

SEEKING THE EXPLANATION OF REESE'S "MIND READING"

Committee of Scientists Will Make Special Tests of His Powers---How Somewhat Similar Performances Are Done.

By Edward Marshall.
The article in last Sunday's TIMES in which I called the mind-reading exploits of Prof. Bert Reese before Thomas A. Edison, the world-famed inventor; a celebrated Judge, and a half dozen other men, all high in business or professions, at the New York residence of one of them, has attracted the attention of the Nation from one coast to the other. There have been some interesting developments, which are today presented.

Later in this article will be found suggestions made by Mr. Edison himself for a more careful study of the "mind reader," whom he regards as a plain prodigy. He suggests as his associates in this two men of world-wide reputation, and expressed the wish to have the test made at his famous laboratory in Orange, where he could certainly see the thing possibly be practiced. This is not a matter which I have any doubt as to its being possible to arrange it. It will be for THE TIMES exclusively.

"Will Reese submit?" I asked Mr. Edison.
"I think he will," said Mr. Edison.
"Later, that same evening, I saw Prof. Reese. His good-natured German face beamed pleasantly. The idea did not seem to frighten him.
"I will submit," he answered cheerfully. "to any test that Mr. Edison may care to make; I will gladly let any gentleman he may select, or whom THE TIMES may choose, try any experiments they wish upon me. I am very anxious to improve the methods that do my work by the ordinary used by sleight of hand performers, and I can disprove them. I will go before any group of men, at any time, at any place, if asked to do so by Mr. Edison or by THE TIMES, and show them everything I can."
All sorts of explanations have been advanced that Reese did was an old-time palming trick. It is asserted that both Mr. Edison and Dr. William Hanna Thomson, whom THE TIMES mentioned last Sunday as having been puzzled by Reese's performance, were deceived by simple jugglery.

The explanation given is that Reese, while the experimenter is writing out the questions which he wishes to have answered, gets hold of a bit of paper similar to that on which the questions are being written. This he is said to palm in his own hand, doing it so skillfully that not even if you were looking straight at him could you note what he was doing. Clever work this would be in a parlor full of watchful, able men! It is then asserted that while the mind reader is showing you or telling you where to hide your questions, he is sure to handle one of them himself, and that, as he does this, he skillfully, with such expert sleight of hand that not the keenest eye can follow it, substitutes for it the blank bit of paper in his hand and retains the written question.

The paper which is hidden in a drawer, or in his pocket, or a book, is therefore the blank. By doing this he gets one bit of written paper "ahead of the game."
After that, according to the favorite "exposure," he finds his labors easily declared that he must state plainly before he can tell what is written on the paper, and, as he does this, raises his hand, palm inward, and places it against his forehead. As the hand is raised, he reads the paper in a flash, and then amazes all beholders by announcing what is on it.

The trouble is that this "exposure" does not really expose. It undoubtedly is true that the methods mentioned might be used upon a credulous crowd of children at a party, that such tricks have been used in theatres, where people gather for the special purpose of amusement. But they were not used in the experiments which Reese went through, and the presence of men of whom I wrote last Sunday in THE TIMES; they were not used in Dr. William Hanna Thomson's study, when Reese did there the queer things which mystified the doctor; they certainly were not used at the laboratory of Mr. Edison, in Orange, when Reese went there alone and answered written questions for the order of a scientist.
To make certain that what Reese did could not be explained in this way, I telephoned for him and had him come to my own house Friday evening.

There one question was written upon a half sheet of paper of which there was not another piece. Both bits of paper had come to me from a distance, being part of that on which was written one of the hundreds of letters called out by last Sunday's article in THE TIMES. This paper was dark gray.

The other question was written on one-half of a brown statement of dues payable, which I had received during the year from the Society of the Genesee, of which I am a member.
Each of these bits of paper were unusual, neither could be duplicated on short notice. I chose them so that if it proved to be a case of "the hand is quicker than the eye," those present could not possibly fail to detect it. One bit of paper was dull gray, one bit of paper was warm brown. Both bits of paper had come to me from a distance, being part of that on which was written one of the hundreds of letters called out by last Sunday's article in THE TIMES. This paper was dark gray.

On one of these bits of paper, on my own desk, with my own hand, I wrote the name of an old friend from whom, during the day, I had received a letter--William d'Heppburn, Washington. On the other I wrote, "What is the matter with my leg?"

