



“**NOW, LADIES AND** gentlemen,” said the conjurer, “having shown you that the cloth is absolutely empty, I will proceed to take from it a bowl of goldfish. Presto!”

All around the hall people were saying, “Oh, how wonderful! How does he do it?”

But the Quick Man on the front seat said in a big whisper to the people near him, “He - had - it - up - his - sleeve.”

Then the people nodded brightly at the Quick Man and said, “Oh, of course;” and everybody whispered round the hall, “He - had - it - up - his - sleeve.”

“My next trick,” said the conjurer, “is the famous Hindostanee rings. You will notice that the rings are apparently separate; at a blow they all join (clang, clang, clang) — Presto!”

There was a general buzz of stupefaction till the Quick Man was heard to whisper. “He - must - have - had - another - lot - up - his - sleeve.”

Again everybody nodded and whispered, “The - rings - were - up - his - sleeve.”

The brow of the conjurer was clouded with a gathering frown.

“I will now,” he continued, “show you a most amusing trick by which I am enabled to take any number of eggs from a hat. Will some gentleman kindly lend me his hat? Ah, thank - you - Presto!”

“He extracted seventeen eggs, and for thirty-five seconds the audience began to think that he was wonderful. Then the Quick Man whispered along the front bench, “he - has - a - hen - up - his - sleeve,” and all the people whispered it on. “He -

has - a - lot - of - hens - up - his - sleeve.”

The egg trick was ruined.

It went on like that all through. It transpired from the whispers of the Quick Man that the conjurer must have concealed up his sleeve, in addition to the rings, hens, and fish, several packs of cards, a loaf of bread, a doll’s cradle, a live guinea-pig, a fifty-cent piece, and a rocking-chair.

The reputation of the conjurer was rapidly sinking below zero. At the close of the evening he rallied for a final effort.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “I will present to you, in conclusion, the famous Japanese trick recently invented by the natives of Tipperary. Will you, sir,” he continued, turning toward the Quick Man, “will you kindly hand me your gold watch?”

It was passed to him.

“Have I your permission to put it into this mortar and pound it to pieces? He asked savagely.

The Quick Man nodded and smiled.

The conjurer threw the watch into the mortar and grasped a sledge hammer from the table. There was a sound of violent smashing. “He’s - slipped - it - up - his - sleeve,” whispered the Quick Man.

“Now, sir,” continued the conjurer, “will you allow me to take your handkerchief and punch holes in it? Thank you. You see, ladies and gentlemen, there is no deception, the holes are visible to the eye.”

The face of the Quick Man beamed. This time the real mystery of the thing fascinated him.

“And now, sir, will you kindly pass me your silk hat and allow me to dance on it? Thank you.”

The conjurer made a few rapid passes with his feet and exhibited the hat crushed beyond recognition.

“And will you now, sir, take off your celluloid collar and permit me to burn it in the candle? Thank you, sir. And will you allow me to smash your spectacles for you with my hammer? Thank you.”

By this time the features of the Quick Man were assuming a puzzled expression. “This thing beats me,” he whispered, “I don’t see through it a bit.”

There was a great hush upon the audience. Then the conjurer drew himself up to his full height and, with a withering look at the Quick Man, he concluded:

“Ladies and gentlemen, you will observe that I have, with this gentleman’s permission, broken his watch, burnt his collar, smashed his spectacles, and danced on his hat. If he will give me the further permission to paint green stripes on his overcoat, or to tie his suspenders in a knot, I shall be delighted to entertain you. If not, the performance is at an end.”

And amid a glorious burst of music from the orchestra the curtain fell, and the audience dispersed, convinced that there are some tricks, at any rate, that are not done up the conjurer’s sleeve. — **STEPHEN LEACOCK**



## Stephen Leacock: *A Model Conjuror*

**IN 1974, WHEN** I was thirteen and just getting interested in magic, my father gave me a copy of *The Treasury of Great Canadian Humour*. The first story in the compendium was *The Conjuror's Revenge* by Stephen Leacock.

Born in England in 1869, Leacock immigrated with his family to Canada in 1872 and settled in Sutton, Ontario, near Lake Simcoe, north of Toronto. A graduate of the University of Toronto, Leacock taught high school at Upper Canada College, an elite school for boys and his alma mater.

Disillusioned with teaching, he embarked on graduate studies at the University of Chicago in 1899, graduating in 1903 with a PhD in political science and political economy. He then moved to Montreal as a lecturer, and eventually, head of the political economy department at McGill University.

Leacock supplemented his income by writing, tendering short stories and reports to magazines in Canada and the United States. In 1910, he published *Literary Lapses*, his first book of humor. It was a compilation of short stories that he had submitted to or had published in other magazines. Two of the short stories involved magicians. The first was *The Conjuror's Revenge*. By 1911, Leacock was considered one of the most respected humorists in the world. He influenced such writers, comedians and humorists as Robert Benchley, Groucho Marx, and Jack Benny.

I then came across *The Conjuror's Revenge* again, some fifteen years later, in 1990 having read it in Sid Lorraine's file of *The Sphinx*. Much to my surprise, the story was published initially on April 15, 1903 (Vol. 2, No. 2, page 20) in that treasure trove of magic. There was no credit to Leacock, however, or to any other author.

