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**HENRY WARD BEECHER.**

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# **Gamblers and Gambling**

**By Rev. Henry  
Ward**

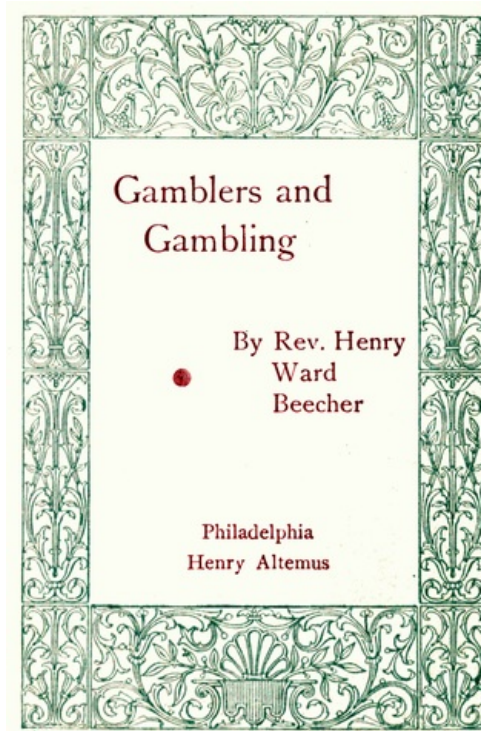
**Beecher**

Philadelphia  
Henry Altemus

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# GAMBLERS AND GAMBLING

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Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part, and also his coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be. These things therefore the soldiers did.

I have condensed into one account the separate parts of this gambling transaction as narrated by each evangelist. How marked in every age is a Gambler's character! The enraged priesthood of ferocious sects taunted Christ's dying agonies; the bewildered multitude, accustomed to cruelty, could shout; but no earthly creature, but a Gambler, could be so lost to *all* feeling as to sit down coolly under a dying man to wrangle for his garments, and arbitrate their avaricious differences by casting dice for his tunic, with hands spotted with his spattered blood, warm and yet undried upon them. The descendants of these patriarchs of gambling, however, have taught us that there is nothing possible to hell, uncongenial to these, its elect saints. In this lecture it is my disagreeable task to lead your steps down the dark path to their cruel haunts, there to exhibit their infernal passions, their awful ruin, and their ghastly memorials. In this house of darkness, amid fierce faces gleaming with the fire of fiercer hearts, amid oaths and groans and fiendish orgies, ending in murders and strewn with sweltering corpses,—do not mistake, and suppose yourself in Hell,—you are only in its precincts and vestibule.

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Gambling is the staking or winning of property upon mere hazard. The husbandman renders produce for his gains; the mechanic renders the product of labor and skill for his gains; the gambler renders for his gain the sleights of useless skill, or more often, downright cheating. Betting is gambling; there is no honest equivalent to its gains. Dealings in fancy-stocks are oftentimes sheer gambling, with all its worst evils. Profits so earned are no better than the profits of dice, cards, or hazard. When skill returns for its earnings a useful service, as knowledge, beneficial amusements, or profitable labor, it is honest commerce. The skill of a pilot in threading a narrow channel, the skill of a lawyer in threading a still more intricate one, are as substantial equivalents for a price received, as if they were merchant goods or agricultural products. But all gains of *mere* skill which result in no real benefit, are gambling gains.

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Gaming, as it springs from a principle of our nature, has, in some form, probably existed in every age. We trace it in remote periods and among the most barbarous people. It loses none of its fascinations among a civilized people. On the contrary, the habit of fierce stimulants, the jaded appetite of luxury, and the satiety of wealth, seem to invite the master-excitant. Our land, not apt to be behind in good or evil, is full of gambling in all its forms—the gambling of commerce, the gambling of bets and wagers, and the gambling of games of hazard. There is gambling in refined circles, and in the lowest; among the members of our national government, and of our state governments. Thief gambles with thief, in jail; the judge who sent them there, the lawyer who prosecuted, and the lawyer who defended them, often gamble too. This vice, once almost universally prevalent among the Western bar, and still too frequently disgracing its members, is, however, we are happy to believe, decreasing. In many circuits, not long ago, and in some now, the judge, the jury, and the bar, shuffled cards by night, and law by day—dealing out money and justice alike. The clatter of dice and cards disturbs your slumber on the boat, and rings drowsily from the upper rooms of the hotel. This vice pervades the city, extends over every line of travel, and infests the most moral districts. The secreted lamp dimly lights the apprentices to their game; with unsuspected disobedience, boys creep out of their beds to it; it goes on in the store close by the till; it haunts the shop. The scoundrel in his lair, the scholar in his room; the pirate on his ship, gay women at parties; loafers on the street-corner, public functionaries in their offices; the beggar under the hedge, the rascal in prison, and some professors of religion in the somnolent hours of the Sabbath,—waste their energies by the ruinous excitement of the game. Besides these players, there are troops of professional gamblers, troops of hangers-on, troops of youth to be *drawn* in. An inexperienced eye would detect in our peaceful towns no signs of this vulture-flock;—so in a sunny day, when all cheerful birds are singing merrily, not a buzzard can be seen; but let a carcass drop, and they will push forth their gaunt heads from their gloomy roosts, and come flapping from the dark woods to speck the air, and dot the ground with their numbers.