Reese read the name of Washington with ease while the slip which bore it remained closed in a drawer--no substitution there. The "d'Heppburn" bothered him, but he got it all but the apostrophe.
When the other question's turn came he laughed before he answered it. This query was in another drawer. My care and unusual paper proved to be unnecessary, for he did not touch either slip. "Your leg is artificial," he replied at once.
Of course, he knew this, so his answering the question was not wonderful, but his reading of it was.

During the day I had been at Mr. Edison's laboratory in Orange discussing Reese and other matters with him. I told him of the suggestion of solution of Reese's performance by "palming."
"Absurd," said Mr. Edison. "The first time that Reese was here in this very room, and I was suspicious of him, I was expecting him to try to trick me. There are few intelligent men to-day who have not read exposures of 'mind-readers' who palm the questions after the method which this 'exposure' attributes to this man. I was prepared for that, for I had heard of it before. I guarded against it absolutely. There was no palming of the questions; the man did not palm one of them before his eyes and read it, having fooled me by sub-

sstituting for it in the place where I had hidden it a blank bit of paper.

"He did not palm the papers at my laboratory; he did not palm them at the interesting little exhibition which you wrote about last Sunday in THE TIMES. I do not say that this has not been done, I do not say that he might not have done it elsewhere, although I do not say he ever did, mind you. But I have not been fooled by any childish sleight-of-hand. I am interested in the man as a curious phenomenon, not otherwise. I vouch for nobody. But the explanation of his work which you have outlined is absurd.

"I have tried Reese on the reading of papers more than once, and he has done it when there has been but a single paper, and that one which he has not seen. To perform the trick which you refer to it would be necessary that the operator should take the paper into his own hands at some stage of the game. I have experi-

"There are some queer things not yet understood about what we call 'intuition.' The word is not quite definite in its interpretation by the average man, but human beings sometimes know things quite intuitively undoubtedly. There is a chance there for investigation. Nor is intuition entirely confined to human beings.

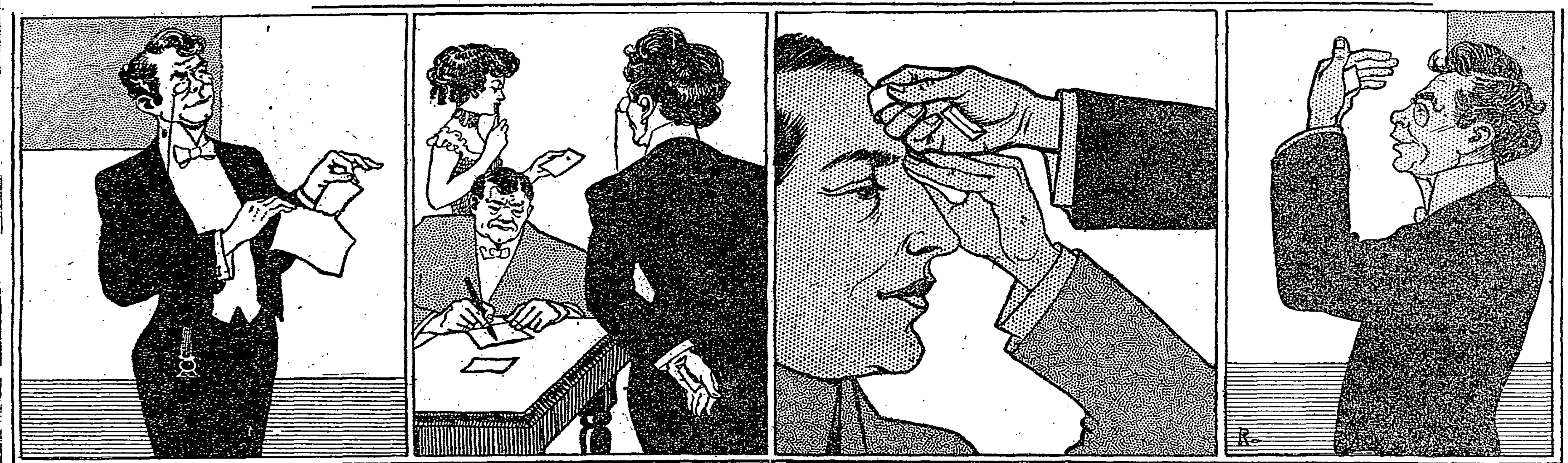
"Hans, the famous German horse, undoubtedly had intuition. He could tell the meaning of words written on a blackboard, to all seeming, but a strange thing was that it was necessary that he see the man who wrote them. Try him upon words previously written by a man then absent, and he was stumped completely. His powers of observation must have been amazing for an animal, and it is possible that some things that he did were suggested to him by the faces of the men who worked with him, but it was principally intuition.
"How much Reese's work can be ex-

