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ABSTRACT

THE AMERICAN GAMBLER STORY IN THE SENTIMENTAL TRADITION, 1794 TO 1870

By

Clarence Ellsworth Brown, Jr.

Although critics, reviewers, and literary historians acknowledge the influence of the sentimental tradition on the American gambler story, none have examined this tradition in detail. To this end, this study begins by drawing upon socio-economic backgrounds as well as Beggar Books and Coney-catching pamphlets of England during the Renaissance. Further sentimental materials are furnished by eighteenth-century dramas, particularly those featuring prodigal sons, rakes, profligates, and neglectful and abusive husbands. Notice of the possible influence of Samuel Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa and Henry Fielding's Amelia concludes this introductory chapter.

In the second chapter, I examine the early magazine stories starting with the 1794 American Bee and The

Massachusetts Magazine. These stories establish sentimental criteria that appear in gambler fiction treated in the remaining chapters of the study. In the third chapter, I present several types of gambler stories found in novels with a big city setting. This approach, in which all types of gamblers--Southern, Eastern, and Midwestern--are described, harkens back to the first chapter where London formed the milieu for low- and high-class coney-catchers. For Chapter IV, I survey novels laid in the South, another geographic region rich in gambler lore.

The final chapter describes the California gold rush scene and its topsy-turvy society which created the distinctive marks of mining camp gambler fiction. In addition I examine the setting that Bret Harte reflected in his gambler fiction and reveal the continuity of and pervasive influence of the sentimental tradition on the gambler genre. In an addendum I include Mary MacMichael's "The Gambler's Fate," a typical "lady-book" magazine tale of the nineteenth century by virtue of its unmistakable tone, point of view, and style.

The American gambler story has never reached the "acceptable" stage of literature. Devised to teach moral

lessons to generations of ladies fearful of marital bondage to unreformed rakes, it offers little in terms of aesthetic satisfaction. Nevertheless, it serves as an accurate indicator of the state of mind of countless Americans in the formative and developing stages of our society. Although it rarely deserved first-class rating, the genre provided samples of Americana that deserve consideration as an expression of our culture.

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SENTIMENTAL TRADITION, 1794 TO 1870

By

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PREFACE

This study purports to treat the American gambler story as a sentimental genre. I assume that the origin of this genre is in two movements in the Renaissance, one social and the other literary, both of which are inextricably related. The social background begins with the breakup of the European feudal system which sent thousands of beggars, vagabonds, and rogues into London where many had to survive by means of confidence rackets, including gambling. In the city, sharp-eyed chroniclers of the street scene wrote Beggar Books and Coney-catching pamphlets which I link with eighteenth-century plays featuring rakes, profligates, and the fiction of Samuel Richardson whose Pamela and Clarissa are classics on the seduction theme. A further and more specific tie-up with the literary aspect of the sentimental tradition is made with Henry Fielding's Amelia (1751). This novel contains a chapter which I use as a rough standard of reference along with a "lady-book" type tale on the popular theme of

ladies in distress, including abused wives of the Amelia-type. By "a lady book" is meant a magazine like Godey's that specializes in subjects such as love, marriage, and the home.

The first of five chapters in this study provides a background of the European sentimental tradition, particularly the English; the second, synthesizes, as it were, the sentimental strains in American gambler fiction but also provides a standard of reference in the aforementioned lady-book gambler tale. The remaining chapters which cover the geographic areas of the East, South and Southwest, and West, I have titled Big City, Gamblers Ashore, and Gold Rush gambler stories. In an addendum I have included a short magazine gambler story with comments on it. The story is typical of those in the sentimental tradition of the nineteenth century.

A few technical terms that need to be cleared up are sentimental story, gambler, roper, pigeon, and greenhorn. By sentimental story is meant a species of fiction designed to elicit a melancholy, tearful mood, and although it usually combines a woman with a gambler, the woman is not an indispensable element. By a gambler I

mean a man who has reached or almost reached the addict or compulsive stage in his enchantment with gambling and is motivated either by avarice or amusement or by both factors. A roper is a confidence agent who works alone or with a dealer or other member of his swindling fraternity. He catches pigeons or gulls by means of an oral "pitch" or some other trickery and then escorts them to the dealer to be fleeced or plucked. A greenhorn has many connotations, but in our period it means a rustic or clerk who comes to the big city and falls prey to the practices of the roper or capper. In the gambler tale, the argot situations are as follows: the roper ropes in a gull and accompanies him to the Barnard (dealer) who fleeces or plucks the gull who has flown in from the country to see the sights of the city or to close a business deal.

To get a cross section of the various types of gambler stories in publications in different sections of the country, I have relied mainly on the New York Spirit of the Times for the East; the New Orleans Times Picayune for the South and Southwest, and the Golden Era and The Overland Monthly for the West. These seemed the best

sports depositories of their kind and representative of their region.

On occasion, I depart from the sentimental tradition and use gambler stories in other traditions, namely, the adventure and humor traditions. This liberty seems appropriate inasmuch as these traditions are not "pure" and contain sentimental elements in their tales, although action or humor may be their raison d' etre.

Of the many works on American gambling, those most useful are Henry Chafetz's Play the Devil, Herbert Asbury's Sucker's Progress, and the gambler autobiographies and exposé books of Jonathan Green, John Morris, and Mason Long. For the European literary background or rogues, Frank Wadleigh Chandler's The Literature of Roquery and the Cambridge History of English Literature prove indispensable. Other sources most helpful to compile a bibliography on gambling and gamblers are Frederick Jessel's A Bibliography of Works in English of Playing Cards and Gaming, Rose Eyring's University of California Dissertation, The Portrayal of the California Gold-Rush Period in Imaginative Literature from 1848 to 1875, and Lyle H. Wright's two volumes: American Fiction 1774-1850 and

American Fiction, 1851-1875. Important books that supply information on all phases of gambling are John Ashton's The History of Gambling in England, John Philip Quinn's Fools of Fortune, and Theophilus Lucas's Memoirs of the Lives, Intriques and Comical Adventures of the Most Famous Gamesters.

CHAPTER I
EUROPEAN BACKGROUNDS OF THE AMERICAN
SENTIMENTAL GAMBLER STORY

A proper perspective of the American sentimental gambler story depends upon an awareness of certain English developments. One of these is socio-economic in origin and the other literary. The socio-economic factor has a two-pronged division which came about when the European feudal system broke up. The first of these divisions is based on the agricultural revolution that took place when the English lords turned their farms into sheep combines to meet the demand for wool that made England the trade center of the world.

The consequence was a social upheaval throughout the country. Countless thousands of castle workers and farmers took to the highways and roads to London in the hopes of getting work to keep from starving to death. Estimates vary of the numbers of these dislocated persons, but they were considerable for that period of time. One

estimate has 13,000 beggars and vagabonds living in London in 1569¹ and another has 12,000 in 1594.² To be noted also is that thousands of soldiers, let loose from their lords, looted the countryside as they did during war and now without homes offered their services free to the lords merely to have a place to hide their stolen goods.³

About the same time as this migration took place, Henry VII dissolved the monasteries. This royal decree further aggravated the over-expansion problem of London. Now, along with countless bands of roaming beggars, strollers, and soldiers, another group descended upon the city--monks, priests, valets, bakers, brewers, laundry workers, gardeners, and so forth.⁴ The city soon doubled in population from 100,000 to 200,000 and the medieval walls could no longer hold the people who spread

¹Frank Aydelotte, Elizabethan Rogues, app. A I, as quoted in Arthur V. Judges, The Elizabethan Underworld (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1950), p. xv.

²Ibid., Strype, Annals (1824), I, ii, 346.

³Frank Aydelotte, Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds, Oxford Historical and Literary Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), I, 15.

⁴Judges, op. cit., p. xxiii.

out into the countryside.⁵ Without adequate poor laws to provide for them, these human drift crowded into the streets to form ghettos of criminals, including gamblers who preyed off the rich and innocent.

The second or literary factor that provides a necessary background for the sentimental American gambler story has two aspects or attitudes, one of which points backward and the other forward. The backward-looking or older attitude is represented in the medieval works of Robert Copland's The Hye Way to the Spyttel Hous (1535), Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1400), and William Langland's Piers Plowman (1399). They have the traditional view of the gambler sui generis as a social menace and threat to the community as was the opinion of Aristotle, the Greek philosopher.

This has been the opinion of most countries since the dawn of civilization. According to the gambler-historian, Ashton, gamesters or aleators in Imperial Rome were unable to recover their losses in court, and in the Jewish court or Sanhedrin, gambling was looked upon as a form of theft. It passed a double restitution law which

⁵G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History, as quoted in George Richard Hibbard, Three Elizabethan Pamphlets (London: Harrap, 1951), p. 14.

refused gamblers the right to testify in trials or to hold positions of trust in society. In the Koran, Mohammedans are warned to avoid all games of chance, except chess, for "surely," the religious book says, "wine and lots, and images, and divining arrows are an abomination of the works of Satan" to be avoided in order for one to prosper. Tacitus the historian says the loser in a game in Old England during the Teutonic occupation "submits to servitude, though younger and stronger than his antagonist and patiently submits himself to be bound, and sold in the market; and thus sadness they dignify by the name of honour." Gamblers became so offensive to the crusading kings, Richard of England and Philip of France, that they placed a limit of twenty shillings a soldier could wager in their combined army over a twenty-four hour period. Violators forfeited their money to the state, paid a one hundred shillings fine to the archbishop, and marched naked through the ranks to be whipped for three days' duration.⁶

In London in the Middle Ages, gamblers were treated harshly in court. In the letter books of 1311

⁶ John Ashton, The History of Gambling in England (London: Duckworth & Co., 1898), pp. 5-14.

of the Corporation of the City, Elmer Multone, for example, was fined for luring strangers into a Chepe Ward tavern and of cheating them there with crooked dice. This same Multone was later indicted for taking other men against their will into a Tower Ward tavern where he played his dice tricks. More punitive a form of action was taken against Messrs. Outlawe and Prestone who during the Christmas season of 1376 lured John and William Atte Hill into a tavern where they cast loaded dice on a false checker board. Sentenced by a jury, Outlawe and Prestone were exposed in a public pillory an hour a day as their checker board burned beneath their noses. Later they were cast into prison to hope for mercy from the mayor and aldermen.⁷

Gambling during the Puritan inter-regnum in England was suppressed but after the crowning of Charles II in 1660, a reign of gambling took place that made England "one vast casino," according to the historian Trevelyan.⁸ By the eighteenth century, the island had reached the

⁷Ibid., p. 13.

⁸The Early History of Charles Fox (1880), as quoted in Kathleen Campbell, Beau Brummel, A Biographical Study (London: Hammond, Hammond & Co., 1948), p. 99.

heyday of the worship of the Goddess of Chance. Almost everyone gambled in this period, says Ralph Neville, especially the members of the upper class among whom horse-racing, cock-fighting, cards, and dice became a fashionable form of dissipation.⁹ Horace Walpole, reflecting the opinion of many Englishmen of the time, complains in a 1770 letter:

The gambling is worthy the decline of our empire. The young men lose five, ten, fifteen thousand pounds in an evening. Lord Stoverdale, not one-and-twenty, lost eleven thousand last Tuesday but recovered it by one great hand at hazard. He swore a great oath. "Now, if I had been playing deep I might have won millions."¹⁰

This attitude of disapproval of the gambler manifested in England, however, does not apply to American gamblers before the coming of the white man. Indeed, among the Indians, gamblers were thought to have divine powers, and they represented the tribe in games of skill against other tribes. But the Puritans in the Massachusetts Commonwealth did not share this exalted opinion of their gamblers. Although many of the saints as well as sinners played in their private block houses and in forest

⁹Ralph Nevill, The Man of Pleasure (London: Chatto & Windus, 1912), pp. 61-62.

¹⁰Campbell, p. 99.

retreats, the ministers imposed heavy fines on those caught,¹¹ including students at Harvard College.

The second, a more modern and humane attitude toward the gambler, grew out of the aforementioned social movement in England that sent countrymen to London when the sheep ranches displaced them from their farms and the Royal edict dissolved the monasteries. While these rogues, vagabonds, and beggars prowled about London, writers recorded their street activities. As these realistic writings are mentioned, one should be aware that beneath the hard surface of their accounts is a latent sympathy for the poor who tried to obtain by theft what society had deprived them of legitimately.

The first of these "exposé" writings was the German Liber Vagatorum (1509), which became a model rogue-tract or Beggar Book. It developed from the records of the trials in Basel, Switzerland, in 1475, when thousands of migrants and common cheats were arrested. One of the most pertinent anecdotes in Martin Luther's 1528 edition of Liber Vagatorum concerns a "joner" [gambler] who cheats

¹¹Henry Chafetz, Play the Devil (New York: Bonanza Books, 1960), pp. 8-9, 14-15.

with cards and dice and passes off Loe Mess and Loe Stettingers (bad coins and florins). True to type, the gambler robs the landlord before leaving his inn.¹²

Of the English Beggar Books, the best on gamblers are John Awdeley's Fraternitye of Vacabones (1579) and Thomas Harman's A Caveat or Warening for Commen Cursetors (1567). Awdeley's Fraternitye consists of two parts. The second and most interesting part minutely describes three cheats. The second of the trio, the "fingerer," dressed like a fop in gorgeous attire and attended by a servant, goes to St. Paul's Churchyard in London, Christ's Hospital, and the Royal Exchange. Here he selects from the crowd a wealthy young countryman and lures him to a tavern where another member of his group comes stumbling in pretending to be drunk and half-blind. After some disarming conversation, a card game begins and everyone wins from the "old karle." Finally, the fingerer convinces the stranger to make some easy money, too. As each gambler wins from the gull, the gambler swears a mighty oath and leaves the table under some pretext or other and,

¹²The Book of Vagabonds and Beggars (London: John Camden Hotten, 1860), p. 48.

reaching the door, dashes away into the crowd to rendezvous with the other gamblers to divide the spoils.¹³

Harman's Caveat or Warening for Commen Cursetors, like Awdeley's Fraternitye, attempts to alarm honest citizens against those who would prey on them and is the standard book on "those rowsey, ragged, rabblement of rakeshells." A kind of sixteenth century source book done in the spirit of modern inquiry, Caveat dissects thieves--

their dress, food, origin, training, and sexual relations. The different departments of a highly specialized profession are explained. Their complicated frauds are fully investigated, and we catch glimpses of the dark shallows of their private life.¹⁴

The fingerer's "game" in Awdeley's Fraternitye goes under various names but most often as "Barnard's law" or "Coney-catching law." Two to five gamblers play the game with a "cozen" (cousin) or gull designated as the prey or victim. The best Elizabethan picture of this cozen appears in Thomas Dekker's Gul's Horne-Booke (1609). This gull struts in new clothes in St. Paul's, sits on the

¹³ Edward Viles and F. J. Furnivall, eds., Early English Text Society, N. Trubner (1869), IX, pp. 7-9.

¹⁴ Harold V. Routh, "The Progress of Social Literature in Tudor Times," in Cambridge History of English Literature (1909), III, 103.

stage at the theatre, and, pipe in hand, brouses in book shops to make an impression. Aydelotte has a further description of Dekker's fop:

The gull pretends to wit, fashion, or wealth in the ordinary, lets a sonnet drop from his glove, or inquires who has need of help to obtain a suit at court; he feasts in a tavern on a tapster's credit, and directs his link boy, hired for one night, to call him 'Sir' as they pass the watch going home.¹⁵

His money comes from his father, a "worme-eaten farmer" who died leaving him five hundred pounds a year and a farm. Bent on being a gallant, he goes to fashionable haunts with gamblers and, in need of money at rent time, borrows at exorbitant rates of interest from a lender. He ends up dead-broke and duped of his farm. His gay career over, he then works as a fingerer or taker for a gambler and preys on other countrymen. "This was the typical 'rake's progress,'" says Aydelotte, "from the state of gallant, gaily feathered gull to that of poor and needy cozener, who lived from hand to mouth by the practice of the various cheating 'laws.'"¹⁶

¹⁵(London: 1609), Temple ed., p. 13, as quoted in Aydelotte, Oxford, p. 78.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 79.

Several classes of houses catered to London's gamblers, high and low. The foppish takers preferred the better licensed resorts such as George Whetstone describes in Touchstone for the Time (1584). In this ordinarie, gentlemen of wealth and fashion, soldiers, and wits held high talk before a grand suppor and cards or dice. Of the lower-class places, almost every tavern, bowling alley, or inn in the city was equipped for gambling. Whetstone describes one of the lower-class London dives:

The dayle guests of these priuie houses, are masterless men, needy shifters, theeues, cut-purses, unthrifitie seruants, both seruing men, and prentises. Here a man may pick out mates for all purposes, saue such as are good the most of these idle persons haue neither landes nor credits, now will liue by an honest occupation: forsooth they haue yet handes to filch, heades to deceive, and friendes to re-ceiue: and by these helps, shift meetely badly well.¹⁷

Although London had "open season" on connies, the best time for the sport occurred during court sessions in St. Paul's walk, a common meeting ground for rich and poor seeking pleasure or business. In The Dead Tearme (1608)

¹⁷Addition to A Mirrour for Magestrates of Cytes, leaf 33, verso, Aydelotte, ibid.

