

A Parlour Séance with David Devant.

By E. T. SACHS.

Author of "Sleight of Hand." From Photos. by George Newnes, Ltd.



THE normal attitude of the public towards the conjurer is that of endeavouring to find him out. In the case of David Devant it has hitherto proved to be an occupation productive of very small result, and, by way of variety, I, personally, have been devoting myself to the task of finding him in. This is not the easy thing it might appear, for, temporarily forsaking the home of magic in Piccadilly, whose mystery-permeated walls are to be replaced by a new building at no great distance of time, David Devant has been occupied in carrying the cult of the occult into the provinces, and along with it the fame of the celebrated Egyptian Hall combination.

I sought out David Devant with a set purpose. On previous occasions this man of many parts had provided delectable amusement for readers of THE STRAND MAGAZINE, and it occurred to me that the time was ripe for some more. As became one of his vocation, I found David Devant enshrouded in the dim light of his sanctum. In front of him was a spot of greater brightness, and this inspection showed to be a miniature stage, a precise model of the one which our magician employs, with every detail, down to the electric foot-lights, complete. The pigmy rehearsal in progress was that of the new entertainment which David Devant was preparing for his audiences, and which, by this time, will have become familiar throughout the country.

It may be news to the reader to be told that the magician forms the one exception to the world's economic provision which prohibits less gifted mortals from doing two things at once. The Man of Magic not only habitually employs either hand in two separate and distinct occupations, but he will probably have his mind engaged on a third matter in addition. So it did not in the least interfere with Devant's occupation of the moment when I told him the purpose of my visit. With his head half inside the miniature proscenium he said: "You want something from me for the readers of THE STRAND MAGAZINE in the shape of easy tricks, without sleight of hand, or with very little? Something that can be done with common objects of everyday use? Ah, I daresay I can manage that, if you give me a few minutes." He was busy arranging a *cou-lisse* at the exact angle, and, whilst continuing to do this with the left hand, he reached with the right for a match-box,



1.—SHOWING THE MATCH-BOX APPARENTLY EMPTY.

which he handed me with the admonition to empty it of its matches. Whilst this was being done the conjurer's voice was raised in a loud call for "Ernest." "Ernest" is no other than Devant, junior, and he speedily made his appearance out of the gloom, and, for all I could see to the contrary, he might have come through the wall. The youngster was sent to bring a glass of water, and Devant, showing me the match-box empty (Fig. 1), begged me to close it and retain it in my hands. Ernest arriving with the glass of water, a half-crown was

produced, placed in a handkerchief (Fig. 2), and, under its folds, held suspended over the tumbler (Fig. 3). At a given signal the half-crown was allowed to fall into the water, and that it had done so was announced by the jingle it made against the glass. Yet, on the handkerchief being removed by Ernest, no coin was visible in the tumbler. Told to shake the match-box, a rattle betrayed the presence of a solid object inside, and on investigation this proved to be the half-crown.

It may seem impossible that no sleight of hand enters into this trick, but such is the case, a little adroitness being all that is called for. Unknown to the audience, the conjurer has a second half-crown (a florin, penny, or other coin may be used) and an eye-glass of about the same size. When the match-box is being exhibited empty one half-crown is held concealed in the third, fourth, and fifth fingers of the right hand (I presume throughout that the reader is not able to "palm" coins), which is holding the outer cover of the box. Into this cover, on the



2.—PLACING THE COIN IN THE HANDKERCHIEF.

the right hand the eye-glass, this concealment being covered by holding the coin between finger and thumb, the whole being very accurately portrayed in Fig. 2. The handkerchief is thrown over this hand,

upper side, this coin is slipped. When the tray part is pushed in the coin is forced over the advancing end of the tray, so as to be nipped between it and the cover. In this position the coin is held secure, and when the tray is finally pushed home it naturally falls down and is thus contained in the box.

