

## FACTS ABOUT HOTEL SWINDLERS.

## The Methods of Clever Sharpers.

It is doubtful if London has ever been so much overrun with members of the swindling fraternity as it has been during the course of this year, a well-known detective informed the writer recently. This, of course, was owing to the great influx of visitors to the Metropolis for the Coronation festivities, and the detective force have had a very busy time during the past few months in keeping a watchful eye on several well-known gangs of English, American, and Continental sharpers who had all sorts of dodges at their finger-ends, so to speak, in order to fleece the innocent and foolish.

The type of swindler who has reaped the richest harvest is undoubtedly the swell sharper who frequented the crowded hotels. With such a variety of people to work upon, it was a comparatively easy matter for him to find some who would accept his baits, only to discover when too late how they had been caught and swindled. It is really surprising what a number of wealthy men, whom one would think would be wide-awake enough to escape all sharpers' snares, allow themselves to be duped, generally by being inveigled into having a game at cards.

An amazing instance of this occurred at one of our biggest West-end hotels in the early part of the year. A wealthy American, who had come over for the Coronation, while in the smoking-room one evening, was accosted by a gentleman in evening dress, who was also staying at the hotel. He claimed an acquaintance with the American, although the latter could not remember having met the man before. The stranger, however, seemed so sure of the acquaintanceship, and his manners and conversation were so agreeable, that the American thought that possibly they had met in the States, and thus they became quite friendly.

For several days the two went out and about together to see the sights, and the American congratulated himself on having found such a charming companion. One night, however, he was asked by the latter to make up a card-party of four. He consented, and, needless to say, the other two of the party were the sharper's confederates. At first a few ordinary games of cards were played, and then poker was suggested. The American, having by this time imbibed pretty freely, agreed, and for the first hour seemed to hold his own. After that, however, he lost steadily, and ultimately rose from the table the loser of something like £6,000.

Of course, he knew the next morning that he had been swindled, but had no definite proof against his "friend." The latter left the hotel suddenly the following day. And I rather fancy that the sight of me had something to do with his abrupt disappearance, for I recognised him as being a member of a certain gang of sharpers about which we had been warned by the French police.

The aforementioned, you may think, is a somewhat old dodge, which has been exposed many times. But there always seem to be fresh victims. As a rule, the latter are young men who, having little experience of the world and in search of excitement, are more easily persuaded to take part in a game.

The hotel swell sharper is always on the lookout for some young aristocrat who is anxious to see life and does not know the "runs." The swindler makes himself particularly agreeable by introducing the young fellow to all sorts of excitement, and they invariably come across one or two of the former's acquaintances. This, of course, is but a preliminary to the card-parties, when the sharper and his friends recoup themselves for their trouble.

Unprotected ladies, too, are favorite victims of the hotel swindler. Perhaps a wealthy widow and her daughter may be staying at a certain hotel during the town season. The sharper will therefore take a room in the same hotel, and proceed to ingratiate himself if possible into the favor of both ladies.

Naturally, he represents himself as being a man of wealth, and very often assumes a false title. Once on a footing of friendship, it is seldom he fails to swindle the ladies of money or jewels, either by getting them to cash a worthless cheque or offering to have their jewels reset by his jeweller, and substituting paste stones for the real.

Swindling guests by means of worthless cheques is often resorted to by hotel sharpers. The swindler will put up at one of the best hotels, and try to make himself particularly agreeable to everyone. He will always show a great liberality with his purse, and thus lead other guests to think that he is a man means. After he has been at the hotel for a few days, however, he will—probably one evening after the banks are closed—ask one of the guests, with whom he is familiar, to cash a cheque for him, explaining that he has run short of loose cash; and as he intends to go out for the evening he needs some money before the bank opens the following day.

Probably the cheque will be for only £5 or £10, and the guest will, in nine cases out of ten, cash it. This trick is repeated the same evening with several other guests, and when the sharper thinks that he has gone as far as he dare he departs, often without paying his

bill. I have known a sharper leave as many as half-a-dozen worthless cheques, for amounts varying from £5 to £20, behind him in this manner. He generally gets caught, however, sooner or later.