Thomas Dekker describes St. Paul's as a tower of Babel
 what with all the "halking" and "humming." Here all
 classes mingle in a state of confusion:

the Knight, the Gull, the Gallant, the Upstart,
 the Gentleman, the Clowne, the Captaine, the
 Appelsquire, the Lawyer, the Usurer, the Cit-
 tizen, the Bankerout, the Schooler, the Begger,
 the Doctor, the Ideot, the Ruffian, the
 Cheater, the Puritan, the Cut-throat, the Hye-
 men, the Low-men, the True-man and the Thief:
 of all trades and professions some, of all
 Countryses some¹⁸

Another group of Renaissance writings which provide an incipient sentimental attitude toward the realistic gambler is the Coney-catcher tracts. More literary than the authors of the Beggar Books, Elizabethan writers like Robert Greene, Thomas Dekker, and Thomas Lodge, nevertheless, copy from the older writings of Awdeley and Harman. Perhaps names and other specific details differ in Barnard's Law, but the basic pattern is identical to that described in Awdeley's Fraternitye. Greene's version in A Notable Discovery of Coosnage (1591), contains a taker or Setter who snares a cousen and then, armed with information about this gull's home

¹⁸ Sig. D 4, Verso E, ed. Grosart, IV, 30-2, Aydelotte, ibid., p. 85.

town, tells the details to the Verser. This worthy claims intimacy with the countryman and his friends and celebrates their new-found friendship by escorting him to a tavern for a drink. Here the Barnard or card sharp, pretending to be drunk, traps the gull into a card game.

An added detail of Barnard's Law is found in several rogue-tracts. In Walker's A Manifest Detection, a Rubber stands watch at the tavern door while his fellow-gamblers swindle a gull. When the victim finally cries for help, this Rubber flutters his arms about and starts shadow-fencing with himself. In Thomas Dekker's The Belman of London, he picks an idle quarrel either in the room or at the street door while his companions take flight through the crowds. In another innovation of the Law, Mihil Mumchance in His Discoverie of the Art of Cheating (1597) describes the popular guided tour device. Here, as customary, the taker-up drops into a tavern at the point the tour started and, joined soon by a "fygge boy," fleeces the gull who is "forced to trip on his ten toes homeward for the lack of a hackey to ride on, and begge for his charges by the way."¹⁹

¹⁹ [Robert Greene] (London: n.d.), p. 5.

A further refinement of this adaptable Barnard's Law occurs in the anonymous The Country Gentleman's Vade Mecum (1699) and in Greene's pamphlets. According to the Vade Mecum, the trick is best played in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Covent Garden, or any public area between Westminster Hall and Temple Bar. To play this "perfect occupation" three "masters" are needed--a merchant, a tradesman, and a country gentleman, known respectively as the front man or spark, the rear man or mouth, and the gull or cully. Dressed in appropriate clothing, the spark starts the game by dropping a coin near the gull. The mouth then steps up gingerly to claim it the same time as the gull. To avoid argument, the spark says the correct thing to do under the circumstances is to drink together in a tavern to make the coin divisible into three parts. Once inside the tavern, the young heir is either cheated at cards or is knocked down and has his pockets picked.²⁰

In Greene's account of Coney-catching Law, the moment the coin strikes the ground the Verser cries, "half part" and then quotes the proverb: "Tis ill luck to keep found money." The outcome here coincides with that in

²⁰(London: J. Harris, 1699), pp. 97-100.

Vade Mecum--a card game follows in a tavern where the stranger is shorn clean of his money by a band of gambler-thieves.²¹

To conclude this brief survey of Elizabethan sharpsters, we shall cursorily treat a miscellaneous group of gambler writings which contain a variety of incidents which later appear in one form or another in sentimental dramas and fiction.

The first of these important gambler-type tracts is Dekker's The Belman of London (1608). Although this book is said to qualify Dekker as "the first great literary artist of London street life,"²² it is a work of plagiarism in that it copies from Mihil Mumchance's Discoverie, Greene's Discovery and Second Part of Conny-catching, and Harman's Caveat.

In The Belman, Dekker, as in his Gul's Horne-Booke, describes a gallant-gambler type. In rustling silks and stuffed purse, he rides in a rich coach and has the "prowdest Curtizan" at his command as he is whorried

²¹A Notable Discovery of Coosnage (1591), Grosart, X, 15-29, Aydelotte, pp. 86-88.

²²Harold V. Routh, "London and the Development of Popular Literature," in Cambridge History of English Literature (1932), IV, 401.

through the streets of London on his way to his gambling sessions at the best ordinaries where merchants and wealthy citizens meet and gamble for high stakes. "It is now growne to a fashion," Dekker sourly notes, "to have some one or other to take up the Cheaters weapons, and (without all respect of honesty, friendship, or societie) to beate all commers."²³

Gilbert Walker's A Manifest Detection of the Most Vyle and Detestable Use of Dice Play (c. 1532) contains an authoritative dialog on "cheating laws" between M, an old gamester and R, a raw young gull. M explains a host of devices used by professional gamblers in card and dice games, including pinching and marking cards, "cutting by a bum card," stealing the discarded cards, using mirrors behind the cousin, songs given by lookers-on, stitch-dropping by women confederates at the table, loading dice with quicksilver or lead, and setting one face of a die with a hair so that when cast that face will not fall flat on the table. These devices, and palming, slurring, and shifting dice were all taught to apprentices by a "master"

²³(London: Nathaniel Butler), Grosart, ed., Huth Library. The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker (1885), III, 118.

gambler²⁴ who may have worked with a city-wide syndicate of gamesters.

In a Theophrastian character sketch of "A Dishonest Gamester" in Wits Miserie and The Worlds Madnesse; Discovering the Devils Incarnat of this Age (1596), Thomas Lodge tells of a French gambler, a "Sonn of Mammon," who would gamble though "wife, children, all shall want . . . lands, goods, and all must go, but fortune must be followed; hell, will be had, if this be not considered." After this drunkard-gambler leaves his wife and two children to starve, she stabs the children and the husband in his sleep and then accepts her execution. The moral: "In reading therefore this history, be provident to avoid and shun the Devill" (the gambler).²⁵

The last of the foursome to be mentioned in this section is Richard Head's The English Rogue Described in the Life of Meriton Latroon (1665). A criminal biography that qualifies as a forbidden book, it treats the infamous career of an Oxford graduate whose claim to distinction concerns whoring, gambling, and drinking. After working

²⁴ed. J. C. Halliwell, *The Percy Society* (London: Richards, 1850), XXIX, 27-33.

²⁵(London: Adam Islip), pp. 40-44.

as a coney-catcher fleecing gallants in a tavern in Chapter XVI, he marries and deserts a "thing" in London, turns "Knight of the Road," and ends up in Newgate prison where gamblers take him into their confidence. Armed with their cheating secrets and money, he takes to playing Barnard's Law in Christ's churchyard but soon abandons cards for whores and returns to prison, only to escape and start a new series of roguish adventures.²⁶

The sentimental attitude toward the gamester that is latent in the Beggar Books and Coney-catching pamphlets emerges distinctly in gamester and "abused-wife" plays. Some of the earliest of these are French: for example, the anonymous La Moralite de l' Enfant Prodique (1535) in which a father forgives his wayward son as the brother grumbles about the loss of a patrimony in gambling.²⁷ La Moralite de l' Enfant de Perdition (1540) varies this basic plot by having the son turn robber, and unaware, kill his own parents in a highway stick-up, after which the boy undergoes remorse and dies insane.²⁸

²⁶(London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1928).

²⁷Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility, Harvard Studies in English (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), III, 27-28.

²⁸Ibid., 31.

The play The Prodigal Son (1593-4), contained in a German collection of English plays, is thought to have been acted by Shakespeare's Company on tour of Germany and to be composed by Shakespeare. The action takes place in Italy and Germany and features a wastrel who sows his wild oats in Italy. At the end of his dissipated career, he is robbed by an inn-keeper and his whorish daughter and sent home in a manner reminiscent of the tip-toer in Mihil Mumchance's Discoverie. To prove that the play belongs to the morality genre, Hope and Despair end it by carrying on a dialog.²⁹

When the dramatists focused their attention on the domestic scene, they blended their comedies and tragedies with ingredients of the prodigal son plays to create a heightened sentimental mood. Of this fusion, Professor Schelling states,

the tyrannical and neglectful husband is commonly presented in the more general and attractive terms of the prodigal son . . . [which] combine with the various effect the motive of the faithful wife with that of the young spendthrift.³⁰

²⁹ed. Richard Simpson, The School of Shakespeare (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1878), I, 122-123.

³⁰Felix E. Schelling, Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1642 (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1959), I, 351.

Along with Renaissance plays featuring gamblers, the abused-wife play developed using Griselda as its ideal model. To Thorp there is a direct line of influence from the popular medieval story of the patient and forgiving wife to the abused-wife play. For example, he states that between 1470 and 1527, Griselda appears twelve times in German writings as well as in Chaucer's tales, Shakespeare's Othello and Much Ado About Nothing, John Philip's Commodye of Pacient and Meeke Grissil (ca. 1565), and Italian novels of calumniated wives.³¹ Two plays of this abused-wife type are The London Prodigal (1603) and A Yorkshire Tragedy (1608). In The London Prodigal a wife saves her philandering husband from life imprisonment by means of a strategem,³² and the wife in A Yorkshire Tragedy forgives her gambler husband in a tearful prison scene: "Dearer than all is my poore husbands life," she laments, "I will kneele, sue for his life" ³³

³¹Willard Thorp, The Triumph of Realism in Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1612 (Princeton University Press, 1928), p. 87.

³²Bernbaum, p. 45.

³³[William Shakespeare] (London: Thomas Pauier, 1608).

Although English gamester plays combined the sentimental elements of the prodigal son and abused-wife plays, they avoided the "anatomies" approach of the Beggar Books and Coney-catcher tracts by concentrating, not on a detailed analysis of gambling as Joyce Tompkins noted in the popular novel in England in the eighteenth century, but on the effects of gaming on the domestic circle.³⁴ Despite being one of the earliest gamester plays in England, Shirley's The Gamester (1635) does not qualify as a full-blown sentimental play for no pity is extended toward the distressed wife, gambling is not a motivating factor in it, and the repentance scene is hurried over.

With the production of Colley Cibber's Love's Last Shift (1696), however, sentimental plays in England became very popular. Here Cibber uses the commonplace but pathetic theme of a wife's discovery of her husband's unfaithfulness. Amanda, the deserted wife, forgives the prodigal Loveless of his dissipations and by a stratagem brings him back to the path of virtue. Reformed in the final scene of the play, Loveless thanks Amanda's "conquering virtue" which subdued him, and on bended knee,

³⁴The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 80.

he says, "here will I fix, thus prostrate, sigh my shame, and wash my crimes in never ceasing tears of penitence."³⁵

By the first decade of the eighteenth century several more gamester plays appeared. In Mrs. Centlivre's The Gamester (1705), which has Regnard's Le Joueur as its source, the protagonist Valere reforms, keeps his wife, and vows never to gamble again, whereas in Regnard's version Valere loses his wife and ends up a slave to his passion of gambling.

What sentiment Mrs. Centlivre missed in The Gamester and her female-gambler play The Basset Table (1705) was abundantly furnished by Colley Cibber in The Lady's Last Stake (1707), which had a spasm of popularity as late as 1786. A twofold plot in the play involves the reconciliation of a husband and wife and an attack upon gambling. When the gambler-wife piles up a debt she cannot pay, friends arrive in the nick of time with money to satisfy her debt which keeps her from losing her virtue to her debtor.

The best English gamester plays between 1721 and 1753 are Aaron Hill's The Fatal Extravagance (1721) and

³⁵Bernbaum, pp. 72-76.

Edward Moore's The Gamester (1753). Although said by Bernbaum to be written "in a manner wholly new," The Fatal Extravagance borrows from A Yorkshire Tragedy. In Hill's play, Bellmour, a "fine, frank spirit," turns into a gambling addict and seeks the help of a willing friend but cannot return the same favor when his turn comes. Bellmour murders the creditor and attempts to poison his wife and children but only succeeds in taking his own life.

Better known than The Fatal Extravagance, Edward Moore's The Gamester (1753) has three characters to form the chief dramatis personae--Beverley, Mrs. Beverley, his wife, and Stukely, a villain-gambler. To attempt to seduce Mrs. Beverley, Stukely plots to bankrupt Beverley, who loses his wife's jewelry and his sister's inheritance, and, unable to pay off these gambling debts, is thrown into prison. Now despondent, he takes poison as Mrs. Beverley, unaware of his action, informs him that he has inherited a fortune from his uncle and that all will turn out well, but it is too late. He dies in her arms.³⁶

³⁶ John Homer Caskey, The Life and Works of Edward Moore, Yale Studies in English (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), LXXV, 103-105.

The reform motif in domestic tragedies featuring gamblers takes on a lighter aspect in Thomas Holcroft's Duplicity (1781). When one of a pair of upper-class gamblers swindles the other in order to reclaim him to virtue, the play serves as an object lesson in what would happen if the loser had fallen into the hands of a villain-gambler rather than in those of a future brother-in-law.³⁷

Although sentimental elements in English plays form a strong strain in the gambler story, the genre of fiction also shows a potent influence on it. Of the many impulses and writings--philosophic, religious, social, and economic--we shall mention the writings of only three eighteenth-century authors, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, and Henry Fielding.

Richardson's contribution to American gambler fiction comes slantwise through his two seduction novels Pamela (1741) and Clarissa (1747) which feature maidens in distress. In Pamela, a middle-class heroine in an exchange of letters with her parents tells of her struggles to preserve her chastity against the assaults

³⁷Ibid., 117.

of a wealthy libertine named Mr. B--- in whose household she works as a servant girl. Her marriage to the nobleman proves the sub-title of the book that virtue has its own reward in this life. In Clarissa, the same theme is worked out with an upper-class lady who is drugged and raped by a profligate named Richard Lovelace who dies remorseful in a duel with the heroine's cousin in which he only half-heartedly defends himself.

The impact of Laurence Sterne on American gambler fiction is owing to his style. In Tristram Shandy and The Sentimental Journey (1767), his ornate and delicately constructed sentences and melancholy tone become a pattern for countless histories and domestic tales of grief in real and make-believe life in the period.³⁸ This arch-priest of the tender mood, says Edith Birkhead, "taught the men and women of the eighteenth century what an exquisite pleasure might be derived from feeling the pulse of their emotions."³⁹

³⁸ Lillie Deming Loshe, The Early American Novel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1907), p. 5.

³⁹ "Sentiment and Sensibility in the Eighteenth Century Novel," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), XI, 106.

More directly related to the theme of the gambler story is Henry Fielding's Amelia (1741). Like a host of sentimental plays of the time, this story has a model wife who, although abused by her husband Booth, forgives him his trespasses. The entire two volumes do not concern us, only chapters V-IX of the second part of the second volume. Here appears a small-scale gambler story replete with all the staple ingredients of the full-blown type popular up to the Civil War in American short stories. It features a coney-catcher named Mr. Trent, Amelia, her impetuous and negligent husband, Captain Booth, and a few minor characters. The plot begins when Colonel Bath and Trent meet Booth in the park and take a friendly drink together in a tavern where Booth loses everything in a card game with Trent and writes him several I.O.U.'s for which Trent promises not to press for payment.

We later discover that Trent pimps for Lord --- and that the lord has designs on Mrs. Booth. When Trent fails to convince Booth that to submit to let Mrs. Booth go to Lord --- is a good idea, they part company. Soon, Trent circulates gossip about Mrs. Booth and duns her husband for the money owed him. Mrs. Booth, aware now of Trent's dastardly plot to have her deflowered by

Lord ---, pawns her jewelry to repay Trent and gives the money to the maid to deliver, but the wench steals it. Booth is then sent to debtor's jail where providence intervenes in the affair. The crooked lawyer who has been hired by Amelia's sister to defraud Amelia is exposed and Amelia inherits her rightful fortune. The segment ends with Trent slinking off to obscurity and the Booths taking up residence in the country where the dutiful Amelia is happy about her husband's reformation of character and his promise to be less neglectful of her in the future.⁴⁰

To summarize, the gambler story belongs to a sentimental tradition that began in the period of the Renaissance. Then two related movements in England, the break-up of the feudal system and the dissolution of the monasteries created a social upheaval which sent thousands of people to London unprepared for jobs in an industrial economy. Many turned to thievery and gambling rackets in order to survive. In London at the time gifted writers recorded the activities of these swindlers in Beggar Books and Coney-catching pamphlets, the best of which are by

⁴⁰(Boston: Colonial Press, n.d.), II, 208-341.