posed passed the age when parlor tricks would be likely to deceive him; that he was awarded the Grand Prize for electrical work at the St. Louis Exposition; that he is a Trustee of the Peabody Academy of Science at Salem, Mass., and a member of the Corporation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A few men aside from Mr. Edison have done such wonders in the field of electricity. "Elihu Thomson could not possibly be fooled," Mr. Edison went on. "There is no keener, shrewder mind in the United States than his. If Reese will stand before us, and the other two will give consent, I shall be glad to join in an investigation of his powers which will certainly investigate."
"Shall I ask the men you mention?"
"Do."
The inventor's face glowed with enthusiasm. The thought that he was charged with having been duped easily by

read the future for them. For the second time he mentioned this before I left.
"I want to say again," said he, "that the man has shown no evidence to me of any power to read the future. I do not, of course, consider such things probable. They would involve too many things, would eliminate chance happenings and imply that all things for the future are ordered and arranged for in advance. Still, there are strange things happening; but--no--prophecy--impossible."
"So far as I can figure out, as I told you, and you stated in last Sunday's TIMES, the man's ability is some strange variation of plain sight. I believe he actually sees what may be written on the papers, and I reiterate that this would be no stranger, no more, apparently, impossible than some things which have been already and beyond a doubt established by the science of the time. The X-ray 'sees' through solids.

of how it is done. None of them, however, exactly solves Reese's performance.
Here are two explanations given by Khaldah, the well-known author. "I have never seen Mr. Reese show his skill--I call it skill because it must be a trick--but there are a half dozen ways of reading what is written in this manner, each very simple and each very mystifying to the inexperienced looker-on. Perhaps these explanations may not cover the Reese method, but you can make up your mind that whatever he does is a trick--clever, but none the less a trick.
"What he does requires a material explanation. It is not mental, it is not spiritual, it is all material. He reads in some way what is written or what some one has in his possession, not what some one is thinking. So a material solution must be sought--in other words a trick.

HOW THE ORDINARY TRICK OF SUBSTITUTION IS WORKED.



The "wizard" tears an ordinary piece of paper into smaller bits.

While the observers are busy thinking what to write he folds a similar piece of paper into the shape he has intended them to fold their "palms" it for future use.

The "wizard" takes the original bit of folded paper, apparently to show the observer how to tap his forehead, and then substitutes the bogus paper that closely resembles it. It is done so deftly that no one notices it.

Then he unfolds the paper unobserved and reads it while holding his hand up in some "wizard-like" gesture. This explanation does not fit the Reese performance, as he does not come near or touch the slips, so cannot palm them.

ment with Reese when he absolutely did not touch the paper--any paper. He could not manipulate with 'hand-is-quicker-than-the-eye' dexterity a paper which he did not touch. In order to work a deception by the methods which this article attributes to him he would need to touch the paper, wouldn't he? Well, I have tried him when the paper never for an instant left my hands.

"I wish to state some things emphatically, though. I am no believer in the supernatural. I must confine my statements of what Reese has done to those things which I know him to have done. Frankly, I do not much believe in prophecy. Prophets were not always honest in the days of old, although some of them achieved great reputations. I am inclined to shy at prophecy to-day, unless it be the prophecy of logic, and reasoning from cause on to effect. I do not credit that any man has prophesied correctly, save by chance, events still hidden in the future. But Reese did not deceive us by means of any of the childish tricks of which you speak, and which you say

planned by intuition I am not prepared to guess, but what he does is mind phenomena, not physical trickery. Even if it is mere mental jugglery, it would still remain remarkable. The man may claim sometimes to do much, but there is something very wonderful about him, whether he claims much or little.

"I'll tell you what I'd like to do. I'd like to get a group of men together of my own selection and put him through his paces in their presence--let him operate on them. I have in mind for one at just this moment Prof. Charles F. Chandler, at one time of 'Columbia University.'