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The universal prevalence of this vice is a reason for parental vigilance; and a reason of remonstrance from the citizen, the parent, the minister of the gospel, the patriot, and the press. I propose to trace its opening, describe its subjects, and detail its effects.

A young man, proud of freedom, anxious to exert his manhood, has tumbled his Bible, and sober books, and letters of counsel, into a dark closet. He has learned various accomplishments, to flirt, to boast, to swear, to fight, to drink. He has let every one of these chains be put around him, upon the solemn promise of Satan that he would take them off whenever he wished. Hearing of

the artistic feats of eminent gamblers, he emulates them. So, he ponders the game. He teaches what he has learned to his shopmates, and feels himself their master. As yet he has never played for stakes. It begins thus: Peeping into a book-store, he watches till the sober customers go out; then slips in, and with assumed boldness, not concealing his shame, he asks for cards, buys them, and hastens out. The first game is to pay for the cards. After the relish of playing for a stake, no game can satisfy them *without* a stake. A few nuts are staked; then a bottle of wine; an oyster-supper. At last they can venture a sixpence in *actual money*—just for the amusement of it. I need go no further—whoever wishes to do anything with the lad, can do it now. If properly plied, and gradually led, he will go to any length, and stop only at the gallows. Do you doubt it? let us trace him a year or two further on.

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With his father's blessing, and his mother's tears, the young man departs from home. He has received his patrimony, and embarks for life and independence. Upon his journey he rests at a city; visits the "school of morals;" lingers in more suspicious places; is seen by a sharper; and makes his acquaintance. The knave sits by him at dinner; gives him the news of the place, and a world of advice; cautions him against sharpers; inquires if he has money, and charges him to keep it secret; offers himself to make with him the rounds of the town, and secure him from imposition. At length, that he may see all, he is taken to a gaming-house, but, with apparent kindness, warned not to play. He stands by to see the various fortunes of the game; some, forever losing; some, touch what number they will, gaining piles of gold. Looking in thirst where wine is free. A glass is taken; another of a better kind; next the best the landlord has, and two glasses of that. A change comes over the youth; his exhilaration raises his courage, and lulls his caution. Gambling *seen*, seems a different thing from gambling *painted* by a pious father! Just then his friend remarks that one might easily double his money by a few ventures, but that it was, perhaps, prudent not to risk. Only this was needed to fire his mind. What! only prudence between me and gain? Then that shall not be long! He stakes; he wins. Stakes again; wins again. Glorious! I am the lucky man that is to break the bank! He stakes, and wins again. His pulse races; his face burns; his blood is up, and fear gone. He loses; loses again; loses all his winnings; loses more. But fortune turns again; he wins anew. He has now lost all self-command. Gains excite him, and losses excite him more. He doubles his stakes; then trebles them—and all is swept. He rushes on, puts up his whole purse, and loses the whole! Then he would borrow; no man will lend. He is desperate, he will fight at a word. He is led to the street, and thrust out. The cool breeze which blows upon his fevered cheek, wafts the slow and solemn stroke of the clock,—one,—two,—three,—four; *four of the morning!* Quick work of ruin!—an innocent man destroyed in a night! He staggers to his hotel, remembers as he enters it, that he has not even enough to pay his bill. It now flashes upon him that his friend, who never had left him for an hour before, had stayed behind where his money is, and, doubtless, is laughing over his spoils. His blood boils with rage. But at length comes up the remembrance of home; a parent's training and counsels for more than twenty years, destroyed in a night! "Good God! what a wretch I have been! I am not fit to live. I cannot go home. I am a stranger here. Oh! that I were dead! Oh! that I had died before I knew this guilt, and were lying where my sister lies! Oh God! Oh God! my head will burst with agony!" He stalks his lonely room with an agony which only the young heart knows in its first horrible awakening to remorse—when it looks despair full in the face, and feels its hideous incantations tempting him to suicide. Subdued at length by agony, cowed and weakened by distress, he is sought again by those who plucked him. Cunning to subvert inexperience, to raise the evil passions, and to allay the good, they make him their pliant tool.

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Farewell, young man! I see thy steps turned to that haunt again! I see hope lighting thy face; but it is a lurid light, and never came from heaven. Stop before that threshold!—turn, and bid farewell to home!—farewell to innocence!—farewell to venerable father and aged mother!—the next step shall part thee from them all forever. And now henceforth be a mate to thieves, a brother to corruption. Thou hast made a league with death, and unto death shalt thou go.

