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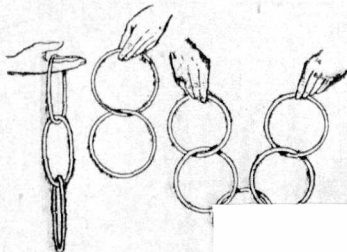
HINTS TO YOUNG CONJURERS

BY
Oswald Williams



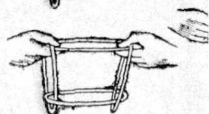
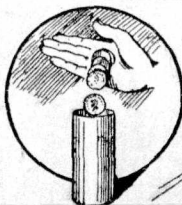
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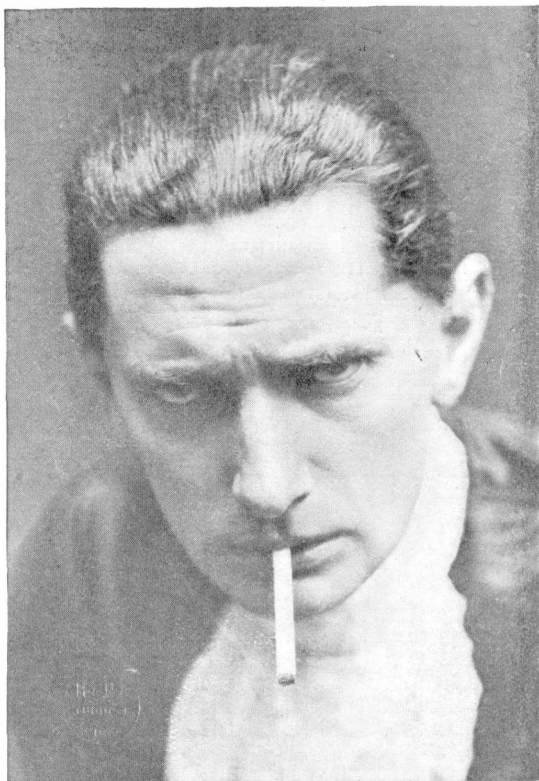
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TO
YOUNG CONJURERS



BY
OSWALD WILLIAMS.

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HINTS to YOUNG CONJURERS.

BY

Oswald Williams.

Let us come to the point at once. You want to learn conjuring? You want to take up conjuring as a hobby?

You have a good choice of a hobby, for apart from any pleasure you may derive from performing—and the pleasure of performing to an appreciative audience is very real—you may be sure that in magic you will have a very interesting hobby. A close study of conjuring will take you out of yourself, sharpen your intellect, provide never-ending material for thought. I doubt if there is any other hobby which yields so much pleasure at such a small cost in pounds, shillings, and pence. I say nothing as to the cost of the time given to it, for if you are really fond of a hobby you do not grudge any expenditure of time bestowed upon it. Magic is an ideal hobby for the lonely man, because while he is developing his knowledge of it he is not dependent on any outside assistance. He can work and amuse himself. Magic is also an ideal hobby for the man with troops of friends, for the more friends a magician has the more often he will be called upon to amuse them with a performance, and the pleasure he receives himself will certainly not be less than that which he gives to others.

Another point. The study of magic can be carried on anywhere—on the top of a bus, when you are walking in the street, or lounging on the sea-shore. Part of the study of magic must be conducted in the privacy of your own room, of course, but a good part of it can be carried on in any place, at any time, and without any materials.

Let me begin by clearing your mind of a few popular, but entirely erroneous, notions about the study of conjuring. Conjuring does not necessarily demand from the student that he should learn how to make a number of difficult movements with his fingers and hands. So far as manual dexterity goes, many a fine trick can be learned in five minutes, but possibly the ability to present that trick in such a way that it will appear to be almost a miracle may not be acquired in five years.

The old, old saying "the quickness of the hand deceives the eye" is pure rubbish. Forget that you ever heard it. You cannot make a movement with your hand so quickly that the eye cannot follow it. When a conjurer does not want the audience to see some movements of his hands or fingers he hoodwinks them in two or three ways. The most important way is by misdirection. The conjurer directs the attention of the audience away from what he is actually doing, and he does this by his manner, his speech, or his gesture. We will come to that matter presently.