Prof. Charles Frederick Chandler is credited in 'Who's Who in America,' with a long list of academic honors. He was one of the organizers of Columbia's School of Mines, and is now Professor of Organic Chemistry, and President of the New York College of Pharmacy.

"Prof. Chandler has a mighty mind," said Mr. Edison. "There is no keener analytical intellect in the world to-day than his, I think, and I would like to have him meet this man and look him over.

childish tricks did not disturb him. He was not considering that at all; that he was puzzled by a foolish person, victimized with ease, did not especially interest him. He was busy with the bigger problem of the strange phenomena which he believes Bert Reese's mind presents to scientific study.

"May I use your name in asking them for THE NEW YORK TIMES to take part in such an investigation?"

"You may."
"Will Reese consent, do you believe?"
"I think he will," said Mr. Edison. "I don't believe he'd be afraid; I don't believe he would have reason to fear exposure; I don't believe the things which I have seen him do, the things which Dr. William Hanna Thomson saw him do, can be 'exposed,' as you put it.

"No," said Mr. Edison, "the man may claim sometimes to do much; but there is something strange about his mind--something very much worth scientific study. He is unlike other men in some particulars. He

who comes out with the bald statement that such a thing or such another thing is quite impossible. We have accomplished many, many things which would have been declared impossible by our forefathers."

He did not even smile complacently as he said this, although he has himself accomplished more of them than any other one man living probably. Known from the earth's end to the earth's end as "The Wizard," he many very likely be hard for him to feel convinced that there are such things as impossibilities.

"He sees what is written on the papers, quite beyond a doubt. I wish I had the time to have him over here for a long and close investigation. It is a pity that it cannot be arranged by some one to sequester him and study him; to place him absolutely beyond all temptation to deceive, to make secrets impossible."
"After you have written on and folded the slips the cleverness of the performer is exerted. He knows you are on your guard so he must contrive in some way to get you off guard by deflecting your attention. 'Place one slip on my fore-

"The most effective method used in this kind of trick is substitution--the simple replacing of the original paper with a blank piece so closely resembling it that it readily passes for the original.
"The method of substituting is this: The performer tears a sheet of paper into five or six pieces. He takes one piece and says to the onlooker: 'Take these slips, write on each one a question, or some one's name or 'phone number, or whatever you wish. Then fold it up like 'The Wizard.' He then prepares just how it is to be folded, and thus prepares before your eyes the bit of paper that is afterward substituted. This he 'palms'--the simplest yet most necessary accomplishment of all performers in tricks. You fail to take note of this because he has handed out the other blank pieces, and you are interested in these and busy thinking about what you intend to write.
"After you have written on and folded the slips the cleverness of the performer is exerted. He knows you are on your guard so he must contrive in some way to get you off guard by deflecting your attention. 'Place one slip on my fore-

ANOTHER SIMPLE METHOD OF SO-CALLED MIND READING.



Each person present is asked to write something on a bit of paper, fold it and drop it into a hat.

The "wizard" draws a paper out of his hat, holds it and announces that it is a bogus question or something agreed upon with a confederate, who appears surprised to hear it read out.

Then the "wizard" opens the paper, apparently to confirm what he has said was written on it, but in reality to read what is actually written, which he announces as the contents of the next slip taken from the hat.

When the final slip is read, all of the questions of course have been told, including that of the confederate. This explanation does not apply to the Reese performance, for he has no confederate and does not touch the slips in his hand or open them.

It is to be announced that we were fooled by.

"Precautions were too careful, too elaborate, both on the evening when I met the group of gentlemen in New York City, as you described last Sunday in THE TIMES, and on the several occasions when Reese operated at the laboratory here.

"No," you can say positively that we were not fooled by any palming trick. The man has some strange quality, some ability abnormal, which permits him to see things the normal eye cannot. His answers to the questions might possibly be bluff, but his reading of the questions written on the folded bits of paper which have never once been in his hands is not that part of his performance is quite genuine.

"Of course the simplest explanation of this is that he reads the mind. He does not hypnotize his subjects. That claim, which some have advanced, would be too foolish to be given any dignity whatever. That group last week, for instance, was not a group which could be hypnotized, in all human probability, and even if some members of it might have been men possible to hypnotize, the theory is still untenable, because hypnosis cannot be produced offhand. That idea was exploded long ago after careful consideration by the French Academy of Medicine.