Let us here pause, to draw the likeness of a few who stand conspicuous in that vulgar crowd of gamblers, with which hereafter he will consort. The first is a taciturn, quiet man. No one knows when he comes into town, or when he leaves. No man hears of his gaining; for he never boasts, nor reports his luck. He spends little for parade; his money seems to go and come only through the game. He reads none, converses none, is neither a glutton nor a hard drinker; he sports few ornaments, and wears plain clothing. Upon the whole, he seems a gentlemanly man; and sober citizens say, "his only fault is gambling." What then is this "*only fault?*" In his heart he has the most intense and consuming lust of play. He is quiet because every passion is absorbed in one; and that one burning at the highest flame. He thinks of nothing else, cares only for this. All other things, even the hottest lusts of other men, are too cool to be temptations to him; so much deeper is the style of his passions. He will sit upon his chair, and no man shall see him move for hours, except to play his cards. He sees none come in, none go out. Death might groan on one side of the room, and marriage might sport on the other,—he would know neither. Every created influence is shut out; one thing only moves him—the *game*; and that leaves not one pulse of excitability unaroused, but stirs his soul to the very dregs.

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Very different is the roistering gamester. He bears a jolly face, a glistening eye something watery through watching and drink. His fingers are manacled in rings; his bosom grows with pearls and diamonds. He learns the time which he wastes from a watch full gorgeously carved, (and not with the most modest scenes,) and slung around his neck by a ponderous golden chain. There is not so splendid a fellow to be seen sweeping through the streets. The landlord makes him welcome—he will bear a full bill. The tailor smiles like May—he will buy half his shop. Other places bid him welcome—he will bear large stealings.

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Like the Judge, he makes his circuit, but not for justice; like the Preacher, he has his appointments, but not for instruction. His circuits are the race-courses, the crowded capital, days of general convocation, conventions, and mass-gatherings. He will flame on the race-track, bet his thousands, and beat the ring at swearing, oaths vernacular, imported, simple, or compound. The drinking-booth smokes when he draws in his warehouse suit. Did you see him only by day, flaming in apparel, jovial and free-hearted at the Restaurateur or Hotel, you would think him a Prince let loose—a cross between Prince Hal and Falstaff.

But night is his day. These are mere exercises, and brief prefaces to his real accomplishments. He is a good fellow, who dares play deeper; he is wild indeed, who seems wilder; and he is keen indeed, who is sharper than he is, after all this show of frankness. No one is quicker, slyer, and more alert at a game. He can shuffle the pack till an honest man would as soon think of looking for a particular drop of water in the ocean, as for a particular card in any particular place. Perhaps *he* is ignorant which is at the top and which at the bottom! At any rate, watch him closely, or you will get a lean hand and he a fat one. A plain man would think him a wizard or the devil. When he touches a pack they seem *alive*, and acting to his *will* rather than his *touch*. He deals them like lightning, they rain like snow-flakes, sometimes one, sometimes two, if need be four or five together, and his hand hardly moved. If he loses, very well, he laughs; if he gains, he only laughs a little more. Full of stories, full of songs, full of wit, full of roistering spirit—yet do not trespass too much upon his good nature with insult! All this outside is only the spotted hide which covers the tiger. He who provokes this man, shall see what lightning can break out of a summer-seeming cloud!

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These do not fairly represent the race of gamblers,—conveying too favorable an impression. There is one, often met on Steamboats, travelling solely to gamble. He has the servants, or steward, or some partner, in league with him, to fleece every unwary player whom he inveigles to a game. He deals falsely; heats his dupe to madness by drink, drinking none himself; watches the signal of his accomplice telegraphing his opponent's hand; at a stray look, he will slip your money off and steal it. To cover false playing, or to get rid of paying losses, he will lie fiercely, and swear uproariously, and break up the play to fight with knife or pistol—first scraping the table of every penny. When the passengers are asleep, he surveys the luggage, to see what may be worth stealing; he pulls a watch from under the pillow of one sleeper; fumbles in the pockets of another; and gathers booty throughout the cabin. Leaving the boat before morning, he appears at some village hotel, a magnificent gentleman, a polished traveller, or even a distinguished nobleman!

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There is another gambler, cowardly, sleek, stealthy, humble, mousing, and mean—a simple blood-sucker. For money, he will be a tool to other gamblers; steal for them, and from them; he plays the jackal, and searches victims for them, humbly satisfied to pick the bones afterward. Thus, (to employ his own language,) he *ropes in* the inexperienced young, flatters them, teaches them, inflames their passions, purveys to their appetites, cheats them, debauches them, draws them down to his own level, and then lords it over them in malignant meanness. Himself impure, he plunges others into lasciviousness; and with a train of reeking satellites, he revolves a few years in the orbit of the game, the brothel, and the doctor's shop; then sinks and dies: the world is purer, and good men thank God that he is gone.

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Besides these, time would fail me to describe the ineffable dignity of a gambling judge; the cautious, phlegmatic lawyer, gambling from sheer avarice; the broken-down and cast-away politician, seeking in the game the needed excitement, and a fair field for all the base tricks he once played off as a patriot; the pert, sharp, keen, jockey-gambler; the soaked, obese, plethoric, wheezing, bacchanal; and a crowd of ignoble worthies, wearing all the badges and titles of vice, throughout its base peerage.