Another popular error about conjuring is that connected with the "tricks of the trade." People think that you merely have to acquire a knowledge of the secrets of tricks and—behold!—you are a conjurer. That is a great mistake. Many of the best secrets are secrets no longer, for the broad principles of conjuring are fairly well known even to the general public. That knowledge does not detract from the fascination of watching a good conjuring performance. If you are performing to an intelligent audience—and, as a rule, the more intelligent the audience the more sincere will be their appreciation—you may rest assured that a good sprinkling of them can reason out for themselves how some of your tricks must be done. Intelligent people know quite well that you are not presenting miracles. What you, the conjurer, have to do is to prevent those people from knowing exactly how you make the impossible possible. I am not suggesting that even the most intelligent members of your audience will arrive at the exact secrets of your tricks, but they will put two and two together and draw their own conclusions.

For example, if I give eighteen cards to one man and ask him to pocket them, and give twelve cards to another man and make five cards pass magically from the first man to the second, it does not need a great amount of intelligence to discover the fact that the cards must have been changed in some way before the two men put them in their pockets. Having arrived at that conclusion your intelligent spectators will set their memories to work and will try and think out just what happened before the cards were put into the men's pockets. Their memories will probably fail them at that point; indeed, it is your business, as a conjurer, to make their memories faulty without appearing to do anything of the kind.

Do not attach too much importance to the so-called secrets of conjuring. The mere knowledge of how a trick is done will not help you very far on the road; you will still be without the knowledge of how to do the trick. That kind of knowledge is acquired by practical experience.

But enough of theory. You are anxious to become a conjurer. You want to begin. Very well, begin. Take any trick that happens to catch your fancy and study it. It does not matter very much what it is, as long as its performance does not demand a great amount of dexterity. The easier the trick the better—to begin with, at any rate.

Now, remember this. A conjurer is a man who apparently breaks some law of nature. He does not really achieve miracles, of course, but that is the impression he has to produce on the minds of his audience. It does not matter very much how he produces it as long as the impression is there when the trick is over. Very well. We will suppose that you have begun your conjuring career by learning some easy, mechanical trick, a trick that "works itself." You may feel inclined to say to yourself: "That trick will not deceive anybody; it's so easy." Well, a trick of that kind has its limitations, of course. You must make allowances for these limitations. Your task is to get the utmost possible effect out of the trick, to do it as well as it can be done. The trick may be something quite simple, fit only to deceive a young child. Never mind. Do the trick in such a way that the child is thoroughly well deceived.

The purchase of the first trick is sure to be followed by the purchase of many others, if you have the real love of magic within you. Here a word of warning is necessary, even if money is plentiful with you. When buying

a number of tricks you may fall into a very common error of young conjurers. I refer to the error of half-learning a lot of tricks instead of learning how to do a few tricks thoroughly well.

When buying tricks do not be guided by what you like yourself. Try and put yourself in the place of the audience, if even the tricks you are buying are only small pocket tricks suitable only for impromptu performance. You may be tempted to like a trick yourself because the mechanism of the apparatus is very ingenious, or because the working of the trick is easy, or because the trick is new to you. Those should be minor considerations with you, and instead of thinking about them you should ask yourself:—"What sort of effect can I get out this trick? How will it strike the audience?" When you come to think over the matter you will see that the answers to those questions are the only things that matter.

I have suggested that you should buy and learn any tricks that take your fancy. If you have been wondering how you are going to learn them—well, you will not wonder when you buy the tricks, for directions are usually given with each trick, and very often you will be fitted up with "patter" as well. ("Patter" is the technical name for conjurer's conversation while he is performing). Now, take a step backwards.

I spoke just now of getting the utmost effect out of a trick. I suggested that you should take any trick and study it. How are you to do that?

Put the trick on your table, sit down, and think about it. First, you have to make quite sure that you understand what the effect of the trick is supposed to be. For example, suppose you are going to cut a piece of string in half, tie the two ends together and then make the string whole again. You will not have much difficulty in understanding the effect of such a simple trick, but some small tricks are not quite so simple, so study the effect which you are going to produce.

Having mastered that detail, begin to perform the trick just as you would perform it if you were giving a performance to an audience. Say every word that you would say if someone were present, and then—pause. Are you quite certain that the audience see just what you are doing? You must remember that you know the effect of the trick. But the audience, seeing it for the first time, know nothing of what you are going to do, and if

they miss one of the preliminary details they may miss the whole point of the trick.

