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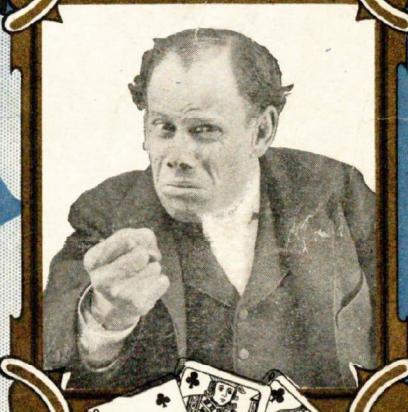
NOVEMBER

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CHIPS

POKER

A MONTHLY
MAGAZINE
OF ORIGINAL
STORIES.



Contents.

A GAME, - - - - - JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

MY STEAMSHIP POKER GAME, - A. OKEY HALL.

NORRIS'S NIGHTCAP, - - - - - EDGAR FAWCETT.

THE MAGIC OF EVIL, - - - LURANA W. SHELDON.
Sequel to "The Mystery of a Face."

THE ONE NIGHT CLUB, - - - MARSHALL P. WILDER.

A ROMANCE OF THE QUAYS, - - - WESLEY LYMAN.

THE IRON POT (Prize Story), - - - J. IRVING ALDEN.

THE SOUVENIR CORKSCREW, - - - CAMPBELL STEWART.



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Notice.—Publishers are warned against reproducing any of the stories contained in this magazine.

A GAME.

BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE.



N spite of the epidemic the house-party went on. Some people must die, but those whose time is not yet must amuse themselves. Among the guests were Miss Galatea Alma, a girl without fortune, but endowed with beauty and innocence; young Captain Sabremore, who was paying her attentions (whether serious or not, all but Galatea herself doubted), and an elderly, rough-looking gentleman named Spiridion, a great traveler, with the courtesy-title of "Professor." He had lately returned from Africa.

He seemed to be a good-hearted old fellow. He was a little mysterious in his unpolished way, and some persons found an agreeable magnetism in his intercourse. Galatea and her Captain were not greatly put out, therefore, when he strolled up to them one evening as they were sitting on the veranda, and the Captain was writing his name on Galatea's fan.

He stood before them with his hands in his pockets, his beard bristling out like an African jungle, and his bushy brows bent down over his big round eyes.

"Are you fond of diamonds?" he asked, addressing himself to the girl in his abrupt fashion.

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"Yes,' indeed—not that I ever had much chance to make their personal acquaintance," she added, with her ingenuous smile.

Professor Spiridion sat down and drew up a rustic table that was at hand. He pulled out of his pocket three big diamonds and slapped them down on the table. "Let me introduce you to these!" he said. "I call them Youth, Beauty and Virtue. The biggest one is Virtue."

The Captain put in his monocle and bent over them. "My soul, professor!" ejaculated he. "The least of 'em is worth a fortune! All perfect stones, and of the first water. Get 'em in Africa?"

The professor nodded. "What do you think of them, Miss Galatea?" he demanded.

"They are worthy of their names," she replied. "I never saw anything so magnificent!"

In truth it would have been difficult to exaggerate their splendor. "Virtue" was as large as an acorn, and the others were but little smaller. They were pure white, without flaw, and of symmetrical form. As they lay there in the light of the sunset they seemed alive; they flashed like stars, and sent out a rainbow radiance. Sabremore twisted his mustache. Galatea caught her breath in a girlish sigh. "How did they become yours?" she asked.

"I call them mine, but in fact they're not. They're nobody's," answered Spiridion. "They belonged to a friend of mine, who died of fever in the bush, leaving no will, and no relatives that I've ever come across. I'll tell you what I'll do, young lady. I'll toss you for them."

"Toss me for them!" she repeated, glancing up with her brows at the angle of perplexity.

"Throw the dice, you know," rejoined the other. "The Captain has a pair in his pocket, I'll wager!"

"Youth, Beauty and Virtue!" murmured Sabremore; "Miss Galatea has the three realities already; she ought to have their representatives into the bargain."

"But how can we play?" asked she. "What can I set against the Professor's stake?"

"Set your realities, as the Captain calls them, against my representatives," he returned. "I need youth, beauty and virtue quite as much as you need these pebbles. Is it a go?"

"You're making fun of me," said she, with a nervous laugh.

“I might win your diamonds, but how could you win——” she stopped and blushed.

“That’s my affair,” said he, nodding his big head. “All you have to do is to throw the dice. Hand them out, Captain !”

The Captain did, in fact, produce a pair of cubes from his waistcoat pocket. At the same time he whispered something in Galatea’s pretty ear.

“That’s right !” said Spiridion, with a gruff chuckle. “When Fortune says, ‘Come !’ don’t stop to ask questions. Still, if you have any moral objections to gambling, of course, I——” He began to gather up the stones. Captain Sabremore made an involuntary movement and muttered something beneath his mustache. He almost frowned at the girl.

“Oh, no, I——” she began. The Professor paused, with “Virtue” between his thumb and forefinger. “Let us try, just for fun,” added she, breathlessly. “I know I shall lose !”

“Which shall we throw for first?” asked Spiridion.

“Oh, for the big one !” said she.

“For ‘Virtue’ be it !” he rejoined. “I’ll take the first toss. Your dice aren’t weighted, I presume, Captain? Here goes !”

He shook the dice in his large hands, and let them fall on the table. He then leaned back in his chair without looking at them; but the other two bent eagerly forward to learn the result. The Captain whistled. “A five and a six !” said he. “There’s only one throw can beat it, Miss Galatea.”

She took the dice between her delicate palms. Her cheeks were red and her eyes bright.

“Remember the stakes !” said the Professor.

“The diamond is mine !” she exclaimed, defiantly, and threw. But then her courage failed her, and she covered her eyes with her hands. Spiridion still retained his indifferent posture; but the Captain, after a glance through his monocle, came as near shouting as the laws of polite breeding permit.

“Sixes ! She’s won, by Jingo !” was what he said.

“Won and lost !” remarked the Professor, coolly. “Virtue is a gamble, anyway ! My congratulations, Miss; and if you please we’ll postpone the next bout till to-morrow; my luck may change. If I can’t be virtuous, I might be content with youth and beauty !” So saying, he picked up the remaining stones, bowed grotesquely to the lovers, and withdrew.

Meanwhile Galatea sat with the great diamond pressed against her bosom, and a strange expression in her eyes.

"What did he mean by 'Lost?'" asked she, in a voice barely audible.

The Captain, who had returned the dice to his pocket, stooped forward and, for all answer, kissed her.

Next morning the lovers went out rowing on the lake. Returning through the wood after leaving the boat, they came to a forest glade, lonely and beautiful. The broad bole of a fallen tree, cushioned with green moss, lay prone amidst the wild flowers.

"Capital lounge!" remarked Sabremore. "Let's sit down."

They advanced slowly, absorbed in each other, his arm round her waist, her face bent down, as she listened to his murmured words. She had made a little net for the diamond, and hung it by a cord round her neck. A nervous movement of her hand broke the cord, and the diamond fell. She uttered a cry—"My diamond!"

"Permit me to restore 'Virtue' to its owner!" said the gruff voice of the Professor. He seemed to have started up out of the ground; but there he stood, bowing, with the great stone gleaming in his hand. "That's the trouble with such things—they're so easily lost," he observed, grinning through his beard at her agitation. "Come, let's play for the next! Which shall it be? 'Youth or beauty?'" He led her to the tree trunk; the Captain stood by. "Which would you rather have?"

"I won't risk my beauty yet," said the girl; "let it be youth!"

She glanced up at Sabremore as she spoke; he shrugged his shoulders with a smile. "That suits me," said Spiridion. He took the glorious crystal from his pocket; it sparkled with immortality. He clapped the other hand down on that which held the stone, then separated them, the fists closed. "Guess in which it is," said he. Galatea hesitated, her hands clasped over her heart. Sabremore made a secret sign, unseen by the Professor.

"In the left!" whispered she.

He opened his hairy fist, and there, sure enough, lay the stone. She caught it up eagerly; the two men laughed—Sabremore with a characteristic subdued grace, Spiridion with his usual heavy chuckle. "Luck is still against me," he said, "but I look for a change to-morrow. Till then, my virtuous young friends, adieu!" He stood up, and with an obeisance that smacked as much of mockery as of courtesy, stepped behind an elder bush, and disappeared.

"I stood by you that time," remarked the Captain, putting his hands on her shoulders, and looking into her eyes.

Galatea, strange to say, burst into tears.

"Excuse my intrusion," said the burly Professor, opening the door. "I'm something of a doctor. Let me see her."

The room was dusky. Galatea lay in the bed. Though little more than twenty-four hours had passed, there was a change in her as great as so many years might have caused. She was still beautiful—perhaps even more so than before—but her movements and demeanor were those of a feeble old woman. The epidemic had visited her and she was very low. Sabremore leaned against the footboard of the bed with one hand in his pocket, the other moodily twisting his watch-chain.

Galatea's dark eyes opened; she recognized Spiridion.

"You played me false," she said. "I lost, not won!"

"Nonsense, young lady," he returned; "don't I see, even in this dim light, the stones shine on your bosom? As for the rest, blame the Captain; the lake and the wood are not safe places for delicate ladies. But come—there's no time to be lost. Here are two little boxes; one contains a medicine that will cure you, the other, 'Beauty.' Make your selection."

"I must win—he would not love me if I lost," she said, with a slight shudder. "Life without beauty would be death?" She lifted herself up with a sudden, passionate movement, closed her eyes, and snatched at one of the boxes. Its weight told her that she had got the gem. She fell back with a hysterical little laugh. "I can die now!" she said faintly, while her darkening gaze sought her lover. "You won't refuse to look on my face in the coffin?"

"'Youth,' 'Beauty,' and 'Virtue'—all yours, and you talk of coffins!" exclaimed the Professor. "A touch of delirium!"

"I know you now!" said the girl, with a strange look.

At that moment a singular alteration began. The disease, hitherto confined within her body, showed itself upon her features. They became drawn and ghastly, and hideous blotches made their appearance. In a few minutes her beauty was gone, and only repulsiveness remained. The Professor took a hand-mirror from the table and held it up before her.

"You devil!" exclaimed Sabremore, striking it from his grasp. "Can't you let her alone?"

"I have certain duties to perform," replied the other, coolly. The Captain had not been quick enough; she had seen. With

a moan of horror her spirit passed. Sabremore, averting his eyes, drew the sheet over her blasted face.

“The diamonds come to me,” he said, after a pause.

“You’re welcome to them—they’re bogus, as we are,” returned Spiridion, with a sneer. “But she,” he added, in a different tone, as he turned to leave the room, “was a woman!”



THE MAGIC OF EVIL.

Sequel to "The Mystery of a Face."

BY LURANA W. SHELDON.



HE burly proprietor of a flourishing "Tenderloin" saloon, passed to and fro before the table at which his last patron was seated, and even coughed loudly, in the hopes of attracting his attention. Finding that hints were useless in this case, he stopped and spoke apologetically to the stranger :

"Sorry to hurry a good customer, sir, very sorry, but it's nigh on two o'clock, and we're obliged to close at twelve sharp Saturday nights. It's the law in New York now."

He paused and waited fully a minute, but the stranger, if he heard, vouchsafed no answer.

The proprietor coughed again louder than ever, and mentally deciding that the gentleman was deaf, bent forward a little, and tapped him on the shoulder.

In an instant his hand recoiled from the contact, while his hair fairly stood on end from the peculiar sensation that had spread over his body. It was as if he had touched a galvanic battery, whose every cell was in furious action.

After a little the stinging passed away, and with his hands held carefully behind him, the bewildered man stooped even lower and peered at his guest with what was beginning to be a feeling of terror.

He was only a slight, sinewy creature, with the swarthy skin and beady eyes so common to Oriental countries, but so deep was the trance into which he had fallen, and so alarming the unseen force with which he had apparently surrounded himself, that for, perhaps, the first time in the whole course of his disreputable career, the keeper of various notorious "Dives" was filled with a sense of awe and timidity before one who was physically, at least, very much his inferior.

What should he do? Another glance at the clock showed him that he must hesitate no longer. The bartenders were gone, the waiters were gone, and he must empty the place if he wished to keep within the law and save the bother of being arrested.

He dared not close with the fellow inside, he had done that several times in his younger days, and once it had cost him thirty days on the "island." His guest had missed his watch and ring just after he was aroused and allowed to go in the early morning.

He dared not take that chance again, although the stranger wore a tempting chain and the pin in his scarf was a remarkably good one.

His host smiled grimly as he took a hasty inventory of these things, but he would as soon have tried to rob a red-hot stove as to touch again that living battery.

Keeping one eye on the silent form, he shuffled noiselessly across the floor and looked out in the street in search of assistance. He hardly knew whether to call an officer or send to the telegraph company and get a "lineman;" but while he stood with one hand on the door and the other upon his left hip-pocket, the stranger suddenly sprang to his feet and began jerking his body in the most extraordinary manner.

At that moment two policemen entered, or rather a "Roundsman" and an officer. The "Roundsman" was strong and vigorous, but the other, when the light in the saloon fell upon him, seemed strangely pale, and his eyes gleamed wildly.

"Give me a bit of whisky, Lannon," the stalwart Roundsman began imperiously, but in another instant his attention was attracted to the scene before him.

Like one in the throes of some mighty passion, the stranger was twisting and contorting his person, now flinging out his arms as if warding off some evil thing, and now snapping his fingers vigorously in the air, while his eyes seemed fixed in a sightless vision.

With a sudden accidental movement, the proprietor knocked a large glass pitcher from the bar and the crash it made seemed to calm the fellow. With one long shiver he sat down again, his arms hung limply by his sides, but the light of reason seemed restored once more to the glassy eyeballs.

Almost simultaneous with the change the ailing policeman suddenly revived, and a look of consciousness crept back to his ashen features.

