

all low, disreputable company; would drink no kind of intoxicating liquors, wine, or ale; would neither smoke nor chew; would go nightly to his play, as a man would go to his office or to his trade; would play as long as he won, or until the bank broke; would lose a certain sum and no more; when he lost that, he would stop playing, and leave the room for the night; if he lost ten nights in succession, he would lose that exact sum and no more, and wait till his luck changed. This system he has followed exactly. While this one man has been successful in this career, tens of thousands, who have tried the hazard, have been carried down into irretrievable ruin.

XLVI.

LOW CLASS GAMBLING-HOUSES.

THE SKIN GAME.—HOW VICTIMS ARE SECURED.

THE SKIN GAME.

THERE are two kinds of gambling in the city, one known as the square game, which is played only by gentlemen, and in first-class houses; the other, the skin game, which is played in all the dens and chambers, and in the thousand low hells of New York. In the square game nobody is solicited, nor obliged to play, though they visit the rooms. In low gaming-houses it is not safe for any one to enter unless he plays. Persons are not only solicited, but bullied into hazarding something. Runners are out, who visit all the hotels and places of amusement to solicit custom, as drummers solicit trade for dry goods houses.

HOW VICTIMS ARE SECURED.

The mode of procedure is usually this. A person arrives in New York, and books his name at a hotel. A sharper, who is hanging round from a low clubhouse, watches his descent from the coach, or his entrance with his carpet-bag; watches him as he books

his name, and waits until he has finished his dinner or supper, and comes into the public room. To a stranger there is no place so lonely and utterly desolate as a great city. The stranger does not know what to do with the time that hangs heavy on his hands till the morning trade begins. The roper-in for the gambling-house understands this very well. At the proper time he approaches the visitor, and calls him by name; asks him if he is not from Chicago or New Orleans, as the case may be; announces himself as from that city; speaks about mutual acquaintances. The visitor, thankful that he has found somebody to speak to in this great wilderness, becomes communicative. The sharper soon finds out whether his companion is a drinking man or not. If he is, an invitation is given to come up and take a drink, in which the health of their mutual friends in New Orleans and elsewhere is duly honored. Each treats the other, and several glasses are drank. From the bar the parties proceed to the front steps of the hotel. "What are you going to do with yourself to-night?" is carelessly asked by the roper-in. Of course the victim has no plans; he has not been in New York long enough to form any. He is only too happy to accept an invitation to call at a private club-house of a friend. "They keep vile liquor in this house; I would not drink the stuff. My friend imports his own liquors; you'll get a fine drink over there." Arm in arm the parties start for the club-house, which, of course, is a gambling-den. They take a few drinks all round, and then pass into another room, where "a few gentlemen" are having a quiet game by themselves. The roper looks on for a while,

and suggests to his friend that he take a chance for a dollar or so; that he is not much accustomed to play, but that he does so once in a while for amusement. He plays and wins; he plays again and wins. The game is so played that winning or losing is at the pleasure of the man who shuffles the cards. Between each play the visitors drink. It costs them nothing, and they drink deep; at least the victim does. Confidentially over their glasses the sharper suggests that his friend back him for the little sum of fifty dollars. The excited man yields, and wins. He now bets a hundred dollars. The infatuation is upon him. He bets all his money, pledges his watch and jewelry, till, insensible, he is turned out on the sidewalk, to be taken to the station-house, or carried to his hotel by the police. In these dens strangers have lost as high as two hundred thousand dollars in a single night. In the morning the gamblers cannot be found, and if found, the robbers are far away. There are about fifty of these sharpeners, who prowl around the hotels nightly, seeking their victims among the unwary. Men who frequent low and disreputable places to fleece strangers and the young are not only professed gamblers, but curbstone brokers and gamblers in stocks, with whom the excitement of the day is exchanged for the hazard of the night.

XLVII.

DAY GAMBLING-HOUSES.

THEIR ORIGIN. — HOW THE ROOMS ARE FITTED UP. — AN INSIDE VIEW.

THEIR ORIGIN.

