

THE LUCKY NUMBER

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The lucky number by I. K. Friedman

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I. K. FRIEDMAN

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BY

I. K. FRIEDMAN



CHICAGO
WAY AND WILLIAMS

1896

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Chauvinism at Devereux's

"Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

—DR. JOHNSON.

DEVEREUX is a Frenchman — his name has told you that at a glance; he is a Frenchman out of France, a fish out of water, and the water is cleaner for the absence of the fish. Anxious as France is for an increased population she offered every inducement in the world to Devereux, and those of his compatriots who frequent his saloon, to stay in America. They had left their country to our country's detriment, true patriots they.

L'Auberge, so Devereux named his place, and The Lucky Number (a saloon one block removed from L'Auberge in distance, a mile in caste) represent the two extreme points on the crooked line of vice: L'Auberge

symbolizes the attractiveness of crime, The Lucky Number its repulsiveness; the one tempts men to sin, the other punishes them when they fall; a career of evil starts in a place like Devereux's and ends in a place like The Lucky Number;—so much for the spirit of these dives, just a word or two about the letter.

At Devereux's you may look down on a polished oak floor and up at a richly ornamented ceiling; you may draw a cane-bottom chair, neatly varnished, up to a cherry-stained table, sip your absinthe out of a thin, shining glass, and see just how you look as you do it in the beveled mirror which covers the wall back of the mahogany bar. If your taste run toward art, you may indulge it by admiring the copies in oil of Bougereau's paintings—*honi soit qui mal y pense*.

The Lucky Number is a crude study in dirt, done in rough pine; in some places this dirt is thicker than in others, and thus the monotone is relieved,—beyond this there is no attempt made at the decorative. If

you look down you will see sawdust and dust; if you look up, look out for your head.

The *clientèle* at Devereux's is composed of two distinct types; the one is best described by the French term *sâle-type*, a term I prefer to leave untranslated; the other is made up of "fine workers," forgers, counterfeiters and thieves, who represent the intellect of vice, and draw the plans and lay the plots for the muscle, the labor, of vice to carry out. They have a way, all their own, of covering and retracing their tracks, which baffles and discourages the most persistent of sleuths. Yet detection is easy as compared with arrest, for the rascals never seem to get farther than the station steps; there they always pause, lift their hats in the most approved Parisian style, bid the officers a *bon soir*, and disappear. It is impossible not to admire their manners.

Safe in jail,—when the police get them that far you may be sure they are safe,—then the work has but begun, for to convict them is quite another matter. They play a game of wit, a game of which they

are past-masters, and one worth winning only when they hold the bad cards. Let an illustration serve.

A complicated plot, finished in every detail, was laid for the murder of a miser; this miser, moreover, was a Frenchman, and lived in a hovel in the French quarter—two things which made the job hazardous, nay, foolhardy; because they would certainly be suspected of the crime an hour after its execution. To let suspicion fall elsewhere and fall there naturally, not to jerk it there—here is where the finesse, the adroitness of the plot centered. The combined astuteness of their depraved minds, fitted by long training for such work, was taxed to solve the difficult problem; but the solution was as nice, as logical and as perfect as a definition in calculus. One fault only could be found, it was too nice; let the smallest cog slip by so much as a hair's breadth, and the ponderous machine would hurl them to death in the balance wheel.

This they knew, and their knowledge made them shudder, and their shuddering made