He looked inquiringly into his companion's face, then, as the stranger walked swiftly by him on his way to the door, he shuddered as if from some inward horror and sat down upon the nearest chair.

"I found him at one o'clock in this curious fix," the Roundsman explained, as he received the whisky. "He was never off his beat before, so I'm sure that something uncommon has happened."

The sick man evidently understood, for he nodded his head in an affirmative manner.

"I was called by some fellow to a house," he began, weakly. "where there was either a murder or some stealin' bein' done; I remember goin' in and goin' up the stairs, but after I had got to the second floor I seemed to get as cold as a dead man, and when I turned the handle of the only door that showed a light inside I came slam-bang upon a woman's shape, but, God in Heaven! She had the face of the devil!"

He shuddered again and great drops of moisture gathered on his forehead as he slowly recalled that dreadful vision.

With a gulp he swallowed the whisky and attempted to rise.

"Help me get rid of this thing," he begged, "for so long as that cursed face is before me, I'll never be able to go back on duty!"

Together they finally left the place and with a sigh of relief, largely mixed with terror, the proprietor promptly put up his shutters.

The cool night air seemed to revive the officer and at last, with the instinct of his class, he longed to grapple with the mystery.

He was going over the details once more as they walked along, but half way across the square his curious story was interrupted. They had come suddenly upon a peculiar figure—a gentleman evidently, in evening dress, but bareheaded and with a look in his face that warned them at once he had lost his reason.

"Take her away!" he screamed to them shrilly as they reached his side. "Take her away or her face will kill me!"

Then as both men held him by the arms, trying, if possible, to learn from his speech some clue to his identity, he rambled on in an excited way that was almost blood curdling to his listeners.

"What did they do to change her so? She was once so beautiful—so beautiful! My God! Is *this* the wife of my heart? No! It is a fiend! An inhuman monster! Take her away, I say, or I will never enter my home again! You were my friend. Why did you tell me to go in there?"

With troubled glances, the two men looked at each other.

"Here seems to be another victim of that awful *something*," the Roundsman said in an anxious manner. "Do try, Dave, to

think what's happened. You were probably drugged or knocked out in some way, but if you try——”

“No, no! It's no use!” the other said, sadly. “I can't think of anything but the face of that woman!”

And then the man between them demanded their attention for he reeled suddenly forward and would have fallen had not their hold on his arms prevented. The strength of both his mind and body seemed about departing in the hour of rescue. “There's a light in this Doctor's office,” the Roundsman said quickly. “Let's take him in there till we can call the wagon!”

But repeated ringing of the bell brought them no answer. A few steps farther down the block there was another sign and here there was not only a light but they were amazed to find the front door open. As they carried their burden up the steps a voice in the hall made them stop and listen.

“You have had a terrible fright,” the physician from up the block was saying, “but with rest and quiet you will probably be all right in the morning.”

Then he came out and met the trio on the steps, but a few words sufficed for explanation.

“Take him back to my office,” he said, at once. “My friend, Dr. S., is ill this evening.”

Strangely enough not a paper could be found on the sick man's person, whereby to identify him or locate his residence, although the evening dress may have accounted for it—there was nothing in his pockets but a pack of cards, two poker chips and a little money.

In his watch was the picture of a beautiful woman—no one once seeing, could forget those fair features.

After the ambulance had relieved him of his patient, and the officers returned to their respective duties, Dr. Williams, a clever clairvoyant, sat down to try and test his skill in the curious mystery that had come before him.

Trial after trial resulted in failure; his power of “second sight” seemed strangely weak this morning. He glanced at the clock—it was half-past three—perhaps an hour's sleep would restore his vision.

He awoke at five, in profuse perspiration. Already the unseen power was controlling his will, and a subtle influence at work in his brain, was leading him on to forbidden pastures.

He felt at the very first a presence near him of a contending spirit—it was as if some evil fiend was trying to overcome his mediumistic prowess.

He battled manfully against the influence, grappling with it in a mental struggle, and throwing it from him, after a bitter fight, solely by the strength of his noble nature.

It was such a dwarfed and uncanny thing—such a dark and loathsome spirit that defied his wisdom. He recognized from the first its extraordinary power, its perfect knowledge of diabolical magic, but feeling sure that it was this unclean thing that had crept abroad, and that had cast the spell upon his friend, the Doctor, he wrestled with it in the vistas of darkness, then trampled it in the mire as he emerged upon a fairer prospect.

The lights were dull before his eyes at first—deep, solemn grays that melted into purple. Around him rose the mists of uncertainty, but as he sank deeper and deeper into that death-like trance, fine golden rays began traversing the horizon, and soon, in the full scope of his wondrous sight, burst forth the glorious light of heaven.

First there came a woman's face, pale, starry-eyed, and of charming contour. She was bred in wealth and surrounded by love, but alas, to her home had crept the serpent—that reptile he had met at first and trampled upon ere his trance became perfect. It had come in the form of a human being, a small, dark man of Oriental features, cunning and affable in speech, but capable of an undying malice.

To him, base gold was the breath of life, woe to the man who should deprive him of it!

In panorama, as clear as day, the sleeper saw him at a table with the fair one's husband; cards were in progress; the game was Poker—the husband won *and the black fiend cursed him*. But the curses were hidden by a smile, and the hand of the serpent was outstretched and cordial.

A dark, dank vapor crossed his sky—was it possible that he had not killed the creature?

Now he saw woe and horror on the fair young face, and woe and grief for those who loved her. The vision of an open door, lowering like portals of the dark unknown, was looming up on his brain's horizon; mortals with white, frightened faces and uplifted hands seemed constantly passing and repassing the threshold.

As each entered they wore hopeful looks, and the steps of each were light and buoyant, but as they passed out after an interval of time, there were only blanched cheeks and distorted lips, and the cry of them all was of some fearful vision.

He awoke with the horror of it still upon him. He had learned nothing tangible from his sleep and the disappointment was overpowering.

When the sun rose he went out again and visited his friend the Doctor.

"I tell you, the thing was a woman's face!" his friend repeated, over and over.

Leaving the house with determined steps, he started forth on a strange undertaking.

The picture of an open door, flung wide upon darkness and desolate space, seemed firmly imprinted upon his memory. Block after block he walked, gazing right and left at the massive doors that bore silent witness to costly dwellings.

Why did he pause at this special street? Was it a human voice that so softly called him?

Half way down the block he found it, an open door that he would not have noticed had not the vision of his trance been so plainly before him.

He stood and gazed until his sight grew dim—he was conscious of feeling himself a conqueror.

Why were those blinds so tightly drawn? Were they mocking his efforts to see beyond them?

He called a policeman from the nearest post and together they returned to the house and entered.

Not a soul could be found on the lower floors, the servants, even, had all deserted.

Over and over the searchers grew sick and faint. It seemed as if the air was tainted with noxious vapors.

Up-stairs they passed in silent haste, entering and inspecting each empty chamber.

And at last they came upon the crime they sought—a man lying dead upon his mistress' carpet—at least, this was what they thought at first, but they found him breathing when they examined him more closely.

It was not a servant, as they supposed, but a gentleman in full evening dress. They found a card from his club in his pocket.

A trifling search disclosed the name of his host, and on an easel before them was the life-sized portrait of that beautiful woman whose face, in miniature, the doctor had gazed upon early that morning.

But the fair young hostess could not be found, and not a soul was left in the place to explain the secret of her disappearance.

Carefully and with the greatest skill, the almost dying man was restored to consciousness. There was a look of horror in his eyes when he opened them at last, and gazed slowly around upon his strange surroundings.

To him the details of the past night were perfectly clear, the shock had not dethroned his reason.

As his strength came back, he told them briefly of that vision of a face, that awful sight he had so suddenly encountered, and which seemed to him to be a hideous dream, from which he with difficulty had awakened.

“She was the wife of my friend,” he told them weakly, “I had been playing cards with him all the evening. As I passed the house on my way home I became suddenly convinced that something was wrong, and of course I did my best in the matter.

“I dared not go in until I was sure I was needed, for I was both her own and her husband’s friend, and the world would doubtless have misconstrued it.

“I waited on the steps until one after another of her intended rescuers had deserted her, but with her husband’s weak and hurried flight I put aside all scruples and boldly went to her assistance.

“The house was dark and silent as the grave, but all the air seemed permeated by some subtle odor, some strangely soporific scent that made me almost immediately drowsy. Half way up the stairs a small, dark fellow touched my shoulder, and at his touch my limbs refused to act, and for a moment I was in serious danger of falling.

“How I reached her door I do not know, but once inside, I saw her graceful form, noticed, even in my anxiety, the red lights glinting in her hair, then as she turned I thought I was going mad, for her perfect face had become a demon’s.

“From a purple putrifying mass of flesh one dull red eye glared at me fiercely. There were tears of blood dripping down her cheeks—her lips were blue and her fangs were terrible.

“It was a vision of corruption surrounded by grace—the face of a ghoul on the shoulders of a woman.

“There was rapacious fury in the horrible eye and those blue lips leered at me with such lecherous intent that my blood turned to ice in the fear that she would touch me.

“Only a monster could conjure that face for its expression was the embodiment of every known evil.

“There were flashes of fire before my eyes and a horrible stench

oppressed my nostrils. I felt that I was in the grasp of death—then I fell before her in senseless horror."

Dr. Williams listened but did not speak—he was mentally solving this hideous problem.

The officer's report to the sergeant at the station had been preceded by a somewhat rambling one from the lips of his still dazed brother officer, and slowly, as the facts leaked out, the wheels of the law were set in motion.

Dr. Williams supplied what information he could, but wisely refrained from submitting his mental evidence.

Law is not governed by "second sight" and the visions of a clairvoyant, no matter how thrilling, would not be accepted in the courts of justice.

They must take their ways and he would his—perhaps the results would be mutually gratifying.

The owner of the fated house was quickly found, they were caring for him at the hospital still, for he was none other than the unfortunate man whom the officers had found in the early morning.

Days passed before he entirely recovered, but at last his reason returned again and the cause of his condition seemed to be swallowed up in the fearful uncertainty of his wife's existence.

But where was the fair young mistress of the house? There were scores of people searching for her.

The days passed by and still no news; was she living or dead? No one could answer.

Dr. Williams tried daily to pierce the veil, but each time when he ventured to scan the future some fiendish spirit seemed to thwart his purpose.

"The knave is strong in magic, but weak in flesh—I will wear him out some day," he argued.

And three weeks later something happened which proved convincingly his mastery of this occult practice.

Sitting at his desk he heard his office door open, and without even rising or turning his head he knew that he was in the actual, bodily presence of that evil spirit which had hitherto crossed his path only in the mazes of his mental wanderings.

He felt the dull, sickening sense of contact with a noxious object, but immediately rallying from the feeling, he rose and went forward to receive his visitor.

It was a small, dark, sinister-looking face that was turned toward him in the act of greeting, and below the face there was a

wasted form that told of dread disease and approaching dissolution.

The man was well dressed and affable in manner—it was evident that he recognized no antagonistic presence.

On the contrary, he had come for aid to the very man who, of all the world, possessed the power to encompass his ruin.

Flushing with victory, yet acting with the utmost caution, the clever physician proceeded to entrap his victim. During the examination that followed he probed his will and sounded resolutely his occult knowledge, then before the intensity of his own desires could arouse the suspicion of his patient, he brought the full force of his concentrated power upon him, and was more than gratified at the results which followed.

Too late the wretched culprit awoke to the knowledge of his helplessness. As his eyelids drooped in answer to the commanding will he struggled valiantly to throw off the fetters, but the bodily weakness (which the physician depended upon to aid him), proved a stumbling block too cumbersome to be resisted.

Gradually he dropped into a fitful sleep that deepened as the spell fell heavier upon him. The close drawn veil of his soul was rent and the foul, black depths of his hideous nature lay bare before the physician's eyes. He saw it all now, the horror of that dreadful night, but to learn the full details from his victim's lips was the sole ambition of his weeks of labor.

Sternly he commanded the wretch to speak, then prepared himself to watch and listen.

Then came the story of that poker game, and the loss of a sum that was to him a fortune. The curse on his lips had been stopped solely by a coward's fear of his opponent, but the vow for vengeance sank deep in his soul, and taking firm root, developed swiftly.

Cunning and affability were his weapons, and the incredulity of an honest man the field for his eager, hellish labor.

He had met the wife of the man who won his money, and through her he determined to wreak his vengeance.

She was proof against flattery, so he, perforce, employed one by one his tricks of magic. Like a child she yielded to his power, and the husband also became an easy victim.

Powders and brews of his native land added strength to his own mesmeric prowess, and the night upon which he had determined to abduct her from her lovely home he had come well supplied with these deadly mixtures.

In the midst of his efforts to control her will, servant after servant had come to her assistance, and acting with the ferocity and fiendishness of his class, he had cast upon each a mesmeric spell that forced them to obey his slightest wishes.

They saw as he saw and heard as he heard, and when finally they glanced at their mistress' face, the sight sent them flying on wings of terror.

For with fiendish imagination he had conjured a face which was as hideous as his diabolical brain could conceive, and then, while they were under his hateful spell, he thrust it before them as the face of their mistress.

Blind to the features that were actually before them, they could only see the conjured vision without understanding or even questioning.

It was the supreme conquest of a mesmerist's will—the astounding success of a magician's prowess.

Over and over he had been forced to resort to this power, for it seemed as if there were no end to the interruptions in his evening's programme. Men had entered the house at unthought-of hours, but the poisons with which he had tainted the air made them all easy prey to the craft of his magic.

Advancing up the stairs a subtle aroma would fill their brains—queer, sleepy sensations would creep over their members, and with the expertness and swiftness of his devilish skill he would promptly overcome and control their senses.

Thus had he led her from her husband's home, and thus had he avenged his imagined wrong at the hands of the man who had won his money.

But see, in the midst of his hellish triumph the subtle power was fast deserting him! The strain on his brain had been too severe and the moment of victory was his own undoing!