THERE is a class of speculators who are not content with legitimate business nor legitimate hours. The uptown hotels are crowded with them. Rooms are occupied, halls rented, and the day excitement at Wall Street is renewed in the evening, and often runs up to the small hours of the morning. The same spirit led to the opening of day gambling-houses. These are conveniently located to business. They run from Fulton Street to Wall, are found at a convenient distance from Broadway and Water Street. They are designed to attract merchants, bankers, young men, and visitors from the country. They have ropers-in, as have the night gambling-saloons. These decoys have a percentage taken from the winnings of their customers. Every man they can seduce to enter one of these establishments, if he lose money, is a gain to the decoy. These sharpers hang round the street, loaf on the curbstone, dog their victims from store to store, proffer them aid, go with them blocks to show them the way, help them to make purchases, propose to show them sights, and at

length, as if accidentally, lead them into a day gambling-saloon, which is situated very conveniently for the purpose. In these dens, men who have lost in stocks on the street try to make gains. Missing bonds here turn up, missing securities are here found, pledged by confidential clerks, who, until now, were supposed to be trustworthy. Young men who are robbed in the street, from whose hands funds are snatched, from whose possession a well-stuffed pocket-book has been taken, find the thief usually within the silent walls of a day gambling-house.

HOW THE ROOMS ARE FITTED UP.

The place selected for one of these saloons is in the busiest and most frequented parts of lower New York. A store let in floors is usually selected. A large building full of offices, with a common stairway, up and down which people are rushing all the time, is preferred; or the loft of a warehouse, if nothing better can be had, is taken. A sealed partition runs from the floor to the wall. The windows are barred with wooden shutters, and covered with heavy curtains. The rooms are handsomely carpeted, and gayly adorned. Lounges and chairs line the sides of the room, and the inevitable roulette and faro tables stand in their place. The padded cushion on which the cards rest tells the employment of the room. The outside door is flush with the partition. A party desiring to enter pulls the bell, and the door opens without any apparent agency, and closes suddenly on the comer. The hardened gambler walks in as he would into a bar-room or an omnibus, regardless of observation. But the young man who is

new to the business, who has come justly or unjustly by a bill, who has been sent on an errand and must make up a falsehood to account for his detention, or who is sent from the bank to the Clearing House, or from the Clearing House to the Custom House, and who runs in to try his luck for a few minutes, or for thirty, can be easily detected. He pauses below; goes a story above; looks up and down before he pulls the bell; faintly draws the wire, and darts in like a startled fawn. Not without observation and scrutiny does the customer get into the saloon. The outside door admits him into a small vestibule. The door behind him is closed, and he cannot open it. The bell has announced his presence. He is scrutinized through a small wicket opening in the wall. He must in some way be vouched for. If he comes through invitation of a roper-in he has a card. If all is right he is admitted. The darkness of night fills the room. The gas is lighted. The silence of a sepulchre reigns in the chamber. Persons sit, lounge, and stand in groups; they watch the table, but not a word is spoken except the monotonous utterances of the men who have charge of the gaming.

AN INSIDE VIEW.

Seated at the table to deal the cards sits a man apparently between forty and fifty years of age. These men all seem of the same age and of the same tribe. They are usually short, thick set, square built, pugilistic fellows, half bald, with mahogany faces — men without nerve, emotion, or sensibility. They sit apparently all day long pursuing their monotonous and deadly trade, making no inquiry about their victims, caring nothing

about their losses, unmoved by the shriek of anguish, the cry of remorse, the outburst, "O, I am undone! I am ruined! What will my mother say? What will become of my wife and children?" While the wounded are removed, and their outcries hushed, the play goes on. These rooms are distinguished by their silence and quiet tread inside. They open about nine in the morning, and close at four, when the tide begins to turn up town. The amount of misery these day gambling-houses create, the loss of money, character, and standing, exceeds all belief. The men who carry on this class of gambling down town are connected with the low class up town, and when the day gambling-houses close, those that run in the night are opened. The losses are often very heavy. Men enticed into these dens have been known to lose from twelve to fifty thousand dollars a night. There is no seduction in New York more subtle or more deadly than the day gambling-houses.