A detail of the evils of gambling should be preceded by an illustration of that constitution of mind out of which they mainly spring—I mean its *EXCITABILITY*. The body is not stored with a fixed amount of strength, nor the mind with a uniform measure of excitement; but both are capable, by stimulation, of expansion of strength or feeling, almost without limit. Experience shows, that within certain bounds, excitement is healthful and necessary, but beyond this limit, exhausting and destructive. Men are allowed to choose between moderate but long-continued excitement, and intense but short-lived excitement. Too generally they prefer the latter. To gain this intense thrill, a thousand methods are tried. The inebriate obtains it by drink and drugs; the politician, by the keen interest of the civil campaign; the young by amusements which violently inflame and gratify their appetites. When once this higher flavor of stimulus has been tasted, all that is less becomes vapid and disgusting. A sailor tries to live on shore; a few weeks suffice. To be sure, there is no hardship, or cold, or suffering; but neither is there the strong excitement of the ocean, the gale, the storm, and the world of strange sights. The politician perceives that his private affairs are deranged, his family neglected, his character aspersed, his feelings exacerbated. When men hear him confess that his career is a hideous waking dream, the race vexatious, and the end vanity, they wonder that he clings to it; but *he* knows that nothing but the fiery wine which he has tasted will rouse up that intense excitement, now become necessary to his happiness. For this reason, great men often cling to public office with all its envy, jealousy, care, toil, hates, competitions, and unrequited fidelity; for these very disgusts, and the perpetual struggle, strike a deeper chord of excitement than is possible to the gentler touches of home, friendship and love. Here too is the key to the real evil of promiscuous novel-reading, to the habit of reverie and mental romancing. None of life's common duties can excite to such wild pleasure as these; and they must be continued, or the mind reacts into the lethargy of fatigue and *ennui*. It is upon this principle that men love *pain*; suffering is painful to a spectator; but in tragedies, at

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public executions, at pugilistic combats, at cock-fightings, horse-races, bear-baitings, bull-fights, gladiatorial shows, it excites a jaded mind as nothing else can. A tyrant torments for the same reason that a girl reads her tear-bedewed romance, or an inebriate drinks his dram. No longer susceptible even to inordinate stimuli, actual moans, and shrieks, and the writhing of utter agony, just suffice to excite his worn-out sense, and inspire, probably, less emotion than ordinary men have in listening to a tragedy or reading a bloody novel.

Gambling is founded upon the very worst perversion of this powerful element of our nature. It heats every part of the mind like an oven. The faculties which produce calculation, pride of skill, of superiority, love of gain, hope, fear, jealousy, hatred, are absorbed in the game, and exhilarated, or exacerbated by victory or defeat. These passions are, doubtless, excited in men by the daily occurrences of life; but then they are transient, and counteracted by a thousand grades of emotion, which rise and fall like the undulations of the sea. But in gambling there is no intermission, no counteraction. The whole mind is excited to the utmost, and concentrated at its extreme point of excitation for hours and days, with the additional waste of sleepless nights, profuse drinking, and other congenial immoralities. Every other pursuit becomes tasteless; for no ordinary duty has in it a stimulus which can scorch a mind which now refuses to burn without blazing, or to feel an interest which is not intoxication. The victim of excitement is like a mariner who ventures into the edge of a whirlpool for a motion more exhilarating than plain sailing. He is unalarmed during the first few gyrations, for escape is easy. But each turn sweeps him further in; the power augments, the speed becomes terrific as he rushes toward the vortex; all escape now hopeless. A noble ship went in; it is spit out in broken fragments, splintered spars, crushed masts, and cast up for many a rood along the shore. The specific evils of gambling may now be almost imagined.

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I. It diseases the mind, unfitting it for the duties of life. Gamblers are seldom industrious men in any useful vocation. A gambling mechanic finds his labor less relishful as his passion for play increases. He grows unsteady, neglects his work, becomes unfaithful to promises; what he performs he slights. Little jobs seem little enough; he desires immense contracts, whose uncertainty has much the excitement of gambling—and for the best of reasons; and in the pursuit of great and sudden profits, by wild schemes, he stumbles over into ruin, leaving all who employed or trusted him in the rubbish of his speculations.

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A gambling lawyer, neglecting the drudgery of his profession, will court its exciting duties. To explore authorities, compare reasons, digest, and write,—this is tiresome. But to advocate, to engage in fiery contests with keen opponents, this is nearly as good as gambling. Many a ruined client has cursed the law, and cursed a stupid jury, and cursed everybody for his irretrievable loss, except his lawyer, who gambled all night when he should have prepared the case, and came half asleep and debauched into court in the morning to lose a good case mismanaged, and snatched from his gambling hands by the art of sober opponents.