Leaving her in a cab in a darkened street he had fled to a saloon to revive his members, but the worn out nerves would not respond and, forgetting her entirely, he had fallen into slumber.

With the last words of his confession the fiend's jaw fell and his face took on a deathly pallor.

“Awake! You shall not escape me thus!” the physician shouted as he grasped his shoulder.

“You, who have done this fearful wrong, do you think that death shall save you from punishment? Awake to your poor, vile self once more! I demand the fate of your innocent victim!”

But the cunning of Satan had fled from his eyes, and they only remained wide open and staring.

The powerful will that had controlled men's minds, was powerless to restore his own base instincts. The lines of his face became drawn and tense—the blue veins swelled with a sudden horror.

Before his dying gaze there had come a vision that froze the blood in his guilty heart.

Was it the conjured vision of that fearful face with which he had tortured his fellow mortals?

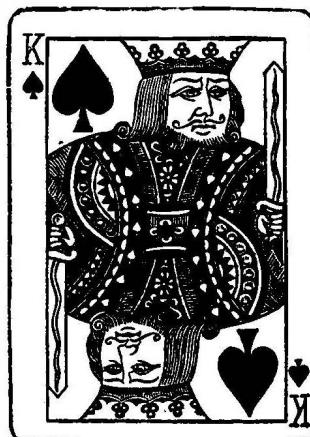
Dr. Williams stood silent in baffled rage—death, cold and voiceless, had prevented his victory.

But, no, there came a peal at the bell—the hand of the law had kept pace with his visions.

Two detectives entered in search of their prey, but stopped when they saw that death was before them.

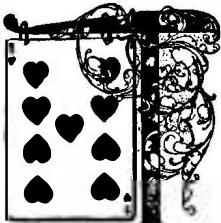
"We have found her," they said, more softly, when they saw the dead face. "It seems that the villain was trying to abduct her. The driver suspected some evil, he says, so as quick as this little black wretch left the cab, he drove her, like mad, to the home of his mother.

"She is safe with her husband," they added, "and now we'll send word for the Morgue man to come and relieve you."



MY STEAMSHIP POKER GAME.

BY A. OKEY HALL.



HERE has been so much gossip respecting the fleecing by professional poker players of credulous fellow passengers on ocean steamships, that ply between New York and Europe, only reference to the gossip is needed to introduce my poker story.

Several years ago it was a regular business for Western and Southern card sharps to travel to and fro between New York and Liverpool or Southampton in the summer and autumn months, lying in wait for passengers who were glad to relieve the tedium of a voyage by card playing in the ship smoking room, and for some time not an ocean trip was made unless some passenger became fraudulently victimized by a poker game. These sharps would generally travel in threes, and for the first day or two of the trip would pretend not to know each other, and aim to seek obtrusive introductions to each other so as to disarm any suspicion of confederacy. But of late years steamship captains, pursers and stewards have learned to keep ward and watch over the swindlers, and to detect them, and so protect passengers from their machinations.

It was my ill and also good fortune some years ago to fall into the clutches of three Westerners while voyaging to Liverpool on a Cunarder with dear old Captain Haines. A fellow passenger with me was a banking promoter and prospector, resident in London, who had been visiting Colorado and Nevada mines on a business tour, and had there imbibed a liking for the fascinating game of poker, that so marvelously excites in its players varied and mixed emotions of hope, exultation, expectancy, resolution and invites so many of the functions of actor and personator. He and I had adjacent seats at the dining table and in the course of conversation the poker game came up as a topic. A really distinguished looking passenger—a cross in dress, appearance, and action, between a well to do clergyman and a judge—who sat near us joined in our after dinner talk, and admitted that he too was an amateur poker player and would be glad some time to join us in a game, but only with a considerate limit.

Wherefore, it came to pass, that one morning in the smoking-room on deck, my banker friend, seeing this clerical-judicial gentleman near by, suggested that a game might be had, if we could find a fourth. At that moment another passenger, who had been standing at the deck door, lazily gazing out upon the ocean, turned around and pleasantly said: "Is it poker you are about to indulge in; and if you want another hand and can make allowances for an indifferent player, I will join you?"

Our dinner-table friend looked a bit askance at the suggestion, and whispered something to my banker friend, which the new spokesman observing, added: "Oh, but I must introduce myself," and taking out a very handsome tortoise card case, produced three bits of pasteboard for us, on which was embossed "Arthur Brandon, 19 Tchoupitoulas street, New Orleans," and adding: "it is unnecessary for you to need introduction, for every one on board has already, through the passenger list and inquiry, made the saloon identification of so widely known a Londoner and so popular a journalist," bowing to each of us. Whereupon, our other table acquaintance rejoined: "but I am too modest a gentleman to be favored by publicity—I am Mortimer Hendricks of St. Louis," and looking at the cards, "if I am not much mistaken, my firm has had the honor of business correspondence with Mr. Brandon."

Both the new comers had insisted upon a light limit of a sovereign, or five dollars, and agreed with me and my friend that poker was only worth playing for its exciting interest and not for mere winnings.

One of them played readily well, but the other seemed amateurish with his questions, which tended to disarm any possible suspicions we might have had.

Our first Jack pot amounted to only fifteen dollars which we pocketed. Again came a second, third and fourth game with only equally slight winnings on our side. Interrupted by the luncheon bell our antagonists hoped that in the evening they might take revenge.

There ensued at that time another game at which a German-looking passenger made his appearance and chipped into some of the by-play remarks of our party in a very off hand, witty manner, but he seemed to be very peripatetic in his walking around the small apartment seemingly listlessly smoking his cigar. On this second occasion our luck began to change, and my friend and I finally went to our berths joint losers in about twenty pounds worth of chips.

On the next day luck alternated slightly in our favor, but on the third morning, perhaps somewhat exhilarated by some Heidsieck of which the player from New Orleans insisted upon our partaking, we acceded to passing the original limit, so that play rapidly rose into the scores of pounds, and in the main we became very heavy losers. Our antagonists had worked into the lucky fashion of often holding three of a kind, and their supply of mutually elastic aces was not infrequent. And I left the smoking saloon an hundred pounds out with my friend losing nearly as much. However, our antagonists were regrettably suave, and indeed proved to be considerate and agreeable in intercourse, the St. Louis passenger being indeed particularly witty with narrative of Western manners and life.

Captain Haines on the following day meeting me on deck—I had made a previous voyage with him, and he was a friend of the proprietor of the journal whose correspondent I was—he inquired how our poker party was getting along, and grew very interested when I referred to the elastic manner in which a poor player had suddenly become a seeming expert and how luck had rapidly changed against us, and what lucky hands our antagonists held. Then he asked : “ Is there in the smoking-room any passenger, not a player, who seems apparently interested in the game, and who frequently crosses it towards the saloon door ? ” And I immediately mentioned the German.

“ I’m afraid that the three are of the card sharpening gang that has given our steamers an awful lot of bother ; but I shall have a watch. Go on with your game in the morning, and the second steward, who is a clever card player himself and a born detective also, can easily move about the smoking-saloon, or in its vicinity, so as to watch your antagonists.”

That succeeding game proved equally disastrous to us, and the good cards of our antagonists, ever lucky in the draw, so we again heavily lost. I began to believe in Captain Haines’ warning, and so personally watched for symptoms of foul play, and especially kept guard on the peripatetic German.

In the afternoon the captain said to me : “ I was right ; the steward’s report is that you have been systematically victimized. As captain I could, of course, explode them and even put them under confinement ; but I don’t care to have a row. I suggest that you fight fire with fire, and use against them their own ammunition of unfairness. To-morrow let your London friend feign indisposition and not care to play, while you alone tackle

the other two. I shall manage, when you begin the game, to get away the German, who is very sweet upon one of the lady passengers, that I shall make his temporary decoy. Then have your London acquaintance take up the role of walking delegate while the game proceeds; arrange signals with him, through his handling his cigar, as to the hands each opponent has, and as he walks about he will be able to catch glimpses of their cards as the German did, and as correspondingly telegraph you whether to draw, or call, or bet, and lead them to agree to pass the limit. I hear from the purser that both are well provided with the stuff. I should be the last man in the world to abet in a skin game, but these fellows can only be fought and punished with their own ammunition. But, above all, it is the suggestion of my steward that on some pretext you change the position of your opponents from the broadside of the table to its long side, so that their feet cannot possibly meet under it. These sharps, my steward claims, have arranged toe and heel signals as to their respective holdings—such a pressure signifying one hand, and another pressure still another holding of pairs, and so on."

My London friend fell readily into the recriminatory scheme, and we ourselves arranged signals through methods in which he would hold his cigar or blow its smoke upward, downward or sidewise, in order to acquaint me with their cards, while he, like the German, would apparently innocently walk about.

At the next game the captain's scheme worked admirably. They became willing to drop my indisposed, but walking delegate, as player for the time, and accept me as sole antagonist. Making an excuse as to the plunging of the vessel, I separated them at the table from their (not under-handed exactly), but under-footed intercourse, and soon pretending vexation at my previous losses, urged higher play, which they readily acceded to, although apparently deprecating it—and perhaps sincerely, since they had lost the German sentinel, whom, as I afterwards discovered, had been nicely waylaid by the captain and his innocent feminine ally. Moreover, they had also lost the chance of toe-and-heel signaling.

At first they were allowed to have the best of me, until after awhile I succeeded in our obtaining a five hundred pound Jackpot, which, by the aid of the cigar smoke signals, I was able to finally capture and pocket, thus recovering all my previous losses and those of my sign-giving partner in our recoupment methods, and a handsome surplus of winnings besides. They were very

MY STEAMSHIP POKER GAME.

effusive in their congratulations at my luck, and rather chaffed my late London partner at his having the temporary indisposition which had debarred him from being sharer in my luck.

But we parted with the expectation of renewing the contest on the following day, when they promised themselves revenge. That, however, did not occur, because I really became ill, and was compelled to keep my state-room, where the ship's surgeon demanded my absolute rest. We were then already in St. George's Channel steaming for the Mersey.

After squaring with my London friend, I took the precaution of lodging my winnings with the purser. After our reimbursement it was our intention to leave the surplus in the purser's hands, to be turned over to the usual charity into which are awarded the proceeds of the saloon entertainments, always given by passengers in the closing hours of a voyage.

Passenger Brandon of Tchoupitoulas street, New Orleans, happened to be in the purser's office, into which, when ascending the Mersey, I had gone to draw my funds and settle the bill for wine and extras. Brandon pleasantly rallied me again upon my luck, but his words were very much at variance with the scowl upon his face as he saw me placing in my portemonnaie the roll of Bank of England notes.

Having booked in Liverpool on arrival for the night at the well-known North Western Hotel, adjacent to the railway station, I was about retiring, when passing through the office I chanced to look at the register and there saw the name of the St. Louis player just inscribed in bold letters—Mortimer Hendricks. Usually upon retiring at any hotel, where a bolt is missing upon the bedroom door, I withdraw the key after locking, so as to avoid any use of nippers which hotel thieves carry; and with which they can grasp the ball of the key and turn it from the outside. But, as subsequently appeared, this method left me exposed to the operation of a skeleton key.

Only he who has slept a week in the berth of an ocean steamship fairly and fully realizes the luxury of repose after it upon a wide spring mattress on shore. I was in the enjoyment of that luxury when something awoke me. Awoke me to see moving about the bedroom a figure. The chamber was in the rear of the hotel looking out upon the platforms of the railway station, into which a train was just on the point of entry, and its bull's eye light sufficiently shone into the room to enable me to distinguish the back of a man engaged, to quote police vernacular—"in going

through my garments.” To do that he had laid a revolver on the chair. Mine was not a suicidal folding bed, nor yet a creaking wooden one, but a firm brass and iron bed, which made no noise as I silently moved out of it, and noiselessly crept up to the intruder and with a first instinct grasped the pistol. At that moment he turned, just as a gleam of the locomotive head-light outside struck his face. It was that of Mr. Mortimer Hendricks, the St. Louis card sharper, and now evidently posing as a hotel thief intent upon the money I had won.

I remember the eyes of the elder Booth, when in boyhood I saw them at the footlights, while he had, as Richard the Third, arisen from his dream and recited “Oh, coward conscience, how the lights burn blue,” and I have seen white faces upon a scaffold, but no eyes were more horror stricken, and no face whiter than were now turned to mine, only to confront the muzzle of his own pistol. He dropped my coat, that he was holding in his hand—the money was under my pillow—and looked appalled.

Still pointing the pistol, I said: “Good-morning, Mr. Hendricks of St. Louis—take a seat, and let us talk this matter over.”

“Yes, I was after your roll of notes. I am stranded. For some reason I am refused passage back with monies to be paid on my arrival, and I was driven to this by my necessities.”

He spoke abjectly; all such creatures do when cornered, just as the rat squeals shrillest when also cornered by the terrier.

I answered: “You are in my power, but I shall not only (pistol still at his head, and he made no attempt to grapple it) let you go, but give you money to pay your passage back, if in the interest of poker players you will, before you leave this room, tell me how you do it.”

“No one knows better than I when I am taken dead to rights, but of all the eccentric Americans I have ever met, you are miles ahead. D’ye mean what you say?”

My head and the pistol nodded together.

“Yer look as if you meant it, and you can prove it by handing me an hundred and fifty of the notes I saw you have in the purser’s office. That will take me back to the States, and as you and the captain have somehow spoiled my ocean games, for the future I’ll go back to the Western rivers for my profession. You need not think I shall give it up. It pays,” and he drew a deep sigh, but whether of satisfaction or regret was doubtful. I was impressed with his *sang froid*; and seeing that he had placed

himself in the confessional box, I had only to keep silent as if a priest and to listen.

"You want to know how we fleece our countrymen and blasted Britishers. Is it that you want to improve on your own methods and take up with the skin profesh?"—and his tone made a feeble attempt at the sarcastic.

