

ALEXANDER HERRMANN PRESTIDIGITATOR.

BY W. E. ROBINSON.

The late Alexander Herrmann, the subject of this article, was born in Paris, France, February 11, 1843, and died in his own private car on December 17, 1896, while en route from Rochester, N. Y., to Bradford, Pa.

He came of a family of great prestidigitators. His father Samuel Herrmann being the first of that name, also the original of the modern magician to use the word "prestidigitator" as a title of his profession. Samuel Herrmann was the most famous conjurer of his day and a great favorite of the Sultan of Turkey, who, whenever feeling indisposed, would invariably send for him and pay a princely sum to be entertained by this man of magic.

The next in the family to pick up the magic wand was Carl Herrmann, who was the first of the Herrmanns to visit America, likewise the first to use and introduce the name prestidigitator in this country. Carl was Alexander's eldest brother and achieved great success in the world of magic, and at the time of his death, which occurred June 8, 1887, at Carlsbad, Germany, left behind a large fortune. Carl and Alexander came of a family of sixteen children, Carl the eldest and Alexander the youngest.

After Carl took up magic as a profession, the father retired and took up the study and practice of medicine.

It was the father's fondest hopes to make of his youngest and favorite son Alexander a physician, but fate decreed it otherwise; the youngster's mind did not bear in that direction, but in the same channel as the brother's, and that was magic. His whole desire and ambition was to become a magician. Like father like son. He coaxed his brother to accept him as his assistant, and finally one day young Alexander was missing. The fact was he had been kidnapped and taken away by Carl, with whom he made his first public appearance at the age of eight, at a performance given by Carl in St. Petersburg, Russia. Even at that early age his great dexterity and ingenuity and presence of mind were simply marvelous, and his brother benefited greatly by his genius and built castles in the air of the great future in store for them both; but his dreams were rudely awakened by the sudden appearance of the father, who had traced their whereabouts and immediately returned home, taking Alexander with him.

But the youth's attention could not be diverted from his chosen profession. His mind and thoughts were ever about it, and one day he was again found wanting, it afterward having been proved that he had written to his brother, who sent for him. This time the father made a compromise with Carl, stating that if Alexander's education be not neglected, he could continue with Carl, who thereupon engaged two competent tutors to travel with and instruct the young prodigy. For six years the brothers worked together, visiting Spain, France, Germany, Russia, and the surrounding countries. And then again the parents had Alexander taken away and put to school at the University of Vienna to finish his education. But at the age of sixteen the old desire and fascination for magic possessed him, and having received a proposal from his brother to join forces and make a tour of the world, he again ran away from the old folks.

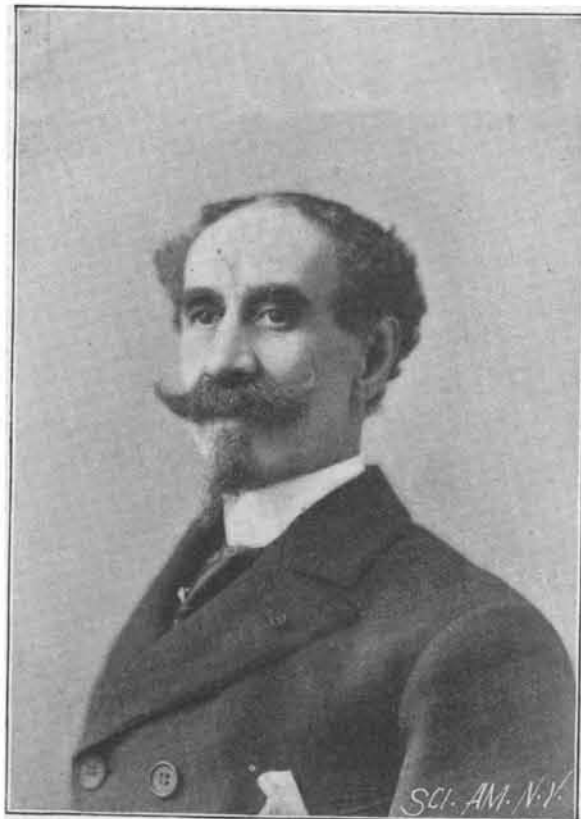
Their first appearance in America was at the Academy of Music on Monday, September 16, 1861. After touring this country a short while they left it, returning again at two different times, once, Monday, September 11, 1865, and the next time Monday, September 20, 1869. This was the opening night of their last joint engagement, and on this night Carl introduced Alexander to the audience as his brother and successor. After this engagement Carl continued a short tour of this country, while Alexander went to Europe, where he appeared in the principal cities, and also made a tour of the Brazils and South America, and also made a remarkable run of one thousand performances at the Egyptian Hall, London, England, after which he returned to the United States in the year 1874; since which time he had made this country his home, becoming a naturalized citizen in Boston, Mass., in the year 1876. His career as a magician was one uninterrupted success, and I doubt if any man was more of a public character than himself.