An illustration will show you what I mean. Suppose you show a penny of your own and borrow two pennies. Then, suppose you show the three pennies in the left hand and put the right hand under the table. Then, suppose you throw the three pennies on the table and cause one of them to pass through the table and you produce it from underneath the table with your right hand. Well, the whole point of the trick will be missed by the audience if you fail to let them see that you really were holding three pennies in your left hand in the first place.

Therefore, learn slowly, and think always of the man in your audience who has never seen the trick before and who therefore must be told all about what you are going to do. Of course you do not tell the audience what the effect of the trick is going to be until you have secretly brought about the effect; you must not disclose your hand before you play your cards.

This matter is of great importance, because there is nothing more galling to a young conjurer—or, for the matter of that, to any conjurer—than to overhear someone say at the close of a trick:—"Very clever, I've no doubt, but I didn't see what he was supposed to be doing." When that is said the fault is usually with the conjurer.

Well, having decided how you are going to make the audience see the point of the trick, you next have to think about the actual manipulation of the trick. The printed directions with the trick may tell you one method only. Possibly you may think of an easier way, or a way which you think is more mystifying. Well, test your opinion by trying the trick your way, and if it bears the test, do it that way. There is no one best way of doing a number of tricks; the best way is the way which happens to suit the performer.

Having got so far, you can now turn your attention to the end of the trick. It should end well, with a climax, and directly it is finished you should stop. It should not be necessary to add any words of explanation of what you have apparently done. The trick should speak for itself.

I mentioned "patter" just now. The choice of "patter" will probably be one of your greatest difficulties, and at this stage of your magical education you must not expect to overcome that difficulty, because you will pro-

bably be rather at sea with your patter until you have acquired some experience by performing before audiences. But I may say this in passing; Patter should help a trick along, and it should serve two purposes. It should explain any point which needs explanation to enable the audience to grasp the effect of the trick, and it should also amuse the audience. If you wish to cultivate a solemn, pompous manner as a conjurer, there is no law to prevent you from doing so, but you will never be so popular as the magician who is easy and natural, and pleasantly amusing. In thinking out what words you are going to say while you are doing any trick it is well to err on the side of brevity. Say what must be said in the way of explanation, but don't drag in jokes merely for the sake of getting a laugh. After all, the first business of a magician is to do tricks.

Now, you must regard all this business of buying a few tricks and learning them by yourself as a kind of preliminary canter to the serious study of conjuring. At this stage you are probably just a little disappointed with your hobby. The goal at which you are aiming seems so far off. Maybe you are thinking that all you have done you could have done without any advice. I can assure you, however, that the study of a few unimportant tricks is an excellent training for the study of some of the tricks that delight larger audiences. Besides, the little knowledge you have gained will serve to improve your respect for the work of the leading performers; the knowledge will also convince you that you have a long way to travel before you arrive at their stage of proficiency, and you will see that there is more in conjuring than you probably thought there was.

And now we will advance more rapidly. You must read up the subject of conjuring, and there is no better work to start with than Professor Hoffmann's "Modern Magic," one of the conjurer's classics. Many of the tricks explained in that book are now out of date; many of the methods have been superseded by better methods, but the principles of conjuring are explained in that book thoroughly and very clearly, and you will gain a better all-round knowledge of conjuring from that book than from any other book on conjuring.

Having mastered that book you will probably want to read the same author's "More Magic" and "Later Magic," and you may well become the owner of both volumes. By this time your appetite for reading books about conjuring will probably be very keen. Well, you

cannot read too much ; a good knowledge of the principles of magic will be of great assistance to you. If your taste lies in the direction of card-conjuring buy "The Expert at the Card Table," an American book ; it is an excellent guide and it will help you in the performance of a number of card tricks.

I advise you to join "The Magic Circle," the conjurers' society. Informal meetings are held every Monday during the winter and spring, and once a fortnight there is a kind of "performance evening." You will derive much pleasure and instruction from mixing with conjurers; the interchange of opinions and knowledge cannot fail to be very helpful to you. "The Magic Circle" has a large library of magical books which you can borrow. Full particulars about "The Magic Circle" can be obtained from Mr. H. Donn, 17 Sangora Road, Clapham Junction, S.W.

Now I have started you well on your road. The book knowledge you have gained will help you to regard conjuring in the right way and to form your taste in the matter of tricks which you wish to perform. Even if you are not ambitious to become a first-class, all-round performer you will still find in conjuring a very interesting hobby, and one which will always keep your mind alert. The more you progress with the study of magic the more interesting you will find it.