John Awdeley, Thomas Herman, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Lodge, and Robert Greene. Although faithfully reporting the criminal scene, these writers expressed a muted sympathy for the downtrodden whose habits formed the core of their exposés. The most interesting of their descriptions is that involving Barnard's Law which consists of two or more players, a roper-in and a dealer who work out of a tavern, preferably near a hub of activity so that when challenged they can escape in the crowd.

The theatrical aspect of the sentimental tradition to which the gambler genre belongs includes the medieval prodigal son play and later the abused-wife, gamester, and full-blown sentimental domestic tragedies. From the point of view of fictional influences, the "big three" of the eighteenth century novel produced the chief impact on the American gambler genre. Samuel Richardson contributed the seduction theme and a prototype rake in Richard Lovelace; Laurence Sterne, a suitable tearful style, and Fielding's Amelia, which served as a model gambler story in having a confidence man, negligent husband, abused wife, and the theme of virtue in distress.

CHAPTER II

EARLY AMERICAN GAMBLER TALES

The chief theme in American magazines in the eighteenth century is virtue in distress. In them the Richardsonian element of seduction predominates as it does in William Hill Brown's The Power of Sympathy (1789), America's first published novel. In The Massachusetts, a typical sensibility magazine of the period, Herbert R. Brown notes, "Of eleven true, moral, and pathetic tales in the first volume, nine are accounts of seduction and resultant misery."¹ A few examples are "The Story of Edward and Louisa" (Aug.-Sept., 1789), "Amelia, a Moral Tale" (Jan., 1789), and "The Sorrows of Amelia" (Jan., 1789). Betrayed innocence figures also in earlier tales, "The History of Sophia M" in The Gentleman and Ladies' Town and Country Magazine (May, 1789), "The Fatal Effects of Seduction," in The New York Magazine (Jan., 1790), and

¹"Elements of Sensibility in The Massachusetts Magazine," American Literature, I (1930), 289.

"A Confession" in The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle (May, 1741).

Competing in popularity with the seduction tale is Fielding's Amelia which has echoes in "Charles and Amelia" in The Gentleman and Ladies' Town and Country Magazine (May, 1791), "Henry and Charlotte, an Affecting History," in The American Magazine (Nov., 1786), "The History of Mrs. Hortense Melmoth" in The Nightingale (July 7, 1796), and "Pathetic Letters from a Deserted Wife to a Faithless Husband" in The American Universal Magazine (Feb. 6, 1797).

The fascination of the subject of gambling for these early American magazine writers is articulated by the anonymous author of An American Bee anecdote (1794). Although gaming never fails to end in "shame, poverty, and distress," she says, "Few vices are more prevalent in our days than gaming."² In agreement, the author of "The Gamester" in The Weekly Visitor; or, Ladies' Miscellany (1806) notes,

As the subject [gambling] is so interesting to the welfare of society, I shall frequently devote my pen to the theme; and as example is

²"The Fatal Effects of Gaming," pp. 93-94.

allowed to be more impressive than precept, I shall describe a few instances of the effect of this destructive passion, which I have either read or seen.³

Despite its use by men, gambling is a woman's subject in eighteenth century magazines. In that period, unless titled, the heroine was entirely dependent upon the bounty of her husband-gambler. Then, too, the age abounded in female gamblers against whom even Steele in his Tatler papers expresses concern.⁴ One gets some notion of the hold the vice had on the fair sex in a reprinted article titled "Gambling" from a London paper in The Visitor or Ladies' Miscellany (1805). Here a lady of title is said to have lost almost half a million pounds sterling playing faro in the house of another high ranking lady.⁵ Indeed, "lady books" on the variety of Godey's are the chief depositories for early gambler tales. In the already mentioned Massachusetts Magazine (1794), the table of contents of the first four volumes indicates sentimental "female" titles: "parental

³IV (May 3), 209.

⁴The Guardian, No. 120 (London: J. Tonson, July 29, 1713).

⁵pp. 278-279.

affection," "compassion," "The Fatal Effects of Love."

In addition several gambler writings appear: "The Gamesters" (II), an apologue, "On Gaming: A Fragment" (IV), an essay, and "Disquisition on Gaming" (IV), a poem.

Also included among a plethora of other suitable matter for the "fair reader" are a fragment titled "The Reformers" in which an honest mechanic is ruined by a lottery⁶ and "The Gambler: An Anecdote," a brief narrative concerning a newlywed who is taught a lesson when he returns from one of his late gambling sessions to find a monstrous black hog in his bed instead of his wife.⁷

Although "The Gambler: An Anecdote" is one of our early gambling tales, its humor, reminiscent of the Second Shepherd's Play, is not characteristic of the sentimental gambler genre. More representative of the sugar-coated and tearful species are two sketches in The American Bee (1797). In "The Fatal Effects of Gaming" a pair of gambling brothers turn highwaymen and accidentally kill their own father in a hold-up, after which, in despair, they commit suicide.⁸ Even closer to the generic

⁶II, 231.

⁷VI, 458-459.

⁸pp. 93-99.

sentimental type in the same magazine is "Matrimonial Infidelity Detected" (1797). Here a young officer marries for money to pay off his gambling debts, but when his generous wife catches him in the embrace of one of his many mistresses, she cuts him adrift. When last heard of, he was a commissioned officer in General Clinton's army in America during the war.⁹

At this stage of "British-American" magazines, one cannot distinguish an English from an American gambler story. The period, of course, was one of literary laissez-faire and English publishers capitalized on the market created in America during a period of expanding prosperity following the Revolutionary War. One should not be alarmed, therefore, to find "The Gamester" in the 1806 The Weekly Visitor¹⁰ almost identically reproduced in Edward Maturin's "Original. The Gamester. A Tale" in the 1838 The Ladies' Companion.¹¹ So far as settings are concerned, the tales may as well take place in London or Brighton as in New York or Boston.

⁹ pp. 238-243.

¹⁰ IV (May 3, May 10), 209-10, 217-218.

¹¹ IX (Aug.), 165-173.

The characters share the same vagueness as do the locales and even the prefix "Lord" appended to a name offers no help in identifying the story-figures as of American or English persuasion. Titles are often descriptive of the contents of the stories and follow the Rakes-progress pattern as in "Leaf No. II . . . The Errors---The Consequences---The Remorse."¹² Lengths vary from one to fifteen pages and ordinarily conclude with a moral tag and the author's signature or a pseudonym such as "The Rover" or "A Friend of Virtue."

Two or three characters are featured in the plot--a man, single or married, and a woman, single or married. If a third person is necessary, he is either another gambler or a friend or relative of either the wife or husband. The gambler as a third person in the plot functions as a conflict agent and usually appears in tales with a romantic sub-plot in which the unwed heroine has a choice to make between two fiancés.

The focus of attention invariably falls on the woman and the standardized plot has two sections. The first centers on the maiden life of a happy lady during

¹²Godey's Lady's Book, XXXIX (Sept., 1849), 207-214.

which she falls in love with a gentleman, perhaps a stranger to her; and the second part treats of her woeful married life to him. Since the purpose of the tale is to extract tears from the reader, this second part comes in for the greater share of attention. When the husband becomes bored, which customarily occurs after about five years of married bliss, he drifts to gambling houses. Meantime his wife suffers in silence, a portrait of sorrow, praying and hoping for her spouse's reformation.

Justice is hard in these tales of grief and resultant woe, and the wife gets a measure of revenge for the neglect and abuse at the hands of her husband. His fate usually sends him to a madhouse, a jail, or the bottom of a river. Inexorably, the gambler receives the just deserts of the traditional villain. As a Christian he has disobeyed the laws of God, church, and community by abandoning his home, wife, and children to pursue the fickle goddess of chance. So rigid is this element of retribution in the tales that any deviation from the pattern comprises an act of charity beyond the expectations of the reader. Indeed, the creation of the man as a foil for the woman constitutes the chief defect of the gambler story as a genre. The gambler is drawn as a puppet on a

string, stripped of free will, and totally at the whim of a moral-minded author or her persona in the story. In a word, the gambler becomes an abstraction as in the Old Morality plays and is destined for great suffering both in this and the other world.

A vessel of virtue, the gambler-wife plays a passive role in the tradition of patient Griselda and courts the tearful moment. Like her counterpart in eighteenth century English plays, she frequently dissolves in tears and reaches a state of complete inertia. It is then that the authors bring in one of their favorite deus ex machina, a providential agent to answer her prayers. The heroine in "Gambling, or Rain and Sunshine," for example, is helped out of a gloomy situation when a grandfather tricks his gambler son and, having reformed him, takes him and his family home to take care of them.¹³ In Sylvanus S. Cobb's "The Card Table," an unrecognized Mississippi riverboat gambler bankrupts his brother-in-law as a way of reforming him,¹⁴ and in Blunderbuss's "The Duel by

¹³The Ladies' Garland, IV (June 30, 1827), 25.

¹⁴Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion, X (Jan. 12, 1856), 27.

Candlelight" another Southerner insists on a shotgun wedding to help clear up his family's name.¹⁵ The intercessor-device backfires, however, in Rover's "The Gambler" in which the son of a hypocrite gambler is saved from suicide by a stranger who robs him but with whom he ends up a parricide in an argument over cards.¹⁶

The staple approach in tales featuring unwed girls echoes the strategem devices of the sentimental dramas. For the most part, married women stay home rather than check on the nocturnal habits of their husbands. The only exception is "Matrimonial Infidelity Detected" (1797) in which an upper-class English lady finds her young husband in the arms of one of his mistresses. A standard tale which uses a bachelorette to spy on her fiancé is "The Gamblers" in Godey's for 1840. Here the heroine is escorted by her former flame to a gambling house where, concealed behind draperies, she overhears her deceiver, "a handsome gentleman with large black whiskers," disclose his dastardly plot to marry her for

¹⁵Golden Era, VI (Aug. 7, 1859), 1.

¹⁶The Ladies' Companion, VIII (April, 1838), 277-278.

money and then abandon her.¹⁷ The most plucky of this single girl type in gambler fiction is Flora in H. J. Plomteaux's "The Outcast Reclaimed; or, Strength of Pure Love" who practices shuffling cards for months in order to disguise herself as a professional gambler and thereby bankrupt her boyfriend as a means of bringing him to the altar.¹⁸

In conjunction with the pervasive theme of virtue in distress are the themes of corruption abroad and reform. The first appealed to British and American writers whose readers probably still had events of the Revolutionary War fresh in their memories. From the point of view of English authors, America is pictured as a dumping ground for Britain's ne'er-do-wells and incorrigibles. In The Gambler; or, Memoirs of a British Officer (1802),¹⁹ an Englishman returns from the American battlefield to continue his gambling habit and lead his family and himself to ruin. Before his suicide, he works as a translator of French books, a fate perhaps as low as the author

¹⁷XX (May), 225-229.

¹⁸Golden Era, VIII (May 13, 1860), 1-2.

¹⁹(Washington: W. Duane & Son).

can devise for a British gentleman. Perhaps less subtle in its denunciation of Revolutionary America is "Matrimonial Infidelity Detected" in which a lady cuts off her allowance to her young philandering husband and sends him to his brothers who ease his distress by buying him a commission in a foreign land.

As part of a literary tradition, a few early lady-book tales treat the theme of corruption abroad with an Italian setting as in the seventeenth century essays of Roger Ascham and Francis Bacon. Dated 1806, "The Gamester" features two rich English youths on the Grand Tour who accidentally meet in Italy. Clifford, the innocent of the pair, victimized by Lord Dorset at the gaming tables, returns home to marry and once more fall prey to his nemesis Dorset. Finally, they engage in a duel in which Clifford is injured and reduced to dependency upon his Amelia-like wife.

A companion piece to "The Gamester" is Edward Maturin's "Original. The Gamester. A Tale," which although bearing the date 1838 was probably written much earlier. In Maturin's version, young Mortimer haunts a dazzling Roman gambling den where Alessandro gains revenge for being jilted by Mortimer's wife Isabel. Reduced to

beggary and despair, Mortimer dies in a duel with Alessandro and merits the author's final comment--"Mortimer was an idiot!"

As noted previously, the vague settings and "homes" of the characters in lady-book tales make it difficult to determine whether the tales are pro- or anti-British or American in this period of the War. This ambivalent attitude shows up in Sarah Wood's Dorval; or, the Speculator, By a Lady (1801) in which the titular villain, an English bastard, is pressed into service in the English Navy and after an honorable discharge works as a hand on a Massachusetts farm. Fired from this job because of cruelty to animals, he goes to the West Indies, marries a woman he tries to murder, does succeed in murdering two plantation workers, and returns to America as a member of a gambling syndicate with headquarters on the Eastern Seaboard. While floating bonds to swindle George Washington's veterans out of Georgia land, he murders a woman he married in America and tries to seduce the heroine of the tale. When he is finally captured in the West Indies, he accidentally dies in jail from

his own hand as he tries to murder the heroine who out of pity has visited him there.²⁰

Even more indefinite in locale is "The Fatal Effects of Gaming." Here a Western gentleman gives his twin sons a "polite education" at "a distant university" where an insinuating gamester lures them into gambling and bankrupts them. Temporarily spared want, a rich relative gives one brother a commission in a foreign regiment and the other a place in an eminent London merchant's house. These offers spurned, they fall into the gaming habit once again in London, turn to highway robbery when broke, and die suicides as they accidentally shoot their father in a stick-up.

The distant university mentioned in the tale may be American rather than English, for American Colleges in gambler stories are portrayed as corrupters of youth and citadels of infidelism. This aspect of the gambler story will be explored more in detail later in this study. At present it needs only to be noted that story writers felt that colleges were mere meeting places for wealthy and spirited young men rather than institutions of higher

²⁰(Portsmouth, New Hampshire, n.d.).

learning. The supervisors of the schools were particularly remiss in duty by failing to supervise the activities of their charges.

Despite its early date, Caroline Mattilda Thayer's The Gamesters (1805) may serve as a model for college-gambler tales which had a steady appeal up to the Civil War. The plot of The Gamesters involves Leander Anderson's fall from innocence to that of wicked gambler through the evil deeds of his Harvard friend, Edward Somerton. After Anderson commits suicide, Somerton develops a guilty conscience and roams the earth a despised beggar until he dies and is unmourned at the grave.²¹

The second of the themes to be discussed in early American gambler stories in lady books is that of the reformed rake, a theme popular in several species of eighteenth-century drama as well as in the fiction of that period. In the previously mentioned "Matrimonial Infidelity Detected," a wealthy and mature widow mistakenly places her trust in a young ensign who betrays her for a spate of mistresses. Another type tale of this kind is "The Reformed Rake. A Tale." Here a good

²¹(Boston: Thomas & Andrews).

woman marries a gambler hoping to reform him while he pretends to love her only to get her money. This fortune seeker dies a debauched man and the wife is reduced to poverty and dependence. In moral indignation the author cries out, "May those of my fair readers whose matrimonial prize still continues afloat within the wheel of fate, be careful how far they trust to the specious appearance of a reformed rake."²²

The reformed rake theme relates to three other sentimental elements in gambler stories--the cult of filial obedience, and a concomitant aspect, seduction, and total dissolution. In tale after tale, the moral shines through: once a woman has made her choice, right or wrong, she is committed to her lot, miserable though it may be. From the point of view of parents, therefore, a long period of courtship is the ideal so that a daughter and her family can get acquainted with her fiancé. Girls are poor judges of the characters of their fiancés because girls in love are giddy and trust to the specious appearances of gentlemen who may be wolves in sheep's clothing.

²²Ladies Visitor, I (Jan. 19, 1820), 151.

A composite type formed from several of these early lady-book tales reveals a rich, handsome gentleman of intelligence, charm, and talent. One of the chief characteristics that stand out in relief in the outline is his reckless defiance of social convention. This contempt for conformity shows up in his proud curl of the lip, an indefinable sign of insolence toward others. Although dressing in the height of fashion, he prefers black suits, complemented by flashing rings and cuff links. The most gifted of the breed are Fitzhenry in "The Gambler's Fate" whose resonant voice can even make an old lady in her rocking chair weep at his melancholy notes²³ and DeValcour in "The Gamester," a French atheist with many "projects."²⁴

Traditionally, the gambler has a roving eye for the turn of a lady's ankle. This manner, of course, only reinforces the parental argument that rakes bear watching and that their pasts need reviewing. Lucy Sumner in Hanna Foster's The Coquette (1797) notes that the wife

²³Mary E. MacMichael, Godey's Lady's Book, XI (July, 1836), 41-55.

²⁴The Ladies' Garland, I (Sept. 25, 1824), 129-131.

of profligate Peter Sanford was "a stranger to his [Peter's] manner of life; and doubtless allured . . . by flattery, deceit, and external appearance, to trust to his honor, little thinking him wholly devoid of that sacred tie!"²⁵ The rake himself acknowledges his own villainy. To his friend Charles Deighton he says, "She [Mrs. Sanford] must blame herself if she suffers hereafter; for she was visibly captivated by my external appearance" (p. 171). Everyone should be alerted to the habit of rakes to treat their female victims shabbily after seducing them. The titular heroine in Emily Hamilton offers up her woeful experience at the hands of a seducer as a warning to girls to distrust the man who seeks to conceal his intentions from her parents.²⁶ The unhappy fate of the heroine in Susanna Rowson's Charlotte gives poignancy to the warning of the author, "Oh my dear girls, for to such only am I writing, listen not to the voice of love, unless sanctioned by parental approbation."²⁷

²⁵(Boston: E. Larkin), pp. 200-201.

