

Mysterious Box Tricks.

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I SHALL assume that the larger number of readers are familiar with the style of box tricks; but for the information of those who may not have seen such a performance it may be briefly stated that a conjurer, after permitting a large box or case to be minutely examined by invited members of the audience, huddles himself within the receptacle, which is subsequently locked and tied up securely with rope. In many instances it is also placed bodily in a sack, which is sealed and otherwise rendered apparently secure. After certain preliminaries have been indulged in the whole paraphernalia is re-opened, when to the onlookers' surprise the box is seen to be entirely empty, the previous occupant having made his exit in a seemingly miraculous manner from his well-bound, self-chosen prison, to reappear later on with perfect freedom before his startled patrons.

The charm of these box tricks is their naïve simplicity of action. The audience might agitate their brains till Doomsday in seeking an elucidation of the mystery before them, yet really nothing more potent than the unfastening of secret springs, and the loosing and folding of a few flaps, has enabled the magician to appear possessed of infernal capabilities.

The rope with which the box may be encircled only serves to strengthen the appearance of wonder, and adds materially to the effect produced. The spectator mentally jumps to the conclusion that to

leave the box the inmate must force or open some portion of it *outwardly*. He loses sight of the possibility of removing sliding panels and inwardly-acting flaps.

The commonest trick is, perhaps, that displayed in Fig. 1. The box is roped across as shown with a man concealed within it, and is then erected "on end." Escape at this point is made by the ridiculously simple means of opening one end as illustrated. It will be noted that the rope forms no bar whatever to this mechanical movement. Of course, in actual operation, the working extremity of the contrivance is placed directly over a trap-door in the stage. My reason for inverting it will naturally be obvious to the reader. When the box is afterwards sealed up in a sack the man has already disappeared from it.



FIG. 1.—A COMMON DEVICE.

of the rope so that it occupies similar positions to those indicated in the other drawings. But then it is the performer's express purpose so to arrange matters that the box is secured precisely in conformance with his desires.

A similarly deceptive and equally clever idea is shown in Fig. 2. In one important feature, however, it far surpasses that which has just been disposed of. It may be tied up in any way; yet will not fail to allow the occupant to make good his escape. In this instance the conjurer merely folds the end as a double-flap inwardly, when, as will be comprehended, the rope proves to be no obstacle



FIG. 2.—BOX WITH DOUBLE-FOLDING FLAP END.

whatever. There, again, the opening would be in direct communication with a trap-door. The flaps would regain their normal attitude as soon as the operator had forced his way out between the ropes. A very essential part of the making of this cunning device is so to paint the exterior to resemble the grain of wood as to conceal the division of the end—*i.e.*, the joining of the two flaps. But clever workmen can accomplish marvels in this direction.

A more meritorious invention is given in Fig. 3. There, again, the box may be strongly bound, within certain reasonable limits, of course, after the performer has secreted himself. In displaying this device to the audience, and more particularly to



FIG. 3.—A VERY EFFECTIVE AND SIMPLE TRICK.

those who mount the stage from among the main body of the people, the operator is anxious that a very searching examination shall be made to convince the inspectors that it is a "hard, sound, well-made job"—as the cabinet-makers say of their furniture. When he is about to shut the lid down, however, he just slides to one side the teeth which are supposed to catch into the lock, and which are attached to the under-side of the lid. He shuts this lid down once with a bang before imprisoning himself, to emphasize his eulogy on its impregnability. This movement releases *the whole front of the box*, which, by means of springs, quickly lowers itself as shown in Fig. 4 until it occupies a position in contact with and right over the genuine bottom. Naturally, the loud noise made by the shutting of the lid deadens any sound produced by the front falling against the bottom. When he subsequently steps



FIG. 4.—EXPLANATION OF FIG. 3.

inside, to be bound and locked in by a *confederate*, all that he is called upon to do is to roll up the dummy front, as you would roll up a blind. This dummy front is nothing more than a square of American cloth, prepared to conform exactly in appearance with the other sides of the box. It will be understood that the hinged board which had previously been erect behind the dummy front had so stiffened the latter that tapping and inspection would not reveal its composition. When a final view of the empty box is being undertaken all parts have resumed their normal positions; and, of course, again defy detection.

Somewhat similar in character to the preceding devices, yet possessing individual merits of great difference from them, is box Fig. 5, which is made to bear a resemblance to a packing-case. The captive, in this instance, opens two flaps inwardly, as in



FIG. 5.—THE PACKING-CASE TRICK.

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FIG. 6.—HOW FIG. 5 TRICK IS EFFECTED.

Fig. 6, and this movement permits him to slide, in opposite directions, the two upright central staves, when an opening sufficiently large to permit of his egress is obtained. A slight survey of the drawings will reveal these particulars.

It may be a relief for the reader to have his attention directed to receptacles of a more novel formation. That exhibited in Figs. 7 and 8, for example, is delightfully naive and mysterious. The magician urges upon his



FIG. 7.—A TRICK IN WHICH TRAP-DOORS ARE DISPENSED WITH.

listeners the very obvious and well-impressed fact that, being poised upon a trestle, no escape is afforded the prisoner by means of stage trap-doors. This isolation of the contrivance lends a very significant importance to the experiment.