At this stage of your magical career you will probably fall into an error which most beginners make, an error which may be a great hinderance to you. I refer to the error of supposing that pure sleight of hand alone is all that you wish to learn. By sleight of hand tricks I mean those tricks which are performed with ordinary objects without the aid of any piece of apparatus whatever. The tricks are therefore performed entirely by the conjurer's hands. A great many tricks are apparently performed by sleight of hand, because the audience do not see the little apparatus which the conjurer uses for bringing about his effect, but I am not referring to these tricks for the moment but to those tricks in which the conjurer has to depend entirely on his hands.

You, the beginner, will feel sorely tempted to spend a lot of time in learning such tricks. Every beginner makes that mistake, and I think it will be worth while to inquire why the young student of magic errs in this way. Why is it?

In some cases the young student concentrates on sleight of hand tricks for reasons of economy—there is no apparatus to buy. In most cases—the great majority of cases—I am convinced that the young student takes up sleight of hand tricks and neglects others simply out of personal vanity. He thinks it so much cleverer to be able to do tricks with his hands than to do tricks in which some hidden pieces of apparatus are employed. To a certain extent the beginner is right there, because of course a great deal of manual dexterity is required in order to do sleight of hand tricks well. But, with a few exceptions, such tricks are appreciated at their true worth only by conjurers, and in the average audience there is probably not one conjurer. The audience do not know whether you are using your hands only, or whether you are making use of some ingenious piece of apparatus which makes a difficult trick easy. Therefore, why waste a lot of time in practicing a few very difficult tricks—for no sleight of hand tricks are easy—when you might spend the same time in improving your performance and bringing it up to the professional standard? I grant that if you are going to perform only in drawing-rooms you will find that the ability to do a number of sleight of hand tricks is an excellent stand-by, but, as you progress with your study of magic your performances will be given on stages in small halls, school-rooms, etc., and at such places there are few sleight of hand tricks which are as effective as tricks which cannot be so described.

Always bear in mind that the audience is not interested in the secret way by which you bring about your effects: the only thing that interests them is the effect you produce. Therefore, you gain nothing at all by doing your tricks in a difficult way when you might be doing them in a far easier way by using apparatus (not necessarily visible to the audience). To the ordinary audience such tricks will seem to be tricks of sleight of hand and will therefore be just as effective as tricks which demand an immense amount of practice before they can be done well.

I give you this warning about not spending too much time in learning sleight of hand tricks because it is so easy to waste time in this way. A beginner will take up some trick of pure sleight of hand, practice it for weeks at a time and then, becoming disgusted at his repeated failures, will feel inclined to give up conjuring altogether. If you wish to perform in any place larger than a drawing-room, you will soon find that the most acceptable tricks are those

which are not done entirely by sleight of hand. Therefore do not waste a lot of time in learning a lot of difficult tricks, those which depend on manual dexterity only, but aim rather at being able to give a good all-round performance.

What do I mean by a good performance? One in which every trick tells.

Let me amplify that answer. The average beginner invariably fails at his first few performances simply because he has not practiced his tricks thoroughly. He hesitates, for the simple reason that he is not quite sure of what comes next. This fault can be cured only by constant practice of the right kind. When you have settled on the method you mean to employ for doing a trick, keep to that method and go over the trick again and again until you can do it mechanically, without having to think what you are doing. Then decide on the "patter," the words you are going to speak while you are performing. Say those words over and over again, speaking the words while you are performing. If, during these rehearsals, you find yourself compelled to think of what you are to do and what you are to say, you may be sure that you do not know the trick thoroughly well. Continue the rehearsals until these faults are eliminated and you can do the trick without thinking about it and without looking at your hands. Remember always that you must rehearse as though you were facing an audience. For some tricks, a rehearsal before a looking-glass will be of great help to you, but after you consider you know the trick thoroughly you should continue the rehearsals without the looking-glass; otherwise, you will find when you perform to an audience that you are so accustomed to seeing yourself in a glass that you will be lost when you are facing the people whom you have to entertain.

You cannot practice too much so long as you do not fall into the error of speaking in a monotonous tone, as though you had learnt the whole thing by heart and were merely repeating the words. Your jokes must appear to be impromptu; although you should know every word you are going to say, you must appear to be talking naturally—in fact, as though you were a good conversationalist.

