

THE GAME OF BUNCO.

CAPTAIN WILLIAMS TELLS ABOUT ITS HISTORY AND METHODS.

NEW YORK, April 21.—It is hard to say where the word "bunco" was born. It comes, if not from the gutter, at least from an origin of not better, if even of as moral character. Its first appearance to the best of my knowledge was in the early part of the seventies, when it was added to the list of such sporting words, so called, as *faro*, *keno*, *loto* and the like. At the outset it was the equivalent of confidence "operation," but after a brief while it became limited to express these transactions in which a swindler secures money or valuables from a victim who willingly parts with his property in the hope of securing a pretended reward of ludicrously enormous proportions.

The success of the first "steerer" and "hand-shaker" upon the ignorant and credulous brought imitators into the business. These tried their hands upon men whom the original workers would never have approached, and wound to their surprise that education and knowledge of the world did not protect their possessors. They continued in their experimenting until, having buncoed Charles Francis Adams, the late Commodore Garrison, Oscar Wilde, the distinguished apostle of aesthetic culture, and other men of prominence in various fields they concluded that every man was capable of being robbed in this manner, provided, of course, that the right operator and right mode of attack were employed.

FAMOUS BUNCO MEN.

Nearly all the famous men are well-dressed, mild-mannered, quiet speaking and companionable fellows. Many of them would be ornaments to a parlor, and most would be popular and thriving business men if their talents were honestly and properly applied. "Hungry Joe," who is now doing yeoman's service for the State in Sing Sing, would pass muster in many of our clubs. "Kid Miller," until his last fracas, in which his face was seriously disfigured, might be, and probably has been, mistaken for a theological student.

Harry Ashton, who victimized Commodore Garrison, looks like a prosperous Wall Street broker, and talks as well as two-thirds of that fraternity. "Cigarette Harry," or Harry Desmond, or Harry Dressner, who is serving a term in the Buffalo Penitentiary, resembles a lawyer or a politician of the better type. Will Hawley cultivates literature in his leisure hours and shows considerable ability as a newspaper man. Frequently when in bad luck or when desirous of getting a reference as to character he has worked for the daily press, and always done creditable work. Sigless is a typical young Hebrew salesman of the better class. "Easy Archie" apes the gilded youth who follow the anise bag at Rockaway, and makes, it must be admitted, a very clever imitation. "Sheeny Doc" is the typical physician of a few years' standing, and, it is said, did actually study a short time in some medical institution.

PROFESSIONAL METHODS.

Like every other art, the bunco of today has innumerable variations. The commonest form that comes to the notice of the police is as follows:

Mr. Smith, a well-to-do farmer or tradesman, comes to New York from his native town, Smithville. He carries with him a well-filled wallet, which, being distrustful of hotel clerks and hotel safes, he carries in some inside pocket. Near the Brooklyn Bridge, the Central Park plaza, Madison or Union Square, he is accosted by a pleasant-mannered man who shakes his hand violently and says in the most friendly fashion: "Brown, dear boy, how are you?"

Mr. Smith draws himself up and replies: "You've made a mistake, young man. I'm not Brown. My name is Smith—Ephraim Smith, of Smithville, Smith County, Pa."

This is all the "hand-shaker" wants—the man's name and address. Frequently, in fact, generally, these are not given as short and pat as in the interview described. Frequently he half suspects the friendly stranger, and a brief talk is needed to secure the desired information. When it is given the accomplice joins the bunco man, who is not far away, and who has at this moment in his hand a small bankers' directory which contains a list of all the banks in the Union by States, the names of their President, Secretary, Cashier and sometimes other information. As the accomplice reaches the word he says: "Pennsylvania—Smithville, Smith county," and together they run down the entry. It usually reads as follows:

SMITHVILLE.—First Nat'l.—Jabez Jaggs, Pres't; William A Snow, Sec.; John Porter C'shr.

Smith County.—John Piggsnap, Pres't and Sec.

THE TRAINED EXPERT.

The bunco man trained in this work need not to write these entries down to remember them. He runs them over twice and can then recall them to the letter at any time until the job is over. He approaches the victim who has moved leisurely along in the meantime, pleasantly bows as he reaches him, coughs slightly and says:

"Why, good morning, Mr. Smith. It is a pleasure to meet you in New York. How are your folks and how is my uncle, Jabez Jaggs?"