A gambling student, if such a thing can be, withdraws from thoughtful authors to the brilliant and spicy; from the pure among these, to the sharp and ribald; from all *reading* about depraved life, to *seeing*; from sight to experience. Gambling vitiates the imagination, corrupts the tastes, destroys the industry—for no man will drudge for cents, who gambles for dollars by the hundred; or practise a piddling economy, while, with almost equal indifference, he makes or loses five hundred in a night.

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II. For a like reason, it destroys all domestic habits and affections. Home is a prison to an inveterate gambler; there is no air there that he can breathe. For a moment he may sport with his children, and smile upon his wife; but his heart, its strong passions, are not there. A little branch-rill may flow through the family, but the deep river of his affections flows away from home. On the issue of a game, Tacitus narrates that the ancient Germans would stake their property, their wives, their children, and themselves. What less than this is it, when a man will stake that property which is to give his family bread, and that honor which gives them place and rank in society?

When *playing* becomes desperate *gambling*, the heart is a hearth where all the fires of gentle feelings have smouldered to ashes; and a thorough-paced gamester could rattle dice in a charnel-house, and wrangle for his stakes amid murder and pocket gold dripping with the blood of his own kindred.

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III. Gambling is the parent and companion of every vice which pollutes the heart, or injures society.

It is a practice so disallowed among Christians, and so excluded by mere moralists, and so hateful to industrious and thriving men, that those who practise it are shut up to themselves; unlike lawful pursuits, it is not modified or restrained by collision with others. Gamblers herd with gamblers. They tempt and provoke each other to all evil, without affording one restraint, and without providing the counterbalance of a single virtuous impulse. They are like snakes coiling among snakes, poison and poisoning; like plague-patients, infected and diffusing infection; each sick and all contagious. It is impossible to put bad men together and not have them grow worse. The herding of convicts promiscuously, produced such a fermentation of depravity, that, long ago, legislators forbade it. When criminals, out of jail, herd together by choice, the same corrupt nature will doom them to growing loathsomeness, because of increasing wickedness.

IV. It is a provocative of thirst. The bottle is almost as needful as the card, the ball, or the dice. Some are seduced to drink; some drink for imitation, at first, and fashion. When super-

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excitements, at intervals, subside, their victim cannot bear the deathlike gloom of the reaction; and, by drugs or liquor, wind up their system to the glowing point again. Therefore, drinking is the invariable concomitant of the theatre, circus, race-course, gaming-table, and of all amusements which powerfully excite all but the moral feelings. When the double fires of dice and brandy blaze under a man, he will soon be consumed. If men are found who do not drink, they are the more noticeable because exceptions.

V. It is, even in its fairest form, the almost inevitable *cause of dishonesty*. Robbers have robbers' honor; thieves have thieves' law; and pirates conform to pirates' regulations. But where is there a gambler's code? One law there is, and this is not universal, *pay your gambling debts*. But on the wide question, *how is it fair to win*—what law is there? What will shut a man out from a gambler's club? May he not discover his opponent's hand by fraud? May not a concealed thread, pulling the significant *one*;—*one, two*; or *one, two, three*; or the sign of a bribed servant or waiter, inform him, and yet his standing be fair? May he not cheat in shuffling, and yet be in full orders and canonical? May he not cheat in dealing, and yet be a welcome gambler?—may he not steal the money from your pile by laying his hands upon it, just as any other thief would, and yet be an approved gambler? May not the whole code be stated thus: *Pay what you lose, get what you can, and in any way you can!* I am told, perhaps, that there are honest gamblers, gentlemanly gamblers. Certainly; there are always ripe apples before there are rotten. Men always *begin* before they *end*; there is always an approximation before there is contact. Players will play truly till they get used to playing untruly; will be honest, till they cheat; will be honorable, till they become base; and when you have said all this, what does it amount to but this, that men who *really* gamble, really cheat; and that they only do not cheat, who are not *yet* real gamblers? If this mends the matter, let it be so amended. I have spoken of gamesters only among themselves; this is the least part of the evil; for who is concerned when lions destroy bears, or wolves devour wolf-cubs, or snakes sting vipers? In respect to that department of gambling which includes the *roping-in* of strangers, young men, collecting-clerks, and unsuspecting green-hands, and robbing them, I have no language strong enough to mark down its turpitude, its infernal rapacity. After hearing many of the scenes not unfamiliar to every gambler, I think Satan might be proud of their dealings, and look up to them with that deferential respect, with which one monster gazes upon a superior. There is not even the expectation of honesty. Some scullion-herald of iniquity decoys the unwary wretch into the secret room; he is tempted to drink; made confident by the specious simplicity of the game; allowed to win; and every bait and lure and blind is employed—then he is plucked to the skin by tricks which appear as fair as honesty itself. The robber avows *his* deed, does it openly; the gambler sneaks to the same result under skulking pretences. There is a frank way, and a mean way of doing a wicked thing. The gambler takes the meanest way of doing the dirtiest deed. The victim's own partner is sucking his blood; it is a league of sharpers, to get his money at any rate; and the wickedness is so unblushing and unmitigated, that it gives, at last, an instance of what the deceitful human heart, knavish as it is, is ashamed to try to cover or conceal; but confesses with helpless honesty, that it is fraud, cheating, *stealing, robbery*,—and nothing else.