"Bless your innocence, it's an easy explanation, and lies in a nutshell. One pressure of toe upon toe between me and partner means one pair; another kind of pressure of toe against heel means something else of tell tale as to our hand; so does a mere rubbing of shoe against shoe; then cards held in a certain pose make sign manual for other indications; all arranged and understood beforehand like the magician and his pal; and then when we have a sentinel to lounge around the table and telegraph similarly by the pointing of a finger on the face or a wave of cigar or its smoke, what more is wanted? If you know the hands of cards that are opposed to you in any game, except perhaps faro, isn't the game always in your own keeps?"

I gave him the money and he quitted the room with a mock bow, and I could hear his stealthy steps as he strode away. We met next morning in the breakfast room and the assurance of his manner was a triumph to his ability as an actor.

Time passed and I was again in New York, where having occasion to interview Superintendent Byrnes, I passed by his photographic book and turned its latest pages when almost the latest photo was unmistakably that of my St. Louis card sharp.

"What has he been doing?" I asked of Byrnes, pointing to the picture.

"Doubtless you know him. Caught red-handed at the Victoria Hotel thieving from a lodger at night—he posing as a wealthy English tourist and disarming suspicion. But we know as yet nothing of his antecedents."

"Then I can enlighten you," I added, and I told my adventures with him.

"Write it out," sententiously remarked the chief, "and print it. The publication may put many an ocean traveler on his guard and be of public service. There is a lot of card sharpening still done on steamers, although of late captains are wary, and they and stewards become amateur detectives and warn passengers. But usually I send one of my men down on every steamship to return with the pilot, and meanwhile suspicious passengers are sure to come out of their cabins and are likely to get

spotted and quietly exposed to the officers who are afterwards put on guard. Regarding the spotting of crooks, I and some of my men have acquired the remarkable intuition of women. Even the greenhorn and fresh crook has a curious self consciousness about him that gives him away to us."

So now, that fresh complaint has been recently made of poker sharpening on the summer ships, I have after a short lapse of time taken Byrnes' advice.



A ROMANCE OF THE QUAYS.

BY WESLEY LYMAN.



OU know the quays by the Esplanade des Invalides? Where the Seine glides by at night with an oily swish, swish, like the passing of some great whispering serpent. The Seine is blacker here than at any other place throughout its whole dark course. The river's ominous whispering to the quays tell a more terrible story here than at any other spot, and its devilish eloquence is horribly enticing. Think you the Seine cannot speak? You are wrong. The last limp, dripping body that gazes at you with its glassy eyes from its marble bed at the morgue, can mutely testify as to the river's alluring speech, and the last despairing soul that shrinks against the quays with pinched, drawn features, can hear it chant its promises of rest. Yes, that is the burden of all its songs—rest. To the soul that knows not sorrow, the water simply seems to say: "Swish, swish, gomp, gomp," but to the soul tormented with doubts and memories of shattered hopes and wrecked ambitions it chants a different lay, too dreadful to repeat.

I have heard the song of the Seine. It was about twelve months ago that I stood by the quays at the Esplanade des Invalides and gazed down into the black river and heard it whisper its awful promises—and my heart re-echoed the Seine's wild chant. I had intended never to return to the streets of Paris that November night. My route through the city was to be a different one, and I was to float placidly down the great bosom of the Seine, to be intercepted and dragged ashore at some point in my course to create a new sensation for the Parisian press. That was the programme I had arranged for myself, and I had the plans all laid. Everything was in readiness, and there was no reason why I should prolong the agony of existence by hesitating over the quays.

It was not fear that made me hesitate. I was not afraid to die. A few weeks before life was sweet. Then I would have dreaded that which I now looked forward to with longing. I was alone in the world, had no one dependent on me and cared naught for

the hereafter, which even at the brink of death was only a careless mystery to me. Therefore it was not cowardice that made me hesitate. For some strange reason I loved to stand and brood on my mistakes, and review the happenings of the past three weeks before dropping into the black waters of the Seine. There was not much to review. I had been wealthy—moderately so—had been fond of a gay life and had lost all on the Bourse. My money went in two days, my friends in as many weeks, and hope and happiness soon followed.

It was very dark on the quays. I remember leaning against a post and wondering whether I had best remove my shoes before making the fatal plunge or take the interesting leap with all on. It occurred to me that I did not like the feeling of a wet boot on my foot, and I reached down to unlace the shoe. Then the humor of the situation flashed upon me and I actually laughed aloud. There was no mirth in the laugh, but it was involuntary. For fully a minute I thought of the little incident and pictured myself drowning in the river, with all my thoughts intent on the uncomfortable feeling in my feet. Then I laughed again.

The laugh was echoed from a post at my right. The echo was a mocking, mirthless, feminine laugh, and my heart leaped to my throat. Someone had been spying upon me and was now mocking my misery. I peered through the gloom and could vaguely discern a form standing motionless not many feet away. I tried hard to study my neighbor, but made no attempt to advance toward her. Presently I heard a rustle of garments and the figure moved towards me. Right near she came, until I could see that the mocker was a woman with tawny hair that shone in the darkness, and satin garments that glistened when the river threw its reflected sparkle towards us. She stepped so close that her breath came hot in my face, and her eyes glittered as she looked up into mine. I stood like a statue and glared back with a whispered curse.

“So you would do it too!” she said in a hissing whisper. “You would sleep in the black waters of the river, but you are afraid to step from off the quays!”

I made no reply, and the woman laughed again.

“Come,” said she, gripping my arm with a vise-like clutch. “I will help you. Be brave with me. We will do it together.”

She dragged me towards the river, and I jerked myself loose with a curse.

"Who are you?" I asked. "What are you doing here, you hell fiend?"

I might have shrieked the words, and she alone would have heard them, but the situation was too intense. I spoke in a husky whisper and leaned forward with burning eyes, and a desire to throttle my companion. She made no motion, but in a moment laughed again.

"Who am I?" said she, repeating my question. "What does that matter? If I told you truly, you would not then know, and the real name was lost years ago. What do I here? Ask yourself the same question. You curse me, but we have an equal right to die, have we not?"

Again I muttered imprecations and moved further back into the shadow.

"There is an old saying that misery loves company," said the woman, "but the adage fails here. You wish to be miserable alone."

Then she came close to me, and this time I did not move away, but looked down at her wonderingly.

"Come," she said, softly. "In a moment it is all over. I will give you courage." She grasped me by the hand, and her fingers were icy cold. My hands and temples were burning, and as in a dream I drew her towards me and smoothed back the hair from her forehead. Her face was cold, and I then felt of my own brow. Again the woman laughed.

"You are feverish and I am cold," she said. "But I have had the fever, and it is determination that makes my blood now run sluggish. What do you die for—love?"

Of a sudden a great desire to unburden my sorrows on this woman came over me. But I fought with my inclination, and only answered softly: "No."

There was a moment's silence, and the woman asked:

"What then?"

"I am penniless—the Bourse!" I jerked out, in fierce whispers.

The woman nestled closer to me, and tightened her grip on my hand. Then her eyes gleamed up into mine, and she said:

"Penniless? And jewels in your scarf and rings on your hand? You die for some other reason, surely."

"A few hundred francs will not restore me to my position in the world," I returned, bitterly. "I am poor—and for that I die!"

The woman slipped a sparkling bracelet from her wrist, and handed it to me.

"'Tis all I have, but it is valuable," she said. "Take it and live."

"Twas I who laughed this time. I gently placed my arm about her waist, and took one step forward.

"Come," said I. "We will do it together. I have lost thousands, and cannot live on such a meager store. I have spent as much as these will bring in a single night—when I lived."

I startled myself by these last words, for I had spoken as one already dead. The woman held back.

"'Twas a moment ago that you were impatient—now you hesitate," I whispered softly, bending over so that my lips touched the tawny mass of hair, that shone with a weird luster in the gloom. "Do not be afraid. For what do you die—love?"

Her hand tightened on mine, and her breath came faster, as she said so softly that I could hardly catch the word "perhaps." Then she continued in a stronger voice: "You are a coward! You have all that life can offer, save one thing—money. And you are not willing to work for that, but would rather end your life. What can you know of real sorrow—of blasted hopes, of a wronged and ruined life and a broken heart? I have naught to live for—you everything. You are in despair through one calamity—I from a succession of griefs, each one of which is greater than any which have marked your life. You are a coward!"

I answered nothing and her words but added to the weight of despair that burdened my soul. I realized that what she said was probably true, but I could not, would not live.

Presently she broke away from me and stepped off several paces. Then in a voice which startled me by its loudness she asked sharply and hurriedly :

"You are not lying when you say you die because you are poor? Would you live if your fortune was restored? Would you wish to die if you were again rich?"

She was excited with a new idea. It was infectious and not knowing what her thoughts were I answered huskily :

"No. If I were rich I would not want to die. I cannot stand being poor."

She stepped quickly over to me and placed her hands upon my shoulders.

"I may save you!" she said, her voice low and trembling with excitement. "Give me your jewels and come with me!"

"You cannot save me!" I exclaimed in bewilderment. "My jewels are worth but little. You are mad! Come—the river waits, and our sorrows but grow the stronger."

Again I placed my arm about her to lead her to the brink of the quays. She stopped me with an imperious whisper.

"I offer to try and save you," she said. "I may not succeed, and if we meet with failure we will come back to the quays together. What are a couple of hours? I am willing to live two hours more of soul misery to try and save you. Will you not take the chance?"

I was confused by her manner and remained silent. She reached out her hand and commanded:

"Give me the pins and rings." I complied with the command and then she said: "Now come with me!"

"But where to?" I asked in wonderment, as she started to leave the quays.

The woman came to me and took me by the hand. In this manner we walked slowly away from the alluring whisper of the dark waters.

"They say," said she, "that the right hand of a suicide brings luck in games of chance. Perhaps the right hand of one who is soon to take her own life may also bring luck. We will go to Vautrin's."

Vautrin's! I had heard of the place. Who in Paris had not? A gambling palace where fortunes far more colossal than mine had been, were won and lost in a single night, where the gilded scions of nobility staked their inherited fortunes on the roll of the roulette wheel, where courtesans flaunted their professions before the winners and insulted with ribald remarks the losers, where men entered with the fever of the game hot upon them and left with a grim despair gnawing at their souls,—such was Vautrin's.

"I know of the place," I said to the woman. "But I have never been there."

"You prefer gambling on the Bourse to gambling over the wheel," said my companion. "'Tis royal sport either way, but I should like my way best. The place is not far from here, and we will sell the jewels for as much as Vautrin will give. Then we will play—and you shall have a chance for life."

The possibility, rare as it was, of redeeming my fortune, excited me. I will not say that a great hope was born within me, for despair had taken too firm a hold upon my mind, to be ban-

ished by such a wild chance as was offered. But I was excited and quickened my step. The woman held back.

“Wait,” she said. “I will not go until you have made a promise.”

“A promise at such a time?” I asked. “ ‘Tis easily made—but perhaps it will be harder kept. A man tottering on the edge of eternity, can fulfill but few vows and keep not many promises. If it is a promise that can be kept, I give the promise.”

“It is easily kept,” said the woman, taking my hand in both of hers, and leaning hard against my shoulder. “We are going to take a rare chance, but we may win. If we win you will live. ‘Tis for lack of money that you would die, and if the wheel rolls us wealth, life and happiness will be yours. But it is not for poverty that I would die. Promise me that if our venture brings you luck, you will not hinder me in my plans. I will come back to the quays, and you will go on to the lights and life of Paris.”

I was silent, for the promise I was asked to make was a strange one. For a full minute I stood motionless and speechless by her side. Then I again bent over her and drew her closer to me.

“If we win wealth,” I whispered, “part will be yours, and then we both will live.”

The woman shook her head, and her fierce eyes, the only feature I could clearly discern in the darkness, again sought mine.

“Wealth cannot restore my happiness,” she said. “If I wished wealth it were easily got. But money cannot bring back honor or mend a broken life. We both may die—but should you win back life you must not interfere with me. Do you promise?”

I did not hesitate in answering this time. “It is folly to think that we will win,” I said. “We will seek the waters of the Seine together. But should the rare chance come to pass, I promise you that I will not interfere with your plans. Come, let us go to Vautrin’s. Perhaps the wheel will be kind and roll us life.”

“It has rolled many others death,” said the woman. “We may win its good graces.”

Off from the quays we walked, and quickly made our way on to the lighted thoroughfare. Under the bright glare of the first arc lamp I stopped and looked curiously down at the woman. She looked back at me and gently laughed.

“A strange met pair,” she said. “And each would study the

other's features. In truth you are a handsome man—far too good looking to die."

"You are hardly fair," said I, for she had covered her face and head with a filmy veil, and only the fire of her eyes shone out from the meshes.

"At Vautrin's we will know each other better. There is a carriage. I have money enough to pay the fare, if you have not, my penniless misanthrope. Hail the driver."

I did this and in a trice we were rumbling rapidly over the pavements of Paris, to play a game where life was the stake.

The light and grandeur of Vautrin's place could not lift the weight of despair that was on my soul. The painted harpies that flitted from room to room and table to table, did not even inspire me with passing curiosity. The click of the chips, the ring of the coin and the whir of the roulette ball made strange music for my ears, but I heeded it little. On a sofa we sat, and as I gazed down at the veiled face, I felt that the unknown woman exerted a strange influence over me and I was oddly thrilled by the neatness of her presence. Somewhat timidly, I said :

"You are my benefactor, perhaps my savior. Am I never to know your features?"

"'Tis a strange place for a savior to come to and 'twill be a strange game the savior will soon play," said the woman. And then she drew aside her veil. "My face is not unknown here, though a few years ago I would have thought it were far more likely to see the inside of a convent cell than the gilt and tinsel of a gambling hell. Men have said that I am beautiful. Do you not think so?"

The question was frankly asked. Our souls were too stirred with deeper emotions and sterner passions to be influenced by vanity. I gazed long and rapturously at the perfect, dazzling beauty of the woman, and for the time forgot my sorrow. I bashfully touched the mass of tawny hair that shone like an aureole above her features, and said softly :

"You are very, very beautiful—too beautiful to think of death!"

