

PLUNGERS OF THE TURF.

PLUNGING on the turf—that is, habitually betting great sums of money on horse-races—is as old, almost, as the establishment of horse-racing as a popular institution. But those addicted to this kind of sport were not denominated as “plungers” until quite recent years, and it was the ubiquitous American newspaper reporter who first gave such gamblers this name. In England, where horse-racing as we know it began, the plungers are not the same kind of men, as a general thing, as they are with us. As a rule the English plungers have been in the past and are to-day wealthy and “noble” prodigals who make ducks and drakes of their inheritances as quickly as possible. Notable among these of not less than a generation ago were the late Duke of Hamilton and the Marquis of Hastings. Both of these noblemen went a terrific pace on the turf, and both of them spoiled splendid inheritances, by the misfortunes which attended their ventures in the betting-ring. The most recent English plunger was a Mr. Benson, who inherited a great fortune and immediately set about to make himself conspicuous and ridiculous by spending it in all kinds of sensational ways. Quickly he gained for himself the sobriquet of “Jubilee Juggins,” and as such, for a brief season, he was notorious all over the world. But he has now subsided into well-deserved poverty, and will probably be heard of no more. Then we had Mr. Abington Baird, who did pretty nearly everything a self-respecting and conservative man would not care to do, but he died, fortunately for his heirs, before the harpies and gamblers had very seriously impaired his great fortune.

The plunger in America, however, has rarely been a man of fortune. As a rule our plungers have been adventurers who have undertaken the perilous task of beating the betting-ring for the fun of the thing, and out of love for the excitement which accompanies most games of chance. What is more, they have usually secured the capital they used in their attacks on the book-makers from the book-makers themselves, and in misfortune it is seldom that any of them has had the right to rail against fate and complain that he had been undone of what was actually his own. The first conspicuous plunger of this class, and the man to whom the title of “plunger” was first given, was Mr. Theodore Walton, sometime of Philadelphia and sometime of New York. Mr. Walton had been a successful hotel-keeper, and was a business man of good training. It was when he was keeping the St. James Hotel in New York that he began the career on the turf which attracted to him much attention and the title which gives a name to this article. His methods were simple and at the same time complex. He had an idea that there was information to be had about the horses that were to run, and as a business man, in the coldest way in the world, he set about buying this information and, when it seemed to be well founded, paying for it with a most prodigal hand. It was thought that at one time he had in his pay a man in every considerable stable in the country, and these men were supposed to keep him informed, and doubtless endeavored to do so, of all the important happenings to their employers' horses. With this kind of information as his guide he speculated on a scale previously unknown in America, and for a season or so he had most uncommon success. The jockey who successfully rode a horse on which Mr. Walton had great wagers would receive a present from the “plunger” much larger than his fee from the owner of the horse, and nearly all of them tried hard to be in the good graces of this new factor in the racing world. These methods did not tend to make Mr. Walton popular with race-horse owners, who, not unreasonably, complained that Mr. Walton had more control of their horses than they had themselves. But he went on for a season or so without any serious backset, and then, sighing for a new and richer world to conquer, he went to England. In England he applied the same methods he had used at home. They were most novel there, and for a little while he was successful. But it was not for long. Horse-owners would not put up with Mr. Walton's interference, and this culminated when the late Sir John Astley scratched a horse that Mr. Walton had heavily backed just before those entered in the race were called to the post. It may be said here that it has never been considered good form for an outsider to back a horse so heavily in the books that the price is reduced and the owner is prevented from getting a fair wager on his own horse. However, for the first season in England Mr. Walton's career was sensational and in a measure successful. Speaking of it, Davis, the great English book-maker, is reported to have said: “It makes no difference; it will all come back to us.” And so it did. Mr. Walton's plans the

next year all miscarried, and he left England before the season was over so broken in fortune that he has since not amounted to anything whatever on the American turf, where also it had become impossible for him to put again in operation the methods he had previously employed. On the turf, at least, he is now never heard of save in a reminiscent way.

Long before Mr. Walton began his meteoric career Mr. Michael Dwyer had won a reputation as a fearfully large better. His methods, however, were so quiet that he did not attract to himself in ten years half the notice Mr. Walton received in half a season. Mr. Dwyer, with his brother Philip, was a butcher and a man of some substance before he took an interest in racing. Some twenty years ago he appeared on the turf as the owner of a modest stable. He had success, and he and his brother were probably the originators in this country of managing a racing stable on business-like principles and for the money that was in the thing. Therefore owners of large stables were usually men of wealth, who raced their horses more for glory and distinction than for money. The business-like methods, however, prevailed, and in a little while the Dwyer Brothers had the strongest stable in the country. In stakes and purses they won, year by year, great sums; but these were insignificant in comparison with the amounts won by Mr. Michael Dwyer in bets. He came to be looked upon as an almost infallible judge of speed, stamina, and condition, and a commission from him on a horse, whether in his own stable or that of some one else, would usually send the quotations tumbling. Of course he did not always win, but he was considered a good loser, and never made any protest, whether he had lost five or fifty thousand dollars. But there can be no doubt that for years he was at the end of each season very much ahead of the game. And so he became a rich man. Of late he has been unfortunate both with his horses and his betting, and there is an impression that his fortune is not nearly what it was a few years ago. Observers of him have also noted that he is not so imperturbable as he used to be; that he does not lose so gayly as of yore, and many of those who forecast the happenings of turfdom predict his early downfall if he does not very soon retire. Mr. Dwyer never goes into the betting-ring, but makes his wagers through agents, known as “commissioners.” He is a plunger, and has long been one, but no one ever sees the title prefixed to his name.

