

"NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE"

The Listener Makes Some Discoveries About Magic

"TAKE a card," said the ex-president of the Wellington Magicians' Society, thrusting a pack at me. I took one.

"Look at it," he said. I looked at it.

"Put it back in the pack." I did so, and just to make it difficult, squared it off carefully.

He then put the pack behind his back, mumbled something under his breath, looked dreamily at the ceiling, finally said, "It was the queen of spades."

And so it was.

"Now that may seem pretty slick to you," the ex-president went on. "but you know, and I know, that there is no such thing as magic really. It is deception, fraud, and trickery, and there were three sleights of hand in the trick I showed you, though I won't tell you where they were."

"I noticed that the Magicians' Society held its annual meeting the other day," I said before he had time to produce another trick. "I was surprised to find that there are enough magicians in New Zealand, let alone in Wellington, to form a society. Tell me all about it."

"Well, it's like this," said the ex-president. . . .

THE art of magic, some people may think, goes back to the day when the patriarch Moses astounded several thousands of Israelites by turning a rod into a snake. In New Zealand the practice of the art goes back to the old Maori Tohungas, who achieved an enviable social position with the aid of a few simple tricks which most amateur magicians to-day could perform with ease.

An historical example of Maori magic is related in an old issue of the New Zealand magicians' magazine *Te Tohunga*. The occasion was a visit paid by Bishop Selwyn to that redoubtable chief Te Heuheu. When most of the Maori chiefs had been converted to Christianity, Te Heuheu alone withstood all advances by the missionaries. To be defied in this manner so piqued Bishop Selwyn that he resolved to visit Te Heuheu and convert him personally.

When the two met there was a great deal of haranguing and argument, and at last Te Heuheu beckoned to a Tohunga by the name of Hunuaho, who was standing near.

"Show the stranger priest a sign," he said, whereupon the Tohunga picked up a brown and faded leaf that had fallen from a cabbage tree overhead. "Here," said the Tohunga to the Bishop, "make this dead leaf green again."

"I cannot do this," said the Bishop, "nor can you, nor any living man."

"But see," said the Tohunga, and he tossed the brown leaf high into the air. It wavered downward to the earth, fresh green as any new leaf.

"Can you do as much?" then asked Te Heuheu.

"I have already answered you," said the Bishop.

"Then," said Te Heuheu, "your Gods are weaker than mine, and I shall not listen to you."

The account in *Te Tohunga* adds that this was apparently a good colour change trick.

THE modern era of magic in New Zealand is believed to begin with the visit in 1855 of a gentleman by the name of "Wizard Jacobs." The following year came "Monsieur Theo," and two years later "Professor Anderson." Little is known of these, little even of a colourful magician who toured this country in 1875 under the title of "Dr. Sylvester, Fakir of Oolu."



H. DOVER

From three billiard balls to president

More is known of Carl Hertz, however. He came to New Zealand in 1880 with a programme of parlour conjuring, vaudeville, and illusions, and whipped up a great deal of free publicity by offering £1,000 to anyone who could blow the bottom out of his "canary in a cage" act. With typical conservatism, old time magicians who saw him perform claim that there has been no one in recent years to touch him.

Trickery Exposed by Trickery

It was in 1912 that the first magical society in New Zealand came into existence. It was known as the New Zealand Magical Circle, and held regular meetings until just before the outbreak of the Great War, when it disbanded and reformed as the New Zealand Psychic Investigation Society, with Tom Driver ("Kudarz") as first president. "Kudarz," who was a well-known newspaperman, was acclaimed by Houdini as "the Maskelyne of Australia." One of his hobbies was exposing fraudulent spiritualistic mediums. Several years before the war a certain spiritualist describing himself as an apport medium toured the Dominion giving demonstrations of his supernatural skill. He must have been sadly embarrassed by the fact that "Kudarz" was following hard on his heels, demonstrating exactly the same phenomena by avowed trickery.

