

TAKING CHANCES

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Taking Chances by Clarence L. Cullen

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CLARENCE L. CULLEN

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BY
CLARENCE L. CULLEN



AUTHOR OF
"TALES OF THE EX-TANKS."

G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY
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Taking Chances.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

To the man who, at any period of his days, has been bitten by that ferocious and fever-producing insect colloquially known as the "horse bug," and likewise to the man whose nervous system has been racked by the deprivations of the "poker microbe," these tales of the turf and of the green cloth are sympathetically dedicated. The thoroughbred running horse is a peculiar animal. While he is often beaten, the very wisest veterans of the turf have a favorite maxim to the effect that "The ponies can't be beat"—meaning the thoroughbred racers; which sounds paradoxical enough. Poker, too, is a mystifying affair, in that all men who play it appear, from their own statements, to lose at it persistently and perennially. There is surely something weird and uncanny about a game that numbers only losers among its devotees. However, poker-players are addicted to persiflage. The genuine, dyed-in-the-wool, blown-in-the-bottle pokerist rarely acknowledges that he is ahead of the game—until the day after.

These stories, which were originally printed in the columns of the *New York Sun*, belong largely to the eminent domain of strict truthfulness. If they do not serve to show that the "horse bug" and the "poker microbe" are good things to steer clear of, they will by no means have failed of their purpose; for the writer had nothing didactic in view in setting them down as he heard them.

CLARENCE LOUIS CULLEN.

NEW YORK, *Sept. 1, 1900.*

THIS WIRETAPPER WAS COLOR-BLIND.

And His Visual Infirmary Cost Him \$15,000 and His Reputation.

"I WENT down to New Orleans a couple of months ago to get a young fellow who was pretty badly wanted in my town for a two-months' campaign of highly successful check-kiting last summer," said a Pittsburg detective who dropped into New York on a hunt last week. "I got him all right, and he's now doing his three years. I found him to be a pretty decent sort of a young geezer, although a born crook. I don't remember ever having had such an entertaining traveling mate as he was on the trip up from New Orleans. Before we started I asked him if he was going to be good or if it would be necessary for me to put the bracelets on. He gave me an on-the-level look and said:

"No, I don't think it will. But I pass it up to you. I don't want to throw you. All I ask is, don't give me too much of a chance if you keep the irons off of me. I wouldn't be jay enough to try a window-jumping stunt, but don't give me a show to make either one of the car doors. If you do I may have to give you a run for it."

"Well, I could see that he would be all right without the cuffs, and so I didn't put 'em on him. He rode up with me in the sleeper all the way from New Orleans to Pittsburg—I let him do the sleeping, though, of course—and he had a drink when I did and played quarter ante when I did, and none of the rest of the passengers were any the wiser. He was a clinking good talker and he told

me a lot of interesting stories of queer propositions that he had been up against. For instance, when we were running through the Blue Grass region of Kentucky, he turned to me and asked me where the blue grass was. I told him that the term blue grass was largely ornamental, and that, while the grass down there was no doubt high-grade and the limit as fodder for thoroughbreds, I thought it was mostly green, like grass the world over.

“ ‘Well, I’m blooming glad to hear you say that,’ he replied. ‘It proves that I’m not color blind on the whole gamut of colors, anyhow. If you’d said there really was blue grass in these fields we’re running through, I’d have given myself up as a bad job in the matter of distinguishing colors. But as long as the grass is green like other grass—well, there’s some hope for me.’

“ ‘Color-blind, eh?’ I asked him.

“ ‘Yes, I guess I am, more or less,’ he replied. ‘I never knew it, though, until last spring, and it cost me \$15,000 to find it out.’

“ ‘Expensive information,’ said I. ‘How’d it happen?’

“ ‘If you’ll undertake to forget about it by the time we get to Pittsburg, I’ll tell you,’ he said. ‘I was fooling around one of the big towns—one of the biggest towns on this side of the Mississippi—last spring, when I met up with a couple of wiretappers that got me interested. They were the real kind—not fake tappers who rope fellows into giving up coin just by showing ‘em phony instruments in shady rooms, but professionals, who really knew how to tap the wires and pull down the money. They had been working together for some time, and when I happened to meet them they had just pulled off a swell hog-killing up in Toronto and had two or three