Another man whom I would like to have meet Reese is Thomson.

"Dr. Thomson," I suggested, "has already met him and has authorized me to announce, as you have, that the idea that he does his work by sleight-of-hand substitution of papers is absurd."

"I don't mean Dr. William Hanna Thomson," Mr. Edison replied. "I know what he says of Reese. At first he thought I was mistaken, then he found that I had not been fooled. He was misled at first, I think, by the same notion which must be in the heads of those who are, you say, 'exposing Reese.' Well, he tried him out and found that there was no such trickery. Dr. Thomson is a great man in his line--a brain expert of lowering ability and an investigator who could not be deceived, but he is not the Thomson whom I now am thinking of. That is Elihu Thomson of the General Electric. There's another great man and another man who can't be fooled."

Later I looked this Thomson up in "Who's Who in America." It tells that he has accomplished wonders in the realm of applied science--the list of his achievements is so long, indeed, that I shall not reproduce it here. Suffice it to state that half a dozen Governments have honored him for his contributions to the sum of human knowledge; that he was born in England in 1858, and that he has

is, as I have said already, really a prodigy.

"I'll tell you what would be an interesting thing to try on him. It might show whether the thing is really 'mind reading' or something still more puzzling. Try, if you get a chance, to find out if he can read a paper written on by one man and presented to him by another who does not know what has been written on it. If he does that it will make certain that it is not 'mind reading.' You see, the man who holds the paper won't know what is written on it; its contents will not be in his mind to be read. That would be most interesting."

Acting upon Mr. Edison's suggestion, I tried this experiment on Reese a few hours after it had been suggested and he was apparently quite as able to read papers written on by another person not then present in the room when I held them tightly closed in my hand, as he was to read the papers which I had written on myself. I am not satisfied with the experiment, however. It was tried later under circumstances more convincing.

The thing which Mr. Edison seemed worried over was the claim which has been made by various folk who have had dealings with Prof. Reese that he has

conviction that the changes in environment will bring changes in our mental make-up, in our physical powers. Changes in environment always have done this, both with men and animals, from the beginning of all time. Why should they not do so with us? We have lost senses--notably that of direction--which the aborigine possessed. Why should we not possess?"

The interest in this extraordinary man which has been aroused by Mr. Edison's frank statement of belief that he has some unusual ability, is widespread and intense. The efforts to explain as trickery what he has done seem quite abortive. If Prof. Chandler and Elihu Thomson consent to act with Mr. Edison upon the invitation of THE TIMES, which will at once be extended, the outcome of the meeting will probably be interesting to scientific minds and those of laymen.

ATTEMPT AT EXPLANATION.

Based on Substitution or a Confederate. "Not My Way," Says Reese.
THE reading of what is written on slips of paper has been a favorite accomplishment of entertainers for many years, and there are plenty of ex-

head" he says. You do so. 'Now tap my forehead four times with the paper.'

"You do as directed. 'No, not that way,' he exclaims impatiently; 'tap this way.' And he takes the slip of paper in his own hand and illustrates just how you are to tap. The moment he gets it into his own hands it's the simplest of things to 'palm' the original bit of paper and hand you the duplicate piece that he has prepared. It is done so deftly, so quickly, that you don't notice it, but that is the important moment and the important part of the whole trick. Once in possession of the original paper it is simplicity itself to read what is on it to the amazement of everybody.

"So much for that. Here's another way quite as mystifying and just as simple, but it requires a confederate. It is better than the other method when many persons are present or for a public exhibition. The performer has arranged with the confederate what to write on one of the slips passed around. Let's say, for instance it is the telephone number, 1000 Evans. After each person present, or as many as is desired, have written whatever they choose and folded them up, they are requested to put them in a hat. Some one is asked to mix them up thoroughly, which is done.
"The performer reaches into the hat,

picks up one of the bits of paper, and presses it to his forehead. He assumes a trancelike expression, then reads aloud not what is on the paper but 'Some one has written a telephone number, Bryant 1000.' The confederate gasps and says, 'Marvelous! That's my number.' Whereupon the performer opens the bit of paper that has been pressed to his forehead and pretends to verify this. 'Yes,' he says, 'Bryant 1000,' but in reality he is reading what is really there, which we will say is 'Who will be the next President of the United States?' He puts this slip to one side and picks another paper from the hat. Holding it to his forehead, he goes into another trance and says, 'Some one asks "Who will be the next President of the United States?"' and the person who wrote that has every reason to be astonished. He unfolds the slip as if to verify his marvelous reading and thus is able to read what really is written there. We will say, 'How many animals were on the ark?' So it goes with all of the dozen or so slips in the hat, the last one being the one prepared by the confederate, and the first one to be announced. Then he walks to the audience and distributes the papers for examination, slipping the last one in its proper place at the beginning of the slip.