The mystery of the half-crown in the tumbler is explained by the conjurer having concealed under three fingers of the right hand, with the coin held between the first and second joints of the middle finger, being dropped unostentatiously at the side, an early opportunity being taken for transferring the half-crown to the pocket. By putting off the closing of the match-box till now the effect of the illusion is improved.

It is advisable that the eye-glass should fit the bottom of the

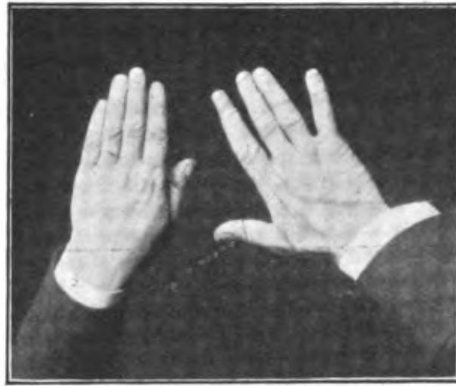


3.—THE COIN (IN HANDKERCHIEF) HELD OVER TUMBLER.

tumbler rather closely in order that the performer may pour out the water and hold the tumbler upside down. A champagne tumbler is most suitable for the trick.

In Fig. 3 the reader is shown what is not visible to the spectator, namely, the coin, for which the eye-glass has been substituted, being held between the finger-joints. In actual practice the hand would not be held open in this way, for, of course, the back of it would be presented to the spectator.

In Fig. 1 the half-crown is inside the



4.—COMMENCEMENT OF THE THIMBLE TRICK.

turned round to me he extended towards me his dexter finger.

On the end of it was a thimble. Holding up the backs of his hands as in Fig. 4, he said: "See that? Now, look here. One, two." At "one" he passed the right hand rapidly across the back of the left; at "two" the hand was passed below the other, and lo! the

thimble had become transferred from the first finger of the right hand to the corresponding finger of the left hand. The "one, two" action was repeated and the thimble



5.—SWALLOWING THE THIMBLE.



6.—RECOVERING THE THIMBLE.

match-box cover, held in position by the first finger of the right hand, inserted in the cover for the purpose.

"What do you think of that?" asked Devant, immersing himself, as it were, in his stage again, the positions of two delicious little gilded Empire chairs seeming to give him some trouble. I said that the match-box idea was quite new to me, and would prove a stumbling-block to the average intelligence.

When Devant next

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7.—HOW THE THIMBLE TRICK IS DONE.

was back to its original position. After this had been done two or three times the finger with the thimble on it was popped suddenly into the mouth (Fig. 5), and when withdrawn the thimble remained behind. It was recovered by way of the ear (Fig. 6). Just to show how painless the operation was the thimble was put back into the ear, the finger inserted into the mouth again, and when withdrawn there was the thimble on the end.

The secret of the trick is revealed at Fig. 7, the

vanished thimble being concealed at the root of the thumb. The right hand shows the thimble in the act of being concealed; in the left hand the movement has been completed.

In the case of the first sleight (Fig. 4) the performer has two thimbles, one of which is concealed in the left hand at the commencement. In the act of making the "one, two" passes the performer conceals the thimble in the right hand and produces that in the left. If he were to endeavour to do this with the hands quiescent the deception would cease to be such, but under cover of the rapid passes the double movements escape detection.

In Figs. 5 and 6 one thimble only is necessary. The hand, with thimble on finger, is advanced rapidly towards the mouth, which organ makes a gesture strongly significant of an anticipated swallowing, this materially helping the illusion (and no one can say that David Devant is here lacking in appropriate gesture), and when the finger is popped in, the fact that no thimble is upon it will pass absolutely unnoticed. The thimble has, of course, been

concealed at the root of the thumb under cover of the advancing movement. After making several gulps suggestive of swallowing, accompanied with pleasurable feelings, the hand is suddenly advanced to the ear, the thimble being brought out on the top of the finger *en route*. Once in the orifice of the ear the tips of finger and thumb are substituted, as in the illustration. When the order is reversed from ear to mouth the thimble is concealed as the hand

is made to approach the ear. The action of pushing in the thimble is simulated (it would not be unnatural for the performer to suffer some agony under the operation), and after the fingers have been shown empty the forefinger is rapidly inserted into the mouth, the thimble being got on to it on the road.