"You are not original," said the woman. "I said nearly that of you. But come. We will learn your fate. It is not well to prolong suspense. Let us see what Vautrin will give for the jewels."

The woman sought out a bald and weazened featured man and bargained with him, while I stood curiously by. He glanced

keenly at the rings and pins and then picked up the bracelet from her open palm. I stepped over to the woman and said lowly :

“ You must not sell the bracelet. We are to gamble for my life and must only use my property to play the game with. The bracelet is yours.”

She looked up with a bitter smile, which softened and grew wan and sweet before she replied :

“ Do you think that I will need the bauble after to-morrow? The bracelet has brought me naught but sorrow. It must be sold.”

I did not argue further, but stepped back to allow her opportunity to complete the bargain. Presently I saw Vautrin count out some bank notes into her hand and the woman came over to me.

“ He has given not a fourth of the value of the jewels,” said she, “ but it matters little. If luck be with us we will win with a small amount as well as with a greater. We must play the game with three hundred francs.”

She passed rapidly by several tables, and led me to a table surrounded by a throng of people interested in the playing of two men, one of whom was excited and flushed with enormous winnings, and the other of whom sat with set, stern face, the changing light in his eyes seeming but the reflected despair which was eating at my own heartstrings.

“ They are royal gamesters, and they wager heavy,” said my companion. “ Do you know the game?”

“ No,” said I, feeling a sort of faint and far-away interest in the proceedings before me.

“ There are many ways to wager,” said the woman. “ By some you can double your wager if you win, some triple, and some obtain thirty-five times the amount of your bet. 'Tis the latter way we must play—a desperate game—but we have a desperate issue at stake. I will place the money on a number, and one whirl of the wheel will give you life or death. What will the number be?”

“ You are young,” said I, looking down into the fair face, marred by the fire of despair in her eyes.

“ I am twenty,” said the woman. “ Will we play that number?” I nodded assent. She forced her way through the throng by the table, and I followed her.

“ I will make one wager,” said she quietly to the attend-

ant at the wheel. "Three hundred francs on twenty, and she placed the banknotes on the number painted on the table.

It was not a large wager, but an unusual one made against such heavy odds. The crowd looked curiously at her, and the gambler who had been winning gave a short, nervous laugh. The attendant nodded stoically and spun the wheel and ball.

I heaved a sigh of relief as the whir of the ball sounded in my ears. I knew I would lose and felt that the agony was over. It seemed an age that the ball whirled about in the bowl before dropping, and in the actually brief period I pictured our journey back to the quays, and our plunge together into the black waters of the Seine. And somehow it seemed not altogether unpleasant to die with the tawny haired woman in my arms.

There was a snap and a click on the wheel and the ball dropped into a pocket. I did not dare look at the machine, and fastened my eyes on the woman's face instead. A quick drawn breath from her and a low exclamation of wonder from the surrounding throng made me look back at the gaming table.

"Twenty wins," came the sharp voice of the croupier, and I felt the woman nervously clutch me by the hand. The man with the pallor of despair on his face had lost again, and he cursed the woman.

"Over ten thousand francs," said my companion, in a low voice. "'Twill start you on your way in life again. Is it enough?"

Of a sudden the fever of the game was upon me. I grabbed the woman fiercely by the arm and said excitedly, but so low that none else could hear :

"'Tis a paltry sum ! I will not have it ! Play it again !"

"Then you will not live for ten thousand francs?" said my companion softly.

"Play !" was all I said in a husky undertone.

"I will play ten thousand francs for a repeat on twenty !" announced the woman in a clear voice.

The hand of the croupier was stopped upon the wheel. Noisy exclamations came from the crowd and the woman and I were the center of a wondering gaze.

"'Tis above the limit !" said the croupier. "One thousand francs upon a number, or fifteen thousand francs upon a color ! You may wager on the color—the sum is too large for a number bet !"

. The woman laughed mockingly. "It is a long time since

Vautrin was frightened by a bet," said she. "It is a good story for Paris to hear. I will wager as I say or not at all!"

Back in the crowd about the table a calm voice said :

"It is a mad chance. Let her play the stakes."

It was Vautrin who spoke. The croupier bowed assent and again the wheel was spun. The woman came close to me and I put my arm about her. The hum of the wheel sounded like the roar of a mighty waterfall in my ears and a mist excluded from my sight the crowd, the croupier, the table and all save the great, golden mass of hair that rested near my shoulder. There came again the snap and click which told that the ball had found its home, and then suddenly the woman buried her face against my coat. She had not dared to watch the wheel.

Things grew suddenly clear, and I leaned forward to learn my fate. The croupier announced slowly, as if incredible that such a thing could be :

"The number repeats—twenty wins again!"

The crowd about the table were thrown into a turmoil of excitement. The woman gave a short gasp when the result was announced, and looked up at me in a half frightened manner. Then she turned hurriedly to the croupier.

"I will play no more!" she exclaimed. The clear voice of Vautrin, back in the crowd, said calmly : "If the lady will step into a rear apartment with me, I will give her her winnings in check. The amount is very large, and would be inconvenient to carry away in any other form, even if we had such an amount of money in the bank."

With a slight pressure of the hand my companion left me, and I pushed my way through the crowd to a secluded corner, where I dropped with a sigh upon a divan. My mind was wonderfully clear. I knew that, through the agency of an unknown woman, in a remarkable manner, my fortune was restored, and I was able to take my accustomed place in the world again. I knew that I had won back life from over the whirring, whirling wheel, but this thought gave me no joy or pleasure, and not an ounce from the weight of misery, which had borne down upon me the past few days, was lifted from my soul. The old grief was banished, but a new and greater sorrow had taken its place. I knew what it was, and quickly decided upon it.

A soft hand was laid on my shoulder and the woman sat on the divan beside me. She was very pale, and her voice trembled when she spoke.

"You asked for my name when we stood on the quays," she said, falteringly. "It is on this paper which gives to you nearly half a million francs. I have endorsed it and you will not wish to die—now. Sometimes, perhaps, you will think of me—in the days to come when you are rich and happy."

I took the paper, but did not glance at it. Instead I gazed into her eyes which were lighted now with a strange, new sadness. Presently she continued :

"You made a promise on the quays and the promise must be kept. The time has come for our parting. You will go out into the life and happiness of the world, and I will go—well—back to the quays."

She smiled sadly as she arose and threw her veil about her head. I rose, too, and grasped her proffered hand.

"I did not promise all that you say," said I, slowly. "But what I did promise I will adhere to. Do you wish to go back to the quays?"

"Yes," said she, looking frightened and suspicious at my manner. "You must not interfere with me."

"That is what I promised," I said, "and with your future plans I will in no way interfere—but I will return to the quays with you."

From out the dusk of her veil she looked steadily at me for a moment, and then said simply : "As you will."

Down the carpeted stairs of Vautrin's place we went silently. A carriage was waiting in front and into this I ushered the woman, giving a sharp order to the driver. We spoke no word as we were whirled over the streets of Paris and in silence we alighted not far from the quays. In nervous haste the woman almost dragged me forward until the dark waters of the Seine glistened out beyond the piers. As we again stepped on the quays the woman drew back with a nervous little shudder and then proceeded more slowly. I took her by the arm and led her to a post that stood up gaunt and spectral out of the gloom.

"It was here that we first met," said I. "It was a strange meeting and seems months ago, does it not?"

The woman did not answer and I continued :

"It was but a few hours ago, but in that time much has happened. Much has happened to me, and—has nothing happened to you?"

I caught a faint sigh and the woman answered lowly, "yes."

"Then," said I, "you may not wish to die."

She turned fiercely upon me and said in a passionate whisper :
 " Yes, more than ever now! You are rich and can go back to your friends and find favor and be respected and happy. If I went back it would be to the old life that I hate and abhor! I cannot, will not live!"

She started away from me, but I caught her by the arm.
 " Then you are determined to seek rest in the waters of the river ?" I asked, lowly.

" Yes !" she hissed, struggling to free herself. " And you have promised not to hinder me !"

" I will not," said I steadily. " We will take the leap together !"

She looked up at me and her eyes blazed from behind her veil.

" You mock me !" she said in a passionate whisper. " You are rich and have no cause to die !"

I drew her close to me and bent over her until my lips touched the silken film that covered her features.

" I have cause," I said, passionately. " A few hours ago I would have died because I was poor—now I would die for love ! I adore you ! Without you life would not be worth the living, and with you life and poverty would be Paradise ! Do not die, my queen ! Come back to a new life, to a new happiness—live for me !"

She struggled weakly to release herself, but I would not let her go.

" You do not know what you ask !" she said hoarsely. " You know not who I am !"

" I care not," said I. " Do you not love me ?"

" I would be a shame upon your life !"

" Do you not love me ?"

" Your friends would sneer at you and cast slurs upon you !"

" Do you not love me ?"

" I am a woman of the city—a creature not worthy of you !"

" Do you not love me ?"

She was silent for a moment and then the answer came in a sobbing whisper, " God knows I love you !"

Snatching the veil from her face I drew her closer to me and covered with kisses the cheeks all wet with tears. Then with my arm about her waist I turned my back upon the dark waters of the Seine.

" We will leave this spot," said I softly, bending over my love and leading her away from the mad chant of the waters.

"We will go back to the life of the greatest city and you will help me to be a man!"

She raised her glorious eyes, lustrous with a new light and joy to mine, and softly said :

"And you will help me to be a woman!"

And in the first gray light of the November morning we twain left the quays.



NORRIS'S NIGHTCAP.

BY EDGAR FAWCETT.



HE doctor had told him he had better do without it for awhile, though he need not consider the abstinence at all enforced. Norris, on his own side, had made a wry face and said that he didn't think it hurt him, but that, of course, medical advice was not to be trifled with. Besides, it made him sleep ; he was confident of that.

The doctor blent a wise look with his customary, genial one, and replied that there are kinds of sleep to which a moderate amount of insomnia is often preferable. "But, my dear Norris," he went on, "your case is not at all serious, and I think this prescription which I shall give you will soon banish its discomforts. The nocturnal toddy is not vetoed, remember. Only, if you refrain from it for a fortnight or so, I promise you that no ill effects will result." And here the doctor smiled with cordial irony at his gold-knobbed cane.

Norris was by no means a "free liver." The shackles of habit were odious to him. For years his one brandy-and-soda at the club, between ten and eleven each evening, had been partaken of with no more sense of enchainment than his morning cup of coffee. He called it his nightcap, and he very rarely went to bed with more than one. He was not married, and he occupied apartments only a short distance from his club. Usually he would drop into a lower room there and meet some man with whom he could chat for about an hour. His landlady supplied him with an excellent dinner (more after the fashion of London landladies) when he did not dine out, which was decidedly often. He was what is called an exclusive person, and did not care to be counted among those bachelors who regularly dined at their clubs when not elsewhere expected. In fact he did nothing at the club of at all a regular sort except to take his nightcap there each evening.

"Of course I'll respect the doctor's advice," he now told himself. But when ten o'clock P. M. came it brought with it a kind of terror. What should he do ? Go into the club and sit there

as usual and talk with somebody, and *order no nightcap?* Impossible! A sense of sickening boredom came over him at the thought. Heavens! What a bond he had been forging all these years! And never had it even remotely occurred to him that he was doing so. Tobacco had no charms for him, but doubtless because he had not cared in youth to enslave himself with its nebulous lures.

That night he determined not to visit the club at all. He went to his chambers, read there for a little while, and at his accustomed hour was in bed. He had always been an excellent sleeper. To-night he lay awake for three hours, and at last fell asleep only to dream bad dreams.

The next day he felt mortified and disgusted. It was very trying to make the self-admission that his peace and comfort were going to be imperiled seriously by anything so trivial as the renouncement of a brandy-and-soda nightcap. He began to dread the coming of another night, and found himself recalling the doctor's words about the relative unimportance of giving the potion up. But nevertheless, he felt quite resolute. The medicine he was taking had caused his slight indisposition, and if any real mischief bode in that time-honored "tipple" he would be willfully imprudent at his time of life not to forsake it forever.

But "forever" had a very solemn and dreary sound to the ears of his spirit. When ten o'clock again came he had determined to seek the club and look over some of the new illustrated English journals which he knew must now have arrived.

In the large room which he soon entered there were two long, broad tables, filled with weekly publications. On these, in their neat, dark morocco bindings glimmered the light of high, green-shaded electric lamps. He seated himself in a big leathern chair at the corner of one of the tables, and took up the London Illustrated News. It was brimming with pictures on the subject of the recent royal marriage. There was the bridal procession into the chapel at Buckingham Palace, and the arrival of the Queen with her ladies and gentlemen in waiting, and the departure, at the station, of Princess Maud and her handsome Danish bridegroom, not to speak of the wedding itself, sketched in capable, dramatic way.

At any other time Norris would greatly have enjoyed these drawings. Now his eyes roved listlessly from one to another. His left arm rested on the corner of the table beside him, but it moved oftener than he knew, spurred by a certain uneasiness

that swayed his entire frame. Yonder, in his favorite corner, were two old friends—Van Alstyne and Gladwyn. Of course they were expecting him to go over and join them any minute. Each of them, highly respected members, would vary between one and two nightcaps, never passing the second. How pleasant, in ordinary circumstances, to take a seat beside them! But now, as matters were, how ineffably boring! He would have to explain about the abandonment of his nightcap, and that would be such a tedious business, as he didn't feel at all social or conversational, or—what was the other word?—clubbable.

“Did you ring, sir?”

A waiter, decorous, low of voice, stood beside him.

“Ring?” said Norris. “No.”

Scanning his paper again, he gave himself up to a tacit mental growl. Did the servants suppose he couldn't enter this place of an evening without calling for his grog?

