

SCIENCE:

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Attention is called to the "Wants" column. All are invited to use it in soliciting information or seeking new positions. The name and address of applicants should be given in full, so that answers will go direct to them. The "Exchange" column is likewise open.

JUGGLERY.¹

RECENTLY I met with a certain observation the source of which, to my regret, I failed to note. I therefore take the opportunity of appealing to my readers for their kind help in identifying the passage or quotation in question, because it has a scientific bearing of a very obvious nature. The observation was as follows: A writer, in speaking of the fallacies of the senses, described the Hindoo juggler's trick of causing a small plant to grow out of a flower-pot in which, a few moments before, the conjurer had placed some seeds. The pot is covered over or concealed by a blanket, and when the covering is withdrawn the apparently marvellous and instantaneous growth of the seed into a perfect plant is witnessed. Now, the writer in question goes on to state that an amateur photographer had taken a "snap-shot" at the conjurer and his performance, and when the negative was developed no plant could be seen growing in the pot at all. The inference is that the spectators only fancied they saw a plant, and that the success of the trick is due to the juggler making his audience believe they see what does not really exist. In plain language, he is supposed to hypnotize the spectators, and the illusion is to be regarded not as due to his dexterity but to his power of making the spectators believe they see what he wishes them to behold.

Assuming the incident with the camera to be true and of good report, how is the omission of the flower in the pot to be accounted for? If a photograph of the scene had been taken at all, it must necessarily have included all the details within range of the lens, and, as Boucicault makes one of his characters in "The Octoroon" say, "The apparatus doesn't lie." I do not pretend to criticise the statement at all. I am merely anxious to know if any of my readers interested in psychical matters can confer a favor by referring me to the original source of the story. My own recollection is that I casually met with the reference in an

American magazine, which I glanced at while waiting for a friend. The name of the magazine and its date (which must be recent, I fancy) have both escaped my recollection.

After thinking over the above incident, one is inclined to be somewhat sceptical of the story as I have related it—although my version, I admit, may not be absolutely correct. A perusal of a paper by Chevalier Hermann, the conjurer, confirms me in my scepticism. He tells us that when he visited India he could find no foundation in actual fact for the marvellous stories of Hindoo jugglery, including the fact of "youths tossing balls of twine in the air and climbing up on them out of sight." What Herr Hermann did see in India, he tells us, he could have imitated "with little preparation," and that he "would not presume to introduce them upon the stage." This is a decided blow to the reputation of our Indian friends, and after this assertion the tales of fakirs being buried for six weeks, and recovering thereafter, may reasonably be doubted also, although I shall feel interested in hearing from any of my Indian readers accounts of what they have actually seen in the way of startling magic. It will be interesting if I quote what Hermann has to say of the flower-pot trick, which the unknown psychologist has tried to explain on the basis that the conjurer causes his audience to see what does not exist—a startling enough theory, by the way, since it supposes that all sorts and conditions of men looking on could be simultaneously hypnotized.

In Bombay a troupe of jugglers appeared in front of the hotel in which Herr Hermann was staying. After a short address, an empty flower-pot was produced. This was filled with earth, which was moistened with water, and into the pot a few mango seeds were dropped. A large piece of cloth was used to cover the pot, which rested upon a tripod of bamboo-sticks. Then followed an address to the audience, and the operator walked slowly round the covered pot, "dexterously allowing his robes to envelop it at each turn," while the other members of the troupe chanted a kind of incantation. After some three minutes occupied in this performance, the incantation ceased, the cloth was removed, and in it was seen growing a mango-tree about three feet in height, the plant having apparently grown after the planting of the seed. This is a bare description of what the Western conjurer saw his Eastern rivals perform, and it sounds very wonderful, no doubt. Hermann's explanation of the trick, however, causes us to repeat the hackneyed expression that "it is not at all startling when you know how it's done." What the Hindoo wizard did was to remove the pot from beneath the cloth—a dexterous proceeding enough, but not a whit more wonderful or clever than things we see done at the Egyptian Hall or at other entertainments of like nature—and to substitute the growing mango, which he carried concealed under his robe. "This," adds Hermann, "he did rather clumsily, while he let the robe rest, as if by accident, over the covered flower-pot previously displayed."

This recital is interesting scientifically, because, as I have said, we hear so much about Indian jugglery and esoteric mysteries, which no science is supposed to be capable of explaining, that one may find some justification for a continued display of scepticism when still more mysterious feats are gravely detailed. I find that the facts about Indian magic and mystery set forth in books in grave, circumstantial array do not always coincide with what actually occurs; hence my appeal to Indian readers of these lines for accounts of things they may have seen in the way of live burials and resuscitations (if such things are still in vogue) and like phenomena.

¹ Dr. Andrew Wilson, in the *Illustrated News of the World*.