Then there is the sharper who tries to swindle hotel managers by pretending to have lost valuables, and claiming their value from the cashier.

An instance of this occurred only a short time ago. A well-dressed man took a room in a fashionable hotel, and after he had been there for two or three days complained that certain articles of jewellery, valued at about £30, had been stolen from his room. A search and inquiry amongst the domestics was made, but without any trace of the missing articles being discovered.

Hotels will do anything rather than have it announced to the world that robberies are frequently committed there, and so the manager settled the matter by paying for the jewelry. Shortly afterwards the man tried the same dodge at another hotel, but was exposed by a guest who, singularly enough, had stayed at the hotel where the sharper had previously tried his trick, and consequently recognised him at once.

A similar dodge was tried by a "foreign countess" some time ago. Aware that hotel-keepers are liable for the property of guests up to a certain amount, irrespective of negligence, the "countess" when her bill was presented to her, declared that she had been robbed of a silver belt worth more than the amount of the bill. But while the manager was dubiously discussing the point the head chambermaid quietly stepped forward and said that she had heard that identical silver belt story twice before at two seaside hotels where she had happened to be serving as housemaid. Needless to say, the "countess" quickly paid her bill and departed.

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## NERVE OF KLEPTOMANIACS.

## They Have More Than Ordinary Thieves.

'The most remarkable case of kleptomania that ever came to my notice, and one that came very near being my ruin,' said a detective the other day in conversation with a Washington 'Post' man, 'occurred several years ago. I was then employed in a large department store in Washington.

'One day during the winter holiday season a well-dressed woman entered the store carrying a muff and umbrella. As she passed by the leather goods department I saw her skillfully "swipe" a pocket book from a number that were in display. She placed the pocketbook in her muff.

'I followed her to the elevator and up on to the third floor. On the way up she discovered that I was following her, and, when she left the elevator she managed, without my seeing her, to place the pocketbook that she had stolen between two boxes on the doll counter.

'This, however, I failed to notice, and, when she came downstairs I told the proprietor in her hearing that she had stolen a pocketbook.

'The proprietor looked at me horror-stricken, while the lady, turning about, demanded to know what I had said. I was so certain of my ground that I repeated the accusation, whereupon the proprietor said to me:—

'No, no, you're mistaken. This lady and her husband are friends of mine, whom I entertain frequently.'

'I was feeling awfully shaky, but being so cocksure that she had the pocketbook, I put on a bold front and stuck to my first statement. The lady was terribly indignant and the proprietor had a regular case of trembles.

'While he was making all sorts of apologies she was reading the riot act to me. She told me that I would "pay for this dearly," gave orders to the floorwalker to telephone for her husband, and insisted on being searched.

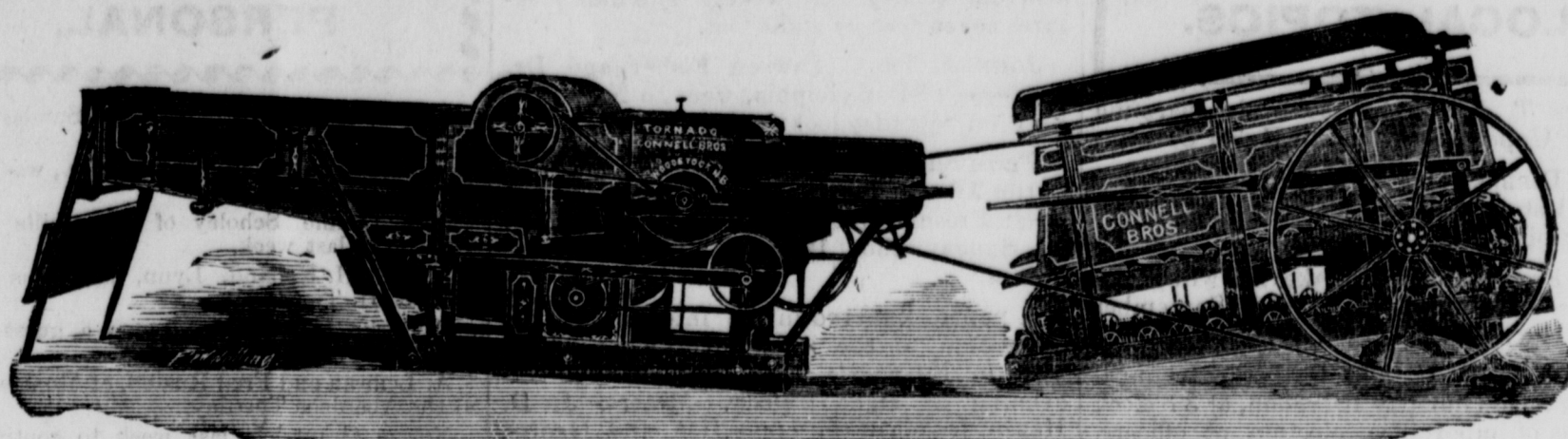
'Things were looking pretty squally for me when a thing happened that changed the complexion of events very materially. I noticed that she had shifted the position of her hands in her muff several times, and that she had also placed her umbrella leaning against the counter, and thinking that she might have slipped the pocketbook down into the latter, I, without saying a word, reached over, picked up the umbrella and turned it upside down.