Still, he mused, in softening mood, it was no doubt the most natural error. Somebody else had rung—there were men at small tables scattered all over the room—and the summons had been mistaken for his.

“Did you ring, sir?”

Another waiter stood close to his elbow, bowing respectfully. “Why, no,” said Norris. “Did you—er—*think* I rang?” He was vexed, but he never showed ill-temper to servants.

“Yes, sir,” the man answered.

“Well, you were wrong. That is all. You can go.”

Norris now felt more restless than ever. He stared down at the portraits of Princess Maud and Prince Charles, through glasses metaphorically green, and wondered how two such homely persons could be so fond of one another. Perhaps, he soon concluded, it would be best to leave the club. He might take a brisk walk before going to bed. The chances were that he would have an easier night. Just then he heard a cork pop, and looked across the room. There were Van Alstyne and Gladwyn having their nightcaps. Van Alstyne had caught his eye, and was nodding to him.

“Did you ring, sir?”

This waiter Norris had known for years. “Now, see here, Fitzgerald,” he said, “you're the third man who's come up during the past five minutes, and asked me if I rang. What's the mystery of it?”

Fitzgerald grinned opaquely. "Must be some mistake, sir."

"I hope so," grumbled Norris. He then addressed, in sarcastic undertone, one of Her Royal Highness' bridesmaids. "I hope I'm not the victim of a jocular conspiracy. Last evening I wasn't here, and this evening I present myself, looking a good deal glummer, perhaps, than is my wont, and somebody may have been impudent enough—"

But he dismissed this thought as the very hysteria of morbid suspicion. How old Queen Victoria was getting to look! After all, those stories about her intended abdication might not be idle gossip.

"Did you ring, sir?"

This time it was Matthew, the superintending waiter of the lower floors. Wrath died from Norris's face as he perceived who stood near him. Nobody could scold Matthew, that model of respect, efficiency, diligence, discretion.

"In Heaven's name, Matthew, what *does* this mean? It seems to be raining questions, 'did you ring, sir?' and I haven't rung, and I haven't wanted to ring, and I don't intend to ring, and—"

Fitzgerald was re-approaching, and his face beamed with polite inquiry. He looked puzzledly for a second, at his superior, Matthew, and then, with a peculiar wistful suavity, said:

"This time you *did* ring, for sure, Mr. Norris; ain't that so, sir?"

Norris looked at Matthew. In the look was despair, not unmixed with melancholy. It seemed to murmur: "Save me, Matthew, or I perish!"

And then, very suddenly, a keen flash of intelligence darted across Matthew's face. He pointed to the edge of the table, dotted here and there with white specks.

"You've got your elbow on one o' them electric buttons, sir, and every time you move your arm it rings the bell."

"Oh—ah—yes—I see. Thank you, Matthew." And at the same time a voice seemed to be sounding through the soul of Norris:

"*It is fate.*"

Just then he saw his friend, Van Alstyne, half rise and beckon to him, with sociable vehemence.

"Matthew," he heard himself saying, "just have some Blue Seal brandy and a bottle of soda sent me over in that corner where Mr. Van Alstyne and Mr. Gladwyn are sitting."

"Very good, sir."

THE ONE NIGHT CLUB.

BY MARSHALL P. WILDER.



HE handsome but somewhat corpulent Mrs. Harvey Lockwood smiled benignly upon her assembled guests, then raising her skirts delicately about her ankles she stepped carefully up onto a broad divan about in the center of the parlor, and prepared to address them on the burning question of the evening.

“Ladies!”

Mrs. Lockwood pronounced the word “Ladies” with the falling inflection. She had long been President of the Sorosis Club of Sleepytown, so it was natural to her to omit the “and gentlemen” from her addresses.

Immediately the five ladies present postponed their voluminous chatter and turned their individual attention upon the speaker. It was plainly to be seen that the question of the evening was one of the deepest import.

“Ladies!” Mrs. Lockwood said again, as if drawing inspiration for what was to follow from the very fact that there was no baneful male influence present, no self-conscious, sneering “lord of creation” to hear and ridicule her remarks, and then, with a trifle more dignity in her manner, in spite of the uncertain springiness of the divan, she plunged at once into the very essence of the troubrious matter. “Inasmuch as our husbands, brothers and lovers” (the latter with a sadly sympathetic glance in the direction of Miss Summers) “have formed the habit of absenting themselves from our tender companionship every evening in the week, every week in the month, and I might almost say every month in the year, and—— Inasmuch as these said husbands, brothers and lovers have added to the nocturnal absences the sin of gambling away an alarming amount of hard-earned capital, and—— Inasmuch as we, their legal wives, sisters and sweethearts, are being deprived both of their company and those luxuries and necessities which the aforementioned capital might secure,

“It is Resolved, that we, the said victims and sufferers of these persistent absentees and pernicious habits, do form a Poker

Club of our own in direct opposition to the one now existing (in parts unknown,) and likewise absent ourselves from the domestic hearth, until such time as our husbands, brothers and lovers, shall regain their senses, and return to a proper fulfillment of their duties!"

Cries of "Hear!" "Hear!" and "Yes!" "Yes!" were frequent while the lady was speaking, and when she had finished, a half a score of daintily gloved hands aided her descent from the treacherous sofa.

"Oh, Mrs. Lockwood! How remarkably clever! I am sure no one would ever have thought of such a splendid scheme but you! How I shall enjoy getting square with David!"

Pretty little Miss Summers looked fairly radiant over the situation, but then she had only been engaged a month, and this neglect of her lover's was driving her frantic.

But sedate Mrs. Watrous shook her head a trifle gravely over the unique proposition.

"The plan is excellent, my dear Mrs. Lockwood," she said, kindly, "but how in the world can we learn to play poker?"

For a moment the ladies looked at each other in a maze of perplexity. They had not thought of this before, but now, when they came to compare notes, they had to admit that not one of their number knew the value of one card above another.

"I suppose Harvey would teach me," Mrs. Lockwood said, finally; "that is if I could manage any way to keep him at home a half an hour after dinner."

"Couldn't you turn the clock back?" Mrs. Olmstead suggested, mildly.

"And have him looking at his watch every minute! No, that wouldn't do!" the hostess answered, sorrowfully.

"I tell you what I'll do!" It was pretty Miss Summers that offered the suggestion. "I'll telephone to David that I am sick, and I'm sure he'll leave the office for an hour or two after luncheon. Then I'll be nervous and awfully blue, and finally ask him to teach me poker so I can amuse myself with mamma in the evenings. That may bring him to his senses, it ought to if he really loves me?"

"Love!" Pooh!" exclaimed Mrs. Lockwood, crossly. "Men love nothing but good cigars and—and poker. Better learn that before you are married, Miss Summers."

"But don't you think it is a little bit wicked for women to play poker?" asked Mrs. Olmstead. "I am sure I should feel dreadfully to have any one know it."

"The end justifies the means, I am sure, Mrs. Olmstead, but of course we are going to keep the matter secret. All Poker Clubs are kept very quiet," added Mrs. Lockwood, knowingly.

At ten o'clock the meeting was adjourned, with the understanding that Miss Summers should learn the game from her lover, "by hook or by crook," and they would meet for the first trial just as soon as success had crowned her efforts.

Just one week from that night, there was a small but ceremonious gathering at the residence of Mrs. Watrous. Each of the ladies had hurried from dinner, much to the surprise of the male members of the family, and with the utmost secrecy in her movements, arrayed herself for the street, and promptly taken her departure.

"If Miss Summers had been suddenly placed at the head of a regiment she could not have felt or shown more responsibility.

"It is a beautiful game!" she began, enthusiastically, "and really I could almost feel it in my heart to forgive David for leaving me every evening."

Then, as the chairs for six were drawn to the table, she took a dainty pack of cards from her pocket and began to shuffle them in a most astonishing manner.

"Why, how funny! They are all different colors!" Mrs. Norcross exclaimed, as she watched the somewhat unmanageable pasteboards.

Miss Summers smiled pleasantly at her keen appreciation.

"There were so many pretty colors in the store that I just got ten packs, all of them different, then I took five of each of the other colors, and seven of this lovely shade of blue. David said it wouldn't make any difference so long as there were fifty-two, and I didn't mind the expense," she added, proudly.

"I guess we'll manage to get along very nicely now without our husbands. What do you think?" said Mrs. Norcross.

Mrs. Olmstead had just received four cards and was turning them over to look at the patterns on their backs, but she nodded her head in an affirmative answer.

"Why do you put those four on the table, Miss Summers?" Miss Ellery questioned in an anxious manner.

"Those are to pick up, that is if you have any in your hand to match them," replied Miss Summers, explanatorily. "For instance, you see I have an eight spot, yes, that's right, one, two, three, four, eight," she counted them carefully with the tip of her finger. "You see, I take that five and that three just

because they make eight. Oh, it's splendid practice! It keeps you up so in arithmetic."

"But where does the betting come in, Miss Summers?" questioned Miss Ellery, in a still incomprehensive manner.

"Why, you bet that you'll beat, and I bet that I'll beat. It's very simple, don't you see it, my dear?"

Mrs. Lockwood was trying experiments with her cards, holding them down close to those upon the table in the hope of aiding her mental calculations, and was just getting ready to see several combinations when Mrs. Olmstead broke in upon her.

"Can I have that ten, I've got a mate to it?" she called with an astonishingly sudden insight.

"That's the Joker," said Miss Summers, delightedly. "Yes, Mrs. Olmstead, you can have it! Why, you are going to be a splendid player! Let me see what you have, do, Mrs. Norcross!"

Mrs. Norcross obligingly laid down her cards so that Miss Summers and the rest could see them.

"Oh, my! You can build sevens—do build sevens, so that I can take them."

"I don't think I quite understand," poor Mrs. Norcross was beginning to say, but Miss Summers had snatched a three from her hands and was laying it upon a four spot on the table.

"That don't match!" exclaimed all the ladies in a breath and then Miss Ellery turning a little uneasily, asked her if she was really sure that "this game was Poker?"

"Certainly it's Poker!" Miss Summers cried indignantly, then she smiled upon her in a condescending spirit. "You'll learn it very soon. Oh, dear, I can't take any!"

"I can!" said Mrs. Olmstead gayly, as she picked up a five from the table and added it to the two and three spots in her hand.

"Now, it's Mrs. Lockwood's turn, and as there is only one card left on the table, it means a broom if she can take it. Put your one spot on it, so, Mrs. Lockwood. Now, that counts you two points, because one and one make two. By the way, I forgot; has any one a pencil and paper?"

"Dear me!" almost gasped Miss Ellery, "I never heard of a 'broom' in poker! I am sure you must be wrong, Miss Summers!"

"Oh, I mean a sweep," said Miss Summers, blushing, "but after all a broom and a sweep are pretty much the same thing," she added, sweetly.

But Miss Ellery's soul was becoming troubled. She had heard a few poker terms in her somewhat checkered existence, and thus far the game that they were playing had not seemed in any way familiar.

"Shouldn't this be a Jack Pot, when there are no cards on the table?" she asked, with just a shadow of embarrassment.

Mrs. Olmstead blushed and Mrs. Norcross grew visibly uneasy. She was a member of the church, and there was something offensive and vulgar about Miss Ellery's suggestion.

"Possibly you know more about the game than I do, so perhaps you should teach us!" Miss Summers cried out, angrily. "I guess my David is familiar with the terms, and he told me nothing about Jacks or—or Jack Pots, either!" she finished, bravely.

"It is to be hoped he didn't!" Mrs. Norcross said, reprovingly, but by this time Miss Ellery was absolutely sure that she had been correct in her assertions.

"I tell you, ladies, I am perfectly right!" she declared, stoutly. "If there was nothing vulgar in a game of poker why should our husbands and brothers and lovers insist upon keeping their pleasure so dreadfully secret? There *are* Jack Pots in a game of poker, and what is more there are Flushes and Full Hands and Kings High and all sorts of indecent things, and I for one am sorry I ever tried to learn it!"

Here she gave way to an indignant burst of tears, while Miss Summers sat pale and wrathful, and glared at her like an avenging spirit.

It was Mrs. Lockwood who rose to the occasion through sheer force of habit; she had been obliged to quell just such hysterical riots before in the club rooms of Sleepytown's Sorosis.

"I am sure Miss Ellery is right, come to think of it," she said, decisively, "and I cannot help questioning your morals, Miss Summers, when you so brazenly admit allowing your lover—your lover, not even your husband, mind you—to sit down with you alone—presumably in a darkened parlor—and teach you such a disgusting and disreputable game as poker! Jack-pots! Kings High! For shame, Miss Summers!"

"I move that we throw these wicked cards in the fire and substitute a prayer meeting," Mrs. Olmstead suggested, with a view towards reconciliation.

But the ladies were altogether too excited to compose themselves for prayer at that minute. Miss Summers had risen in a

very deluge of tears and denounced Mrs. Lockwood in her bitterest language.

It was no sign because she (Mrs. Lockwood) could not see through the game that she should heap such vituperations on it! She and David had played it for an hour, during broad daylight in the family sitting-room and the only terms she had heard him use were "Cards" and "Spades" and Big and Little Something or other! But she would not stay to have her character assailed in that manner! She had faith in David, after all, and now she remembered that he had said to her "few women were capable of playing Poker."

With this sarcasm she fled precipitately from the room and for a few moments even Mrs. Lockwood was undecided how to break the silence.

"Men are such unprincipled creatures," she said, at last. "Just think of the way in which they spend their evenings!"

"And to think that we ever agreed to learn such a detestable game!" Mrs. Norcross sighed in repentant spirit.

There was another silence while the ladies were adjusting their wraps and bonnets, then it was Mrs. Norcross who referred once more to Miss Summers.

"I think I shall cut her acquaintance," she said, half sadly. "I have always thought there was something that was not quite right about her."

Then they filed out silently and with funereal faces, but before they parted on the steps, Mrs. Lockwood delivered her final edict.