The triangular lid is opened; all parts are well tested. Then, with much ostentatious ceremony, the entertainer climbs aloft and

drops with alacrity into the exposed cavity. The triangular lid is afterwards fastened into position with immense padlocks, and, in addition, any desired parts are roped. Apparently to render the exhibition more startling, yet really for the absolutely necessary concealment of certain movements of the performer, the box is surrounded by a four-fold curtained screen, as displayed in Fig. 9. You will observe that under these conditions the audience would have the



FIG. 8.—THE BOX SHOWN IN ACTION IN FIG. 7.

privilege of gaining a clear view entirely beneath the box and its support, completely to the back of the stage. Whence, then, does the artful fellow escape? Well, all he does is to release the two sloping sides of the lid, pull them down behind the upper sides of the box, then creep out and draw aside a small portion of the hinder-



FIG. 9.—THE BOX SURROUNDED BY THE CURTAIN.

most curtain, subsequently sliding down a plank which a confederate has, undetected, placed in the required position. A dummy

picture in the drop-scene behind has previously been removed, and a plank pushed up from the back of the scene (Fig. 10).

In this way the magician is enabled to slip right down out of sight; and when the screen is removed and the box (which, by the assistance of springs, has resumed its ordinary massive appearance) is opened the astonishment of the onlookers is genuine.

The next trick with which I shall here deal has reference to the box shown in Fig. 11. You will readily observe that the lid is a sliding one. Anyone examining the interior of the casket would find that it was apparently strengthened by two angle-irons crossing the bottom and bending upwards across the sides, thus dividing the receptacle into three equal parts. These angle-irons are destined to serve an important pur-

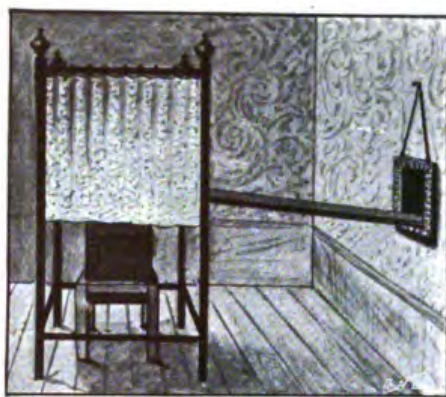


FIG. 10.—HOW THE PERFORMER ESCAPES.

and when its inner end touches the angle-iron nearest to the performer's feet, certain mechanism is released which allows the lid to lift bodily the central bottom portion of the box and the two angle-irons, and carry them on to the feet end. Meanwhile, the captive has to dexterously arch his body and legs to permit of these movements.

Thus, by the time the lid is fixed properly there exists a large opening formed in the bottom of the box, through which the conjurer wriggles. After dropping down through the trap-door he is enabled to replace the central division and angle-irons quickly, without in any way removing the lid.

Meantime an assistant has been fastening a length of cord round and round the sides and ends of the box. Upon receiving a pre-arranged signal, he then elevates the box on to one end and slips it into a sack. It is, of course, empty, but this pregnant fact is unknown to the audience, who naturally marvel

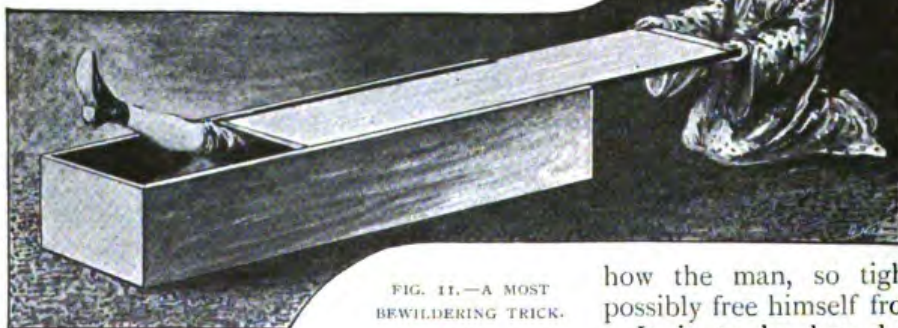


FIG. 11.—A MOST BEWILDERING TRICK.

how the man, so tightly wedged in, can possibly free himself from his prison.

It is to be hoped that this revelation will not detract from the real appreciation which the ingenuity of these contrivances deserves.

pose in the execution of the deception. I can best render my explanation understandable by following the series of actions which ensue after the conjurer has laid himself within the box. It should be said that the contrivance is at this juncture so placed that the central portion (that area which is situated *between* the angle-irons) is directly over a trap-door. What happens is this: As the lid slides into place,

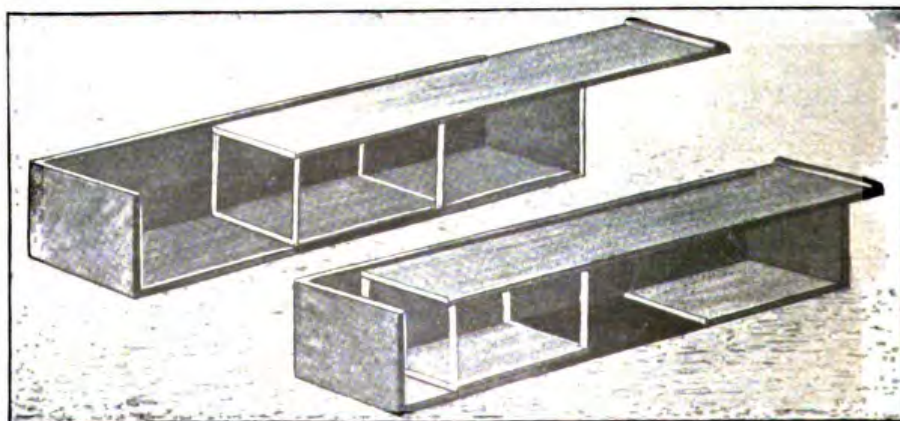


FIG. 12.—EXPLANATION OF FIG. 11.