He may address him as Squire,

Judge, Colonel, Major and Captain. He is pretty certain to use a military title if upon Smith's person he has seen a Grand Army button, badge or other insignia. He may use the judicial title if the victim looks as if he had ever been a Justice of the Peace, court clerk, constable or other official. For to all such the words Squire and Judge have a strangely sweet and fascinating sound. It makes but little difference what words are used. Those which are employed are pleasantly put and make Smith believe at the outset that here is some one who knows him and his and who is glad to see him in the great wilderness where he is already lonely and unhappy. There may be some mistake, however. So smiling at his new found acquaintance he slowly draws out:

"I reckon you've got the best of me, my friend. I can't place you to save my durned old eyes!"

The victory is half won. The bunco in a second has seen that the man is glad to meet an acquaintance, and what is more important, that he does not suspect. He adds heartily: "Well, I wouldn't be surprised. I haven't been there now for three years, and the last time I was on I only stayed a week. I'm Charlie Jaggs, son of Edward, who is the brother of Jabez, the President of your First National Bank. I met you last talking one day on some loan or other business to Snow, the Secretary. How are all your folks?"

This ninety-nine times out of a hundred more than satisfies Smith. In all probability he has a slight acquaintance and a profound awe for Jaggs, the local millionaire. Snow he knows better from having had slight financial operations with him. As a result he is delighted at being regarded in New York as the friend of a man who has intimate relations with the Treasury at Washington and the Stock Exchange in Wall Street. He unbosoms himself to the banker's nephew, and for a dreary quarter hour tells the interminable tale of measles among his children, dip in the chickens, dry rot in the potatoes, his daughter's engagement to his neighbor's son and all the other details of bucolic life.

DISTINGUISHED ACQUAINTANCES.

The next step is to further impress Smith as well as to please him. The bunco man takes his victim to the bar of some first-class hotel where merchants, politicians and prominent men congregate. A popular delusion is that it is a low saloon or dark grogery. It never is except by the least skillful "crooks." Up to the bar they go. If Smith uses intoxicants so much the worse for him. As they stand near the gleaming crystal and silver the banker's nephew points out the celebrities.

"That's Channey M. Depew" (bowing to some politician who faintly resembles the great wit and railroadist and who bows effusively in return, as nearly all New York politicians are in the habit of doing.) "That's ex-Mayor Grace there drinking champagne with his brother. They are worth \$10,000,000 and never drink anything else. That big man is the hotel detective. He arrests every criminal who dares to come to the house. It's a good thing because it protects a man from desperate characters and that's what makes this place so popular with gentlemen and business men."

VARIOUS GAMES.

So runs the glib talk of the bunco man. It is "calculated to deceive the best critics," as the Bank Note Reporter appropriately phrases it, and it does deceive the listener whose horizon for years has been the boundaries of his town. The audacity displayed is sometimes bewildering. They have taken their victims into the rogues gallery, into the Mayor's office, the Common Council Chamber, and the Court of Sessions. They have introduced him to editors, hotel keepers, public officials, and on one occasion, it is reported, to the Mayor himself. Confidence once gained the operator begins the second act of the drama. This is to take his prey to the place where one or more colleagues are awaiting his arrival, and where the actual swindle is perpetrated. The scheme employed in this transaction varies infinitely. Sometimes it is the Louisiana lottery, sometimes a policy shop; it may be the wheel fortune, *keno*, sweet, "green goods," dice, poker, *euchre*, *cribbage*, *whist*, *roulette*, *rouge et noir*, "rolling the log," three card monte, thimble-rigging, "the envelope game," or Heaven knows what not. Of the men who are swindled not more than one in five report their loss to the police, and of these no two tell the same story alike. The commonest trick is for the buncoist to give his colleagues in the office a lottery ticket for which he is supposed to have paid \$25 and to receive \$250 cash in return. He counts it methodically while the victim sympathizes in delight at his friend's good fortune. The cashier announces that the special weekly drawing will be held in fifteen minutes, and that \$500 will in every probability win \$5,000 in good money. The stranger accepts or hesitates. Generally he has only \$200 or \$300 about his person. The bunco man comes to his help. He will take a half risk, and divide the profits. The interest is bought, the drawing occurs, and the selection wins nothing or a small sum. But it always comes within an ace of hitting the capital prize. At this point the victim "sours," to use a slang phrase, and often "squeals," to use another. Sometimes his credulity is so great that he continues until bankrupt. If when he perceives that he is being

robbed he shows the white feather, he is beaten or scared into a silent and hasty flight. In any case the victim is quickly disposed of, peaceably if possible, forcibly if needed.