"Ladies," she said, this time with a decidedly rising inflection, "you may all do as you like, of course, in this matter, but as for myself, I shall never rest until I know what 'Jack Pots' and 'Kings High' are doing in a game of poker!"

THE IRON POT.

(PRIZE STORY.)

BY J. IRVING ALDEN.



THE Legion of Honor had gathered in a grand conclave in New York City. Representatives of the order from all parts of the country were present, among them being some time-worn veterans from both the Northern and Southern armies. After the business of the organization had been transacted, a dinner was given in honor of Bill Edgerton, a leading member of the order. Among the guests was Col. Ellery Summers, a grizzled veteran of the Louisiana Tigers. After the substantials had been disposed of, and while the coffee was smoking in the cups, all eyes were fixed upon the guest of the evening, and the cry arose :

“ Bill Edgerton ! Speech ! Speech !”

Bill arose and apologized, saying that he could not make a speech, but if his comrades were willing, he would tell a story.

“ Let’s hear the story !” was the shout from all sides of the table.

Bill related his story in the following manner :

It all occurred in the Shenandoah Valley. The regiment in which I was a corporal had camped for the night on the bank of the river. After a meager supper of bacon and coffee, Jim Radcliff and I lay outside our tent, smoking. Twilight was rapidly shutting in the lovely valley, when Jim raised himself on his elbow, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked off toward the hills across the river. After gazing long and earnestly, he jumped to his feet, ran into the tent, and re-appeared with a field-glass. My curiosity was excited as he trained the glass on some object nearly two miles away. While still holding the glass to his eye, he said :

“ Bill Edgerton, there’s a farm-house over there in a grove of apple trees. The chimney is gone, and the window panes are broken, but there’s a slim chance of getting some slight relief from the infernal hard tack and bacon. Here, take a look.”

I seized the glass and leveled it in the direction indicated.

"There's one thing you missed in your inventory," I said, as I handed him back the glass, after catching the glint of a rifle barrel half a mile behind the house. "The Johnnies are camped behind that hill."

"Oh, well, they may have left something good to eat. Besides we haven't been foraging for a month. Anyhow, I'm willing to risk a bullet for a bite of young chicken or a mess of sweet corn or potatoes. What do you say? Shall we slip over there to-night?"

The mention of gastronomic dainties to which my palate had been a stranger for nearly a month, dispelled what lingering fears I had entertained of the risk involved, and I replied:

"All right, Jim; we'll take a run over there after 'taps' to-night. The night will be dark. The Johnnies may have left a stray rooster."

It was a warm night in August and so we suffered no inconvenience as we swam the river side by side, with our revolvers in water-tight rubber bags, after crawling past the sentries on our hands and knees. The way led up-hill over low stone walls, through orchards, and across meadows, and it was with a sigh of relief after a toilsome half hour's work that we drew near to the farm-house. When within about fifty rods of the house we dropped to our knees and began to crawl. It was now nearly 11 o'clock and dark as pitch. We crawled along until we reached the house and made our way quietly to the door. There was no difficulty in opening it and we tip-toed in, I first and Jim behind. We closed the door. Then Jim struck a match and by its flickering light we saw that we were in the kitchen. A rude table stood in the middle of the room, flanked by two wooden benches. The fireplace contained a partially consumed log. A general air of desolation and dampness filled the apartment.

"It looks as though the Johnnies had cleaned out all the grub," said Jim, ruefully, as he lit another match and examined the closet. "Let's look through the cellar."

Lifting the trap-door in the floor of the kitchen we went down a short flight of steps into the cellar, but no fat pork barrel or potato-bin met our sight, nothing but dampness and noisome odors greeted us. When we reached the kitchen again, Jim said:

"I think we had better get back to camp. There's nothing here. Hold on! There's a ladder leading into the garret. We'll investigate that before we go."

The ladder was nailed against the wall. We climbed up in the dark, matches being few, and under a pile of old papers and refuse in a corner we found a big iron kettle filled with what seemed to be ears of corn in the husk. But, to our great delight, the husks, instead of being filled with corn, were bulging with sausage meat. We would have danced for joy had the ceiling been higher. The match which had revealed the treasure went out, but we shook hands in the darkness and slapped each other upon the back in an ecstasy of delight. Visions of fried sausages floated before us, and fragrant odors saluted our palpitating nostrils as we carefully felt our way toward the ladder, Jim carrying the precious pot. We were kneeling over the opening in the floor, and just in the act of descending, when the click of the kitchen door-latch startled us. We listened apprehensively, while upon our strained ear-drums fell the sound of footsteps in the room below. A match scratched upon the wall and the feeble rays of a candle illumined the kitchen, as a hoarse voice said :

“ Hang your coat over that window, Bill ; we don’t want the Yanks up here after us !”

Peering down through a crack in the floor we saw three men seated at the table. They wore Confederate uniforms.

“ Trapped, by thunder !” whispered Jim, putting his mouth close to my ear. “ Shall we take our revolvers and make a rush ?”

“ No, no !” I replied. “ Don’t get excited. We’ll wait and see what they are going to do.”

When we looked down again one of the men was shuffling a greasy pack of cards. Looking around at his two comrades he exclaimed :

“ I don’t like three-handed poker. I wish there were two or three more in the game, even if they were Yanks.”

To my utter surprise and consternation Jim stuck his head through the hole and exclaimed :

“ Say, Johnnies, we’ll come down if you’ll play a friendly game !”

The Confederates sprang to their feet and reached for their revolvers.

“ Who are you ?” asked the man who was evidently the leader.

“ Two Yanks foraging,” replied Jim.

“ Well, come down and let’s take a look at you.”

Jim and I climbed down the ladder, Jim carrying the iron pot.

"Sure there's no more of you up there?" said the leader, suspiciously.

"Yes. We're all here," replied Jim. "We'll play fair if you do. We don't want any gun work to-night."

"All right, Yanks, come down and take a hand," said the leader, evidently a member of the Louisiana Tigers, judging from his faded uniform.

"I'll tell you what we will do," said Jim, as we seated ourselves. "We'll play you a game of poker for anything you've got. We've got a pot of sausage and two plugs of tobacco. What have you got?"

"Well, let's see," said the spokesman, "there's the most tangible part of our assets," placing upon the table a quart canteen of peach brandy, together with a bundle of Confederate notes, the nominal value of which was \$10,000. He pulled the cork out of the canteen and an odor sweeter than new-mown hay filled the room. Our mouths watered, for alcohol was scarce in camp and o be-joyful had not moistened our palates in many weeks. Meanwhile the Confederates were looking hungrily at the iron pot.

"Joe," said the leader, turning to one of his men, "you go outside and stand guard."

Joe grumblyingly complied, and the game began. Before beginning, however, we cut the two plugs of tobacco into twelve pieces, the conditions being that we should play each piece of tobacco against a drink of brandy.

That was the most interesting game of poker Jim Radcliffe and I had ever played. We two Union men sat on one side of the table, while the bronzed and tattered Confederates faced us. Between us on the table was a sputtering candle stuck upon a piece of bark. The candle was flanked on either side by a little pile of tobacco and the canteen of brandy, which was industriously pouring out its sweetness into the room, while the iron pot sat somber and rotund in the shadows like a martyr awaiting the sacrifice. There was a strained eagerness of interest in the faces of the men as the cards were dealt and each scanned his hand. We were using dried beans for chips. The first pot was won by the Confederate leader with a straight flush. Each of the Johnnies helped himself to a piece of tobacco and the game went on disastrously for us. In less than half an hour we had lost all of the tobacco, while the only recompense was a swig apiece from the canteen. My pride had been aroused by our losses and in

my desperation I put up my old silver watch, which was an heirloom in my family, against \$10,000 in Confederate notes and the brandy. This, too, was lost. I have regretted the loss of that watch ever since," continued Bill, "not on account of its intrinsic value, but because of the associations connected with it. We then proposed to play the iron pot and its contents against the remainder of the brandy, when the door opened and a harsh voice said :

"Hands up, gentlemen!"

Involuntarily raising our hands we looked toward the door. The candle-light glinted on six rifle barrels in the hands of as many Confederates, while the lieutenant in command of the squad stepped into the kitchen, and said :

"What have we here?" picking up the brandy canteen and nearly draining it of its contents ; "and what is this?" he continued, picking a husk from the iron pot. "Ha! Sausages! They'll frizzle merrily, merrily, in our mess pan!" Then turning to us, he said : "Gentlemen, put your arms on the table ; you are my prisoners."

"I don't mind losing my revolver," grumbled Jim, as he laid the weapon upon the table, "but I object to your interfering with the iron pot. It is contraband of war and it belongs to us."

"Well," said the lieutenant, smilingly, "you may keep the pot, if you like. But fall in. We must get back to camp."

The night was of Stygian darkness. A storm was approaching which threw a mantle of blackness over the valley. Jim pinched my arm as we stepped out of the kitchen, which I understood as a signal that we must try to escape. We started to walk over the brow of the hill. It was so dark that we could not see one foot from our noses. We were walking in files of two, with the lieutenant in front. There were three men behind us. We reached a stone wall when I heard Jim's tense whisper.

"Now!"

Jim and I turned suddenly. Jim still carried the pot. We lowered our heads and bowled the three men behind us over. We ran at top speed down the hill, a volley of curses and bullets following us. But the lead whistled harmlessly over our heads. We did not stop running until we reached the picket lines safely, Jim still carrying the iron pot.

We breakfasted like princes that morning on fried sausage, and many a savory stew was boiled in the iron pot before success perched upon the banners of the Northern armies.

Bill resumed his seat in a tempest of applause, and when the chorus "He's a jolly good fellow," had subsided, Col. Ellery Summers of Tallahassee, arose and addressed the chair. Said he :

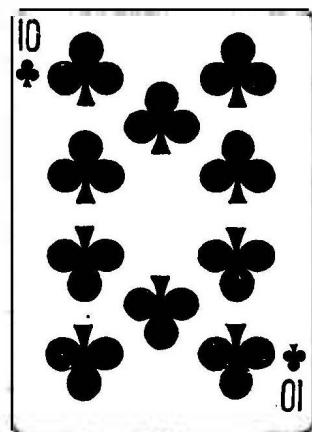
"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen : I am delighted to be associated on this occasion with gentlemen who are my peers in intellect, but scarcely my equals in alcoholic capacity. But I am especially delighted to be with you to-night to listen to Mr. Edgerton's story and to assure you that it is true as Holy Writ. It was my fortune to interrupt that game of poker, to taste the peach brandy the speaker has so feelingly alluded to. I remember vividly the chagrin I felt when the three prisoners escaped with the iron pot. But I am pleased to say that I can restore the watch, which was given to me as my share of the spoils. Here it is."

The Colonel drew from his pocket a battered old silver watch.

"For fear that there may be some doubt as to the ownership of the time-piece, I will read the inscription inside the case : Presented to Mr. George Edgerton on August 4, 1859, by the congregation of the Port Ewen Reformed Church, for his efficiency in teaching the infant class to sing."

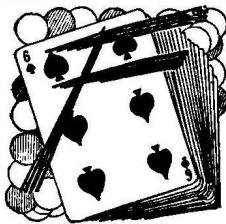
In the language of the Bowery, "they didn't do a thing" to the Colonel. He was toasted with expensive wines, hailed with shouts, and carried around the room on the shoulders of enthusiastic men, and as he shook hands with Edgerton at 2 a. m. he exclaimed :

"It was worth carrying that watch for twenty years to have the enjoyment of restoring it. The only regret I have is that I did not have a chance to sample the sausages in the iron pot."



THE SOUVENIR CORKSCREW.

BY CAMPBELL STEWART.



OR two days our train had been speeding through the broad prairies of the West. I had finished my novel the day before, and unfortunately there was nothing in the smoking-car's slender library that had any interest for me. So I sat gazing out upon the endless plain, which seemed to rotate upon some point in the distant horizon. In my imagination it became a giant roulette wheel, and on it I won imaginary fortunes. My thoughts took this turn because a friend had recently lost a fortune—yes, yes, at Monte Carlo—and I had not yet recovered from my stern resolve to eschew the attractions of the goddess of the green cloth and confine my gaming propensities to an occasional bet on the ball games.

My mind rambled on in this fashion till supper time. I am such a thin, dyspeptic old duffer that my meals, far from being happy privileges, have long been painful necessities. But this supper was one to be remembered, for it brought forth a story of unusual interest.

When the wine was brought on the waiter, by some oversight, left his corkscrew lying on the table. It was a common one, but it attracted the attention of the portly, distinguished looking gentleman sitting opposite me, who slowly drew something from his pocket, and said :

“Gentlemen, that corkscrew there on the table doubtless serves its purpose well enough, but I would not exchange this one for ten thousand such.”

With that he showed us a shiny screw folded against a broad silver handle, which he opened like a watch case and passed around the table. As each saw what the handle contained I noticed looks of wonderment cast at its owner, as if an explanation was wanted. When it reached me I became eager to hear the story behind that curious corkscrew, for in the handle, protected by a thin glass, lay a playing card—rather, I should say, a small piece of one, half cut, half torn, from the card. It was stained a dark brown, but after more

careful scrutiny I discovered a figure seven in the corner, and below it a trefoil.

Certainly, I thought, a man would never show such a thing as that, unless he were willing to give the story, so I said :

“That means more to you than to us. Can’t you tell us why?”

He smiled, and replied : “Well, I might, yes. I forgot that the yarn would be necessary, but now that I’m in for it, I don’t mind trying to entertain you for awhile. But let’s go where we can smoke.”

