods used by Conus and Bosco. Conus was the fellow who could manipulate balls of solid brass. Bosco was, perhaps, the most famous and flamboyant of the old-style escamoteurs.

In his "Memoirs," Robert-Houdin gives a detailed description of Bosco's stage setting . . . "*a long three-storied sideboard, entirely covered with black serge. This lugubrious buffet was adorned with a number of wax candles among which glistened the apparatus. At the topmost point of this strange etagere was a death's head ... In front of the stage, and near the spectators, was a table covered by a brown cloth, reaching to the ground, on which five brass cups were symmetrically arranged. Finally, above this table hung a copper ball, which strangely excited my curiosity!*" . . . and

his costume "... a little black velvet jacket, fastened round the waist by a leathern belt of the same color. His sleeves were excessively short, and displayed a handsome arm. He wore loose black trousers ornamented at the bottom with a ruche of lace, and a large white collar round his neck."

The father of modern conjuring seems to have been rather surprised at Bosco's big buildup for a performance of the old Cups and Balls, but he admits that "*Bosco displayed great skill, and was heartily applauded by the public.*" I bet he was too!

BOSCO reminds me very much of what I have read of the great Max Malini; both were wandering escamoteurs with funny accents, a terrific sense of showmanship and great skill with the goblets. They both, eventually, made the 'big time.'

Thinking of Malini leads me, naturally, to people like Dai Vernon and all the modern masters of the Cups and Balls. Vernon, whose great routines appear in the "Stars of Magic" and "The Dai Vernon Book of Magic," admits that Malini influenced him greatly in his presentation of the old classic. The Cups and Balls became a 'Close-Up' trick, to be performed surrounded, without using a servante or other old fashioned aids.

And the twentieth century experts are as good as ... or better than ... any of the old-time escamoteurs. Let me just name a few of the many magicians who have made a feature of this marvellous old trick ... Maurier, John Ramsay, Ken Brooke, Rezvani, Charlie Miller, Paul Fox, Larry Jennings, John Mulholland, Mohammed Bey, John Platt, 'Hen' Fetsch, Laurie Ireland, Eddie Joseph, Wilfred Jonson, Galli Galli, Dr. Daley, Senor Mardo, Sam Borland, Hans Trixer, Milt Kort, Ed Marlo, Don Alan, Jack Miller, Joe Berg, Johnny Paul, Claude Rix, etc., etc., etc. ... I could go on but I've already rambled too much in this article.

There's really no more room to go into details of even a few of the modern books on the subject; so I shall give you a small selective list of some of the better books, published during the last twenty-five years, which contain words of great wisdom on the Cups and Balls. If you want a really comprehensive bibliography, I suggest that you turn to Victor Farelli's, pester Edgar Heyl ... or wait for the one which I know John Gilliland has been working on and which he may (I hope) decide to publish. Anyway, here is a short list of very good books for the attention of all student escamoteurs.

1. "CLASSIC SECRETS OF MAGIC" (Bruce Elliott)
2. "THE MAGIC OF REZVANI" (Maurice Sardina)
3. "ROUTINED MANIPULATIONS" Part One. (Lewis Ganson)
4. "STARS OF MAGIC" (Ed. by Starke, etc.)
5. "THE CHAMELEON CUPS AND BALLS" (E. Brian MacCarthy)
6. "THE HINDU CUPS" (Eddie Joseph)
7. "THE LAST WORD ON CUPS AND BALLS" (Eddie Joseph)
8. "THE CUPS AND BALLS" (Senor Mardo)
9. "THE DAI VERNON BOOK OF MAGIC" (Lewis Ganson)
10. JOHN RAMSAY'S ROUTINE WITH CUPS & BALLS" (Victor Farelli)
11. "KORT IS NOW IN SESSION" (Milton Kort)
12. "LE JEU DES GOBELETS" (Alma)

There . . . that will have to do as a very basic list, limited to fairly recent publications. "Le Jeu des Gobelets " by Alma (Maurice Meajean) is, unfortunately, not available in an English translation; but it has to be mentioned as the biggest book devoted to the cups and balls. Claude Rix names it as his favourite work on close-up magic of any kind.

I think I should stop now. There's no profound authority behind these writings I know, but, I promise you there's a good deal of enthusiasm for the subject. And that is why I've written about the Cups and Balls ... to express, if I could, some of my enjoyment of the old masterpiece and, maybe, help to infect one or two newcomers with a similar enthusiasm ... or bore them to tears! I sincerely hope that the really expert escamoteurs will forgive my impudence. Rabadallah! Rabadalou! Dzim! Dzoum!

*"If any of you are very excitable, I beg you not to pay any attention to the trick I am about to perform, for it might keep you awake at night!"*  
**(Dr. Jules Dhotel, " MAGIC WITH SMALL APPARATUS" p.289)**

## Recommended Resources for the Escamoteur by Quentin Reynolds

**Bill Palmer's** <http://www.cupsandballsmuseum.com> A fascinating website for any student of the cups and balls.

**Al Schneider's World Magic Center.** I highly recommend anything by Al Schneider. He is a superb teacher of sleight of hand and has analyzed every minute detail of every move. If you ever get the chance for personal tuition with Al, grab the opportunity. <http://www.worldmagiccenter.com>

**Gazzo's Cups and Balls.** The routine with which Gazzo earned his living as a street entertainer for over twenty years. This routine pulled in LOTS of money. Simple and easy to follow routine yet hugely entertaining for any audience. Available from good dealers.

**Michael Ammar's Cups and Balls.** I've seen Michael's routine a number of times, most recently after he had completed over a thousand shows at Caesar's Magical Empire. A joy to watch! Details of Michael's work is available from all good dealers or direct from Michael Ammar at <http://www.ammarmagic.com>

**For Cups and Balls supplies** go to: <http://www.theambitiouscard.com>  
Everything you would want whether performing close-up or on the street.

## Further Reading on Tony 'Doc' Shiels

For information on *The Shiels Effect*, a manual on achieving publicity and celebrity status for mentalists go to: <http://www.TheShielsEffect.com>

For updates on **Tony Shiels**, details of his other works and his most recent book, *Jabberwocky, the Lost Writings of 'Doc' Shiels* go to: <http://www.TheShielsEffect.com>