Some ten years or so ago we read now and again in the newspapers of a youth of phenomenal luck on the turf, and he was always spoken of as “Pittsburg Phil.” I can well remember with what awe a casual grand-stand acquaintance pointed him out to me some eight years ago. He was a clean though ordinary-looking young man, with nothing either distinguished or distinctive in his appearance. But his career proves that he is not an ordinary young man at all, and not merely a gambler who risks his all in the chance throw of the dice. His real name is George W. Smith, and before he gave up all his time to the turf he was a brush-maker in Pittsburg. It may merely have been luck that led to his first successes; it could not have been knowledge of horses or of racing, for of this he had none. But it was not long before he acquired it and earned for himself the reputation of being an adept in judging form and condition. It is upon his own judgment of the merits of the horses in a race that he makes his ventures. And these at times have been phenomenally successful. When he thinks he has a good thing he bets with entire assurance and moves about the betting-ring placing his own money. He has never been a communicative young man, and the stories printed from time to time of his winnings and losses must have been mainly conjectural. But he could not conceal the fact on many occasions that he had won great amounts. Three or four years ago it was estimated, with his silent sanction at least, that he had accumulated a fortune of a quarter of a million dollars. The possession and care of this wealth has tended to make him conservative, and those who have observed him most closely say that he does not lose with the ease that he once did, but, on the contrary, has become nervous and irritable. He has usually had an interest in a book or so, besides betting on his own account against other book-makers. He has also maintained a small stable of horses, and on several occasions he has used one of his own horses to undo the betting-ring quite effectually. His method was to prepare a horse for some special race, and getting the animal in at a weight that suited him, he would bet him almost off the boards, and then depend on the merits of the horse to carry the venture through. Whether he has succeeded oftener than he has failed is not known, but probably he is not, on the long run, a loser in fights of this character.

The most recent of the plungers eclipses, in the stir that he makes, all of his predecessors and contemporaries, and he baffles the critics who analyze methods by seeming not to have any method at all. This is also a young man, as he is not much past twenty-five at this moment, though he has been on the turf, or rather in the betting-ring, for five or six years past. This young man, Riley Grannan, is known from the Atlantic to the Pacific by reputation, and “old sports” grow breathless in telling about the recklessness with which he tempts fortune and the contempt he appears to have for money in either great or small amounts. A few years ago he was the elevator-boy in a St. Louis hotel, and lived on the munificent salary of four dollars a week. Within a year past he has wagered as high as seventy thousand dollars on the result of a single race, and has watched the contest without the quiver of an eyelid. Some years ago he was employed by a man who “played the races” on what is known as the “public form system,” to call off the places of the horses at the different quarters of the race-course. While in this employment he became known as a bold better in a small way on his own account, and there are those who say that by his own system or method, or whatever else it is that guides him, he was much more successful than his mathematical employer. At any rate, he was after a season content to be his own master, and soon he became a book-maker with a Mr. Applegate as his partner. The firm prospered, but Mr. Applegate in a little while lost his nerve, as on several occasions Grannan would bet all the capital of the firm upon the result of a single race. The pace was too hot for the experienced Mr. Applegate, who retired, and since then Grannan has gone alone. But his pace has not been less fast than before; on the contrary, it has been more maddening than ever. In the West he won fame as well as fortune, and his doings at the race-

away if the rule against Grannan were enforced. Of course Walbaum was obliged to yield. At this meeting Grannan is reported to have won ninety thousand dollars. This season his luck or good fortune has continued, and he is credited with having in banks and in his coat-pocket “bank-roll” something like three hundred thousand dollars. Whether this be so or not, only the silent Riley Grannan knows. He says that he is through with the game, and that he will plunge no more forever. There are few, however, who give him credit for sufficient strength of will to carry out such a determination. It might be wise for him to ponder on what Davis, the English book-maker, said of Plunger Walton, and quit while yet the wheel of fortune is stopped and he is on the top. He is now in Kentucky, where he was born. In the main street of his native village he has established his mother in a handsome house with unaccustomed comforts and surroundings.

PHILIP POINDEXTER.