We proceeded without more delay to the smoker, (there were four of us) and soon had the traditional “blue cloud floating over our heads.” After the usual twisting, and hauling, and tilting of chairs, we found comfortable positions, and waited. It had begun to rain—one of those dismal November rains—and the splashing on the windows, the fast gathering darkness, and the general dreariness of the sodden landscape, made the bright interior of the car seem doubly cheerful. We puffed our cigars in silence for a few minutes, then our friend began :

“In ’59 I was employed by a New York firm as a special agent for California. It was a position of considerable responsibility for a young man of twenty-four, as the company’s interests involved several hundred thousand or more a year, but at the expense of every hour not spent in bed, and endless hard work, I had for two years brought my employers satisfactory results. My salary was not large. It should have been much larger, although I tried every way to secure an increase. Failing in that, however, I decided that if my salary could not be made to fit my work, I would make the work fit the salary, and enjoy some of the advantages around me. With that end in view, I joined a club—*the* club, in fact, as there was but one in the city—and spent my evenings there instead of in the office planning business.

“At the club we played poker, and there were frequently some pretty stiff games put up ; but I was too cautious and careful of my reputation to take part in them, and so tried to be satisfied with less expensive recreation. For a year or more I played about even, while my business did not suffer appreciably. Then I began to devote more time to cards and less to business, and soon began to lose steadily until in a few months my losses amounted to more than a year’s salary. But still I played, oftener and for larger stakes, when one night I had a ‘streak’ and won twelve hundred dollars more than my previous losses.

“You can imagine my elation better than I can describe it.

But if I could have foreseen how the influence of that successful game would lead me to the very verge of absolute ruin, poker would have lost all its charms. The absence of such foresight caused the one adventure of my life.

“The next evening I was engaged in a quiet little game, which seemed very dull after the excitement of the previous night, when a waiter brought me a note something like this :

“Can you join Speaks, Brown, Dilworthy, and myself, in Room 4?

“A. O. JUDD.”

“These men were all cool, steady players, noted for high games, and for a long time I had possessed a sneaking desire to be taken into their circle. Like a silly boy I felt immensely flattered by the invitation, and very quickly found some excuse to hasten to Room 4.

“Before going farther let me say something about the men I found there.

“Brown owned big plantations and scores of slaves down in Arkansas, and being a bachelor, roamed about the country spending a week here, or a month there as fancy dictated. Dilworthy was a cattleman, not immensely wealthy, but the luckiest dog at poker I have ever seen. Judd bore the proud title of “Colonel.” He had been minister to Mexico and while there married a rich Mexican of high family. There never was a couple more desperately in love than they—so desperately in fact, that her death a year later at the birth of a daughter almost cost him his reason. He resigned his post, left the child with relatives, and spent ten years in the States before he could bear the sight of his own offspring. Then he sent for her, and from that time, eight years ago, all his attention had been devoted to the education of Miss Anita Judd. Speaks was junior in the firm of Hall, Speaks & Son, clothing manufacturers of Cincinnati, and was spending a month’s vacation in our city at Judd’s invitation, who was an old friend of his father. He was scarcely older than myself, a quiet, gentlemanly fellow, and a clever hand at poker. I subsequently learned that but for the events of that evening he would have been Colonel Judd’s son-in-law.

“Well, we began to play. Brown dealt, and my first card was a king, then a six, a four, and two more kings. I laid the cards on the table before me, big ones on the bottom, and when the draw was dealt discarded two from the top of my pile. A hasty glance at the cards I had drawn revealed king and ten, which

were placed carefully on the others and left there, for I knew I would give myself away if I looked at them too much.

“On my left sat Brown and Speaks ; on the right, Dilworthy and Judd. It was Judd’s bet, and he put up a hundred, which Dilworthy raised to four. Then I startled them all by putting up fourteen hundred dollars. However, the raise was seen except by Brown, and Speaks called.

“Very deliberately I spread out my cards, and without looking at them, commenced to rake in the chips when Dilworthy caught my arm.

“‘Hold on, young man,’ said he ; ‘you can’t do that on a pair of kings when I hold a queen full, which I think is the best hand out.’ With that he took the pile, and I looked for my picture cards.

“Well, you can imagine how I felt when I saw that my four kings were but two. The others had been carelessly discarded.

“After that I played like a child. My nerves got unstrung, and I poured whisky down my throat till I could hardly see the cards. I called small bets on first class hands, and raised on poor ones to such an extent that in the next two hours my losses grew to more than fifteen thousand dollars. That meant ruin and sure disgrace, but still I stayed.

“Judd had been uneasy about me for some time, though he did not know that the money I was losing was not my own, and finally he said kindly :

“‘Look here, George, you must stop this. Come to me in a day or two and we’ll fix things up, but for your own sake go home to bed.’

“I knew what he meant to do, and grasped at the opportunity as the last despairing hope, but as I neared the door, Speaks remarked in an undertone : ‘He seems to be about done up.’ It was not intended for my ears, I knew, which made it all the worse. To my fevered mind the mere thought of giving up the fight was disgrace, and when I realized what Speaks said I was furious. So there were once more five in the game.

“Out of deference to me the bets were made smaller for a while until I began to cool off and play with more judgment. But that did me little good, for my employer’s money steadily left me, as before, though none of the others suspected whose it was, and then I came to this decision : I would risk everything on the first good hand ; if it won, I would quit, if it lost, a bullet would end everything then and there.

"My determination grew firmer as the game proceeded and poor hands still fell to me, until I was ready to give up in despair, when Speaks dealt me the four, five, six, seven of diamonds, and the seven of clubs. We had made a jack-pot several hands before, and there was now in it something like five hundred dollars. You can judge how anxious I was to have it opened ahead of me, for if I drew but one after passing they would never bet high against me."

"Judd passed, then Dilworthy announced that it would cost seventy-five dollars to draw cards. Of course we all went in and I put up my money with feverish eagerness, for I felt intuitively that my chance had come.

"Judd drew three cards, Dilworthy stood pat, and as Speaks looked inquiringly at me I tossed the seven of clubs across the table and took one, trembling like a leaf all the while. I could not find courage to look at it, but laid it down before me till the rest drew. Brown called for three, and as the dealer slipped off five for himself I heaved a sigh of relief and raised my card. It was the eight of diamonds!

"When I realized my good luck I could stand it no longer and burst out crying like a baby, completely powerless to control myself. After some minutes I exerted all my will power and regained my composure sufficiently to know that the infinitesimal chance of two straight flushes being drawn in one deal made my hand practically a sure thing, but it was also practically worthless unless the rest of them held something pretty good. There was not much time for such thoughts as these, however, for the betting began, with Dilworthy up two hundred, Judd having passed.

"Now another problem presented itself: How could the bets be forced high enough to do justice to my hand? I had but an instant to decide, and believing a large raise would bring a call before a smaller one, I raised Dilworthy's two to six. Judd gave me a pitying look, which I answered with a glare like a tiger's.

"Brown thought it over for a minute and threw down his cards, but Speaks, cool as an iceberg, raised me two thousand. His coolness made me frantic.

"'Five thousand better!' I shouted, rising from my seat and leaning over the table.

"Speaks tilted back his chair, propped his feet on the table, and drawled out:

“‘Two thousand better.’

“Then I began to get frightened. He knew I could not bluff, the thought flashed through my mind, and yet he raises. With that my previous resolution came back to me, and I fairly yelled :

“‘You’re raised three thousand.’

“Don’t forget that Dilworthy had a good hand. He quietly met each raise and waited for the next one, though made none himself.

“I suppose the other fellows thought I had lost my mind, but my attention was too firmly fixed on the man from Cincinnati, to take any notice of them.

“That worthy gentleman sneered when he heard my last raise. You’ve lost enough for to-night, I think. I’ll just see you and let Dilworthy call it.’

“‘All right,’ said he, ‘what do you hold?’

“‘Something that can’t be beaten,’ I panted, ‘a straight flush !’

“Dilworthy laid down four jacks.

“Speaks looked at his cards, saying as he did so: ‘Is that straight flush of yours better than this?’ and lowered his hand till it rested on the table, still holding the cards.

“I looked. Clubs—seven, eight, nine, ten, and jack !

“How long my eyes were on those cursed clubs, I don’t know. But all the time my brain was clearing almost miraculously, and I was as cool as I am now, in spite of my anger. Then slowly reaching to my coat pocket, like a flash I drew a knife and drove it through his outstretched hand, cards and all, pinning him to the table.

“The spectators were thunderstruck, but before a word could be pronounced, I said calmly :

“‘Mr. Speaks, that seven of clubs is my discard !’

“He sat as if stunned, pale as death, while the blood slowly spread out on the table. Then, with an oath, he jerked out the blade and sprang at me, hissing through his clenched teeth :

“‘You lie !’

“Of course, we were at once seized and firmly held, though Speaks struggled like a madman. When he quieted down, no one spoke a word for several minutes, and so still was the room, that we could hear his heavy breathing.

“Brown broke the silence. ‘This is a most extraordinary charge,’ said he, ‘but nevertheless true, for I saw Mr. Speaks

pick up a card while George was crying. I meant to denounce him at once, but it was impossible for me to believe that he would cheat, and I knew you would not listen to such a thing. The outcome proves that the gentleman deliberately committed fraud. I suggest that he be sent to his hotel immediately.'

"Your suggestion is a good one"—it was Judd that spoke—"but you forget that he may stop payment on his checks. A man low enough to cheat in a game like this, where a fortune is at stake, is low enough to repudiate his just debts. We would better keep him here till George draws his money.'

"Perhaps," I began, "that will not be necessary. Let's hear what he has to say for himself."

"What Speaks said I cannot now repeat exactly, but we learned that he had seen my card as I threw it across the table, and when he found his hand lacking that very card of being a straight flush the temptation was too much for him. While I was boo-hooing he thought no one was watching and carelessly picked it up, never taking a thought as to what the consequences might be. He begged us to keep the affair a secret, and assured us that his checks would be honored.

"We promised faithfully not to make known his connection with the incident, and for years the subject was never mentioned. Even now I used fictitious names in telling the story.

"My winnings in that pot amounted to about twenty-four thousand dollars, enough to put me on my feet in good shape. Dilworthy and Speaks could stand their losses, for they had been winning from me throughout the game. What became of the latter I cannot now say; not even whether he is alive or dead.

"Before leaving the room I secured the piece of that memorable card which so aroused your curiosity, as a souvenir of what proved to be my last game of poker. A few years ago I had it put in this corkscrew. I rather enjoy looking at it now."

As the gentleman finished his story I drew a long breath and glanced around the little circle of hearers. The man on my right seemed to be paying no attention to the speaker, but was gazing abstractedly into a pocket-book—which lay on his knee. Presently he looked up, and placing something from his pocket-book on his open hand he held it out to us. There in the palm I saw a thin white scar about an inch and a quarter long, and beside lay a piece of a seven of clubs!

"That, too," said he, "was my last game of poker!"

THE OCTOBER NUMBER OF POKER CHIPS

CONTAINED THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTIONS:

THE GIRL WHO BROKE THE BANK AT MONTE CARLO,
A QUIET (?) GAME,
A HAWK IN THE DOVE COTE,
A SCRIPTURE CORROBORATION,
THE ADJUTANT'S INVENTION,
BLAKEBURY TEACHES HIS WIFE THE GAME,
HIS LAST GAME,
"DEAD SOT AG IN PEENUCKLE,"
A LESSON IN POKER,
BACKWOODS BLUFFING,
HOW I WAS TRICKED,
"CHIPS,"

Edgar Saltus
Henry E. Dixey
Robert J. Burdette
Albert Bigelow Paine
J. H. Connelly
Thos. Q. Seabrooke
Mrs. E. Burke Collins
Ed. Mott
Louis F. Massen
Edward Harrigan
Herrmann, the Prestidigitateur
William Wallace Cook

CONTENTS OF THE SEPTEMBER NUMBER.

ALTRUISM AND CHECKERS,
"ILL SPRISE 'Er!"
POKER WITH THE GIRLS,
THE MYSTERY OF A FACE,
THE NEW WOMAN PLAYS POKER,
THE ACE OF HEARTS,
TWO RESULTS IN SLEEPY HOLLOW,
MICKEY FINN TELLS FORTUNES,
ABBY'S SUCCESSFUL BLUFF,
THE FATEFUL POKER HANDS,

Jessie Bartlett Davis
Marshall P. Wilder
John Habberton, Author of "Helen's Babies."
Jurana W. Sheldon
Sam. W. Small, Jr.
James S. Burdette
Robert H. Davis
Ernest Jarrold
Alfred E. Pearsall
Dr. Chas. J. Perry

CONTENTS OF THE AUGUST NUMBER.

A POKER LESSON,
CHIPS IN HER PURSE,
THE GAME AT THE BLACK WOLF,
FIFTY CHIPS APIECE,
JACOB'S BLUFF,
WHY JOE SWORE OFF,
HE DASSN'T TELL,
THEY CAN'T DO ME!
THE KING OF DIAMONDS,

J. H. Connelly
Marie Dressler
M. Quad
F. R. Fast, L.I.B.
Gus Williams
Ed. Mott
Willis P. Sweatnam
Jacob Hess
Francis Worcester Doughty

CONTENTS OF THE JULY NUMBER.

THE DEACON'S SIN,
BAFFLED BY FATE. A Tale of the Mississippi,
HOW COL. SAM LOST HIS PROPERTY,
HOW JIM STAKED HIS "PARDNER" AND WHAT CAME OF IT, *Hon. Geo. R. Malby*
HOW THE PARSON'S BLUFF WAS CALLED,
PHARAOH VS. FARO,
THREE OF A KIND,
HOW McGINTY LOST HIS Winnings,

John Habberton
Col. John R. Fellows
Ed. Mott
Lev Dockstader
Ernest Jarrold
Chas. E. Lambert
W. J. O'Sullivan, M. D.

CONTENTS OF THE JUNE NUMBER.

POKER GAMES IN CHILDHOOD,
CHIMMIE FADDEN'S POKER PARTY,
THE OLD SETTLER'S LAST GAME OF POKER,
MICKEY FINN TELLS HOW POKER WAS INVENTED,
HOW A TEN-CENT CHIP COST A MAN A WIFE,
WASHINGTON'S VINK,
POKER VS. LOVE,
THE CROOK,
A NIGHT AT THE COUNTESS CLUB,

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