Do not hurry. There is a vast difference between the nervous, hesitating style of the average beginner and the deliberate, gently persuasive style of the finished performer. Bear in mind that your first duty is to let your audience see the effect of the trick; if you scamp

hurridly over the difficult parts of it they will probably be at a loss to understand what the trick is supposed to be. Be sure that the audience has time to understand the point of the trick. At the same time you must guard against the error of dawdling through a trick. Do not overload the trick with "patter;" say all that is necessary to be said for the purpose of explanation of the trick, and when the trick is actually over—stop. There should be a certain amount of "snap" in your performance.

Now we will come to more practical advice. We will suppose that you have done a few tricks of the impromptu kind to your friends and you are called upon to give your first performance at some party. Do not be tempted to perform for longer than half-an-hour, and probably twenty minutes will be long enough for the first performance. How are you to go to work to practice for such a performance?

First of all select the tricks you wish to perform. In doing this, take care to get a nice sequence. If you wish to do tricks which faintly resemble one another, put one at the beginning and one at the end of your programme. It is as well to open with a very easy trick, because no matter how well you have rehearsed you are bound to be nervous at your first performance.

You have learned each trick thoroughly well, of course, but—still be careful. Remember how you are placed at the end of each trick. Does the end of one trick leave you in a nice position—so far as apparatus is concerned—for the performance of the next trick? You may have something in your hand which you wish to get rid of, or you may have something concealed on your table which the performance of the next trick will disclose to the audience. Go over your whole programme and see if you have got your tricks in the right order, so that you can go from one trick to another without any inconvenience to yourself.

Having determined on the tricks you are going to do and the order in which you are going to do them, keep to that order, and practice the whole performance in the same way over and over again, so that you do not have to think of what comes next at any time in your performance.

Each trick should be complete in itself. If you want a box of matches in the first trick and a box of matches in your last trick, have two boxes of matches, and keep all the things you require for each trick in a little bag. Do

not reckon on being able to borrow any article you may require, even if you are using such ordinary things as a newspaper, glass, a table knife, etc. By keeping all the things required for each trick in a bag you will always have each trick ready.

Your hostess will be sure to allow you a little time in which to make your preparations for the performance. You should have a screen with a small table behind it. Put the bag containing all your tricks on the table and then take out the little bags take out the things and put them on the top of the bag. Arrange them in order for the performance.

For a performance of twenty minutes you ought not to retire more than once behind the screen in order to make preparations. You may be able to put some of the tricks into your pockets; others may be placed on a chair or side-table on your "stage," so that you can pass from one trick to another without "going off." Remember to have another chair or small table at the back so that you can put each trick down directly you have finished with it. The table on which you are going to perform should be small; the more room you allow yourself the better.

Take care not to have a light behind you when you are performing, and avoid standing in front of a looking-glass. If possible, secure a corner of the room for your "stage" and see that the chairs for the audience are so arranged that no one can get a glimpse of the back of your table when you are performing.

You—an amateur and a beginner—will have one great advantage which the professional drawing-room performer never enjoys. You will know beforehand exactly the conditions under which you will have to perform. You will know the room, the position of the lights, the position of your screen and table, and so on. When you are rehearsing for this, your first performance, remember those conditions and practice in a similar room, with a table in the place which your table will occupy during the actual performance. You will find that the most convenient place for your screen is on your left. Be sure that you have a good light behind your screen so that if you have to go behind it during the performance you do not have to fumble in a bad light to find what you require. But, as I have said, for a short performance you ought not to have to retire more than once, and then for only a few seconds.

You should have a good showy trick for the finish, and it is as well to let your audience know at the beginning of the last trick it will conclude your performance. If you do not do this you can hardly bring your performance to an effective conclusion, because, after you have finished and retired behind your screen, your audience will be left waiting and wondering "if that is all." To have to reappear from the privacy of your screen and inform the audience that you have finished is a very weak way of bringing your performance to a conclusion. Your good-natured audience, composed mostly of your friends, may think that it is "good enough for an amateur," but I take it that you wish to make your performance so good, from start to finish, that your audience is not compelled to make any excuses for you.

