

but next day they had so many wonders to tell that everybody's curiosity was fired, and after that for a fortnight the magician had prosperous times. I was fourteen or fifteen years old—the age at which a boy is willing to endure all things, suffer all things, short of death by fire, if thereby he may be conspicuous and show off before the public; and so, when I saw the "subjects" perform their foolish antics on the platform and make the people laugh and shout and admire, I had a burning desire to be a subject myself.

Every night, for three nights, I sat in the row of candidates on the platform, and held the magic disk in the palm of my hand, and gazed at it and tried to get sleepy; but it was a failure; I remained wide awake, and had to retire defeated, like the majority. Also, I had to sit there and be gnawed with envy of Hicks, our journeyman; I had to sit there and see him scamper and jump when Simmons the enchanter exclaimed, "See the snake! See the snake!" and hear him say, "My! how beautiful!" in response to the suggestion that he was observing a splendid sunset; and so on—the whole insane business. I couldn't laugh, I couldn't applaud; it filled me with bitterness to have others do it, and to have people make a hero of Hicks, and crowd around him when the show was over, and ask him for more and more particulars of the wonders he had seen in his visions, and manifest in many ways that they were proud to be acquainted with him. Hicks—the ideal! I couldn't stand it; I was getting boiled to death in my own bile.

Succumbed to Temptation

ON the fourth night temptation came, and I was not strong enough to resist. When I had gazed at the disk awhile I pretended to be sleepy, and began to nod. Straightway came the professor and made passes over my head and down my body and legs and arms, finishing each pass with a snap of his fingers in the air, to discharge the surplus electricity; then he began to "draw" me with the disk, holding it in his fingers and telling me I could not take my eyes off it, try as I might; so I rose slowly, bent and gazing, and followed that disk all over the place, just as I had seen the others do. Then I was put through the other paces. Upon suggestion I fled from snakes; passed buckets at a fire; became excited over hot steamboat races; made love to imaginary girls and kissed them; fished from the platform and landed mud cats that outweighed me—and so on, all the customary marvels. But not in the customary way. I was cautious at first, and watchful, being afraid the professor would discover that I was an impostor and drive me from the platform in disgrace; but as soon as I realized that I was not in danger, I set myself the task of terminating Hicks's usefulness as a subject, and of usurping his place.

It was a sufficiently easy task. Hicks was born honest; I, without that incumbrance—so some people said. Hicks saw what he saw, and reported accordingly; I saw more than was visible, and added to it such details as could help. Hicks had no imagination; I had a double supply. He was born calm; I was born excited. No vision could start a rapture in him, and he was constipated as to language, anyway; but if I saw a vision I emptied the dictionary onto it, and lost the remnant of my mind into the bargain.

At the end of my first half-hour Hicks was a thing of the past, a fallen hero, a broken idol, and I knew it and was glad, and said in my heart, Success to crime! Hicks could never have been mesmerized to the point where he could kiss an imaginary girl in public, or a real one either; but I was competent. Whatever Hicks had failed in, I made it a point to succeed in, let the cost be what it might, physically or morally. He had shown several bad defects, and I had made a note of them. For instance, if the magician asked, "What do you see?" and left him to invent a vision for himself, Hicks was dumb and blind, he couldn't see a thing nor say a word; whereas the magician soon found that when it came to seeing visions of a stunning and marketable sort I could get along better without his help than with it.

Then there was another thing: Hicks wasn't worth a tallow dip on mute mental suggestion. Whenever Simmons stood behind him and gazed at the back of his skull and tried to drive a mental suggestion into it, Hicks sat with vacant face, and never suspected. If he had been noticing, he could have seen by the rapt faces of the audience that something was going on behind his back that required a response. Inasmuch as I was an impostor I dreaded to have this test put upon me; for I knew the professor would be "willing" me to do something, and as I couldn't know what it was, I should be exposed and denounced. However, when my time came I took my chance. I perceived by the tense and expectant faces of the people that Simmons was behind me "willing" me with all his might. I tried my best to imagine what he wanted; but nothing suggested itself. I felt ashamed and miserable then. I believed that the hour of my disgrace was come, and that in another moment I should go out of that place disgraced. I ought to be ashamed to confess it, but my next thought was, not how I could win the compassion of kindly hearts by going out humbly and in sorrow for my misdoings, but how I could go out most sensationally and spectacularly.

A Hypnotic Crisis

THERE was a rusty and empty old revolver lying on the table, among the properties employed in the performances. On May day, two or three weeks

before, there had been a celebration by the schools, and I had had a quarrel with a big boy who was the school bully, and I had not come out of it with credit. That boy was now seated in the middle of the house, half-way down the main aisle. I crept stealthily and impressively toward the table, with a dark and murderous scowl on my face, copied from a popular romance, seized the revolver suddenly, flourished it, shouted the bully's name, jumped off the platform, and made a rush for him and chased him out of the house before the paralyzed people could interfere to save him. There was a storm of applause, and the magician, addressing the house, said most impressively:

"That you may know how really remarkable this is, and how wonderfully developed a subject we have in this boy, I assure you that without a single spoken word to guide him he has carried out what I mentally commanded him to do, to the minutest detail. I could have stopped him at a moment in his vengeful career by a mere exertion of my will; therefore the poor fellow who has escaped was at no time in danger."