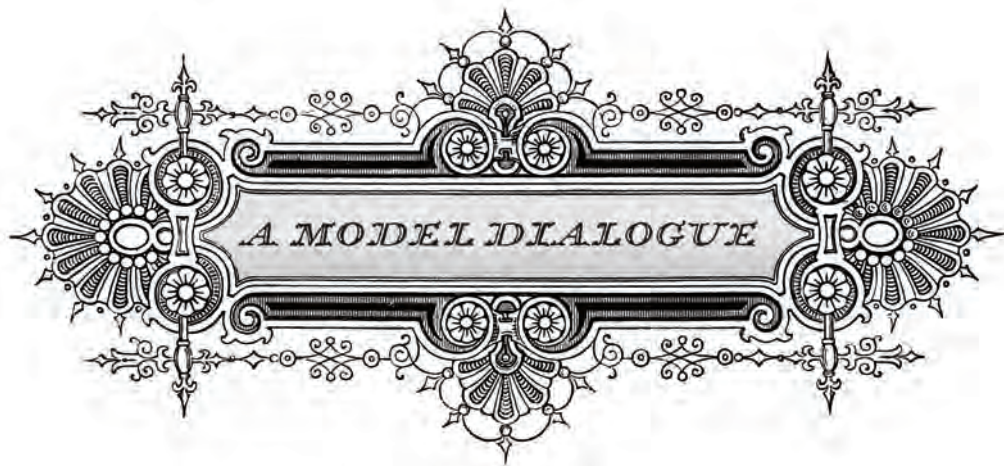
Perhaps Leacock, like Steve Martin and a host of other humorists, was an amateur magician. Perhaps he was even an early subscriber to *The Sphinx*, or had just wandered

into 282 Michigan Avenue, home of Vernello's magic shop, and offered the story to M. Inez, the Proprietor and Publisher of *The Sphinx* Publishing Co. (Leacock would have been studying at the University of Chicago at the time.) Either way, I find it interesting that this short story — one of his earliest attempts at writing humor — appeared in a magic magazine seven years before it is generally acknowledged to have first been published in *Literary Lapses*.

Leacock did rewrite the story, however, ever so slightly for *Literary Lapses*. In *The Sphinx*, Leacock wrote, "He had it up his sleeve." In *Literary Lapses*, he wrote, "He - had - it - up - his - sleeve." Indeed, he altered all of the Quick Man's dialogue, and the response of the crowd, in this fashion. (The em-dashes alter the timing and, in my opinion, make the story funnier. Short stories, like poetry, are best read out loud.)

Interestingly, Dr. Wilson reprinted the story in *The Sphinx* in the August 15, 1923 issue. (Volume 12, No. 6, page 174.) Not only did Leacock receive credit but the story also now had a Wilsonian title: *Leacock on Tempting Magic; Story of a Conjuror's Revenge*. Further, it had a subtitle and paragraph subheadings that appear in no other rendition of the story. It was as if Leacock — or Wilson — was creating 'tags' for Google. The subtitle read: *How the Quick Man Assisted the Harassed Magician in Entertaining the Puzzled Audience. "Famous Japanese Trick Invented by the Natives of Tipperary," Tickle the Spectators Pink.*

The second short story that involved a magician was called *A Model Dialogue*. It has not, to my knowledge, ever appeared in a periodical devoted to conjuring. And, as many collectors disdain card tricks — a view I do not happen to share — it should have broad appeal. — **DAVID BEN**



**IN WHICH IS** shown how the drawing-room juggler may be permanently cured of his card trick.

The drawing-room juggler, having slyly got hold of the pack of cards at the end of the game of whist says:

“Ever see any card tricks? Here’s rather a good one; pick a card.”

“Thank you, I don’t want a card.”

“No, no; I mean, I’ll know which it is, don’t you see? Go on now, pick a card.”

“Any one I like?”

“Yes.”

“Any colour at all?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Any suit?”

“Oh, yes; do go on.”

“Well, let me see, I’ll – pick – the – ace of spades.”

“Great Caesar! I mean you are to pull a card out of the pack.”

“Oh, to pull it out of the pack! Now I understand. Hand me the pack. All right – I’ve got it.”

“Have you picked one?”

“Yes, it’s the three of hearts. Did you know it?”

“Hang it! Don’t tell me like that. You spoil the thing. Here, try again. Pick a card.”

“All right, I’ve got it.”

“Put it back in the pack. Thanks. (Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle – flip) – There, is that it? (triumphantly).

“I don’t know. I lost sight of it.”

“Lost sight of it! Confound it, you have to look at it and see what it is.”

“Oh, you want me to look at the front of it.”

“Why, of course! Now then, pick a card.”

“All right. I’ve picked it. Go ahead.” (Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle – flip.)

“Say, confound you, did you put that card back in the pack?”

“Why, no. I kept it.”

“Holy Moses! Listen. Pick – a – card – just one – look at it – see what it is – then put it back – do you understand?”

“Oh, perfectly. Only I don’t see how you are going to do it. You must be awfully clever.”

(Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle – flip.)

“There you are; that’s your card, now, isn’t it?” (This is the supreme moment.)

“NO. THAT IS NOT MY CARD.” (This is a flat lie, but Heaven will pardon you for it.)

“Not that card!!!! Say – just hold on a second. Here, now, watch what you’re at this time. I can do this cursed thing, mind you, every time. I’ve done it on father, on mother, and on every one that’s ever come round our place. Pick a card. (Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle – flip, bang.) There, that’s your card.”

“NO. I AM SORRY. THAT IS NOT MY CARD. But won’t you try it again? Please do. Perhaps you are a little excited. I’m afraid I was rather stupid. Won’t you go and sit quietly by yourself on the back verandah for half an hour and then try? You have to go home? Oh, I’m so sorry. It must be such an awfully clever little trick. Good night!” — **STEPHEN LEACOCK**