With the facility for concealing the thimble once acquired, as it may be in a short time, the performer may, of course, vary his methods of causing it to disappear and reappear. He will be guided in this by his opportunities.

If Ernest did not show very great interest in the thimble trick it was probably because he had seen it a few times before, but he woke up again when sent for a "bowler" hat and a soda-water tumbler, both "common objects" enough in most households. Each

article having been examined, the tumbler was stood upon the table and on it the hat, crown downwards. Anything less magical than this could scarcely be. However, some pennies were produced, one was marked, and Devant announced that he would throw them

into the hat with such effect that the marked coin would penetrate the felt and fall into the glass, the others remaining in the hat. The coins were duly pitched into the hat and, plainly enough, one of them, and one only, was seen to fall into the tumbler (Fig. 8).

The secret of the illusion of the coin passing through the hat, which, I may state, is a very complete one, is thus accomplished. When the performer places the hat on the glass



8.—PASSING A COIN THROUGH A HAT—THE EFFECT.



9.—WHAT THE SPECTATORS DO NOT SEE.

he has, unknown to the spectators, a coin concealed under the hat. Making a little fuss over balancing the hat upon the tumbler he gets the coin into the position shown at Fig. 9, where it will be seen that more of the coin overhangs the inner side of the rim than it does the outer. The tumbler is shown tilted for the convenience of illustration, but very little, if any, tilting is really necessary. Now, if the balance of the hat is suddenly disturbed, its pressure on the coin will be momentarily relieved and the coin will fall into the glass. If more of the coin is outside than inside the rim then it will fall upon the table, and there may be smiles. Such disturbance is brought about if a few coins are thrown smartly into the hat in a very oblique direction, so that, striking it on one side, it is caused to tilt and so release the coin underneath. Care should be taken that the hidden coin is in a direct line with the throw—whether towards or away from the performer does not matter—as the desired result is then more likely to come about.

The concealed coin may be the marked one or an indifferent one. If it is the marked coin then it must necessarily be exchanged for another before the hat is placed in position. As the performer is assumed to be unable to palm the exchange can be effected by commencing the trick by placing the marked coin in a handkerchief and changing it precisely as shown at Fig. 2. The performer then alters his mind, pretending to see an objection to the use of a handkerchief, and takes up the hat, the supposed marked coin (the real Simon Pure now being in the performer's possession) being placed amongst the others. The preliminary changing of the marked coin creates the best effect, because a spectator

may be allowed to lift the hat off the tumbler and take out the coin for identification.

If an unmarked coin be used it follows that the performer must retain possession of the marked one, refraining from throwing it into the hat. He will also be obliged to take the coin out of the tumbler himself and change it for the marked one as he hands it for examination. The following manœuvre for effecting this is successful if executed with dash. With the marked coin concealed in the left hand, the tumbler is seized by the right at the brim in such a way that the fingers can be made to overhang inside to a considerable extent, though no suggestion of such overhanging must be made as the tumbler is seized. The action of pouring the coin out of the tumbler into the left hand is now rapidly executed, the fingers of the right hand momentarily extended as the tumbler is inverted arresting the descent of the coin, and the marked coin that is already in the left hand will appear to have come out of the tumbler.

Devant said he would now show me a

"Davenport Brother" trick, done with some other common objects, viz., a finger-ring and a piece of cord. Ernest, who had been a mute spectator of the preceding trick, keeping strictly to himself any explanation that may have formed itself in his little mind, was dispatched for the cord, and on returning with it was bidden to bind his father's hands together behind his back, as at Fig. 10. Devant taking a seat on a chair, I was told to place my signet-ring between his lips and to state upon which finger of either hand I should like it to appear. I named the little finger of the left hand. Acting on instructions, Ernest brought from the corner a small Japanese folding screen. "When I say 'Right,'



10.—DAVENPORT TRICK FOR THE PARLOUR—THE KNOTS TIED.