Let me repeat the advice I have given. Learn each trick thoroughly, and then learn the whole performance thoroughly, so that there is no break between the tricks. You should be ready for the second trick directly the applause for the first has stopped, and so right through the performance. By the way, half-a-dozen tricks, well performed, should last about twenty minutes. Vary the tricks as much as possible. Do not have three tricks with handkerchiefs and three more with cards. Also, if there is a good sprinkling of children in your audience do not forget that children like spectacular tricks, tricks in which they can be asked to assist, and any trick in which a rabbit or a bird is used.

Do not be frightened by the children in the audience. I suppose that there never has been a conjuring performance given to children during which the children have not told each other that they "saw how that was done," and so on. Whatever you do be careful to avoid the great mistake of replying to the children's conversation. If they shout with joy when they think they have discovered one of your pet secrets you must just smile as good-naturedly as your nerves will permit and go on with the performance. You may console yourself with this truth. The guesses of children about the methods of conjurers are nearly always wrong, and, if they happen to be right, it does not follow that you have given a trick away. In all probability the right guess was merely a lucky shot. You may also like to know that the fact that the children talk about your tricks to each other is the best proof that you are interesting them, and therefore succeeding. If you were to perform a few sleight of hand tricks with cards you would not be bothered by any guesses from them as to

how your tricks were done, because the children would be so bored by the whole performance that they would be silent.

Do not be afraid of doing a trick because the secret of it is very simple. Some of the best tricks in the world are perfectly simple—when you know them. Another point. You will need all the confidence you can command at your first performance, and the knowledge that your tricks are simple, and with reasonable care, cannot go wrong, will give you confidence. If a trick should go wrong make the briefest apology and go on at once to the next trick. Do not be discouraged; do not lose your head; for the time being forget that you have made a mistake. Afterwards go over the trick in the privacy of your own room and discover why the mistake occurred. Then you will guard against it in the future. It is a good plan, when you are rehearsing, to try and discover how many mistakes it is possible to make with a trick; the knowledge will probably not be complete, but it will help you in your performance.

If the first performance is half a failure, remember that the blame is due to yourself, and in all probability the fault was entirely owing to insufficient rehearsals. You may comfort yourself with the reflection that the best performers make a mistake sometimes, although I am bound to add that when the unlooked-for happens, the professional performer's experience usually enables him to cover up the mistake.

If your first performance has been a success, you will probably sigh for other worlds to conquer. Well, the only way to become a good conjurer is to conjure, and the more you perform the better your performances will be. Therefore, lose no opportunity of giving your performance. Performances at workhouses, Sunday schools, village penny readings, lunatic asylums, etc., will give you splendid practice.

Do not be in a hurry to change your programme. After a time you will probably want to try a set of new tricks merely because you are tired of the old ones, or think they are too old to be effective. Take care! Remember that the tricks you know so well are new to the audience before whom you are going to perform, and that even the most advanced professional is never as happy with a new trick as he is with a trick that he has performed over and over again to all sorts of audiences.

When you decide to change your programme, do not let the change be complete. Be content with dropping one old trick and putting in a new one, and let the new one be in the middle of the performance. By all means keep your knowledge of conjuring up-to-date, but do not be in too great a hurry to put all the new tricks into your programme. When you have put a new trick into your programme do not be discouraged if the first performance of it falls a little flat, for you must remember that no amount of private rehearsals will be as valuable as public performances in teaching you how to get the utmost effect out of a trick. New tricks you must have if you are going to perform before the same audience twice, but take great care in their selection.

Lastly, do not copy any conjurer. Cultivate your own personality and—be yourself.



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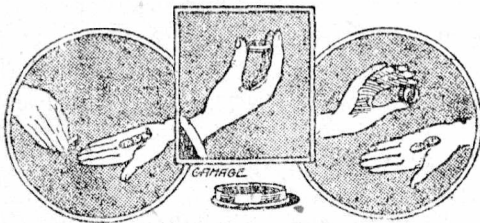
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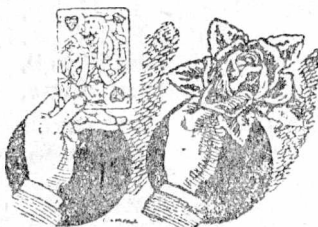
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This wand or stick is shown and proved quite solid; it is then placed into an envelope. Almost immediately the envelope is crushed into a little ball which is tossed aside. The wand is then found in an envelope previously sealed up after having been shown quite empty. It is then once more proved to be quite solid and given to be examined. A very clever and sensational trick. Price, complete with full instructions 3/3 & 6/6. Post 4d.

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