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If I walk the dark street, and a perishing, hungry wretch meets me and bears off my purse with but a single dollar, the whole town awakes; the officers are alert, the myrmidons of the law scout, and hunt, and bring in the trembling culprit to stow him in the jail. But a worse thief may meet me, decoy my steps, and by a greater dishonesty, filch ten thousand dollars,—and what then? The story spreads, the sharpers move abroad unharmed, no one stirs. It is the day's conversation; and like a sound it rolls to the distance, and dies in an echo.

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Shall such astounding iniquities be vomited out amidst us, and no man care? Do we love our children, and yet let them walk in a den of vipers? Shall we pretend to virtue, and purity, and religion, and yet make partners of our social life, men whose heart has conceived such damnable deeds, and whose hands have performed them? Shall there be even in the eye of religion no difference between the corrupter of youth and their guardian? Are all the lines and marks of morality so effaced, is the nerve and courage of virtue so quailed by the frequency and boldness of flagitious crimes, that men, covered over with wickedness, shall find their iniquity no obstacle to their advancement among a Christian people.

In almost every form of iniquity there is some shade or trace of good. We have in gambling a crime standing alone—dark, malignant, uncompounded wickedness! It seems in its full growth a monster without a tender mercy, devouring its own offspring without one feeling but appetite. A gamester, as such, is the cool, calculating, essential *spirit* of concentrated avaricious selfishness. His intellect is a living thing, quickened with double life for villany; his heart is steel of fourfold temper. When a man *begins* to gamble he is as a noble tree full of sap, green with leaves, a shade to beasts, and a covert to birds. When one *becomes* a thorough gambler, he is like that tree lightning-smitten, rotten in root, dry in branch, and sapless; seasoned hard and tough; nothing lives beneath it, nothing on its branches, unless a hawk or a vulture perches for a moment to whet its beak, and fly screaming away for its prey.

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To every young man who indulges in the least form of gambling, I raise a warning voice! Under the specious name of AMUSEMENT, you are laying the foundation of gambling. Playing is the seed which comes up gambling. It is the light wind which brings up the storm. It is the white frost which preludes the winter. You are mistaken, however, in supposing that it is harmless in its earliest beginnings. Its terrible blight belongs, doubtless, to a later stage; but its consumption of time, its destruction of industry, its distaste for the calmer pleasures of life, belong to the very *beginning*. You will begin to play with every generous feeling. Amusement will be the plea. At the

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beginning the game will excite enthusiasm, pride of skill, the love of mastery, and the love of money. The love of money, at first almost imperceptible, at last will rule out all the rest,—like Aaron's rod,—a serpent, swallowing every other serpent. Generosity, enthusiasm, pride and skill, love of mastery, will be absorbed in one mighty feeling,—the savage lust of lucre.

There is a downward climax in this sin. The opening and ending are fatally connected, and drawn toward each other with almost irresistible attraction. If gambling is a vortex, playing is the outer ring of the Maelstrom. The thousand pound stake, the whole estate put up on a game—what are these but the instruments of kindling that tremendous excitement which a diseased heart craves? What is the *amusement* for which you play but the *excitement* of the game? And for what but this does the jaded gambler play? You differ from him only in the degree of the same feeling. Do not solace yourself that you shall escape because others have; for they *stopped*, and *you go on*. Are you as safe as they, when you are in the gulf-stream of perdition, and they on the shore? But have you ever asked, *how many* have escaped? Not one in a thousand is left unblighted! You have nine hundred and ninety-nine chances *against* you, and one for you; and will you go on? If a disease should stalk through the town, devouring whole families, and sparing not one in five hundred, would you lie down under it quietly because you have one chance in five hundred? Had a scorpion stung you, would it alleviate your pangs to reflect that you had only one chance in one hundred? Had you swallowed corrosive poison, would it ease your convulsions to think there was only one chance in fifty for you? I do not call every man who plays a gambler, but a gambler in *embryo*. Let me trace your course from the amusement of innocent playing to its almost inevitable end.

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*Scene first.* A genteel coffee-house,—whose humane screen conceals a line of grenadier bottles, and hides respectable blushes from impertinent eyes. There is a quiet little room opening out of the bar; and here sit four jovial youths. The cards are out, the wines are in. The fourth is a reluctant hand; he does not love the drink, nor approve the game. He anticipates and fears the result of both. Why is he here? He is a whole-souled fellow, and is afraid to seem ashamed of any fashionable gaiety. He will sip his wine upon the importunity of a friend newly come to town, and is too polite to spoil that friend's pleasure by refusing a part in the game. They sit, shuffle, deal; the night wears on, the clock telling no tale of passing hours—the prudent liquor-fiend has made it safely dumb. The night is getting old; its dank air grows fresher; the east is grey; the gaming and drinking and hilarious laughter are over, and the youths wending homeward. What says conscience? No matter what it says; they did not hear, and we will not. Whatever was said, it was very shortly answered thus: "This has not been gambling; all were gentlemen; there was no cheating; simply a convivial evening; no stakes except the bills incident to the entertainment. If anybody blames a young man for a little innocent exhilaration on a special occasion, he is a superstitious bigot; let him croak!" Such a garnished game is made the text to justify the whole round of gambling. Let us, then, look at