THE ETIQUETTE OF BUNCO.

It is opposed to the etiquette of bunco to rob a man by force. It is also much more severely punished by the law. An action of this kind cost Hungry Joe his liberty and his prestige as the "first operator in the land." The intended victim foolishly displayed a large roll of bills in his hand to Joe and his partners after having refused to venture a penny upon any scheme. Joe, hungrier than usual, snatched the money and ran away committing robbery instead of the swindling he had contemplated.

Another odd feature of the version of the bunco man to remain long in one place, either "the office" where he does business, or the house or rooms where he resides. It is not from fear of the police, as all, or nearly all, the worthies are known by face, name and record to the force. So constant are the changes that it would require a large volume to keep their record. It might be supposed that the police would have difficulty in apprehending one in case he were wanted for some offense. The very opposite, however, is the fact. They are gregarious in their habits, more like wolves than bears. Nearly every one knows of the whereabouts of the rest, and being aware of the difficulty of conviction for buncoing has no hesitation in giving information as to a friend or pal. A second mode of placing them arises from their convivial and social habits. They are debauched from good hotels and decent barrooms on the one side, and on the other will not patronize low saloons and cheap grogeries. They therefore frequent those sporting houses where a man's character has neither value nor meaning, and where their company, on account of their extravagance and folly, is warmly welcomed. These establishments are not many in number and are all familiar to the police.

THE OPIUM HABIT.

A third method of locating them is based on their singular addiction to the opium habit. They are the best customers to the opium joints, and since these were prohibited by law, of the private opium clubs, which are scattered throughout the city. Of the five or six hundred affairs of this class it is fair to assume that two-thirds are made up of crooks. It is also fair to assume that three-fourths of all the bunco men are victims of the habit. Hungry Joe, and especially two insignificant confidence operators who have adopted his name, have been recognized by detective-sergeants in such places times numberless; Harry Ashton, the bogus Harry Ashton, "Sheeny Doc," John Palmer and Lew Martin spend twenty-four hours at a stretch in "hitting the pipe," while Cigarette Harry, Sam Goldstein, Philadelphia Harry, and Jim McVicker have been known to lie off on a bank forty-eight and even seventy-two consecutive hours. On this account the suppression of the public joints increased detective labor. It was much easier than to search a few joints for an accused than it is now to visit fifty sport-houses and a hundred clubs.

HOW TO SUPPRESS IT.

To the question that is so often put to the police, "Why don't you suppress bunco and arrest all bunco men?" the only answer is to the question, "How can you do it?" They are never disorderly in their conduct. Their victims seldom complain, and when they do complain usually fall through excitement to identify the swindler. When an old provision of law is called into play and they are arrested as vagrants, it certainly is ridiculous to accuse a man of being without visible means of support who is the best dressed man in the court room and who almost invariably has more money and more valuable jewelry about his person than the Judge or the District Attorney. The true remedy would be a statute whereby any confidence operator seen pursuing his business who cannot satisfactorily prove that he is engaged in legitimate business should be adjudged a professional criminal or thief and fined or imprisoned, in the discretion of the magistrate. Until then the only thing that can be done is for the police to use their discretion and often club and drive these thieves from precinct to precinct, and in everywise both interfere with their nefarious trade and call public attention to their faces and characters.

THE BUNCOIST'S DOWNFALL.

Though the buncoist has fair seas and smooth sailing compared with other criminals, he has but one end—the State prison. Hungry Joe is in Sing Sing and Cigarette Harry in Buffalo; Lew Martin and Sheeny Doc have just completed terms in Moyamensing and John Palmer in New Haven. A dozen others of lesser note are out on bail, and all of them live in perpetual fear of arrest and conviction.