²⁶Eliza Vicery (Worcester, Mass.: Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1803), p. 47.

²⁷(Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1794), p. 53.

Those favoring the argument that children should decide for themselves what choice to make in marriage call the disciplinary tactics of their parents in this matter a form of tyranny. Young ladies, they argue, whether in or out of love, are mature enough to control their emotions and possess the will to resist the machinations of male seducers. To treat children in a high-minded fashion leads only to family problems and is frequently the means to a child's misery and seldom to his happiness.²⁸

As said before, the theme of seduction that links with the filial obedience argument derived from Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa. Correctly speaking, however, it is not seduction per se but rather the threat of seduction that appeared as a popular element in the gambler tales. Indeed in only a few lady-book stories before Bret Harte and the Beadle novelists in the 1870's does seduction receive more than passing reference. Apparently, lady-book writers sincerely observed the eighteenth-century code of conduct regarding decorum and propriety.

²⁸"The Nymph of the Grove--A Sentimental Historiette," The Massachusetts Magazine (1792), IV, 157, as quoted in Herbert R. Brown, "Richardson and Sterne in The Massachusetts Magazine," The New England Quarterly, V (1932), 73.

The only short fiction to come under the present writer's observance in which seduction is emphasized to any extent is Blunderbuss's "The Duel By Candlelight" in which a Southerner impregnates a lady and then forces her to work as his helper in a gambling house. In most magazine stories the seducer decides against seduction when confronted with a lady of spotless virtue, a strategy not unlike that in the rake-dramas of the eighteenth century.

The earliest examples of villain-seducers in the lady-book story are usually enlisted from the professional ranks of gamblers of English nationality. These stories, therefore, merge with the corruption-abroad theme. The best of the tales of this type are the 1806 "The Gamester" and "Original. The Gamester," which has the date of 1838, although it was probably circulated three decades before then. In most respects, these tales are alike. In both of them a young upper-class Englishman falls into the clutches of a gambler in Italy who has been jilted by the wife of his victim. In "The Gamester," Lord Dorset, the better of the two in terms of the seduction factor, duns Clifford for payment of his gambling debts and, as in Amelia, the Lord offers Clifford's wife Louisa the proposition to be her banker for the return of certain

forbidden pleasures. This virtuous lady responds, "Leave, me, sir; and never wound my feelings by your presence; for your friendship, and your favours, I equally despise" (p. 217). When Clifford unexpectedly arrives home on this occasion, he finds Lord Dorset on his bended knee before Louisa, and a hot exchange of words follow during which the Lord is forced into the street where a few days later the two men accidentally meet and agree to a duel.

The jilt motif that motivates revenge in "The Gamester" and "Original" is reserved for true villain-gamblers. As applied to a love affair between a man and woman it becomes a matter of hurt pride. The device in gambler fiction probably owes much to Richardson's Clarissa in which, one recalls, the class-conscious Lovelace says he would consider it a personal triumph to marry Clarissa and thereby hurt the Harlowes, a family inferior to his own. The very thought that he should be considered a rival of the wretched Roger Solmes chagrins Lovelace. Unable to reconcile himself to defeat in his purpose, Lovelace seeks revenge on all womankind. "I have boasted I was once in love before," he says "It was in my early manhood--with that quality jilt, whose infidelity I have

vowed to revenge upon as many of the sex as shall come into my power."²⁹

The theme of seduction as it follows a man-to-man pattern shows connection with Barnard's Law in the Coney-catching pamphlets. Although changing times meant that the modern roper in the lady-book tales should use more sophisticated methods to catch his gulls, the same pattern existed in them as in the old Renaissance tracts. Perhaps the chief noticeable difference, however, is that the old-time roper seemed to be more of a transit than the newer ones with fixed abodes in which to practice their deceptive arts. In lady-book stories, the confidence men had attachments to gaming houses perhaps as regular employees with a set percentage agreement. None of the lady writers in this early period, however, go into detail about these matters, show any curiosity about the interiors or exteriors of gambling establishments, or even to the seduction methods employed in these houses. Such details, naturally, would have enlivened the tales but the purpose of

²⁹Clarissa in Novels of Samuel Richardson, 20 vols. (London, 1902), III, 112, as quoted in H. G. Ward, "Richardson's Character of Lovelace," Modern Language Review, VII (1912), 496-497.

lady books, as said before, is to concentrate on the sufferings of the gambler's wife and not on gambling per se.

Two approaches or "pitches" are used to get the gull to alight in order to be plucked. The first of these is included in the corruption-abroad stories mentioned before. In "The Gamester" it is to be recalled that a rich gentleman named Clifford accidentally meets Lord Dorset, a villain who insinuates himself into the graces of Clifford as a way of seducing Clifford's wife. This Amelia-like situation likewise obtains in "Original. The Gamester" in which Alessandro, an Italian living in Rome, shows up in London to attempt to seduce his gambling victim's wife. Another of this type of seduction plot appears in "The Outcast Reclaimed" with a silver mining camp in California as its 1860 setting. Here the Hon. M.B.T. lures an honest young businessman into a gambling house so as to discredit him in the eyes of a woman the villain hopes to marry.

Attempted seduction is responsible for another motif in these early gambler tales--dueling. In the oft-mentioned "Original. The Gamester," Mortimer challenges Alessandro to a duel when he realizes that the Italian has tried to seduce his wife, a situation which is

paralleled in "The Gamester" in which Clifford demands satisfaction from Lord Dorset for threatening his wife's virtue. The outcome of the duel affords the author ample opportunity to moralize about the evils of dueling which, along with gambling and drunkenness, comprises a chief vice under attack in gambler fiction. When Clifford is injured in the duel and his income reduced as a consequence, his family live in great deprivation. On his deathbed, Clifford admonishes his wife to watch over his children to see that they do not take up gambling: "Every man, at first, may resist its allurements," he says, "but it is a vice which, when once they are engaged in it, it is most difficult to overcome." He continues, "I, alas! I am a wretched instance of the truth of this assertion, and I implore you to impress an abhorrence of the practice upon my injured children's minds" (p. 218).

The primary reason for gamblers resorting to a duel, however, does not arise over the possession of a woman but rather over arguments in card games. Since this factor will be treated later in our Southern tales, only two tales need to be briefly mentioned, "The Gambler's Fate" and Rover's "The Gambler." The first tale, laid in London, features two Englishmen, Russel and Melville, who

play dice at St. James's in London. When Russel detects Hawkes' cheating, he accuses him of the fact and they end up in a duel the next morning. Hawkes, bleeding to death on the ground, claims he only cheated to be able to buy things for his wife Blanche, with whom we belatedly discover Melville has had an affaire de coeur in the past.³⁰

In Rover's tale the substance betrays its 1838 date and seems to have an English rather than an American setting. In it Augustus Cleaveland, a hypocrite gambler, advises his son to "avoid cards as you would a noxious reptile." But the message falls on empty ears, and the son turns gambler. As time passes, the father and son lose sight of each other for a long period of time until one day they meet as strangers and play cards. When they quarrel, a duel takes place in the back of the house where the old man is stabbed and killed. As young Cleaveland unlooses the dead man's coat, he notices a miniature picture of himself hanging from his father's neck and commits suicide as the police rush to the scene.³¹

³⁰ Spirit of the Times, VII (July 8, 1837), 163.

³¹ The Ladies' Companion, VIII (April, 1838), 277-278.

A third aspect of the lady-book tales that grows out of the general theme of the reformed rake is total dissolution. This theme joins the main artery of the sentimental tradition through the abused-wife plays noted in our previous chapter. The term applies only to women and specifically to wives of negligent or abusive husbands. A gambler's wife, unsuccessful in reforming her spouse, usually dissolves in tears and surrenders her will to live, a process which cannot be gradually described in magazine fiction and therefore seems to happen of a sudden. This is the customary procedure in gambler stories, for large spans of time are passed over in the writer's haste to get to the point of the story--a depiction of resultant woe. It does not matter that the lady arrives at her pitiable condition by quick or slow means so long as she grieves when there. Having fulfilled her mission in life as a dutiful wife chained to a philandering gambler, she chooses to die rather than live a lonely and neglected existence in a house without his affection. Two of the better stories illustrating the principle are "Leaf No. II . . .The Errors---The Consequences---The Remorse" and Mary MacMichael's "The Gambler's Fate." In "Leaf No. II" a young lady in a Halifax hospital bed

listens to her gambler-husband whose final words come too late to save both of them from death. MacMichael's "The Gambler's Fate" adds a death-by-childbirth factor but the wife's dissolution follows the conventional pattern in other respects. She is forsaken after a period of a few years of married bliss as her husband carouses with his evil companions. Unable to convince him to change his ways, she grows morose, gives up the life principle, and dies.

In summary, at the opening of the nineteenth century, American gambler stories contain rigidly defined sentimental elements that persisted with slight variation to the Civil War. In both novels and magazine tales, the chief theme is corruption abroad, which is a carry-over of attitudes emerging from the Revolutionary War still fresh in the memories of English and American readers. By the 1820's, the ravages of war had disappeared and the tales reflect an expanding economy focused on the prospering middle classes rather than on the hated gentlemen-class as is true in stories at the turn of the century.

Since no evidence exists of a genuine native gambler short story, no gradual development of the genre takes place. If any tendency occurs in the fiction, it

is the use of full-fledged gamblers as villains rather than as rogues. Nevertheless, rogue-gamblers seem the most probable descendant of the Beggar Books and Coney-catcher tracts of the Renaissance. What happened, therefore, is that a full-blown English gambler stereotype was transplanted from the English magazines and other literary genre into American magazines and novels. Into the 1820's, no indigenous American gambler type exists, although the Southern gambler's heyday was not far off.

One of several static sentimental elements in the gambler story in the first half of the century is that of dissolution of the abused wife, which was taken over from eighteenth-century plays of penitent rakes, prodigal sons, and gamesters. Counterparts of Fielding's Amelia appear in almost every kind of gambler short story in that authors merely abstracted from her personality one or two traits and concentrated on them. In Fielding's story, she has sufficient variety of responses--resignation, resourcefulness, tenderness, gratefulness, and magnanimity--to provide at least one virtue to an author capable of a one-dimensional treatment of character. Unlike Amelia, however, the gambler tales usually end unhappily with

the wife accepting her direful marriage condition while her spouse ends up either dead or maimed for life.

Embracing all lady-book tales of this type is a Puritanic code that conforms to a stern Old Testament ethic of revenge for injury received. In general, this insistence upon punitive action appears more in tales that seem American rather than English, although, here, as in other matters connected with this "British-American" period of literature, one has difficulty pin-pointing people and places in the stories.

Gulls as prey for gamblers were eschewed in the lady-book tales from 1798 to 1850, although a few gallants, prodigals, or youthful scapegraces turn up. Apparently, English writers found the situation sterile for the successful operations of fops. Times had changed and the fop's world was limited in hard-working America during a period of economic expansion. The common man had come into his own as a tradesman, businessman, and merchant. These figures had center stage, and writers and readers wanted to cry over a domestic scene featuring a misunderstood and virtuous woman clinging to her family all the more resolutely as her gambler-husband forsook her, his marriage vows, and a business built up by frugality, hard

work, and prudence. Gentlemen of the leisure classes were suspect and reminded Americans of a rigid class system against which they felt justified their assertion of independence.

CHAPTER III

BIG CITY NOVELS

Sentiment finds expression in all places and situations and a city is no exception to the rule. In the novels set in New York, Washington, Philadelphia, and Boston in the 1820 to 1870 period, the innocent from the country coming to the large metropolises are doomed to break their hearts. A city, said the author of Metropolitan Life Unveiled, "is not unlike a mighty octopus sitting in an inky lair, thrusting its tentacles into every home and feasting off the victims thus secured."¹ Authors like T. S. Arthur, Mrs. Emma D.E.N. Southworth, Osgood Bradbury, and J. H. Ingraham strike an alarming note and warn countrymen about the perils of city life in which gamblers and their parasites wait to lure them from virtue, rob them, and send them to insane asylums, prisons, houses of prostitution, thieves' dens, slums, and a thousand other wicked places.

¹James William Buel (St. Louis: Anchor Publishing Co., 1882), p. 125.

One of the favorite sentimental themes of these novels is seduction. Girls without family guidance are prey for gambler-seducers who "practice all kinds of deception to lure young and beautiful girls into the vortex of moral death and destruction,"² says the author of Alice Barber. The theme, of course, forms a direct link with novels and short stories already mentioned in this study--Charlotte, The Coquette, The Gamesters, Dorval, and a spate of tales around the turn of the century. The simplest seduction story found in big city novels with gamblers is Joseph Hertford's Personals; or, Perils of the Period published in 1870, the same year as Bret Harte's "Luck of Roaring Camp" volume. In Personals, a hackneyed plot unfolds in which a young lady in a Fifth Avenue New York finishing school succumbs to the flatteries of a Southern gambler who sets her up in a New Orleans apartment and then deserts her for another woman, unaware that his first mistress had drowned herself in the Mississippi.³

²Osgood Bradbury (New York: Samuel French, 1853), p. 27.

³(New York: Joseph Hertford, 1870).

This streamlined approach to the theme of seduction in Personals is not standard, however, in the novels. The customary method is to overload the plot with seduction subplots and criss-crossing sub-subplots. At times so many of these abbreviated sketches-within-sketches appear in the novels that the reader has difficulty holding to the main narrative line. The absurd lengths to which writers go to include seduction in their novels in the 'forties and 'fifties is shown in Edward Z. C. Judson's The B'Hoys of New York, a species of dime novels patterned after the story papers circulated in the 'thirties.

The B'Hoys features Chris Barton, a gambler who heads a gang of blackmailers, thieves, and counterfeiters with headquarters in a New York dive. On a sylvan spot of ground on the banks of the Hudson, Barton persuades a bereaved young lady to forget her dead father and come with him to New York City and marry him. Once there, he sets her up in a love nest, robs her of a fortune, and then deserts her.

Two other sentimental ingredients interwoven in this crazy-quilt plot should be emphasized. The first of these is the author's use of the confession technique

which goes back to Richard Head's The English Rogue and Dorval, the Speculator. Like Dorval, Chris Barton in B'Hoys confesses to his butler that he was born a bastard, abandoned on a rich man's doorstep, taken in, and then bundled off to live with a poor washerwoman until he was fourteen years of age. After this, he was taken to his patron's house to be displayed as an object of the gentleman's charity.

As the only boy among four spoiled girls, he was sent to a private academy where a boy competing for the prize as the outstanding student in the graduating class called him "charity boy." This insult was repaid with a solid threshing which resulted in a law suit which Barton lost. Imprisoned and released, he fell in love with and was about to marry a young heiress when his old nemesis turned up again to disclose to the lady's father that Barton had a prison record. Now branded an outcast, like the villain Tiger Dick in Philip Warne's dime novel Three of a Kind, Barton vows revenge on society and turns gambler.⁴

⁴E. Z. C. Judson (Ned Buntline), 2 vols. (New York: W. F. Burgess, 1850).

In another of his stories Judson in The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans focuses attention on an unusual twist in the conventional seduction plot. Here the seduced wife of a gambler wreaks revenge on her husband for killing her seducer by hiring an assassin in Havana to stretch her neglectful husband on a wheel. Earlier this same seducer paid a guardian to drug a young girl preparatory to his ravishing her in a scene echoing that in Richardson's Clarissa.⁵

Satisfactory as is this depiction of a gambler-seducer in Judson's Mysteries and Miseries, he plays his most villainous role in Osgood Bradbury's Emily, The Beautiful Seamstress and the recently discussed Judson's B'Hoys. In The Beautiful Seamstress a gambler disguised as a Methodist minister persuades a young lady at her mother's deathbed to be the "adopted daughter" of a lecherous old man.⁶ In B'Hoys, the heartless libertine Chris Barton takes an assignment from a Jesuit priest to hire a young man to seduce a girl to keep her from bearing a legitimate child to be the rightful heir of a

⁵(New York: Akarman & Ormsby Co., 1851).

⁶(Boston: George H. Williams, 1853).

fortune the church hopes to inherit in terms of a will made out by the girl's uncle.

In their most expansive moods, gambler-story writers using the seduction theme, as well as other themes, deplore the squandered talents of gamblers. They think the nimble-fingered gentry have greater potential than persecuting maidens or flipping pasteboards. De Valcour, for example, in the anonymous "The Gamester" (Ladies Garland, 1824) has a lofty nature, "strong passions, warm imagination, and ever-wakeful energies" (p. 129). Aubrey Fitzhenry in "The Gambler's Fate" deserved to be called a precocious genius and Colonel Carpenter in Alice Barber, a graceful gentleman of forty-five, would do better to stick to his trout fishing than pursuing innocent girls. For a while this worthy held the position of stage director and manager of theatres in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, but soon, he is reduced to wearing an elegant ring and gold chain about his neck as a heartless gambler and a seducer of women.