'The pocketbook did not drop out as I had expected, but, what was better still, eight pairs of kid gloves, from which tags had never been removed, rolled out upon the floor. They were not taken from nor did they belong to our store, but from the tags I recognized them as belonging to an other establishment which dealt in gloves next door.

'I was beginning by this time to catch on, and without losing any time I went for the proprietor of the store next door. He came in, identified the gloves, and stated that the lady had been in his store, but that she made no purchases.

'At this time she broke down and began to cry, and, desiring to clinch matters all around

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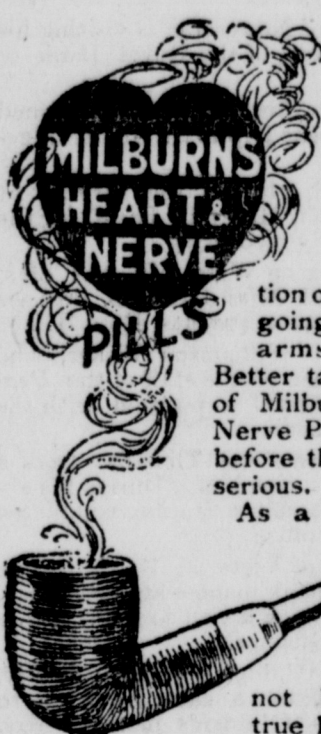
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I made a hurried trip up the third floor, looked over the doll counter, found the pocketbook she had stolen, and brought it back in triumph.

'It turned out that her husband was a wealthy man and could have purchased her anything she needed. She broke down completely, confessed that she could not resist the temptation to take things. Her husband, who was coming down to polish me off as an impudent blackmailer, had the job of paying for the gloves and pocketbook, and of hushing things up with the two storekeepers.

'If I had failed to make good the charge I had preferred against the lady, losing my job would have been the lightest of all the woes that would have fairly rained down upon me.

'There is a great deal more of this than one thinks, and a department store detective frequently has to stand by in silence and see things stolen rather than take the consequences that would certainly follow in the event he undertook to apprehend the genteel "kleptomaniacs" who do the stealing.'

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## HAMILTON'S PILLS CURE CONSTIPATION.

About the only perfect people in the world are the perfect fools.

Rain falls alike upon the just and unjust, but the latter use it as a chaser.

An opportunity of a lifetime is often merely a chance to say "no."—Chicago "News."

The more some people try to explain the deeper they get in the hot water.

Man has very little use for advice that doesn't confirm his own opinion.

Unless a man is satisfied with himself he is not in the self-made class.

Unless a man is intelligent and consistent he never changes his mind.

Servant: "Shall I put the master's pipes away in the cupboard, mum, now that he's sworn off smoking?"

Mistress: "No, Jane; just put them on the corner of his desk, where he'll be able to find them the day after to-morrow."

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