Attractions of the New York Theatres.

THE group of theatrical character-portraits on page 248, while selected almost at random, and far from being completely representative, illustrates, nevertheless, the extraordinary range and variety of entertainment continuously offered to the metropolitan public. The playgoer, suiting his mood of the moment, may choose all the way from the piquant ditties of Clara Wieland at Koster and Bial's music-hall, to Shakespearian tragedy as interpreted by Walker Whiteside.

The brief engagement of this young American tragedian at the Herald Square Theatre will already have closed ere the appearance of these notes in print; but a single week has sufficed for him to win substantial public recognition as well as an unequivocal personal triumph in at least two of the most exacting rôles of the classical drama—*Hamlet* and *Richard III.* Mr. Whiteside is a very young man—apparently several years under thirty. A little more than two years ago he made his debut in New York, in this same legitimate repertory to which he has exclusively devoted himself. The critical verdict then—in so far as he was able to get any critical verdict at all—was decidedly adverse, though careful observers did not fail to recognize certain signs of unmistakable augury. Now those earlier promises are in a reasonable measure fulfilled. Walker Whiteside has demonstrated that his talents are commensurate with his ambition; and these, with the natural means and intelligence he possesses, give assurance that this young tragedian out of the West will go far.

Francis Wilson at Abbey's has achieved popular success of quite another, though by no means a commonplace, kind. He is our light comic-opera comedian *par excellence*, and as *Griggs*, the English tourist, in “*The Chieftain*,” he does some of the best character work of his career. The operetta itself, with its clear and sparkling music by Sullivan, is altogether the most artistic piece with which he has been identified. It is richly staged and costumed. The supporting company includes at least two young women of exceptional grace and charm—Miss Lulu Glaser and Miss Alice Holbrook, the latter being a debutante in America.

Miss Irwin as a star has met with a cordial reception at the Bijou, in “*The Widow Jones*,” a farce-comedy of coarse fibre, but which she pervades with the sunshine of her broad and whole-souled geniality. There is also a fairly good part for Miss Ada Lewis, who is engaged in artistically living down her early hit as the “tough girl.”

Among the things at other leading houses which may be regarded more or less as fixtures are: The perennial “*Trilby*,” at the Garden; the romantic “*Prisoner of Zenda*,” at the Lyceum; “*The Sporting Duchess*,” at the Academy of Music; “*The Gay Parisians*,” at Hoyt's; and “*The Great Diamond Robbery*,” at the American. Della Fox also perseveres with “*Fleur-de-lis*” at Palmer's; Manager Hill announces his determination to keep on “*The Capitol*” a while longer at the Standard; and “*Princess Bonnie*” is still at the Broadway. The novelty of the week is Humperdinck's charming operatic idyl, “*Hansel and Gretel*,” at Daly's, with an augmented orchestra conducted by Seidl. Nat Goodwin has produced “*David Garrick*” at the Fifth Avenue, and John Drew “*Christopher, Jr.*,” at the Empire. At the Garrick Theatre “*A Social Highwayman*,” the only successful novelty this house has had, gives way to Modjeska's engagement. The German peasant players are at the Metropolitan Opera House. The combination and variety theatres give their usual weekly changes of programmes.



RILEY GRANNAN

tracks day by day were faithfully reported in all the newspapers. Two years ago he came East, and he bet here in the same wild and seemingly reckless way that he had done in the West. Sometimes he won and sometimes he lost, but at the end of last season he was undoubtedly very much ahead. He appeared to be particularly anxious to take bets from “Mike” Dwyer, and as Dwyer's accustomed good luck had deserted him, Grannan is credited with having got much the best of the experienced turfman in this duel of dollars. In Henry of Navarre, then owned by a friend of Grannan's, Byron McClelland, he was a great believer, and he has backed that horse for immense amounts. When the match between Domino and Henry of Navarre was announced, Grannan determined to knock down Domino. He offered a larger price against Domino, the favorite, than any book-maker in the ring. The ruling price was one to two. Grannan boldly gave six to ten, and accepted wagers of ten thousand dollars as willingly as other book-makers took one hundred dollars. On this race he took in sixty-five thousand dollars of the public's money, and stood to pay out one hundred and five thousand dollars if Domino won, this representing forty thousand dollars of loss to him. When he had taken in all that was offered he went the round of the betting-ring and placed thirty thousand dollars on Henry of Navarre against forty-two thousand dollars. He therefore stood to win on his choice one hundred and seven thousand dollars or to lose seventy thousand dollars. But there was a dead heat, and in the division that followed the young plunger was nineteen thousand dollars ahead, and not as nearly satisfied as he would have been had he lost. Earlier that season Walbaum, at Saratoga Springs, asked him to leave the ring because Walbaum's books were suffering by reason of the more liberal odds that Grannan gave. The owners and trainers protested against such arbitrary and tyrannical conduct, and threatened to take their horses