Closely related to the theme of seduction in the big city novels is that of the neglected wife. For models these stories had the English domestic tragedies of the

eighteenth century, Fielding's sentimental Amelia, and the tales in lady-book magazines. Along with novels featuring seduction, intemperance, and confidence men, these narratives of abused wives form the largest single cluster in the gambler genre in the nineteenth century.

Three of the best stories in this category are all by T. S. Arthur, a militant temperance reformer of the 'forties and 'fifties--The Ruined Gamester (1842), "The Hasty Marriage" (1853), and The Martyr Wife (1849). In The Martyr Wife, a gambler reforms upon viewing the wreck he made of his life and that of his now dead wife.⁷ "The Hasty Marriage," a short story, features a kindhearted wife who accepts her gambler-husband back time and again under the promise of reformation, but he repays her by driving her to an early grave and sending her ragged children to be wards of relatives.⁸ The Ruined Gamester has a two-part structure as in the lady-book gambler tales of domestic woe, a fact which the subtitle indicates--

⁷(Philadelphia: Henry F. Anners, 1849), pp. 3-70.

⁸Leaves from the Book of Human Life (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley Co., 1853), pp. 263-286.

Or, two Eras in my Life, an Autobiographical Romance.

After a prefatory remark that he hopes his brief sketches serve as "beacon-lights to my fellow-men, warning them from a dangerous coast," Mr. Arthur relates incidents in his hero's innocent childhood that show the hero, George Fuller, to be a gentleman of fine sensibilities with a fondness for games of chance, especially marbles. In Part Two, Fuller's successful business and married life is treated.

One New Year's day, Fuller drops into a local tavern for a holiday drink where, half-tipsy, he reveals his financial state to his old marble-playing friend who is now a confidence man. This, of course, starts George's undoing. As George gambles, he withholds his secret from his distraught wife who is only made privy to his actions when it is almost too late to do anything about them. She tries, nevertheless, to reclaim him and frequently cries her eyes out hoping he will refrain from gambling. In time, he discloses to her his losses in the amount of \$10,000 in a three-day period, but he continues to gamble. Home early one night from the gambling house, he finds his wife in a posture resembling death and is shocked back to his senses. Soon thereafter he discovers that

his friend is a stool pigeon and by an unusual turn of events recovers part of his losses, providing a happy ending to a genre unaccustomed to happy endings.⁹

Two overlapping sub-groups of this abused-wife theme in big city novels can be conveniently treated at this time--fortune hunters and drunkards, types of gamblers who also appear in several other categories.

Fortune hunters are some of the most charming villains in the gambler genre. High kickers in their heyday, these young bucks are always short of cash and being dunned for their debts of honor. Fearing the outcast brand, they prowl on rich widows and heiresses. This gentleman type, pointed out in several lady-book short stories, appeared in the early "Matrimonial Infidelity Detected" in The American Bee (1797). Often these wolves in sheep's clothing have two or more wives as in Dorval and perhaps several mistresses. Naturally, the more women added to his list, the more trouble a gambler invites for himself, for women pose a threat of exposure. The favorite approach of this class of gambler-libertine is the easiest and

⁹(Philadelphia: Henry F. Anners, 1842).

time-honored one of merely flattering a wealthy lady into marriage, of living with her a short while to gain her confidence, of having her sign over her securities or real property to him, and then finally of absconding. Although these tricksters make a successful getaway in the stories, fate catches up with them in the end and they get their just reward--a tortured conscience and death in a great many agonizing ways.

The most satisfying in this cluster of novels featuring fortune hunters is A. L.'s The Tenant-House; or, Embers from Poverty's Hearthstone (1857) and T. S. Arthur's The Martyr Wife (1849). In The Tenant-House, an artful scamp deserts his wife for a rich Jewess; and, when his plans go awry, he hires a gunman to kill the heiress's uncle but is double-crossed and shot by the assassin he hired.¹⁰ The Martyr Wife reveals a bigamist's cruel treatment of his former wife who commits suicide after telling the gambler's second wife the truth about the vile fortune hunter. Seized by despair, the new wife dies of a broken heart as the gambler begs God for help lest he be lost forever.

¹⁰(New York: Robert M. Dewitt, 1857).

Even more detestable than the fortune hunter on the abused-wife theme is the drunkard. Although the drunkard-gambler novel reached a high point in the 'forties and 'fifties, an organized movement to control the consumption of hard liquor in the United States began much earlier. New York State had a Temperance Society in 1808 and Massachusetts one in 1813. In 1826, three years before James Kirke Paulding's "The Drunkard" in Tales of the Good Woman,¹¹ the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance was founded in Boston; by 1833 more than a million members belonged to over 6,000 local societies in several states. In the same year, according to George Arthur Dunlap, New York's Temperance Society included 1158 auxiliary societies with 161,721 members. But no state law stopped the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors until Maine did so in 1851.¹²

Like gambling, temperance is a lady's subject, but not invariably so. Some novels feature bachelor-drunks in a gambler's progress sort of situation from the

¹¹(New York: G & C. Carvill, 1829), pp. 141-188.

¹²The City in the American Novel, 1789-1900 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934), p. 50.

gaming house to the grave, but most of them combine husbands and wives for additional sentiment. As husbands abandon and neglect them for gambling houses and taverns, their wives suffer in silence, dissolve in tears, and surrender their will to live. Often the distinction therefore between a debauched gambler and drunkard becomes blurred. The wife in Emily Mansfield (1845) tells her husband that drinking is a "dreadful habit" and that "Gambling itself is hardly worse."¹³ Mason Long, an authority on gambling and reformed gamblers, says,

Gambling and drinking go together . . . and lead to one another; that the gambler is almost invariably a drinker, and the drinker very frequently a gambler. A man who is addicted to drinking is almost certain to get to playing, and he who gambles will, sooner or later, become a drunkard.¹⁴

And, according to Charles Sutton, "Gambling leads to intemperance. The intoxicating cup is the natural refuge of the gamesters."¹⁵

¹³[Osgood Bradbury], Emily Mansfield in Miscellany, ed. Josiah A. Fraetas, (n.p., 1845), II, 31.

¹⁴Life (Chicago: Donnelley & Loyd, 1878), p. 159.

¹⁵The New York Tombs, eds. James B. Mix and Samuel A. MacKeever (San Francisco: A. Roman & Co., 1874), p. 59.

Although husbands as occasional gamblers drink, professional gamblers avoid liquor, at least when on duty. A proprietor who mixes drink and cards soon is destined for bankruptcy. The successful among the gambler-breed, the bloods or thoroughbreds (of which there were none in the stories), practice abstinence in their official capacity as heads of houses. The idea is that a clear-headed player has an advantage over a drunken one in which the fumes of liquor spread a destructive effect. Once his victim enters his "hells," the proprietor or capper turns him over to the dealer, a bland, cool and cunning worker who makes quick work of fleecing the victim or of setting him up for bigger pots in the future. A roper for a gambler in a swanky New York club speaks for a whole race of tricksters in the novels: "If I can make him drink," he says, "I can make him play. If he plays I win his money!"¹⁶ The elegant suppers, expensive wines, Havana cigars, and congenial talk all lead to one grand finale--a card game. The purpose of the whole operation is to suck the customer

¹⁶Joseph H. Ingraham, Edward Austin (Boston: Gleason's Publishing Hall, 1845), p. 25.

in and then swindle him of his money, one way or another, through liquor, drugs, card tricks, or perhaps a combination of all of these devices and more.

Among a spate of gambler-drunkard novels, a highly selective list includes J. H. Ingraham's Edward Austin (1845), Osgood Bradbury's Emily Mansfield in Miscellany (1845), a sixty-four page novelette, the same author's Jane Clark (1855), and Charles Burdett's The Gambler; or, the Policeman's Story (1848). These stories do not merit detailed consideration here inasmuch as other novels have already revealed their gloomy contents, but perhaps it is worth mentioning that Charles Burdett's The Gambler and Bradbury's Jane Clark can be singled out among the group as the best counterparts to the standard sentimental short story in the lady-book magazines on the theme of the abused wife.

A blending of the plot elements of these two novels shows the old-fashioned story of the gambler in a tear-jerking sequence of scenes. Initially, he takes up with evil companions, loses his business or job in gambling, incurs debts, borrows, begs, and steals to keep up his high style of living, and finally ends up a hideous and cruel brute. The patient wife, aware of the situation,

pleads with him but to no avail. Either out of the vain hope of reforming him or out of physical fear of him, she mortgages her property, sells her jewels (and maybe even her Bible), works as a seamstress, and endures cold, hunger, sickness, sorrow, humility and dies, if necessary, for his sake. Her neglected children meanwhile beg in rags; the boys run wild and steal, and the girls follow prostitution, both bidding fair to end up in lunatic asylums as do their parents.

People gamble for a variety of reasons--avarice, excitement, enchantment--and city novelists deplore the waste of time, energy, and power at gaming tables. Of course, the blame comes to rest on the gambler's loss of faith in God, on parents who had neglected or improperly trained their charges in childhood, evil companions, the surrender of the will to the pleasures of the senses, a sordid environment, and above all, a misguided education. Perhaps what city novelists wanted was what most early American fictionists wanted--"practical" schools. Although these early writers had faith in the perfectibility of man, their optimism fell short of revolutionary beliefs imported from France or from what we may imagine to be the tutorial plan of England. The gambler-story writers never

detailed their utopian school system but most, while paying deference to the classics, viewed these studies as useless in the New Republic. Perhaps classical works had a purpose in a static society but America after the Revolution and during its period of economic expansion really needed trade and business schools. Enos Hitchcock expresses this materialistic ethos in The Memoirs of the Bloomsgrave Family: "industry must constitute its wealth, and business must form its pleasures."¹⁷

Hence, a stock practice in gambler stories is to feature successful clerks, merchants, tradesmen, mechanics, and architects. As expected, these frugal, hard-working, Bible-reading sons of Benjamin Franklin in the city novels provide suitable contrast figures to the rich members of the gentleman class whose wealth and leisure lead them to gambling and other evil doings. If both middle- and upper-class students appear in the same stories, we shall concentrate on the operations of one of the pair, either the gentleman or the poor but ambitious boy.

The practical people featured in this success-or-failure theme, centering on the hard worker from the

¹⁷Letter LXXXVI (Boston: Thomas & Andrews Co., 1790), II, 263.

middle class, fall into two broad groups: first, school boys who take up mechanics and architecture, and second, clerks who work as apprentices in shops and merchant houses. The best of the schoolboy tales are J. H. Ingraham's Harry Harefoot; or, the Three Temptations (1845) and Frederick Jackson's Riches and Honor. A New England Story. Founded on Fact (1847).

In Ingraham's novel, while the titular anti-hero falls victim to liquor, gambling, and "the grosser pleasures of sense," his friend, Pierce Wentworth, apprentices himself to a Boston housewright or carpenter-architect and attends night school to learn French, mathematics, and Greek. In his enthusiasm for his trade, Pierce says to a chagrined Harry: "Builders have risen to great men, and I can name, besides many Europeans, our own countrymen, Strickland, Haveland, Davis, and others, who are men of the highest respectability, and their names do honor to the genius of their country."¹⁸ At these words, the two friends part enemies. In defense of Wentworth's choice of a trade school and apprentice training, the author states that the position of apprentices in the

¹⁸(Boston: H. L. Williams, 1845), p. 27.

social system is infinitely superior in every way to that of clerks, although each condition has its peculiar temptations. "Nevertheless, mechanics live an even life," he concludes, for "the mechanic's actions or style are temperate and sensible as he neither aspires to great houses, nor apes the costly glitter of fashion." He does not yearn for things beyond his means and learns to be prudent and thrifty. Furthermore, "his amusements may be boisterous and unfashionable perhaps, but they are rarely ruinous to his character; cards and wine, billiards and driving, rioting and harlotry, are very seldom his pursuits" (pp. 47-48). With this philosophy of industry, Pierce rises in society, marries well, and is commissioned to build a royal residence in Europe. Hoping the moral of his story will not fail its mark, the author concludes it with the words, "We write this story for the improvement--if we may aim so high--of the youth of New England, who enter life either over the mechanic's bench or the counter" and to him "who seeks to enter life through the untried paths of the city" (pp. 60-61).

Frederick Jackson in his preface to Riches and Honor. A New England Story. Founded in Fact would make the moral of his story of practical use:

The points aimed at, have been, to show in their true colors, the baneful effects of idleness, and the consequent waste of time and property; the danger of trusting to mere wealth as a security for the future; the necessity of virtue and industry as the foundation of all permanent prosperity; and the certainty of happiness and success which the possession of these always affords.

To prove this belief, the author then contrasts the careers of two small town friends, one of whom goes away to college in Boston while the other, William Wheelwright, attends the local school while working in his father's shop learning a trade. There Williams's father, "a gentleman in the more acceptable sense," gives his son moral lessons based on Franklin's principles, to wit, "education proceeds from the use we make of time, and not from lessons first learned and then forgotten."¹⁹ As his friend receives the better part of his education at the gaming tables in Boston, William develops the skills of an honorable mechanic, an occupation which demands "real talent, learning, taste, and genius" (p. 84).

The second subgroup of big city novels that stresses a useful education includes clerks in mercantile houses, and a further refinement here embraces honest and

¹⁹(New York: Josiah Adams, 1847), p. 27.

dishonest clerks. Among the clerk class more are dishonest than honest, but the gambler genre is slanted toward proving the evils of the city and this tendency to concentrate on crooked clerks is to be anticipated. Fools of fortune, these clerks support their gay routine by forgery, robbery, pimping, murder, or even slave-trading. Two clear-cut examples of this sentimental strain in which clerks fall into evil ways in the big city are Timothy S. Arthur's "The Hasty Marriage" in Leaves from the Book of Life, a novelette, and the previously discussed J. H. Ingraham's Harry Harefoot.

"The Hasty Marriage" concerns the downward plunge to grief of Mr. Fells, the son of a respectable merchant who dies, leaving his son a modest fortune but a poor moral character. With this slender means, Fells gets a job as clerk in a Charleston hardware. By insinuating himself into the confidence of his employer, he becomes a limited partner and marries the boss's daughter. After a few years, he puts into operation his long thought-out plan to take over the business. The first step is to work as head salesman of the firm and thereby entertain young Western and Southern merchants. This activity entails escorting them to the theater and other places of

amusement and debauchery to which their loose morals lead them. Unfortunately for Fells, these customers cheat him and now, short in his accounts, he manipulates the ledgers, a mistake which, along with his irregular attendance at the store, makes his father-in-law suspicious that Fells is engaging in improper business behavior. In fact, Fells has gambling debts to the extent of \$10,000. His ruinous career terminates when he forges notes that bring bankruptcy to the house. After a period with a noted gambler, Fells becomes ill and returns home to be forgiven. With the past over, Mrs. Fells sells her property and lets her husband invest the money in a grocery which in a short time deteriorates into a grog shop with Mrs. Fells as bartender; Fells, now a drunkard, consummates his ambitions in the poor house.

In Harry Harefoot, the titular villain graduates from a private academy in Augusta and then joins a firm as a clerk in that city. Here he meets two other clerks and together they rob a bank during which one of them, Gambler-Moseley, a profligate and seducer, kills the night watchman. Now cast into the sloughs of despair over his part in the robbery and his wasted life, Harefoot develops a guilty conscience and dies of a raging fever. When his

body is discovered, it is side by side with that of his faithful mistress who, distressed by her lover's death, took poison in order to join him.

The second class of schoolboys depicted in the novels major in classical studies. Rich, proud, and insolent, they attend the big Eastern colleges of Columbia, Harvard, and Pennsylvania and many, as in H. M. Huet's Silver and Pewter, take a grand European trip to round out their education as "masters of all arts of fashionable dissipation."²⁰ Blame for their debauches in sin does not lie with the classics per se--the authors pay deference to them in an oblique sort of way--but with the system, administrators, and parents. These private schools, the authors claim, teach the evils of a gentleman class with all its sensual habits. Authorities, lax in their duties, even admit card and dice playing on campus. The parents contribute to this process of student corruption by supplying over generous allowances which their spoiled sons play away, assured that their "debts of honor" accrued at the altars of the Goddess Chance will be paid off when their parents die. Educated fools, most

²⁰(New York: H. Long & Bro., 1852).

of these boys would be better off having gone to school to learn a trade, as the irate author of Jane Clark notes. Here Mr. Hamblin, at wit's end listening to his nagging wife complain about his lack of ability to earn his livelihood in a commercial world, says, "Business! My father never taught me anything like business. He left me money and nothing else, and now that is all gone. Would to God he had taught me some trade instead of leaving me money, and then I should be a better man" (p. 16).