11.—THE HANDS AS BEFORE—RING ON FINGER.

take away the screen quickly," said Devant ; and barely was the obstruction in position than "Right" was shouted from behind it. When it was removed there sat Devant, with an innocent look upon his face, having apparently never moved. But the ring was no longer between his lips, and on rising and turning round it was seen to be upon the selected finger, the hands bound as before (Fig. 11).

For the explanation of the trick look at Fig. 12. It will be seen that the performer twists his two hands round his back far enough to enable him to open one of the palms, into which he drops the ring, when it is a simple thing to place it upon the chosen finger. As there is no question of untying the knots, they may be knotted several times over, or sealed, if the spectators desire it ; and the trick possesses a merit which is not an attribute of every illusion, inasmuch as it may be repeated several times without anyone being much wiser,

It will be noticed that the wrists are not bound close together, but in the case of very slim people this can be done. It is merely a question of conformation. A well-developed person should have the wrists tied loosely, or he will not be able to twist his hands round sufficiently far. The careful performer will, of course, experiment in private and learn precisely what he can do and what he cannot.

The model stage had been a good deal neglected, but it was far from being out of Devant's mind, and my attention was directed to it. On a scale of about 1 in 20 I saw before me an exact representation, colour scheme and all, of Devant's fit-up stage, as arranged for Chinese effects. He explained that he would personate a Celestial magician, and in that capacity cover the stage with all manner of strange living things, both beasts of the field and fowls of the air, which will come from nowhere in particular and appear none the worse for it. From the model before me I certainly obtain no glimpse whatever of the secret of this promised production, and being anxious to gather particulars of a few more parlour tricks (not that anyone nowadays confesses to possessing a parlour), I institute no inquiries. On my suggesting that perhaps



12.—THE EXPLANATION,



13.—THE JUMPING CARD—SELECTING THE CARD.

Devant has a card trick to give away, I am asked if I know his jumping card trick. I do not; and as Ernest is fortuitously discovered to have a pack of cards concealed in his blouse (not so very surprising, perhaps, in the presence of a couple of conjurers), facilities are at once afforded for showing it me. "This, you see, is an ordinary pack of cards; take one, Ernest." Ernest, with a display of caution that is no doubt begotten of some experience as an experimental chopping-block, does as required (Fig. 13), notes the denomination of the card, and sees it slowly pushed back into the centre of the pack. I am, of course, acting as referee in this affair, and my conjurer's eye notes that it is indifferent to the performer what card is chosen, nor is it necessary for him to know the name of it. For the sake of effect, however, we are asked the name of the card, which happens to be the eight of clubs. "Now," said Devant, "all I am going to do is to hold the pack in the

fingers and at my word of command the eight of clubs will jump out of the pack. Eight of clubs, jump!" And sure enough it did jump, flying a good 6ft. into the air (Fig. 14). The reader need not be told that the effect is very good indeed.

The *deus ex machinâ* is a piece of elastic, or rubber band fastened between two cards, as shown in Fig. 15. In the early stages of the trick these two cards are at the bottom of the pack, and it is an easy matter to prevent the person selecting a card from trying to take either of them, in the very unlikely event of anyone wanting to do so. Whilst the selected card is being looked at the performer carelessly shuffles the pack, thus bringing the two prepared cards to the middle of it, and on the chosen card being



14.—WHAT THE CARD JUMPS.

returned it is pushed down between the two cards, where it meets the elastic. This, of course, gives to the pressure; and when the card is pressed home the elastic is prevented from reacting by the grip of the hand holding the pack. When the word of command is given the pressure on the outside is relaxed, and the released elastic shoots the card into the air.

