

ANCIENT TRICKSTERS.

Queer Conjuring Feats of the Seventeenth Century.

SOME QUAIN OLD RECIPES.

Little Experiments in Which Boiling Heads of Living Animals Was an Incident—How They Killed a Horse and Cured Him Again.

Conjurers in ancient times were not very respectable members of society. When successful they enjoyed the reputation of having sold their souls to the evil one, and when of inferior ability they gained notoriety by being either drowned or burned. The mediæval magicians as well as the Egyptian magi and the Chaldean sages were only a strange mixture of chemist, conjurer and charlatan, and as these gentlemen were in the habit of using their supposed occult powers to their own advantage they were naturally unpopular. The feats of jugglery performed by these craftsmen were intended for the mystification and not the amusement of the public, and for centuries conjuring had to it only a black side.

The amateur conjurer of today is not always a popular individual, save with children and the unsophisticated yokels. To the general public he is merely a bore of greater or less magnitude, whose performance is so obvious as to deceive no one. It is hard to realize that this person is no mere mushroom growth of modern society, but in point of fact his role is one of a respectable antiquity, for he is to be found treading close upon the heels of the magicians and in the days when witchcraft was still rampant. This is significant of his reputation even in those early times, for had any one taken his tricks seriously he would doubtless have been run to earth and done to death as a wizard.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, in the earliest years of the restoration, a number of tricks were published in one of those facetious books which seem to have occupied the press to a great extent at this time, but which owing to their popularity have for the most part perished. The chief recommendation of the greater number of these tricks is that no apparatus beyond the utensils of everyday life is necessary; also it is suggested to the performer that he can make some small profit out of his entertainment by prevailing on his audience to bet with him on the result of the trick.

"To set a horse's or an ass's head upon a man's head and shoulders" seems impossible out of the land of Faery, but we are informed that by boiling the head cut off a living animal "the flesh boy'd may runne into oyle," and then by mingling the hair beaten into powder with this oil and anointing the heads of the standers-by "they shall seem to have horses' or asses' heads"—a costly experiment and fearsome if successful.

But, besides this, one can "make people seem headlesse," and this without bloodshed and by the following simple recipe: "Break arsenick very fine and boyle it with sulphur in a covered pot and kindle it with a new candle, and the standers-by will seem to be headlesse." Doubtless a strong imagination is necessary for success.

Some of the tricks are such as would nowadays cause the performer to be disliked, to put it mildly. For instance, "have a nut filled with ink and give this unto another and bid him crack it and see what he can find in that," which being done, "will cause much laughter."

"To keep a Tapster from frothing his pots" must have been an amusement to the wags of the period, and for this "provide in readiness the skin of a red Hering, and when the Tapster is absent do but rub a little on the inside of his pots, and he will not be able to froth them, do what he can, in a good while after."

"To counterfeit a diamond with a white saphir" is a most useful accomplishment, but the fraud is likely in these days to be discovered and is more a chemical experiment than a trick.

Several tricks are recommended which have animals as their subject and are for the most part brutal to our modern ideas. Perhaps the least objectionable is "to seem to kill a Horse and cure him again," which may be thus accomplished: "Take the seed of henbane and give it the Horse in his Provender, and it will cast him into such a deep sleep that he will seem dead. If you will recover him again, rub his Nostrils with Vinegar, and he will seem to be revived." The "seem to be revived" sounds rather ominous, and it is to be noted that the correct quantity of henbane is not mentioned, so that it might be best to make this experiment on some one else's horse.

"To make a shoal of Goslings draw a Timber logge" sounds interesting, but unfortunately the directions are vague. "To make a shoal of Goslings or a Gaggel of Geese to seem to draw a Timber logge is done by the verie means that is us'd when a Cat draws a fool through a Pond, but handled somewhat further off from the Beholders."—London Standard.

What the Hydra Was.

There have been many strange things in English history. One of the most curious was recently mentioned by a little schoolgirl. "The hydra," said this much informed young person, "was married to Henry VIII. When he cut her head off, another one sprang right up."—Youth's Companion.

A MAN AND A MOB.

The Way Lyon Playfair Handled the Lancashire Strikers.

During the great labor riots in Lancashire about the middle of the last century the ready resources of Lyon Playfair saved one of the only two mills which remained open at the time. The government was anxious that these two should continue in action, and supplied the workmen engaged with muskets. But a great force of strikers advanced upon one of the two, and it was obvious that the day was lost. The mob meant to wreck the place. Playfair, who was a friend of the owner, appeared in haste among them, keeping the proprietor out of sight. He put the case frankly to the strikers. The gates of the mill were closed, but the numbers of the strikers made them irresistible; hence it was of no use their all going in and wrecking the place. Let a few of them enter the premises, remove the plugs from the boilers, and thus, without damage to the works, secure their stoppage. Even a disorderly mob, bravely met by a man of courage and tact, will listen. So did this one. Playfair's proposition sounded fair, but might not treachery lie behind it?