Three of the more illustrative of the novels in which students of the classics appear are the anonymous The Life and Adventures of Charles Anderson Chester (1850), H. M. Huet's Silver and Pewter (1852), and Frederick Jackson's Riches and Honor (1847). In Life, Charles Anderson Chester, the son of a wealthy merchant and banker, at eighteen years of age is sent from the mansion of his stepfather to the University of Pennsylvania. But rather than attend classes regularly there, he spends his time at the Hunting Park Race Course, the theater, the brothel, and a Chestnut Street gambling house. His brief and brilliant career at the school includes flogging his tutor, attempting to set fire to several college buildings, and nearly succeeding in abducting the only

daughter of the president of the institution. When expelled from school, he gets disowned by his stepfather and goes off with a "gallant gentleman, with a pale mouse-coloured moustache and aristocratic air." As the title of the story indicates, Chester crowns his career as leader of a band of Philadelphia criminals and dies trying to destroy the California House in San Francisco.²¹

Another son of the "mushroom aristocracy," Frederick Carter in H. M. Huet's Silver and Pewter, attends Columbia University and like Charles Anderson Chester majors in classical studies. His mother, hoping to see her son a successful lawyer and married to a wealthy girl, rounds out his education with a tour of Europe from which he returns home "a slave of sensuality." Soon in league with rich New Yorkers and a friend of a group of young bloods, he hangs around a brown stone-front gambling club called Washington Hall where he receives finishing lessons in the fine art of how to become a male gourmand and a perfect roué. Thieves, pick pockets, burglars, murderers, and an expensive mistress comprise the circle of Carter's

²¹(Philadelphia: Yates & Smith, 1850).

friends. He finally tries abducting a lady which involves him in a duel under the Oaks outside Hoboken, New Jersey.

Now a fugitive from justice, and with hopes of escaping slander, Carter accompanies his parents to London where he continues the wild life he interrupted in New York. At London's famous Crockford's gambling house, he meets his father's former clerk who was discharged for some irregular practice while a regular member of the New York firm. During an argument with this clerk, Carter receives a blow from a loaded cane and, close to death, lies in a French hospital for six years. Well again and his former bad conduct overlooked in New York, he returns to that city to become a hopeless alcoholic. His family is about to send him to a lunatic asylum, when Carter dies from a fall one night on a slippery street in a row with a once virtuous girl he knew in better times, that is, before she was reduced to soliciting customers in the Park Theater.

The third of the trio of college boys with a classical education appearing in city novels is Elbridge Bond, the one-time hero of Frederick Jackson's Riches and Honor (1847). In what constitutes a forthright denunciation of Harvard's liberal arts program, Jackson states

that after graduation from Harvard, Elbridge becomes a gentleman, meaning he attends a gaming house as a regular patron and leads the life of a man-about-town. He "laid aside his studies," says the author, "when he received his diploma and became more interested in the pedigree of horses and hounds than in the classics." Soon the gambling gentry hear of this liberal and foolish youth and, like fowl birds of prey, they wait "to pick his bones, and then leave them to bleach in the sun and storms that alternately blow." In time, the inevitable happens. Elbridge goes to Boston with several haut ton who rent a magnificent house which they convert into a gambling den. By the end of four years, Elbridge, unable to pay his rent, commits robbery and ends up in jail. Bailed out by a friend, he begs on the streets and contemplates drowning when a tender-hearted lady takes him in and nurses him back to health, and then teaches him the true path to happiness through Bible reading. Now a sincere penitent, Elbridge studies law and builds up a successful law practice as a true gentleman.

The roper belongs to a ubiquitous clan. He can be found anywhere a sucker exists, but he thrives best in places of heavy traffic--on city street corners, in

hotel lobbies, bowling alleys, pool halls, taverns, railroad and bus stations, county fairs, farmers' markets, and so forth. He will perform any service for pay and as a parasite draws other parasites within his circle of operations. His friends come from all walks of life, from the most respectable merchants to pawnbrokers, dope peddlers, forgers, counterfeitters, thieves, murderers, and countless other criminals.

As will be made clear in the stories to be plotted out, the roper's chief assets include a fast tongue, great knowledge of human nature, self-confidence, physical dexterity, coolness, and some animal courage. Although usually enlisted from the gutter, he may come from the upper-classes, too; in fact, it is from the wealthy ranks that the most successful gambler-proprietors hire their cappers. A few amateurs actually volunteer as cappers to get some practical experience inasmuch as no apprenticeship system or trade schools exist to teach a gambler the tricks of the trade. He must learn the hard way--from another gambler. Nevertheless, whatever his motive, the capper is portrayed in the novels as a member of a scurvy lot of hustlers who gladly slit a throat, pimp for a seducer, or pluck a pigeon for a

price. From a prolific breed, he darts in and out of the stories, but on occasion remains stationary long enough to be the chief figure in them.

The novels feature two broad types of ropers: those who work for a proprietor and those who work alone as a solitary confidence man or with one or more confederates. The first of these types is associated with numerous classes of gambling houses, from the most plush club on Broadway to the vilest den on the Point. Nonetheless, in general, they seem to have connections with three kinds of establishments more than with others: first rate ones on Broadway and cross streets leading into it which are near the fashionable uptown hotels; second class houses also lying near Broadway; and third class houses or "clubs" found in the upper floors of downtown business buildings.

Most important of the clientele in these houses are the proprietors who own and often manage the operations in the house, including dealers and ropers. These proprietors belong to an elite group of the world's greatest confidence men. Cool, charming, methodical, and of steel nerves, they run the most outrageous skin-games. Although reformed gamblers speak of a high class

of gamblers as thoroughbreds or "bloods," meaning honest aristocrats of the profession, the term honest gambler in the novels is a contradiction in terms. Once the amateur gambler enters into the chambers of a gambler, he is like a fly in a spider's web. William F. Howe says, "When the unwary stranger is in a fit condition for the sacrifice, he is led to the gaming-table with as much indifference and sang-froid as butchers drive sheep to the shambles."²²

Two classes of people frequent the "hells"--occasional and professional gamblers. Those in the first group are attracted there by curiosity or "roped" there by intermediaries. The second group is composed of older gamesters hoping to retrieve losses sustained in their youth. They do not concern us here; it is only the first group, the young gamblers, that have our attention.

The ropers of these young, curious amateur gamblers who seek excitement and escape from boring routines come in two varieties: upper and lower, in terms of their education, manners, dress, and associates. These upper-class ropers may again be divided into two

²²In Danger; or, Life in New York (New York: Butler Bros., Inc., 1888), p. 213.

groups--those who work as agents for mercantile houses and those who work for first- or second-class gambling houses. Often the same roper will work for a businessman and for a proprietor at the same time, perhaps unknown to the merchant. What the roper does with his spare time is of no concern to the proprietor. There seem to be no fixed hours to the roper's job, and he works on a commission basis, getting a percentage of the winnings of the customer he brings to the house.

Whether working full or part-time as an agent for the business house, the roper dresses in a flashy style, spends money freely, and laughs gayly as he circulates about the lobby of good hotels. Once having spotted a greenhorn-clerk, businessman, or pleasure seeker, he tries his "wheedling tricks," as Richard Head calls them in Proteus Redivivus. As a representative of a business firm, he becomes a combination master of ceremonies and guide of the city. His job is to make actual or potential customers feel at home and thereby disposed in favor of the merchant's house for whom he works rather than that of one of the merchant's competitors.

In a gambler story the first roper mentioned usually turns out to be its chief villain. The excuse this

roper uses to corrupt the hero, flimsy as it may be-- jealousy, revenge, greed--seems incredible in retrospect but plausible in context. One never worries about such technical stuff in a gambler story. The conflict never assumes truly tragic proportions. All gambler stories, the reader undoubtedly has concluded by now, are melodrama of the most flagrant order. The "hero" or anti-hero, protagonist, or whatever, offers no convincing struggle to extricate himself from the passion of gambling that overpowers him.

Regardless of the roper's total part in the story, only his "approach" concerns us here. The foremost point to bear in mind is that the roper must secure the "green 'un's" confidence before he can fleece him. The standard approach is given in James Buel's Metropolitan Life Unveiled, an exposé-type book. On almost every busy street corner in New York, sharpsters rush back and forth as though on some important business errand. All the time they are searching among the crowd for a yokel from the provinces whom they feel has a well-filled purse. Once he is found, the game starts. A well-dressed but gawkish fellow bumps into a dapper young rascal of very gentle and sociable appearance and a dialog takes place. It

goes something like this: "Hello, Smith," the dude exclaims, "how are you, and how are all the folks out at Chicago?" The small-town boy is taken by surprise and explains that his name is not Smith but simply Jim Brown and that he hails from Oshkosh and not from Chicago.

"Well," the roper continues,

"I was never so surprised in all my life. Why, you are the very image of John Smith, of Chicago, who is one of the richest men of that place. Well, I'll declare, I've often heard it said that there are no two persons alike, but I don't believe in the saying. I used to know some people of Oshkosh, but it's been a long time since I was there. By the way, who runs the biggest bank in Oshkosh now? Tom Parker, did you say? Why, that's so, I remember now; he's got a nephew up here, in Chatham Square, and he is at the head of a business, too; some of the finest paintings in New York are in his establishment. You ought to go up and see him, for I am sure he would be glad to learn directly from you all about his uncle" (pp. 129-130).

Before the end of his fast monolog, the debonair young man has the name of many rich people of Oshkosh, and the bunko-steerer parts with Brown giving him a cordial handshake and an invitation to call at the office before leaving town. For a few blocks, Brown meditates upon this singular meeting until he runs into another fellow who fairly rushes into his arms, exclaiming:

"Why, Mr. Brown, God bless you, I am so glad to see you; when did you leave Oshkosh? How are all the boys: How is Tom Parker, the rich old banker? And how is--every other person mentioned by Brown during his conversation with the first confidence man" (pp. 130-131).

Brown, understandably so, becomes bewildered by it all but assured that his suspicions are unfounded, he joins his new acquaintance to visit Tom Parker's nephew. That these two con-artists are in collusion need not be mentioned. When the first one obtains the facts about Oshkosh and Tom Parker, he passes around the block to communicate the information to his confederate. Hooked, Brown follows Tom Parker's friend and nephew to a policy shop, bunko-den, mock auction store, or some lottery office where he is robbed and perhaps even beat up.

The same pattern used by the upper-class ropers on the streets and in the taverns is used in the hotels. Two stories suffice to reveal the strategy of this cunning hotel-roper. The stock rendition is given in William D. Ritner's The Rivals Revenge! (c. 1854). Here a stranger who likes all "jolly good-natured fellers" at his hotel asks them to take him for a tour of the city--to the theater, the circus, or other places where there is action. First the boys take their "greenie" to buy a new

suit of clothes and then make the rounds of town which is capped off by a day's-end visit to a gambling hall where the blacklegs join their accomplices to fleece their happy traveler.²³

Benauly's Matthew Caraby (1859) resembles The Rival's Revenge! in exposing the deceptive practices of the roper, many of whom had fortunes pass through their hands during their nefarious careers. George Devol, the river sharp, boasted that he could have retired a millionaire save his addiction to faro. As a confidence man par excellence, he proved Barnum's dictum that a sucker is born every minute. One of his progeny, a Mr. Arent in Matthew Caraby, saunters up to the register in a New York hotel about half an hour before dinner time. He is stout, well-built, "glossily dressed," and wears a black beard. Hired to entertain customers for a respectable dry-goods firm, he specializes in people with an "immodest curiosity and appetite." At the store he officiates as a salesman, counting-room clerk, or partner in the firm. Outside the store, he works as a congenial companion, escorting out-of-towners to dinner, the theater, or other places. In

²³(Philadelphia: M. L. Barclay, c. 1854).

the evenings, on his own, he still has access to the fine places he visited during the day and finds welcome in the best restaurants and revel halls but can also be found loitering in the cheapest stews and vice dens in Five Points or Orange Street, the last retreats of crime.

We have already had some acquaintance with his sort in Old London, playing Barnard's Law, but his pitch should not be overlooked at this time. When Greenhorn-Caraby, a Hartford clerk on a business trip for his boss, meets Arent at the main desk of a hotel lobby, Arent listens as Caraby asks the clerk if there is a line of stages that goes up to Hudson Street. When the clerk gives him directions, Arent, bowing and smiling at Caraby, asks the clerk if Caraby is a stranger to the city, to which the clerk replies that he believes so. Caraby, impressed by the rich dress, shaggy beard, clipped English voice, and grand manner of the elegant gentleman next him, bows as if happy to have the opportunity to converse with so respectful a citizen of New York. Because paraphrasing misses the cleverness of the dialog, let us give it verbatim:

"In that case," said the stranger [Arent],
turning slightly towards Matthew, speaking

with another bow and smile while directly addressing the clerk:

"I hope he will pardon the interest which I express when I suggest that he runs some risk in going out in search of a boarding place in a strange street, and without guidance or direction. It would be well for him to take some acquaintance with him in exploring for such a purpose."

"Undoubtedly, sir," replied Matthew, "but to me the people are all strangers in the streets. What would you do, sire, in that case?"

"I am making very free upon short acquaintance," said the stranger, addressing himself now at least nine-tenths to Matthew, "but if I were you I would stay here until after dinner, and then if you will accept my company for a walk up Broadway and across, I will put you in the way of seeing Hudson Street to advantage, and post you up a little as the New York boarding houses, on the way. You can't be too careful in the matter of choosing a home. Many a young man who came to New York with good prospects owes his failure and ruin to the counsels of bad companions at his boarding place; and there are a great many tricks and traps for strangers in the boarding house business."

"Of all things what I should like the best," cried Matthew, "is to be as free as yourself on short acquaintance. I like your ideas. I would like to take a walk with you up Broadway very much."

"I can show you more in two hours than you could learn by yourself in a month," said the stranger, with the air of an expert.²⁴

The second class of ropers, the lower-class, are more like scavengers than the agent-ropers. A member of

²⁴(New York: Mason Bros., 1859).

this parasite class, as diagnosed by C. G. Foster in New York by Gaslight (1850), roams the streets picking up what he can in the same manner as did his English antecedents hundreds of years before in the vicinity of St. Paul's Churchyard. Off his beat, this modern wheedler carouses in the oyster saloons in the cellars of the Old Bowery district of New York. Here with other street denizens—sailors, drunks, streetwalkers, and vagabonds of all stripe—he drinks, cavorts, and connives. When a "fresh 'un'" enters the bar, he quickly gives his accomplices a wink, and they start a mock quarrel which he asks the greenie to referee. Soon the cards come forth, and these conspirators throw down large bets, often consisting of counterfeit or worthless bills. If the greenhorn fails to fall for this trick, as a last resource the gamblers start a sham fight, pluck the pigeon and dump him bleeding in the street.²⁵

One of the slickest of this low type of roper goes disguised as a rustic. The unknown author of an 1868 article in The Golden Era marks the habit of the type: "A favorite device, and generally a successful one, with

²⁵(New York: Dewitt & Davenport, 1850).

a certain class of ropers-in is to assume the appearance and garb, the wandering look, and the homespun attire of a rustic."²⁶ Canada Bill Jones, the greatest monte player on the Mississippi in the 'fifties, had the reputation as the worst dressed gambler on the river; he looked more like a hayseed than a gambler. Mason Long, who capped for Canada Bill in Utica, New York, during the harness races there in 1876 describes Bill as a disguised hog-drover. He was "a rustic looking creature . . . munching a huge piece of pie . . . a large man dressed in coarse clothes, with a sun-burned countenance, a nose highly illuminated by the joint action of whiskey and heat, and an expression of indescribable greenness and freshness about him" (pp. 117-118). George Devol, the famous author of Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi, a partner of Canada Bill's for many years, saw Bill as

a medium-sized, chicken-headed, tow-haired sort of man with mild blue eyes, and a mouth nearly from ear to ear who walked with a shuffling, half-apologetic sort of gait, and who, when his countenance was in repose, resembled an idiot. For hours he would sit in his chair, twisting his hair in little ringlets.

²⁶"New York Gamblers," Golden Era, XVI (May 16, 1868), n.p.

But make no mistake, said Devol, this "Rankest kind of sucker--the greatest sort of a country Jake" belonged among the great confidence men in the business.²⁷

Despite the publicity attached to the rustic-roper, he appears only once in the big city gambler novels. In James Kirke Paulding's "The Drunkard," a rich Southern schoolboy meets a raw-boned Staten Islander, "a half and half squire," disguised as a country fellow in homespun. The student thinks the yokel is the dupe of the "sages of the Pandemonium," and together they wager on cockfights in an "infernal shrine" in an underground dungeon somewhere in the city (pp. 146-147). Little did our hero realize that the yokel had an evil heart and plotted his destruction.