A more effective card trick without sleight of hand I do not know, and I say so. "Glad you like it," says Devant. "I have always found it take very well, and it is really quite easy. There are various



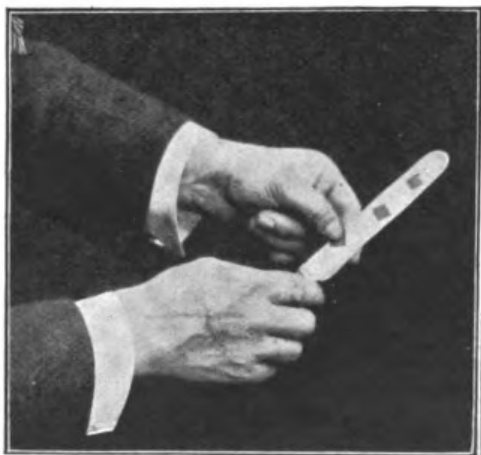
15.—DEUS EX MACHINÀ.

immaterial), and these being wetted are placed on the blade of the knife, three on either side.

"Now, watch. I take away two pieces, one from either side" (suiting the action to the word—Fig. 16). "You see that the piece on the other side has been removed," saying which the knife is turned over (Fig. 17). "Now I take away two more pieces," and the finger and thumb of the left hand remove the second pair of pieces, each side of the knife

being again shown, with one piece only upon it. Finally, the remaining pieces are removed and the knife-blade shown empty on either side. "To bring all six pieces back again, all I have to do is to wave the knife in the air. Here they are: three at the front and three at the back." (See Fig. 18.)

This very amusing effect is brought about by presenting to the spectator one side of the blade only. Instead of twisting the knife in the thumb and fingers so as to really expose first one side and then the other, the knife is brought round with a rapid semi-circular sweep (towards the performer), starting from the position shown at Fig. 18 and finishing in that of Fig. 17. This sweep need not be either violent or extensive—the quieter and more confined in area the better—and it will produce the effect of the knife being actually

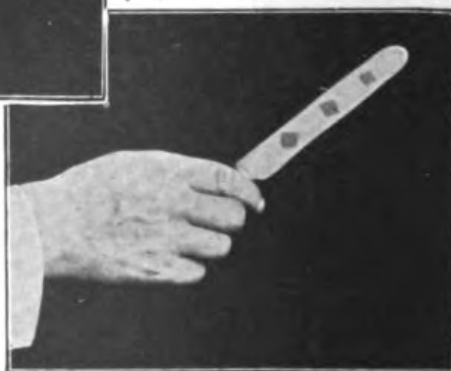


16.—KNIFE TRICK—REMOVING THE FIRST PIECES OF PAPER.

ways of fixing the elastic between the cards, and the neatest way, I think, is to peel each card, pass the elastic through a slit in the face side, and secure it by pasting the card together again. This makes a very neat job of it, and nothing is given away if the back of either of the prepared cards is exposed. How many tricks have I given you? Five? We must have another to make up the half-dozen, and then I'll show you a little bit of my Chinese magic. Ernest, fetch a cheese-knife." Whilst the knife is being brought Devant cuts up six little squares (or diamonds—the shape is quite



17.—THE KNIFE APPARENTLY TURNED OVER.



18.—THE PAPERS RESTORED—FIRST POSITION OF KNIFE.

turned over. Examination of the three illustrations will show that the same side of the knife is being shown in each instance, the edge always pointing in the same direction.

When the performer professes to remove two pieces, one from each side (Fig. 16), he removes the upper one only, showing the same side of the blade (Fig. 17) to prove that he has removed both. When all six (really three) pieces have been removed the empty side of the blade is shown in the two positions, and when the knife is waved in the air it is simply turned round and the full side shown twice. The three remaining pieces are then immediately wiped off with the left hand, the trick being over.