So I was not in disgrace. I returned to the platform a hero, and happier than I have ever been in this world since. As regards mental suggestion, my fears of it were gone. I judged that in case I failed to guess what the professor might be willing me to do, I could count on putting up something that would answer just as well. I was right, and exhibitions of unspoken suggestion became a favorite with the public. Whenever I perceived that I was being willing to do something, I got up and did something,—anything that occurred to me,—and the magician, not being a fool, always ratified it. When people asked me, "How can you tell what he is willing you to do?" I said, "It's just as easy!" and they always said admiringly "Well, it beats me how you can do it."

Tough on the Subject

HICKS was weak in another detail. When the professor made passes over him and said, "His whole body is without sensation now. Come forward and test him, ladies and gentlemen," the ladies and gentlemen always complied eagerly, and stuck pins into Hicks, and if they went deep Hicks was sure to wince. Then that poor professor would have to explain that Hicks wasn't "sufficiently under the influence." But I didn't wince; I only suppressed, and shed tears on the inside. The miseries that a conceited boy will endure to keep up his "reputation"! And so will a conceited man; I know it in my own person, and have seen it in a hundred thousand others. That professor ought to have professed me, and I often hoped he would, when the tests were unusually severe; but he didn't. It may be that he was deceived as well as the others, though I did not believe it nor think it possible. Those were dear good people; but they must have carried simplicity and credulity to the limit. They would stick a pin in my arm and bear on it until they drove it a third of its length in, and then be lost in wonder that by a mere exercise of will power the professor could turn my arm to iron and make it insensible to pain. Whereas it was not insensible at all; I was suffering agonies of pain.

After that fourth night,—that proud night that triumphant night,—I was the only subject Simmons invited no more candidates to the platform. I performed alone, every night, the rest of the fortnight. In the beginning of the second week I conquered the last doubters. Up to that time a dozen wise old heads, the intellectual aristocracy of the town, had held out, as implacable unbelievers. I was as hurt by this as if I were engaged in some honest occupation. There is nothing surprising about this. Human beings feel dishonor the most, sometimes, when they most deserve it. That handful of overwise old gentlemen kept on shaking their heads all the first week, and saying they had seen no marvels there that could not have been produced by collusion; and they were pretty vain of their unbelief too, and used to show it and air it, and be superior to the ignorant and the gullible. Particularly old Dr. Peake, who was the ringleader of the irreconcilables, and very formidable; for he was an F.F.V., he was learned, white haired, and venerable, nobly and richly clad in the fashions of an earlier and a courtier day, he was large and stately, and he not only seemed wise, but was what he seemed in that regard. He had great influence, and his opinion upon any matter was worth much more than that of any other person in the community. When I conquered him at last, I knew I was undisputed master of the field; and now, after more than fifty years, I acknowledge, with a few dry old tears, that I rejoiced without shame.

A Timely Memory

[DICTATED DECEMBER 2, 1906.]

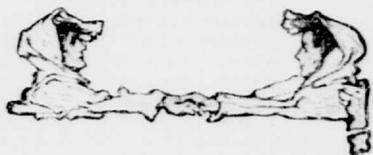
IN 1847 we were living in a large white house on the corner of Hill and Main-sts., a house that still stands, but isn't large now, although it hasn't lost a plank.—I saw it a year ago and noticed that shrinkage. My father died in it in March of the year mentioned; but our family did not move out of it until some months afterward. Ours was not the only family in the house; there was another—Dr. Grant's. One day Dr. Grant and Dr. Reyburn argued a matter on the street with sword canes, and Grant was brought home multifariously punctured. Old Dr. Peake calked the leaks, and came every day for awhile to look after him.

The Grants were Virginians, like Peake, and one

GREAT WORDS DEFINED IN EPIGRAM

By WILLIAM
GEORGE JORDAN

Drawings by J. L. S. Williams



Gossip

Drunkenness of the tongue.
Verbal vivisection of one's neighbors.
A conversational conspiracy of ignorance, inquisitiveness, impertinence, and intolerance.
Syndicating petty, prying personalities.
The malaria of meddlesomeness in a community.
Reports of the vigilance committee of society.
Public laundering of private reputations.
Playing shuttlecock with the personal affairs of others.

Sympathy

The imagination of the heart.
Fellowship of the emotions.
The instinctive fine brotherhood of the soul.
Hearing the unspoken language of another's heart.
Barometric sensitiveness to another's moods.
Two sharing the joy and the sorrow of one.
The universal kinship of humanity made a fact.
The Gulf Stream of love through the waters of the world's misunderstanding.
The power to feel vividly what one has not experienced.

Orthodoxy

Wearing a ready made uniform of belief.
Thinking along the lines of least resistance.
The one word adopted as a trademark by each creed to distinguish it from the others.
Keeping in step with the rear guard.
Comfortable conservatism in the world of thought.
Fighting on the side of the biggest battalions of belief.
Living in an atmosphere of thought guaranteed by authority, tradition, and respectability.
Sterilized mental food put up in cans.
Arrogant assumption of the sole infallibility of one's faith.