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*Scene the second.* In a room so silent that there is no sound except the shrill cock crowing the morning, where the forgotten candles burn dimly over the long and lengthened wick, sit four men. Carved marble could not be more motionless, save their hands. Pale, watchful, though weary, their eyes pierce the cards, or furtively read each other's faces. Hours have passed over them thus. At length they rise without words; some, with a satisfaction which only makes their faces brightly haggard, scrape off the piles of money; others, dark, sullen, silent, fierce, move away from their lost money. The darkest and fiercest of the four is that young friend who first sat down to make out a game! He will never sit so innocently again. What says he to his conscience now? "I have a right to gamble; I have a right to be damned too, if I choose; whose business is it?"

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*Scene the third.* Years have passed on. He has seen youth ruined, at first with expostulation, then with only silent regret, then consenting to take part of the spoils; and finally, he has himself decoyed, duped, and stripped them without mercy. Go with me into that dilapidated house, not far from the landing, at New Orleans. Look into that dirty room. Around a broken table, sitting upon boxes, kegs, or rickety chairs, see a filthy crew dealing cards smouched with tobacco, grease and liquor. One has a pirate-face burnished and burnt with brandy; a shock of grizzly, matted hair, half covering his villain eyes, which glare out like a wild beast's from a thicket. Close by him wheezes a white-faced, dropsical wretch, vermin-covered, and stenchful. A scoundrel-Spaniard, and a burly negro, (the jolliest of the four,) complete the group. They have spectators—drunken sailors, and ogling, thieving, drinking women, who should have died long ago, when all that was womanly died. Here hour draws on hour, sometimes with brutal laughter, sometimes with threat, and oath, and uproar. The last few stolen dollars lost, and temper too, each charges each with cheating, and high words ensue, and blows; and the whole gang burst out the door, beating, biting, scratching, and rolling over and over in the dirt and dust. The worst, the fiercest, the drunkest, of the four, is our friend who began by making up the game!

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*Scene the fourth.* Upon this bright day, stand with me, if you would be sick of humanity, and look over that multitude of men kindly gathered to see a murderer hung! At last, a guarded cart drags on a thrice-guarded wretch. At the gallows' ladder his courage fails. His coward-feet refuse to ascend; dragged up, he is supported by bustling officials; his brain reels, his eye swims, while the meek minister utters a final prayer by his leaden ear. The prayer is said, the noose is fixed, the signal is given; a shudder runs through the crowd as he swings free. After a moment, his convulsed limbs stretch down, and hang heavily and still; and he who began to gamble to make up a game, and ended with stabbing an enraged victim whom he had fleeced, has here played his last game,—himself the stake!

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I feel impelled, in closing, to call the attention of all sober citizens to some potent influences



which are exerted in favor of gambling.

In our civil economy we have Legislators to devise and enact wholesome laws; Lawyers to counsel and aid those who need the laws' relief; and Judges to determine and administer the laws. If Legislators, Lawyers, and Judges are gamblers, with what hope do we warn off the young from this deadly fascination, against such authoritative examples of high public functionaries? With what eminent fitness does that Judge press the bench, who in private commits the vices which officially he is set to condemn! With what singular terrors does he frown on a convicted gambler with whom he played last night, and will play again to-night! How wisely should the fine be light which the sprightly criminal will win and pay out of the Judge's own pocket!

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With the name of JUDGE is associated ideas of immaculate purity, sober piety, and fearless, favorless justice. Let it then be counted a dark crime for a recreant official so far to forget his reverend place, and noble office, as to run the gantlet of filthy vices, and make the word *Judge*, to suggest an incontinent trifler, who smites with his mouth, and smirks with his eye; who holds the rod to strike the criminal, and smites only the law to make a gap for criminals to pass through! If God loves this land, may he save it from truckling, drinking, swearing, gambling, vicious Judges!

[A]

[A] The general eminent integrity of the Bench is unquestionable—and no remarks in the text are to be construed as an oblique aspersion of the profession. But the purer our Judges generally, the more shameless is it that some will not abandon either their vices or their office.

With such Judges I must associate corrupt LEGISLATORS, whose bawling patriotism leaks out in all the sinks of infamy at the Capital. These living exemplars of vice, pass still-born laws against vice. Are such men sent to the Capital only to practise debauchery? Laborious seedsmen—they gather every germ of evil; and laborious sowers—at home they strew them far and wide! It is a burning shame, a high outrage, that public men, by corrupting the young with the example of manifold vices, should pay back their constituents for their honors!