W. H. Willet's Charles Vincent does not contain a rustic-roper but must be listed here in that the victim is a rustic. This verdant one meets a pair of confidence men posing as hitch hikers on the road outside the city. Before the farmer becomes aware, he has divulged all the secrets the gamblers need to fleece him of his horse and

²⁷As quoted in Asbury, p. 240.

one hundred and fifty dollars in a dice game in a woods on the way to Westchester.²⁸

Basically sentimental, Charles Vincent also contains an element of humor. The story told by the rustic to his lawyer back home reveals the rustic's own cupidity. After failing to catch on to the gambler's treachery until he has lost everything, the hick picks a quarrel with the gambler and is knocked unconscious. Now, if the farmer is paired off with only one of these gamblers and taken as a willing victim to the woods where he out-tricks the tricksters using their cheating methods, the tables are turned and the laugh is on the gambler. This type of situation forms a direct link with a species of humor story called Southern yarns. To discuss these yarns in great detail does not serve our purpose, but since they relate, even indirectly, to the sentimental tales of city villainy, it seems incumbent upon us to say a few words about them, after which we shall return to another kind of big city fiction--the Southern gambler story in a milieu of decadence.

²⁸(New York: Harper & Bros., 1839).

Before we cite a few of these gambler yarns, let us say that these sketches or anecdotes, often fragmentary and brief as letters, belong to a regional type of tale popular in the old Southwest from the 'thirties until the Civil War. Composed by amateurs amused by the boisterous and crude antics of the rascals, rogues, and rascallions in the plantation environs, the narratives appeared as contributions to the New York Spirit of the Times and the New Orleans Times Picayune. The writers come from two classes: gentlemen planters, including lawyers and doctors who had association with the planter-class, and sports-minded journalists. A few have the following pseudonyms: "The Old 'Un'" (Francis A. Durivage of Boston), "The Young 'Un'" (George P. Burnham of Roxbury), and "The Little 'Un'" (Coddington C. Jackson of Louisiana).

The chief motif in the yarns is the trickster-out-tricked. In some, the gambler fleeces his victim successfully, and in others he does not. Who wins or loses is unimportant, however, for the ideal situation is to catch a thief red-handed, to make him disgorge his winnings, to embarrass him before a crowd, or to punish him physically for his blunders. In this amoral atmosphere, honesty has no advantage. Everybody gambled in the

territory, said George W. Featherstonhaugh in Excursion Through the Slave States--judges, senators, and members of the legislature; "In fact, the greater part of these men get elected to the legislature [of Arkansas], not to assist in transacting public business, but to get the wages they are entitled to per diem, and to gratify their passion for gambling."²⁹ He had the misfortune to be lumped with ten notorious swindlers and gamblers on a Mississippi steamer who had a "veritable orgy from morning to late at night." In all his travels in almost every part of the world, he complains, he never saw such a collection of low scoundrels. At Vicksburg, he was astonished to see eight respectable planters join the degraded gamblers in faro and in the course of a short period of time resort to "gambling, drinking, smoking, and blaspheming, just as desperately as the worst of them!"³⁰ The prevailing ethic of the time is summed up in the dictum of Simon Suggs, "It is a good thing to be shifty in a new country." And to prove his ability to live by "shykeen'ry," this hog-drover and J. G. Baldwin's Simon Suggs, Jr. taught a

²⁹II (London: John Murray, 1844), 60.

³⁰Ibid., 247.

race of other frontier rogues how to swindle in real estate and make it rain money by confidence rackets and card playing.

Four of many of these gambler yarns in the tradition of Simon Suggs suffice to give the contents of all of them. The formula is rather rigid, although some variations exist within it. Jonathan H. Green, the reformed gambler to whom we have been introduced to before, recalls an experience he had on a Natchez-to-Princeton steamer when two blacklegs disguised as planters awaken him. As he dresses, Greene overhears their plan to swindle him by means of a set of signals in the form of kicks under the table. In the game, Green exchanges foot-taps with the blacklegs and wins a considerable sum of money. Back in his stateroom, he overhears the pair argue over their mixed-up signals, and he wryly comments that they woke up the wrong passenger.³¹

"Sloped for Texas" has a green one losing heavily in a Rackinsack, Arkansas, card game with blacklegs who

³¹"They woke up the Wrong Passenger," Gambling Unmasked! Or the Personal Experiences of J. H. Green, the Reformed Gambler (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber & Co., 1847), pp. 189-193 in A Treasury of Mississippi River Folklore ed. Benjamin A. Botkin (New York: Crown, 1955), pp. 236-238.

discover that their victim uses counterfeit money. As they deliberate what to do, the culprit seizes the money on the table, leaps through a window, and heads for Texas on his horse. The gamblers laugh to think that he has taken his own counterfeit currency until they realize that their good bills were included in the swag.³² In "The Way 'Ligé' Shaddock 'Scared Up a Jack,'" a riverboat gambler bets a judge he can turn up a jack from a face-down pack on the table. When he quickly dumps over the entire pack, he thinks he has won the bet until the judge, unimpressed by it all, says, "If there's a Jack in that pack, I'll be d----d."³³ In "A Stranger Game than Thimbles" a bumpkin takes a tour of a city with a gambler and ends up on a lonely bluff on the outskirts of town where the gambler spreads a red bandana handkerchief and plays thimble rig on it. When a pile of cash is bet, the patient backwoodsman rolls up the edge of the kerchief and with one motion snatches it up and rolls down the side of the hill. At the bottom he cries up to the

³² Harper's New Monthly Magazine, II (Jan., 1851), 187-188.

³³ "The Way 'Lige' Shaddock 'Scared up a Jack,'" The Big Bear of Arkansas, ed. William T. Porter (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1845), pp. 175-177.

disappointed thimble-rigger that this Kentuckian is no chump, that he has spent his entire life on the Mississippi.³⁴

In these sketches, the point of view is detached and realistic. To find potentially sentimental elements in them, we must contrive a category. This occurs when the humor turns sour or the practical joke loses its punch. Nothing changes in this pattern; the same motif of the biter-bit obtains. Five of a cluster can be pointed out for our purpose. In the first one, "A Strong Hand at Poker," a planter with four kings and an ace meets a riverboat gambler's raise by having his Negro servant place an axe on the card table.³⁵ In "A Note from the Little 'Un,'" the Arkansas Toothpick shoots off the fingers of a cheater who used them to itemize his hand to a partner.³⁶ "A Gambler's Punishment" exposes a gambler accused of cheating and a hastily impaneled jury returns the verdict that the cheater either forfeit his

³⁴New Orleans Times Picayune, III (July 21, 1839), 2.

³⁵P.V.T., Spirit of the Times, XVII (Oct. 30, 1847), 422.

³⁶Coddington C. Jackson, Spirit of the Times, XXII (1852), 43.

winnings or walk an hour in rhythm to the giant piston on the steamer with a rope about his neck.³⁷ "Putting a Man Ashore" loses some of its romantic appeal when a yankee cheese merchant taunts a gambler hip-high in the canebrake when the captain puts him off the boat for cheating.³⁸

Some sympathy can be extended toward gamblers paired with wiseacres or sharp traders. An example of each is "The Game of Thimbles; or, the Best Two in Three" and "The Thimble Game." In the first yarn, Dr. B--, a specialist in thimble rig, complies with the request of a group of passengers in the social room of a steamer to show how the game should be played. A young down-Easterner, seeing the feeble and half-blind old man clumsily shifting the shells and exposing a wad of cloth under the shell, bets the professor. Dr. B-- lets him win two games on which small bets are laid but wins the big pot. As he gathers in the money, he smirks that the boy not only has piercing eyes but also that he is a good

³⁷ "A Gambler's Punishment," from Life and Adventures of Henry Edward Hugunin (Oswego, New York: B. G. Oliphant, 1879) in A Treasury of Mississippi River Folklore, ed. B. A. Botkin (New York: Crown, Inc., 1955), p. 242.

³⁸ New Orleans Times Picayune, V (May 4, 1841), 2.

player, for had he not won two games out of three.³⁹ In "The Thimble Game," a young cotton seller tries to out-smart an Augusta agent but ends up losers in a game of thimbles on the waterfront. Home, he tells his irate father his story and the father rushes to fall prey to the tricks of the same gambler.⁴⁰

A yarn which does not fall into a convenient category but which must be mentioned at this juncture is Rekrap's "A Gambling Incident." Here the reader's sympathies drift toward a greenhorn-clerk who out-thinks a cheating gambler on a Mississippi riverboat. Trapped by this blackleg in a poker game, the clerk has already lost \$1,000 of the bank's money and faces a \$1,000 raise on the table. When the clerk hesitates to cover the bet, the gambler gives him five minutes to raise the cash before he rakes down. With one minute left of the five, the clerk empties a bag of currency on the table and raising the bet \$98,000 gives the astonished gambler five minutes to cover the bet.⁴¹

³⁹Spirit of the Times, XV (Jan. 3, 1846), 528.

⁴⁰T. W. Lane, Polly Peablossom's Wedding and Other Tales, ed. T. A. Burke (Philadelphia: Peterson & Bros., 1851), pp. 28-40.

⁴¹XVII, Spirit of the Times (Aug. 28, 1847), 314.

In summary, the persistence of the sentimental tradition with a big city setting appears in two broad types of gambler stories, those featuring distressed heroines and those featuring greenhorns. The first of these, focusing on the single woman, stresses the element of seduction. Although the standard lady-book situation occurs, the tendency here is to exploit the violent elements of the scene as in Dorval. The effect on the gambler character is to make him work for the privilege of harrassing the heroine; his minor vices cannot be excused on the basis of his membership in the nobleman class. In stories with married ladies, the petrified, abused-wife motif shows conformity with the lady-book formula in that the gambler-husband appropriates the lady's property and then either abandons or subjects her to the traumas of existence in a drunkard's house.

The roper-greenhorn type of gambler story continues the popularity it enjoyed since the days of the Tudor monarchs in England. These modern-day ropers use the same confidence games as their nimble-fingered ancestors but alter their approach to suit contemporary social conditions. Instead of loitering about in one area, as in St. Paul's Churchyard, upper-class ropers

lounge about in the lobbies of hotels near the busy financial districts of the city. The lower-class ropers, on the other hand, gravitate to the waterfront wolf traps and other foul dens of iniquity that cater to human scum. Once the pigeon has lighted, the old tour trick is played as in Barnard's law. The roper escorts his victim around town and finally to a gambling house to be swindled by crooked card dealers or dice coppers.

Gambler yarns portraying life in the Old South and Southwest in the 'thirties, although linking more strongly with the realistic, humor, and adventure traditions, rather than with the sentimental tradition of the gambler genre, nevertheless, contain a muted sympathy for the gambler who is created to be the object of ridicule and embarrassment in a practical joke situation that often turns sour.

CHAPTER IV
SOUTHERN GAMBLERS ASHORE

Many of the original Cavaliers brought with them their own gambling habits. In the colonies, these rich refugees wagered on horses, wrestling, cockfights, and nine-pins, not to mention cards and dice. In time gentlemen left the cruder amusement of card playing to their inferiors and clung to the custom of betting on horse races. In the eighteenth century gambling among the aristocracy continued as a popular foible. Carl Bridenbaugh notes, "We cannot overlook the predilection of many gentlemen for gambling, which became a fashionable vice and a part of the extravagance that characterized the aristocracy."¹ Robert Crichton in the Virginia Gazette states, "I am no enemy to Recreation, but it should not be made a trade."²

¹Myths and Realities. Societies of the Colonial South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), p. 27.

²Ibid., as quoted from Virginia Gazette (Sept. 5, 1751).

When the elder Landon Carter thinks of the reckless gaming of his son John, the third William Byrd of Virginia, and Parson Isaac Giberne, he says, "They play away and play it all away . . . I hate such vulgarity."³ Josiah Quincy is more precise in his censure: "Cards, dice, the bottle and horses engross prodigious portions of time and attention: the gentlemen [planters and merchants] are mostly men of the turf and gamesters."⁴ Margery Distaff complains of men wasting their time, money, and health in pleasure parties: "There is not one night in the week," she explains, "in which they are not engaged in some club or other at the tavern where they injure their fortunes by GAMING in various ways, and impair their health by the intemperate use of spiritous liquors, and keeping late hours, or rather spending whole nights, sometimes in these disgraceful and ruinous practices."⁵

³Ibid., as quoted from Virginia Magazine, XX (1912), 413.

⁴Ibid., 84, as quoted from Journal, 455, ed. Uhlenдорff, Siege of Charleston, 327.

⁵Ibid., 83, as quoted from the Newport Mercury (Oct. 23, 1769), quoting South Carolina Gazette (Oct. 5, 1769).

In the romances of plantation life, gambling is seen as one of a gentleman's "genial little vices," as Francis Pendleton Gaines expresses it in his study of the Southern plantation tradition, "the redeeming vices, as it were, of an order of feudal lords."⁶ Actually, he continues, "in the real plantation society they were personal, even social, iniquities of distressing magnitude."⁷ The gambler novels set in a plantation milieu reflect this realistic rather than romantic attitude toward gambling. As members of a family, the fathers themselves do not gamble nor do they countenance gambling by their sons. Some of this abhorrence of gambling has a moral basis but also an economic one. In fact, the planter can ill-afford to lose money. The slave economy over which he rules seems on the verge of collapse. One imagines something grows on the land--cotton, tobacco, or sugar--but he cannot be sure. Such matters are never spoken of in the stories until a flood, a poor stock investment, or a mortgage problem brings out the tottering financial

⁶The Southern Plantation. A Study of the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), p. 161.

⁷Ibid.

structure of the plantation. If things are going sorely for the planter, one knows where to place the blame--on the planter himself. As a businessman he leaves much to be desired and appears a dynast presiding over a decaying feudal order, his sons parasites, his daughters spoiled, and his wife ineffectual in keeping the family from falling apart.

In general, this portrayal of the planter aristocracy coincides with that in the earlier and more legitimate novels of the mid-eighteenth century. Although feudal Virginia was in its heyday when these novels were written, not one of them treats of the plantation prosperity of this period.⁸ George Tucker's The Valley of Shenandoah, despite the glow of glamour cast about the plantation, has as its theme "the ruin of a once prosperous and respected family."⁹ It begins at the time of death of Colonel Grayson when the family, heavily in debt, leaves its plantation in Virginia in the hands of an overseer and moves to cheaper land in the West. George

⁸William R. Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee. The Old South and American National Character (New York: G. Braziller, 1961), p. 155.

⁹Ibid., p. 153.

Balcombe portrays the manorial lord as a spendthrift and an irresponsible businessman.¹⁰ In Westward-Ho, Colonel Cuthbert Dangerfield lives beyond his means and sells his slaves and plantation before moving to Kentucky. When his wife suggests they try to save money, he cries, "Save! Impossible; I never heard of such a thing in the whole course of my life. How the deuce shall I go about it?"¹¹ White Slave, a gambler novel in our period, gives the same general impression of the breakup of the region. Here a young wastrel returns to the plantation after a European trip to find his father dead and the plantation insolvent, the slaves covered by heavy mortgages, and many children destitute.¹² In several novels, French gamblers take up temporary housing in the South and migrate North or return to Paris, the traditional home of sinful dissipation.

Several reasons are suggested for this ante-bellum portrayal of the South. Plantation novels, written by people unfamiliar with the more glamorous days of Virginia, only described the depressed regions they grew up in

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

¹¹ Quoted in ibid., p. 243.

¹² Richard Hildreth (Boston: Tappan & Whittemore, 1852).

during the 1800 to 1830 period. When a recession occurred there, the families migrated westward to the interior and less desirable parts of the area. Second, invading armies passing through the South during the Revolutionary War destroyed many plantations and razed the lands, helping to bring about a sag in the agricultural economy. Related to this war, many pro-British planters broke up their estates and sold them after the War to help pay off their debts. A third factor responsible for the decay of the plantation region in Virginia is simply the bad business management of the planters who encouraged inefficient slave labor and poor farming practices.¹³ Indolent and unpractical people, these planters let their plantations go to wrack and ruin and then moved out as a new and inferior group of farmers of mixed origins moved in to fill the void. There are a couple of other reasons offered to explain this deterioration of the region, which need only to be mentioned in a few words: the disestablishment of

¹³Jay B. Hubbell, The South in American Literature, 1607-1900 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1954), pp. 89-92; Francis Pendleton Gaines, The Southern Plantation. A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), pp. 149-150.

the Anglican Church and the abolition of laws of primogeniture and entail, which stimulated many Tidewater gentry to go to Kentucky and Alabama to start life all over again.

More important than the planters, however, in the gambler novels in our period of study are their sons. These sons fall roughly into two categories: Hamlet and Hotspur types who have a common bond between them, a passion for gambling, the flesh pots, and self-torment.

Shakespeare's Hamlet appealed to Southern writers, says William Gilmore Simms, because Southern society fostered rank, wealth, and social codes of conduct. Aware that action was necessary but unable to act decisively himself, Hamlet turned his mind inward for escape and courted madness and suicide. He suits a doomed static social order and represents, says Taylor, "a kind of parable for the South" and "an apotheosis of the Southern planter."¹⁴ He corresponds to the pre-Civil War generation of grandsons of the Revolutionary War left to brood over the dying South. Among Hamlet's progeny are Poe's Roderick Usher, Faulkner's Quentin Compson III, and

¹⁴Taylor, p. 292.

characters in William Gilmore Simms' and Harriet Beecher Stowe's novels.