There is no more pitiable object than the bunco man who sees a detective or police official approach him, whom he knows. Fear, cringing and abject; hopelessness mixed with puny bravado, despair and the hope that his turn has not come yet, are the lights that shine over his cunning face. There is another end for some of them—death from morphinizations. These votaries of the Eastern drug finally reach a stage when the sharp brain refuses to act and the supple body longer to move.

Beyond this is Bellevue, Blackwell's Island, the morgue and potter's field are the next and final steps. In the past five years fourteen confidence men have thus terminated their career and at the present moment over thirty others are following in the same awful footsteps.

ALEXANDER S. WILLIAMS, Inspector of Police, New York. —The Los Angeles Evening Express.

A SINGULAR STORY.

A GIRL UNRAVELS A NEW JERSEY MYSTERY.

Rahway has another mystery, which Miss Grace Bentwick, a pretty girl of 19 years, solved the other week. Her uncle is a wealthy farmer and sheep-raiser. A month ago a shepherd came to Mr. Bentwick in great alarm and said two of his finest animals were killed during the night, their throats being cut from ear to ear. It seemed impossible that a dog should have done it. The next night two more were killed in the same way.

Two men were hired to patrol the farm buildings. Nothing happened, but the next morning news came that a farmer fifteen miles away had lost two sheep during the night. Since then not a night has passed without some farmer having sheep killed. Last week Mr. Bentwick was to go away from home, and his niece was asked to prepare his breakfast early. She was afraid if she went to bed she would oversleep. She determined to pass the night in the kitchen. She was not afraid as she had an immense Siberian mastiff, who was locked in the kitchen all night. She is in the habit of feeding it and it seemed attached to her.

After the family had gone to bed the girl sat reading some time and then moved to the fire and seated herself on the floor, with her back against the dog's tawny back, and fell asleep. She was aroused by feeling the dog gently move. She half opened her eyes, and what she saw aroused her to full consciousness.

In some mysterious way the dog seemed changed. His eyes were shining like two coals of fire, and he was looking at her with an expression of almost human hate. The skin was drawn back from the teeth, and his whole body was trembling with fury. Miss Bentwick's first impulse was to spring to her feet and rush from the room, but at the first movement the dog growled savagely and she fell back on the floor. Through her half-closed eyes she watched every movement of the great beast. Slowly he rose to his feet, and with the soft tread of a cat walked round her, put his great head close to her face, felt her hot breath, then thinking her asleep, he stole toward the small window.

Overcome by curiosity Miss Bentwick rose to her feet. With one bound the dog was at her side again and on the point of springing at her throat. She sank into her chair and closed her eyes, waiting to feel the dog's teeth in her throat and afraid to call for help. After a moment of frightful agony she partially opened her eyes and saw the dog standing immediately in front of her, with the expression of a man-eating tiger on his face. Miss Grace had self control enough to feign sleep and this saved her life. After a while the dog seemed convinced she was asleep. He slowly approached the window, looking back every step. It was old fashioned and opened with a latch. When in front of it he raised himself on his hind legs, and with one paw gently raised the bolt and the window came open. Then he returned and took a survey of Miss Bentwick. She was still motionless. Then he sprang through the window and disappeared.

Miss Grace then faintly. She was brought back to consciousness by a heavy weight pressed against her and something wet falling on her. Through her half-closed lids she saw the dog standing over her, a paw on each shoulder, looking in her face. Something wet was dripping on her dress from the dog's jaws. After a while the dog left her, stretched himself out quietly and went to sleep.

She sprang for the door, the dog after her, but she got out, held the door and screamed until help came. Mr. Bentwick armed himself and entered the kitchen. He was surprised to find the windows raised and the dog sleeping, apparently. He thought his niece was dreaming, but on her dress were little pools of blood. Two more sheep were killed that night and the Siberian dog was the murderer. Mr. Bentwick concluded to kill the dog, and was leading him out, when Grace came into the room. The dog sprang frantically at her, but a ball from Bentwick's pistol killed him.

A MILLIONAIRE'S BEGINNING.—John W. Mackay does not appear to be made of the common clay of which most millionaires are composed. A writer to a western paper once heard the bonanza king say when a strike was threatened in Virginia City: "I am sorry that these men, who are receiving \$4 a day do not save more of their money. I rolled rocks in Yuba river fourteen hours a day for months at a time, and went to camp every night soaked to the bone, and did not average \$2 a day; but no one ever found me quite broke or ever heard me complain."

