

**BETTING &
GAMBLING, A
NATIONAL EVIL**

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Betting & gambling, a national evil by B. Seebohm Rowntree

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EDITED BY

B. SEEBOHM ROWNTREE

AUTHOR OF 'POVERTY'

London

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TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE
OF
THE YORK ANTI-GAMBLING LEAGUE
AT WHOSE SUGGESTION
THIS WORK WAS UNDERTAKEN

PREFACE

UNTIL comparatively recent years, betting and gambling were largely confined in this country to the wealthy few. Now, however, the practice has spread so widely among all classes of the community that those who know the facts name gambling and drinking as national evils of almost equal magnitude.

There is no doubt that the social conscience is as yet only very partially awakened to the widespread character of the gambling evil and to its grievous consequences. Like a cancer, the evil thing has spread its poisonous roots throughout the length and breadth of the land, carrying with them, where they strike, misery, poverty, weakened character, and crime.

Nor is the practice any longer spontaneous. It is encouraged and organised by an army of social parasites in the shape of bookmakers and their touts; these men or women (for the "profession" is not confined to men) pursue their calling in

every town of Britain—indeed, there are probably but few villages or large workshops which are free from them. In many places, indeed, they regularly call for “orders,” the itinerant packman or agent combining this with his recognised business. Even little children have been known to bet their slate pencils in the playgrounds of our State schools, while women and girls in all ranks of society no longer regard the practice as unwomanly.

And yet, in spite of the acknowledged magnitude of the evil, there are, with a very few notable exceptions, no organised efforts to check it. The apparent apathy of the nation to the extraordinary spread of this mischief in its midst is in sharp contrast to the great efforts organised to combat intemperance. For this there are probably three main causes:—

1. Ignorance on the part of the general public as to the rapid growth and the mischief of the practice.
2. Lack of clear thought regarding the ethics of the question.
3. The difficulty of suggesting practical steps to counteract so insidious an evil.

The purpose of this book is to supply, in concise and readily accessible form, information which may meet these needs. After a preliminary chapter devoted to the ethics of Betting and Gambling,