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Our land has little to fear from abroad, and much from within. We can bear foreign aggression, scarcity, the revulsions of commerce, plagues, and pestilences; but we cannot bear vicious Judges, corrupt Courts, gambling Legislators, and a vicious, corrupt, and gambling constituency. Let us not be deceived! The decay of civil institutions begins at the core. The outside wears all the lovely hues of ripeness, when the inside is rotting. Decline does not begin in bold and startling acts; but, as in autumnal leaves, in rich and glowing colors. Over diseased vitals, consumptive laws wear the hectic blush, a brilliant eye, and transparent skin. Could the public sentiment declare that PERSONAL MORALITY is the first element of patriotism; that corrupt Legislators are the most pernicious of criminals; that the Judge who lets the villain off, is the villain's patron; that tolerance of crime is intolerance of virtue,—our nation might defy all enemies and live forever!

And now, my young friends, I beseech you to let alone this evil before it be meddled with. You are safe from vice when you avoid even its appearance; and only then. The first steps to wickedness are imperceptible. We do not wonder at the inexperience of Adam; but it is wonderful that six thousand years' repetition of the same arts, and the same uniform disaster, should have taught men nothing! that generation after generation should perish, and the wreck be no warning!

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The mariner searches his chart for hidden rocks, stands off from perilous shoals, and steers wide of reefs on which hang shattered morsels of wrecked ships, and runs in upon dangerous shores with the ship manned, the wheel in hand, and the lead constantly sounding. But the mariner upon life's sea, carries no chart of other men's voyages, drives before every wind that will speed him, draws upon horrid shores with slumbering crew, or heads in upon roaring reefs as though he would not perish where thousands have perished before him.

Hell is populated with the victims of "*harmless amusements*." Will man never learn that the way to hell is through the valley of DECEIT? The power of Satan to *hold* his victims is nothing to that mastery of art by which he first *gains* them. When he approaches to charm us, it is not as a grim fiend, gleaming from a lurid cloud, but as an angel of light radiant with innocence. His words fall like dew upon the flower; as musical as the crystal-drop warbling from a fountain. Beguiled by his art, he leads you to the enchanted ground. Oh! how it glows with every refulgent hue of heaven! Afar off he marks the dismal gulf of vice and crime; its smoke of torment slowly rising, and rising forever! and he himself cunningly warns you of its dread disaster, for the very purpose of blinding and drawing you thither. He leads you to captivity through all the bowers of lulling magic. He plants your foot on odorous flowers; he fans your cheek with balmy breath; he overhangs your head with rosy clouds; he fills your ear with distant, drowsy music, charming every sense to rest. Oh ye! who have thought the way to hell was bleak and frozen as Norway, parched and barren as Sahara, strewed like Golgotha with bones and skulls reeking with stench like the vale of Gehenna,—witness your mistake! The way to hell is gorgeous! It is a highway, cast up; no lion is there, no ominous bird to hoot a warning, no echoings of the wailing-pit, no lurid gleams of distant fires, or moaning sounds of hidden woe! Paradise is imitated to build you a way to death; the flowers of heaven are stolen and poisoned; the sweet plant of knowledge is here; the pure white flower of religion; seeming virtue and the charming tints of innocence are scattered all along like native herbage. The enchanted victim travels on. Standing afar behind, and from a silver-trumpet, a heavenly messenger sends down the wind a solemn warning: THERE IS A WAY WHICH SEEMETH RIGHT TO MAN, BUT THE END THEREOF IS DEATH. And again, with louder blast: THE WISE MAN FORESEETH THE EVIL; FOOLS PASS ON AND ARE PUNISHED. Startled for a moment, the victim pauses; gazes

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round upon the flowery scene, and whispers, *Is it not harmless?*—"Harmless," responds a serpent from the grass!—"Harmless," echo the sighing winds!—"Harmless," re-echo a hundred airy tongues! If now a gale from heaven might only sweep the clouds away through which the victim gazes; oh! if God would break that potent power which chains the blasts of hell, and let the sulphur-stench roll up the vale, how would the vision change!—the road become a track of dead men's bones!—the heavens a lowering storm!—the balmy breezes, distant wailings—and all those balsam-shrubs that lied to his senses, sweat drops of blood upon their poison-boughs!

Ye who are meddling with the edges of vice, ye are on this road!—and utterly duped by its enchantments! Your eye has already lost its honest glance, your taste has lost its purity, your heart throbs with poison! The leprosy is all over you, its blotches and eruptions cover you. Your feet stand on slippery places, whence in due time they shall slide, if you refuse the warning which I raise. They shall slide from heaven, never to be visited by a gambler; slide down to that fiery abyss below you, out of which none ever come. Then, when the last card is cast, and the game over, and you lost; then, when the echo of your fall shall ring through hell,—in malignant triumph, shall the Arch-Gambler, who cunningly played for your soul, have his prey! Too late you shall look back upon life as a MIGHTY GAME, in which you were the stake, and Satan the winner!

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