We have now our half-dozen tricks, but I am greedy and remind Devant of the custom of giving seven for six in many trades, and he good-naturedly gives me baker's measure with another coin trick. This is one that can be performed anywhere and at any time, so long as four coins of the same denomination are obtainable. Devant gave me no clue as to what he was about to do, but took a coin in each closed hand and directed me to place the other two coins on

the outside of the fingers, as in Fig. 19. Resting the knuckles on the table, he gave both hands a sudden jerk, but the two outside coins fell upon the table (Fig. 20). The effect, whatever its intention, had evidently failed, and I was asked to replace the coins again. The jerk was repeated and this time the outside coins disappeared, and on the hands being opened the right hand contained but one coin, three being in the left hand (Fig. 21).

The first jerk is a feint intended to produce the effect of the two outside coins falling to the table. Instead, the two coins in and upon the right hand are thrown upon the table, the one on the left hand being allowed to join the other inside. Thus we get two coins in the left hand, leaving none in the right. The second attempt, of course, brings one coin into the right hand and three into the left. When the first jerk is made and the two coins fall upon the table the performer must appear slightly disconcerted, as though he had failed in whatever he was attempting, and say,

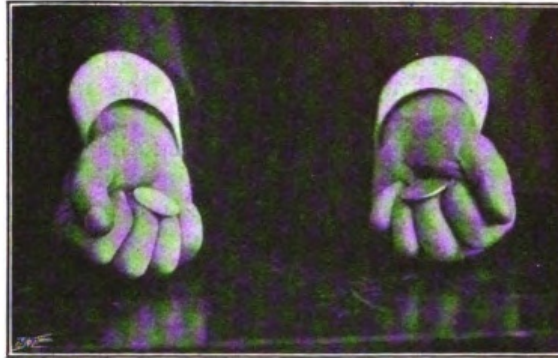
"Never mind, I will try again, if you will place the coins into position once more. I never can do this trick the first time"; which will be perfectly true.

"Now," said Devant, who, I could see, was keen to turn his attention to his more important work in hand, "come this way and I'll show you some of my Chinese business."

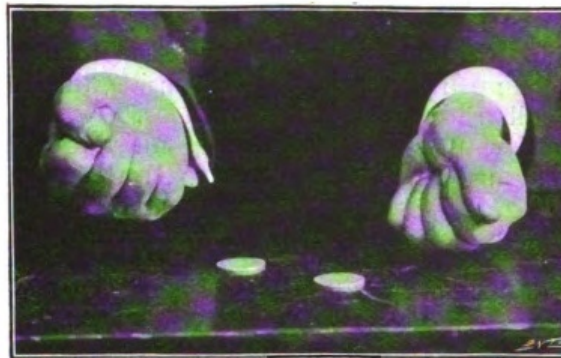
At that moment the bell of the telephone connected with the Egyptian Hall is rung. "Halloa!" Pause. "Yes."

Another pause.

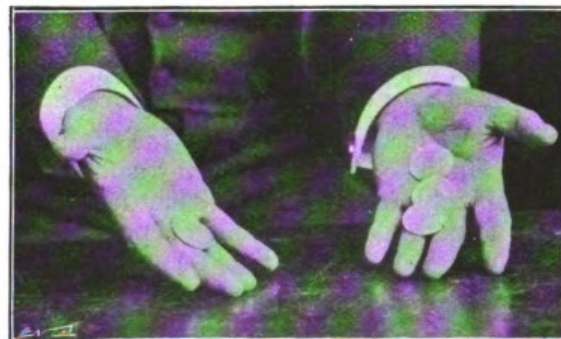
"The deuce; of course, I'll come at once. With you in half an hour." Then to me, "Very sorry, old chap, but I must rush off to the hall as fast as a hansom can take me. Maskelyne wants me at once." And that is why I learned nothing about Devant's new business that afternoon. But I think I may say that I came away stored with material for the amusement of many a STRAND reader and his friends on winter evenings. Indeed, I venture to propose a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Devant for his complaisant kindness.



19.—INVISIBLE TRANSIT—THE FIRST POSITION.



20.—POSITION AFTER THE FIRST ATTEMPT.



21.—SUCCESS!