Herrmann had a remarkable resemblance to his "Satanic Majesty," and he cultivated the likeness as much as possible, well knowing the public ideal of a magician was one who looked like the "old boy."

His aspect was not forbidding, however. He was ever genial and kind to those about him. He had a thin face and sharp, piercing black eyes, and added to this a pointed beard or goatee, and a heavy mustache curled up at the points, and a head of curly hair; such a man looked the magician, and the public expected him to do things magical as a matter of course, and it is safe to say, in no way were they disappointed. "Magicians are born, not made," was a favorite expression of his, and Dame Nature certainly had him in view for one when she brought him to this sphere.

His success lay not only in his skill as a manipulator, but also in his witty remarks and ever-running fire of good-natured small talk. He was a great conjurer and clever comedian, and a fine actor, for he was playing

the part of a magician in this play of life and acted it well. Carl Herrmann was very sedate, and presented his magic more in the manner of a scientific lecture, and always on the mysterious and tragic side, whereas Alexander was ever gay, his tricks one and all had a happy or mirthful ending, he was always striving to make the public laugh as well as mystify them. Carl

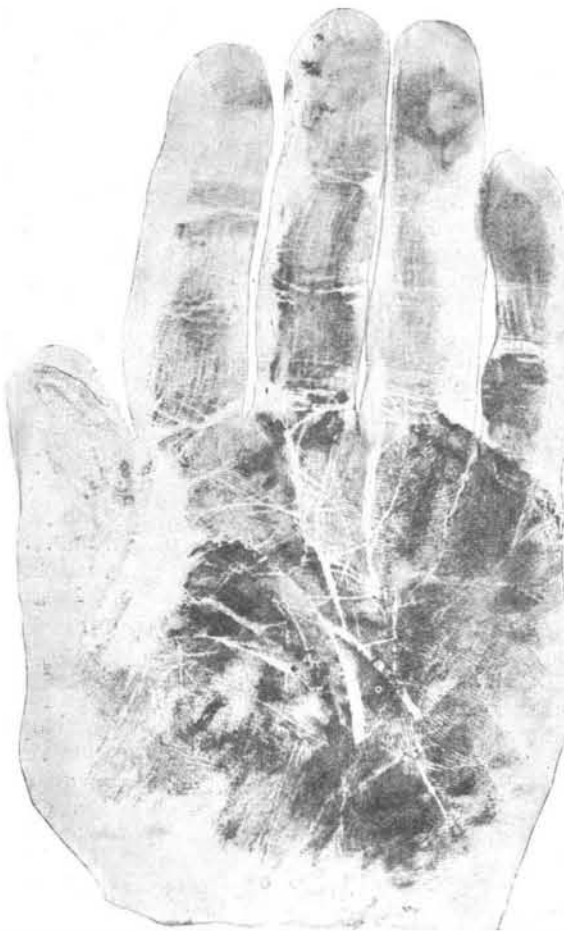


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presented magic as a drama, Alexander as a comedy, and it is doubtful if any conjurer has done more to elevate the art and bring it to a successful recognition as a healthful, innocent amusement than he has. His hands were trained to a marvelous state of responsiveness. His misdirection, as it is termed in magician's parlance, was simply beyond description. If his eyes looked in a certain direction, yours were bound to follow them, as if compelled to do so by some mysterious power.

Herrmann's pet hobby was hypnotism, and he was a master of that weird science, and attributed many of his successful feats at private as well as public performance to its use, although he never gave public demonstrations of it.