To overcome the probability of the confederate's slip turning up before its time it is marked so it can be identified by the 'wizard.' If he picks it up he deftly drops it back in the hat and takes another, or he pretends that it is an especially perplexing question, and he calls on one of the audience to hold it for a few moments, or he tightly clutches it in his hand held high so every one can see there is no collusion. Too easy, isn't it? Another method employed in this so-called 'mind reading' trick is to use sensitive impression paper so that everything written will leave an impression on the sheet beneath. But this is more complicated and less satisfactory.

"Not having seen Mr. Reese's performance, I do not know the exact method used by him, but you can be sure it is something similar to one or the other of these methods that I have described, probably the substitution method."

Mr. Reese, after reading these explanations by Khaldah, says that they are not the methods used by him.
The chief trouble with Khaldah's explanation, as with all the other explanations so far offered, is that while it explains what ordinary conjurers do, it does not in the least explain what Reese does, for he does not do any of these things. In many of his performances he does not press any paper to his forehead. He does not touch the person who writes the answers. He does not come anywhere near them.

The distinguished Judge whose experience THE NEW YORK TIMES described last week may serve as an example of Reese's methods, and gentlemen who intend to expose him should read it carefully, so that they may know exactly what it is they have to expose, and not be misled into exposing simple tricks which have been exposed before and which Reese does not perform.
He wrote down, in Reese's absence from the room, six questions. Now, according to Khaldah, and according to the other explainers, one and all, these slips of paper should have been handled by Reese and pressed against his forehead, so there would be an opportunity for the slight-of-hand substitution of a blank slip which Reese is supposed to have prepared.

Just the questions remained in the Judge's pocket. Reese did not approach or touch him. He did answer the questions; he told the Judge the name of the defendant in the first case he had ever tried, the maiden name of the Judge's mother, and the name of the Judge's first school teacher.

Observed that the Judge wrote down the answers to these questions, but the questions themselves. He wrote the questions and stuffed them into his own pocket; and then Reese, standing at a distance, told him the answers. Three of the six questions Reese was unable to answer. They were such questions as, 'How many arches are there in the bridge which crosses the Hackensack?'

Another well-known man, whose experience was described in THE TIMES, had an experience which also falls entirely outside the explanation of "substitution" or "palming." This man wrote three questions while Reese was absent from the room. He then mixed them up, and when Reese returned he pressed them against Reese's forehead and received answers to all three. In the explanations offered, it is always assumed that Reese must have had an opportunity of touching the papers. But in this case he had none. It was not Reese, but the writer of the questions, who pressed them against Reese's forehead. Reese's hands remained by his side.

In another experiment recently made in a private office a man wrote down the answers to five questions, Reese remaining outside the room. The man then handed four of the slips to two of his subordinates, giving two slips to each, and they crumpled them in their hands. He put the fifth slip in his pocket.

Reese, re-entering the room, called upon one of the persons to raise his right hand, and when he was obeyed Reese told what was in that hand. On opening the hand the man found the answer to be as written on the slip. The same process was gone through with the slip in the left hand, then with the two slips in the hands of the other person, and finally with the slip remaining in the pocket of the writer of the answers.

All this time Reese stood on the opposite side of the room beside the door by which he had entered and six feet away from the three persons. He did not approach them or touch them.
Edison once called to a group of his workmen, singled out one, and when the man advanced asked Reese how much money the workman had in his pocket. "Three kroner," said Reese, which proved to be correct. The man was fresh from the old country and still had the foreign coins with him.
By these illustrations, which might be multiplied indefinitely, it will be seen that the explanation of Reese's performance has not yet been found. The explanation that he performs the trick of "palming" or "sneaking," by pretending to assist the other man, or by pressing the slips against his forehead, does not fit the things he does. Another explanation must be found.