The present New Zealand Society of Magicians is 19 years old, and claims

longer standing than any other similar society in the Southern Hemisphere. The Wellington Magicians' Society was formed in 1932 and has 22 members. There are societies in Auckland, Hamilton, New Plymouth, Opunake, Napier, Wellington, Christchurch, Timaru, and Dunedin. Altogether well over 100 people in this country can claim the title of magician, and are capable of giving a competent display of conjuring, manipulating, card tricks, illusions, hypnotism, and other magical entertainment.

Credentials Demanded

It isn't as easy as one might think to become a member of a magicians' society. With an eye to the dangers of admitting charlatans and people with loose tongues, the Wellington society, for instance, demands an oath of secrecy and three references as to character from applicants for membership.

When H. Dover, recently elected president of the society, joined it six years ago, all he could do was the three billiard balls trick. Now, thanks to what he has picked up from obliging fellow members, Mr. Dover can turn on at short notice a nicely varied fifteen minutes of magic. Not only this, Mr. Dover has also devoted a certain amount of time to studying the academic side of magic, and as the "Hobby Man" gives regular talks in the ZB Children's sessions.

Magicians' meetings are naturally surrounded with a good deal of secrecy, but as far as can be ascertained they usually consist of a mixture of magic and social intercourse. The magic may include exchange of ideas and the latest magical literature, and anyone with a new illusion or sleight is sure to be invited to step up and demonstrate it before the most critical audience he will ever have.

Big Show at Exhibition

Easter of last year saw a Convention of New Zealand Magicians at Wellington, complete with mayoral reception, conference, magicians' day at the Centennial Exhibition, "mammoth public show," contests, banquet, sightseeing trip, and farewell party. The convention president was George Tollerton of Auckland, better known to ZB radio listeners as George of *Chuckles with Jerry*, and the "mammoth public show" at the exhibition attracted 8,000 people to the bandshell, a record for the whole of the Exhibition period.

Te Tohunga, "the new magazine for New Zealand magicians," is a bright quarterly magazine of about 30 pages of news, articles on magic in all its forms, and instructions on new tricks and sleights of hand.

A Headless Boy

Some of the tricks explained are most intriguing to the layman. One is entitled "A New Kink with the Dove Pan," and is claimed as "a wow for ladies' nights." Four cards are selected, torn up, burned, and then rediscovered in the middle of "four nice floral bouquets," which are



then presented to the ladies who selected the cards.

Not so suitable for ladies' nights is the macabre trick "A Decapitation Mystery," an elaborate tableau in which a small boy is seated in a chair with a cylindrical tube over his head, which is then severed from his body by means of a well-sharpened cutlass. A great deal of blood is shed, several yards of tape are removed from the skull, and the boy is generally put to a good deal of discomfort before being restored miraculously to full vigour.

Exposure Not Encouraged

Revelations of how tricks are done, however, had better go no further, for exposure of magic is a subject on which magicians feel deeply. A recent issue of *Te Tohunga* noted with pained surprise the exposures in the film *Eternally Yours*, starring David Niven and Loretta Young.

"But here," the ex-president of the Wellington Magicians' Society interrupted, "I must leave you. As the magician said, I have a date with an egg, and I don't want to break it."

—J.G.M.

Magical Odds And Ends

WHILE we're on the subject of magic: Nicola, the professional magician who has toured New Zealand several times, was a heavy loser last year when the ship on which he was travelling was torpedoed. All his magical equipment, worth several thousands of pounds, went down with the ship.

Sydney has one of the strangest magicians' clubs in the world. It is known as "The Five Demons," and comprises five Sydney magicians who meet by stealth and in great secret, admitting no strangers. Their principal activity is evolving a combined magical act which they stage at charity gatherings. They assume Mephistophelian dress, complete with cloaks, hoods, and horns sprouting from the head, and are said to get a great deal of fun and excitement out of life.

The Otago Magical Society claims that it is the most southern in the world. Several members are described as having been "connected with magic" for 35 and 40 years.