Herrmann's great forte was cards; not only was he



IMPRESSION OF HERRMANN'S HAND.

master of the ordinary tricks of causing cards to disappear, to again reappear under some strangers' vests or in their pockets, but he could also with the greatest ease and grace distribute them about a theater with great accuracy; sending them time and time again into the very laps and hands of individuals asking for them. By long practice Herrmann was able to tear a deck

of fifty-two cards, evenly stacked up, first into halves and then into quarters, almost as clean as if done with a knife. It was while performing before Nicholas, the Czar of all the Russias, that he made a great impression with this feat. At the conclusion of his entertainment, the Czar complimented Herrmann upon his skill, and also decorated him, at the same time smilingly remarking he would show Herrmann a trick. The Czar, who was a man of wonderful strength, in fact most Russians are, took up a pack of cards and tore them in half, and with good humor asked Herrmann what he thought of it, and if he could duplicate it. What was his surprise to see Herrmann take one of the halves of the deck and tear it into quarters. Herrmann was as clever with his tongue as he was with his hands. He had mastered French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Dutch and English, which he spoke with that delightful accent we all liked to hear. He also had a fair knowledge of Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic and Swedish. He had received jewels and been decorated by almost every sovereign of Europe, among which were a cross from the King of Belgium, one from the late King of Spain, a ring from King of Portugal, another from Prince of Wales, and various other gems and medals.

It was at private entertainments, clubs, and like places, that one had a chance to see Herrmann's true skill as a prestidigitator. For it was then he worked impromptu, and of course without any apparatus, simply depending upon his manual dexterity. One trick that caused more talk and wonderment than the rest was the vanishing glass of wine. Just as he would place a wine glass, full to its brim with sparkling wine, to his lips, he would give a sudden look of surprise, and an exclamation, and lo! the glass of wine had disappeared from his hand, only to be reproduced immediately from some bystander's coat tail pocket.

He would also abstract from a person's finger a ring, which had just been placed there by Herrmann, while all eyes were gazing at it. Another clever deception was the changing of a silver dollar into a twenty dollar gold piece. He would also cause to disappear a magnum bottle of champagne, holding about two quarts, and then take it from under a gentleman's coat. These are a few of the countless number of pure sleight of hand tricks with which he was identified. He was also a very good ventriloquist and imitator of birds, and quite clever with his hands at juggling and hand shadows, but these were simply for his own amusement and practice.

The lines in his hands were the most wonderful students of cheirography and professors of palmistry had ever seen. They claim his power of imagination must have been nothing short of miraculous, as he was the possessor of three lines of imagination, instead of one. The lines also denote a generous heart, a seeker after friendship, a determined nature, and a man who would have made a good painter or musician.

The hands of Herrmann were slender and tapering, very much like a lady's hand. The impression of his hand was taken a few days after his death, and appears to be a short hand. This is accounted for by the fact that the hands had become slightly curled inward, consequently the foreshortening of the same in the picture.

The name of Herrmann, let us hope, will, like the brook, go on forever. Leon Herrmann, a nephew of the deceased, who resembles him very closely, is now in America, having taken up the work of magic where his uncle had left off.

Insanity and Tuberculosis Among Negroes.

A correspondent of the Lancet says previously to the abolition of slavery there was very little tuberculosis or insanity in America among the negroes of the Southern States, who were observed to enjoy a remarkable immunity from both affections. After emancipation they appeared to quickly lose this immunity, and at the present time are exceedingly susceptible to both. Formerly, although in a state of slavery, they are said to have been well cared for, compelled to lead orderly, regular lives, and kept from dissipation and excess. Freedom removed these restraints, and they quickly plunged into riotous and vicious habits. A physician who has investigated the subject writes in a transatlantic contemporary that "the rapid increase of insanity and consumption in this race is due to a combination of causes and conditions. They have developed a highly insane, consumptive, syphilitic, and alcoholic constitution which predisposes them to diseases they were formerly free from. In this disturbed and unstable condition they seem to be totally unable to resist the slightest excitement. Recent mortality returns show that the death rate of the colored people from tuberculosis is three times as high as that of the whites."

FRANCE seems to be bent on conquest in Abyssinia. Besides Prince Henri of Orleans' expeditions, two others, one headed by M. Bouvalet, the other sent out by the French Upper Nile Company, have just left France for Menelek's country.