He immediately put their doubts at rest by offering himself as hostage. He would accompany the deputation while the others kept guard over the works. The men agreed, and Playfair strolled off with the men chosen. Together they went to the boilers and withdrew the plugs. This stopped the works, but did no other damage. While thus engaged Playfair was able to listen to the story of the leaders, and found many of their demands most reasonable and such that afterward it was possible readily to concede them. The little party returned from their innocent wrecking and found the mob honorably preserving order. The scientist gave them a couple of sovereigns with which to buy food, and they returned him three times three in cheers. There remained only one other mill to close, that at Clitheroe, and upon this the strikers now marched. Again they were thwarted, but this time not by pacific means, but by the might of the military.—St. James' Gazette.

SUPERSTITIOUS.

General Grant believed in dreams. Nelson, the English naval hero, always carried a horseshoe with him into battle.

Von Moltke, the hardy old German general, would never begin a battle on a Friday.

Prince Bismarck of Germany would never sit down to a dinner with thirteen at the table.

President Davis of the Confederacy believed that the presence of children brought him luck.

James G. Blaine would never turn back to re-enter his home even if he had forgotten something.

The father of Nicholas II. of Russia guided his actions by the advice of an American spirit medium.

Admiral Farragut says he used to be guided by a still, small voice which told him what to do in battles.

The ameer of Afghanistan, the sultans of Morocco and Zanzibar and the khedive of Egypt all maintain official astrologers.

A Timely Present.

A certain colored gentleman recently saluted a large colored lady of the Amazonian type in the following language:

"Yuh's lookin' mighty fascinatin' this evenin', Sal."

Sal hauled off and knocked him down. Then, looking him out of an inclination to get up, she said, "Now, yuh jest lay thar till I goes an' finds out what dat word 'fascinatin'' means!"

Next day the aforesaid colored gentleman presented the said Sal with a copy of Webster's Dictionary, saying, "I might want ter salute yuh ag'in, so jes please look up the meanin' of some of these heah complimentation terms."

Sal promptly refused to accept the present upon the ground that one would have to know the word in order to look it up.—New York Times.

Gowns From the Undertaker's.

"You'll be astonished when I tell you," said a man who knows, "but it's a fact that dressmakers sometimes send to a fashionable undertaker for a gown when they have a hurry order. There was a time when undertakers carried only shrouds in stock, but in this age of luxury the big concerns have a line of what are known in the trade as 'ladies' fine burial dresses.' Such materials as henrietta, pongee, faille and chiffon taffeta are used for these dresses, and they are made in the prevailing style. The dressmakers know this, and if they can't find what they want in one of the regular shops, they don't hesitate to call on the undertaker."—New York Sun.

As He Viewed It.

Stranger (in small town)—I saw by the papers that a boy lives here who was born with no legs and no arms. I am a dime museum manager, and I should like to find him.

Citizen—No use hunting him up. His parents won't exhibit him.

"They won't? Well, it beats all what blessings fall to folks as can't appreciate 'em."—Kansas City Independent.

Never Touched Him.

Nodd—Would you mind returning the book you borrowed of me last year?
Todd—Some one borrowed it of me and hasn't returned it yet. Did you ever see anything like the way some people act about a thing like that? They have no sense of honor.—Life.

Seward's Prophecy Realized.

When, shortly before his death in 1872, William H. Seward was asked what he believed to be the greatest achievement of his public career, he answered, "The annexation of Alaska." He added, however, "But the American people will not grasp the value of that acquisition for a third of a century yet." This shows that Seward, the empire builder, was also a prophet. Seward has been dead for thirty-five years, and it is only in recent times that his countrymen have appreciated the importance of Alaska as a possession. Strong opposition was offered in the house of representatives in 1867 to making the appropriation of \$7,200,000, the price which Seward paid to Russia for the province. Said one of annexation's opponents in that chamber, "All that Alaska will ever be able to produce are polar bears and icebergs." For several years a nickname for the region was "Seward's Folly." But time has fully vindicated Seward.—Leslie's Weekly.

The Oldest Text Book.

Within the last few years a revolution has been accomplished at Oxford which ought really to affect the mind of the nation more than the difference between Lord Curzon and Lord Rosebery. A text book has been discarded which was already venerable for its antiquity at the beginning of the Christian era. Needless to say, we are referring to Euclid's "Elements," for what other text book ever had such a run as that? It has been accepted ever since its publication, which was in the reign of the first Ptolemy (B. C. 323-85). No writer has ever become so identified with a science as Euclid with geometry. The nearest approaches are to be found in the relation of Aristotle to logic and of Adam Smith to political economy.—London Spectator.

A Stairway of Concrete.

One of the most novel, useful and pleasing uses to which cement has been put in interior construction is the hanging concrete stairway. In its construction no structural iron whatever is used, only small channel bars one-quarter inch by three-quarter inch spaced about four inches and covered with expanded metal lathing. The false work can be removed in two weeks. The stairway supports not only its own weight, but, in addition, 7,500 pounds of marble, and a load of 2,000 pounds has been carried up the stairs without injury or deflection. Only the best quality cement should be used in interior work.—Philadelphia Ledger.

The Dog.

Why any sane person should wish to nurse any animal at mealtime it is difficult to see, and when that animal is a dog the matter fairly passes comprehension. With all his good qualities the friend of man has a most disgusting habit of cadging for food whenever he sees it, and as a table companion he is decidedly objectionable.—Country Gentleman.

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