An Illinois man who started through a passenger train taking a straw vote on president fell between two of the cars and was killed. We trust this solemn warning will not pass unheeded.—Philadelphia Press.

HE HAD A PRESENTIMENT.

AND, SURE ENOUGH, SOMETHING DID HAPPEN TO THE STEAMSHIP HE DESERTED.

Presentiments are queer things. Most superstitions seem to be gradually dying out, or rather education and the civilization of the world are killing them. But there are plenty of people left who firmly believe that a knowledge of events to come is sometimes vouchsafed to them. This man hears the voice of fate in the hall of dreams; that in a waking sensation of uneasiness which conjures his mind to picture the coming of some accident or incident, generally of a disagreeable nature.

It is not often that a man dreams or thinks in daylight that he will fall into luck's lap tomorrow. Usually the presentiment foreshadows death, or disaster of some kind.

Nearly all men and all women have felt the circle of tomorrow impinge upon the lessening arc of today. Presentiments are bedfellows of us all. Perhaps you'd like to hear of a presentiment which was fulfilled but the other day? The story is true: Pittsburghers are involved in it, and the time of it is within the current month.

On the first night after leaving Louisville the steamship *Time*, of this city, was pushing her nose slowly up the Ohio, when the steward of the boat came up to Captain Dippold in the wheelhouse, and asked to have a word with him. The steward was a white man, and had been with Captain Dippold for more than fourteen years. Formerly he had been a sailor on the ocean; a sensible, solid fellow, with lots of good points.

Capt. Dippold told the steward to go ahead with what he had to say. The steward seemed a bit flabbergasted, and made a few false starts before he got out: "I want you, Cap'n, to put me ashore as soon as possible—I must leave this boat at once."

"What's the matter, man?" asked Captain Dippold, with surprise in his voice, his eyes, and all over him.

"I've just dream't a dream that tells me afore we go much further this here boat is goin' to burn up, or her bilers will bust, or she'll be wrecked. Once afore I dreamed like this when I was on the Atlantic, and the ship was wrecked the next day, and I only saved my life by a miracle. No money would tempt me to stay on this boat to Pittsburgh. She'll break her shaft at the very least."

And as the steward rattled off this request with a good deal of repetition and much nervousness, Capt. Dippold laughed. But the fears of the steward was not to be laughed away. He persisted that his presentiment was a sure winner; that nothing could keep him on board the *Time*.

Finally Capt. Dippold said that if the steward was such a precious fool to believe in dreams he could leave the boat at Cincinnati. So when the *Time* touched at Cincinnati the steward left her and took passage by rail for Pittsburgh.

Nobody, not even Capt. Dippold, thought much about the steward's dream again until, during the day after the *Time* left Cincinnati, she broke her shaft, and lay disabled for several days before arrangements were made to tow her to Pittsburgh, where she now lies undergoing repairs.

The *Time* is a towboat belonging to Ezra Young and some other well-known Pittsburghers, and if you want to find some men who thoroughly believe in presentiments, make the acquaintance of her crew.—Pittsburgh Dispatch.

The Secret of Health.

Don't worry. "Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow." "Simplify! simplify! simplify!" "Don't over-eat. Don't starve. 'Let your moderation be known to all men.'"

Court the fresh air day and night. "Oh, if you only knew what was in the air!"

Sleep and rest abundantly. Sleep is nature's benediction.

Spend less nervous energy each day than you make.

Be cheerful. "A light heart lives long."

Think only cheerful thoughts. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

"Seek peace and pursue it."

"Work like a man, but don't be worked to death."

Avoid passion and excitement. A moment's passion may be fatal.

Associate with healthy people. Health is contagious as well as disease.

Don't carry the whole world on your shoulders, far less the universe. Trust the eternal.

Never despair. "Lost hope is a fatal disease."

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."—Woman's Magazine.

CHASED BY A WOLF.—A gypsy musician in Hungary, going from one village to another, was closely followed by a large wolf. Suddenly a happy thought occurred and he blew his horn with all the energy of despair. The device took immediate effect. His unwelcome attendant squatted down and howled piteously, as dogs will when they bear music, and the gypsy got away in safety.—Chicago Herald.