In gambler fiction the planters' sons do not brood over the fortunes of a declining Southern aristocracy. They are too egocentric to be concerned with great causes or regional problems. The spirit of public service that characterized Robert Beverly's and William Byrd's careers in Virginia find no expression in these stories. The members of the collapsing order survive mainly on their pride, and the number of contested wills and feuds over property lines are, on a diminished scale, equivalent to Scott's border warfare. The planters apparently had lost a sense of community identification and all hold the wolf by the ears.

The Hamlet-type readily fits several other gambler types, but two have the greatest sentimental potentiality, which we shall treat now: frustrated lovers and sensualists.

One popular approach in Southern gambler novels is to have a gentleman fall in love with a married Parisian woman. One of the more pitiable young planter's sons to make the fatal mistake of falling prey to one of these femme fatale occurs in Household Mysteries. Here Noble St. John,

a dark, handsome Cavalier with the premature look of Southern youth, "like the early luscious ripening of fruit, too often containing within itself the seeds of decay," becomes mesmerized by the seductive charms of Madame D'Allure, the wife of a notorious chevalier d'industrie. Her part in the plan to bankrupt Noble is to soften the youth up one way or another and either pick his pocket or send him in to Monsieur D'Allure to be fleeced at his faro table. The plot goes awry, however, when Madame D'Allure falls deeply in love with Noble whose soft singing and guitar playing has her enthralled. Meanwhile Monsieur D'Allure makes Noble an habitué of faro and gets him in debt. Before their romance can be consummated, Madame and Noble have to part company. The D'Allures suddenly move to Richmond where a report soon circulates that Madame D'Allure dies, one supposes of a broken heart, and Monsieur returns to Europe to pursue his nefarious profession.¹⁵

The romantic story, The Planter's Daughter (1857), likewise contains a love affair, this time between Victor Harrington "a glass of fashion," home from a Northern

¹⁵Lizzie [Petit] Cutler (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1856).

school and Louise Rankin, his half sister, the spoiled daughter of an aristocratic cotton agent. After a crooked speculator discovers a defect in the Harringtons' plantation deed, the fortunes of the Harrington family decline. Louise's mother, aware of this situation, insists that Victor learn a trade in order to support Louise in case he marries Louise. Besides she has suspicions that Victor gambles at the racecourse. Frankly admitting he has no ability in the business world, Victor accepts help from his father and joins a New Orleans merchant house as a clerk. Now comes Mr. Nevin, a wealthy gentleman of independent fortune, who Louise's mother feels is a better catch than Victor. Jealous, despondent, and desperate at this turn of events, Victor leaves his job and goes on a gambling spree in New Orleans, which brings him further in debt.

In a gloomy frame of mind, Victor avoids sports and spends his time on the plantation smoking cigars and bemoaning his sad fate. As a final means of getting the woman, he takes a job as a music man in New Orleans. He lives in the French Quarter of town in the disguise of an aristocratic young Englishman, and once again frequents the gaming houses, ending up, as always, a heavy loser.

In disguise, he visits Louise to tell her he has developed an infallible system and is certain to win a fortune at the gaming tables. But, alas, as all systems do, it fails and Victor contemplates suicide. But in a room, he overhears a conversation between two gentlemen about the death of Nevin's aunt, a wealthy woman from whom Nevin expects to inherit a fortune. The eccentric old woman requested to be buried in her diamonds. Now clutching at straws, Victor robs the grave and takes the jewels to Louise who, when she learns the origin of the neckpiece, faints. Nevin then comes in and a struggle follows during which the mad Victor gets killed. An ironic twist concludes the story. Nevin, apparently having surfeit of Louise, drops out of sight and Louise, having married a young man as frivolous as herself, lives dependent on his salary as a clerk in a large mercantile establishment.¹⁶

As stated before, both Hamlet- and Hotspur-type gamblers have a streak of cruelty in them and may turn from a Hamlet to a Hotspur in the same story. This technique corresponds to the enigmatic character of Hamlet who shows tinges of undisciplined passion and

¹⁶A. E. Dupuy (New York: W. P. Fetridge & Co., 1857).

cruelty in his treatment of Polonious, his mother, and Ophelia. But the cruel actions of the Hamlet-gamblers best serve an antislavery rather than a personal purpose for the story-character. Even the villainies in the dime novel kind of stories of George Lippard and E. Z. C. Judson do not possess the element of perversion shown in these Southern-laid novels.

Undoubtedly, the pictures are exaggerated, although exceptions probably occurred in the gentleman's code in the ante-bellum South which wanted all slaves treated humanely. But the novels do not follow this suggestion. In The Planter's Victim, for example, slaves receive monstrous treatment at the hands of a dissipated gambler. Unable to make a mistress of one of his Negroresses, the sadistic planter lets her die of consumption and kills her husband. After selling his plantation, he takes his Negro servant with him and throws him in a dungeon in his newly-bought gambling house where the boy starves to death and rats eat his body.¹⁷

Frank Grafton, a "Fire-Eater" of the Hotspur variety, a proud, wild and moody character, stays up all

¹⁷ [Samuel Mosheim Schmucker] (Philadelphia: William White Smith, 1855).

night to nurse his sick negro servant but he ignores the pleas of his wife by selling her handmaid to a New Orleans trader with a reputation for sexually abusing slave girls. The sale completed, his wife dies of a broken heart and Grafton, now with a guilty conscience, becomes a melancholy misanthrope and, unpredictable to the very time of his death, leaves the bulk of his property and slaves to his brother with instructions to make certain the slaves are comfortable and happy.¹⁸

Another element both Hamlet- and Hotspur-gamblers have in common is the pursuit of sensual pleasures. The cruel Richard Dudley in The Planter's Victim has an education, the author states, usual with young gentlemen of the South. It included training in all the fashionable vices which he indulged in without restraint. As customary with plantation gamblers, he visits New Orleans and engages in the "Penetralia" of life and dissipation there. Soon he meets an agreeable, handsome, and pleasant companion named Count de Clermont, a roper who has spent most of his life in Paris, "that great centre of the profligate civilization of the world." No luxury, indulgence,

¹⁸A. L., The Beauty of Woman's Faith. A Tale of Southern Life (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856).

or gratification is unfamiliar to the Count, for he learned the debaucheries of the most secret and select arcana of Parisian life. Together Richard and the Count gamble in the most elegant houses on St. Charles Street where the Southerner loses \$20,000 and a span of horses.

The world-weary Frank Grafton in the previously noted Beauty of a Woman's Faith visits New Orleans and mingles in the midnight orgies there among maddened revellers who are shunned by everyone except themselves. In New Orleans, he says to himself, "no temple spires frown upon the gay votary of pleasure . . . I may pursue pleasure in her hidden and most secret retreats." There in a little cabaret looking out upon the place d' armes near the majestic Mississippi, half a dozen old Creoles play dominoes. Across the street stands a palatial coffee house of gaudy architecture. It is sumptuously furnished with all to tempt a debauchee. Inside the cabaret Grafton tastes champagne and has a choice to make of a princely meal from the breasts of a canvas back duck or from a haunch of venison.

Only one other Southern gambling establishment has the luxurious appointments of Grafton's New Orleans retreat. This is Madame Flamingo's satin and brocade

mansion. Her "house" consists of a massive four-story building with bold Doric windows set off by brown-fluted freestones. The curtains, red and faded, that can be seen during the daytime, have lace overlay between the folds of which mysterious eyes peer out.

The front door, of black walnut, fluted and carved, has curious designs on it, reminiscent of the style in some fashionable Italian church pews. Inside, one luxuriates in barbaric splendor. Here the voluptuary finds cloud-like canopies and gorgeously carved furniture: lounges, recliners, patrician chairs, and Ottomans are richly inlaid with pearl and mosaic, and jetting lights form a great sparkling chandelier.

At night a bal masque takes place with music--marches, quadrilles, waltzes, schottisches--furnished by eight Negro musicians. Along the walls chivalrous and grave planters can be seen giving their sons their first lessons in dissipation while a little off in the distance a gambler converses with a judge, and lawyers, merchants, doctors, and politicians sit about on Ottomans.¹⁹

¹⁹ F. Colburn Adams, Justice in the By-ways. A Tale of Life (New York: Livermore & Rudd, 1856), pp. 18-23.

In his search for sensual pleasures, Grafton in The Beauty of has several rivals but none surpasses the Southerner, Colonel Moses Montrose, in "The Quadroon Sisters; a Gambling Scene" (1857). Although missing Grafton's Hamlet-like abstraction, this Virginia-born gentleman has about him a nameless air of infinite sorrow. His handsome face shows the ravages of dissipation but traces of crimson here and there reveal that he is of vigorous health. A combination of physical force and nervous energy, he returns to a small Southwestern town to participate in a slave auction. Before the bidding begins, he leads a mad procession through the streets and throws his money freely to the crowds who follow him all day. When night draws near, this wild epicurean continues his revels in the taverns by drinking rounds of brandy and toasting the town. His business finished at the auction block, the gay, tormented, and reckless gentleman terminates his Bacchanal by executing manumission papers for the slaves he bought and departs with them for the free state of California.²⁰

²⁰Golden Era, V (June 21, 1857), 7.

Despite the similarity between the Hamlet- and Hotspur-types regarding their addiction to gambling and riotous living, the Hotspur-gambler has the distinction of being a hot-headed duelist. The Hamlet-gambler may duel but there is not the emphasis placed on revenge in his conformity to the code of honor.

Although sword play was known in the colony of Louisiana from its beginning, it was not until the 1830's that it became a fashion among the Creoles. These handsome, rich fellows, educated in Europe and acquainted with all the delights of that place, returned to New Orleans and their plantations to find life boring. A tempestuous set of young men, they quickly got into scrapes that demanded a vindication of honor. Laws prohibiting duels existed in the city but this forbidden pleasure encouraged rather than deterred the participants in the sport. These oversensitive Creoles took offense against the slightest breach of etiquette, an improper introduction, a slur on the family name, an insult to a lady, a hint of cheating or awkwardness in a card game and a duel was called for under the Oaks. Since a knowledge of dueling was an essential part of a Creole's education, some of the finest fencing establishments in the

world did a thriving business along Exchange Alley in New Orleans, where great masters of French and Italian counterpoint conducted their illegal exercises.²¹

Duelist-gamblers appear in a host of novels and short stories laid in both the North and South before the Civil War, but Frank Grafton and Lapere, the Creole, form the best combination. A good duel takes place also in Osborn Laughton's Sixty Years of the Life of Jeremy Levis but the novel has an English rather than an American setting and must be passed over here.

Grafton's duel in The Beauty of centers about his quarrel over cards with Lapere, the last of a Creole family in Louisiana. Grafton, paired off at random with Lapere, constantly taunts him for wanting skill in the game, but the carefree Creole only laughs off his mistakes and plays in a nonchalant manner. Finally stunned by Grafton's bitter remark that Lapere plays like a stool pigeon, Lapere offers to pay for the losses of both of them in the game and Grafton flings a glass of wine in Lapere's face. His blood now raging, Lapere picks out

²¹Lyle Saxon, Fabulous New Orleans (New York: The Century Co., 1928), pp. 187-201; Harold Sinclair, The Port of New Orleans (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1942), pp. 135-136.

his second and challenges Grafton. Grafton, now in control of his emotions, says he sees little chance of harm at sword's end from Lapere because if the Creole is as careless in the use of his weapon as he is with his cards, all Grafton has to fear is a random pass of the small sword.

Next day, in accordance with the code rules, Lapere's second, Mr. Girod, calls upon Grafton and presents Lapere's card. Grafton, calm and polite, places the card on a table, and pouring Girod a glass of wine, laughingly says he hopes their acquaintance will not end with Grafton's meeting on the field in the morning.

That evening Grafton's second, Colonel Clarke, calls upon Grafton to settle the details of the forthcoming duel, but Grafton will talk only of New Orleans, of its delightful society, of the charming party he attended the evening before, and of the future of Louisiana. The night passes and Colonel Clarke retires early only to awaken before daybreak. Grafton has already dressed and has coffee ready for the Colonel. On the street below a horse and carriage wait to bear the duelists to the outskirts of town. When they arrive, Lapere is already there and seeing Grafton salutes him in a

dignified manner. The instructions given and their places taken, the overexcited Lapere, before the signal is given, shoots a ball that only tears up the grass at Grafton's feet without doing injury to the man. Grafton, reserving his fire until a large bird passes overhead, shoots the fowl which falls dead at Lapere's feet. Girod then rushes to the center of the field to call an end to the affair, but Lapere wants another round. He feels Grafton's last shot was intended as an insult. This time, Grafton aims carefully and kills Lapere in what may have been a premature shot. As the Creole lies dying, Grafton hurries to his side and, casting a last look of mingled pity and contempt at him, solemnly walks to his carriage and drives back to the city. Meanwhile, Lapere's friends bear the noble Creole home to his mother to be grieved over.

The affair does not end there, however, for Lapere's family vows revenge on Grafton. The opportunity finally comes when Grafton, on a course of unchecked depravity in New Orleans, accidentally meets a stranger named Lavasseur, one of Lapere's cousins. He invites Grafton to a card game in a hotel room where Grafton, half-drunk, gets constantly embroiled in petty quarrels.

At the pitch of the excitement, Lavasseur, testy beyond endurance, passes a snide comment about Grafton's dead wife, commonly known to have died of a broken heart when Grafton sold her slave. Aroused, Grafton leaps at Lavasseur's throat, but the Creole, ready for him, draws a dagger from his shirt front and runs it through Grafton who dies in the arms of one of the players. Lavasseur then cries in triumph, "Perish, murderer of my cousin! Lapere, you are at last revenged!" With almost indecent haste and in silence, they bury the dead gambler in Potter's Field where there are no sorrowing friends and no one sheds a tear.

One of the most distinctive incidents in gambler stories is that in which slaves are used as stakes. The sadness inherent in the situation can be noted in the remark of an old Negro to a Southern gentleman who asks to whom the Negro belongs: "When I went to sleep las' night, I 'longed to Massa Carr; but he bin gamblin' all night, an' I don't know who I 'longs to dis morning."²²

Additional sentiments obtain when women are subject to the same treatment. Actually women were sold

²²William Wells Brown, Clotelle; or, the Colored Heroine. A Tale of the Southern States (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1867), p. 14.

to others along with entire plantations but a kind Massa only disposed of his slaves when he had to, when he had debts brought about by crop or stock failures or by some natural calamity such as a flood. "His people are the last property a true Southerner will part with," says the author of The Lofty and the Lowly (1852), "but misfortune may leave him no choice."²³

Perhaps the most famous modern story in which a woman has been sold by her husband is Thomas Hardy's The Mayor of Casterbridge. In a cheap version of Hardy's incident, "Original. The Gamester's Fortune" (1842) tells of a sick gambler who wagers his wife in a card game. When the stranger comes to collect his winnings, the wife commits suicide.²⁴

The most romantic and sentimental aspect of selling girls or wagering them in card games is to separate them from friends, family, or sweethearts and have them carried off by strangers. A philosophical blackleg gives up slave trading in White Slave (1852) because he cannot

²³ Maria Jane McIntosh (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1852), II, 56.

²⁴ E. F. Ellet, The Ladies' Companion, XIII (July, 1840), 104-110.

stand the wailing of the women separated from their loved ones: "As to the men," he confesses,

I should have gone quite well enough with them; but the women, old and young, were always getting up such scenes, and were always full of complaints about being separated from their daughters, and their mothers, and their babies, and their husbands, that to a man who had the least of a tender spot in his heart, it was perfectly intolerable (p. 341).

The gambler writers took full advantage of this separation factor and added another sentimental dimension by making the slave girl, not a rough field hand but a quadroon or octoroon lovely enough to be desired by white men either as mistresses or wives. The ancestral home of these light-colored Negresses is Africa, but they probably came to America from the West Indies where they lived as "free persons of color" in a society composed of neither white nor black people.

Her blood line is examined further by Joseph H. Ingraham in "The Quadroon of Orleans" (1839). When one of these African women cohabit with a white man, their child is called a mulatto if a boy and a mulatress if a girl. A child born of a mulatress and a white father is called a mustaze. This child may have blue eyes and light hair but ordinarily has dark skin. Since it has only one

part black and four parts white, the African part has almost become extinct and the child, therefore, looks European. As long as some trace of African blood remains, though, even in the fifth or sixth removed cases, the black woman is known as a quadroon.²⁵

To be sure, the fictionists took liberties with this strict definition. In Beauty of, for example, a slave girl is said to be of Indian descent, although her clear olive complexion, her erect and handsome figure and graceful movements seem to show Spanish origins (p. 52). A quadroon of the fifth descent may resemble lovely Italian women, but one knows she is African because of an indescribable expression in the center of the pupils of her eyes.²⁶

Although as respectable as other ladies of New Orleans, a quadroon is destined to be the mistress of a rich young gentleman. When she reaches maturity, her mother takes her to the Orleans Ballroom where in an upper

²⁵ Joseph Holt Ingraham, The American Lounger; or, Tales, Sketches, and Legends Gathered in Sundry Journeys (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard Co., 1839), pp. 261-262.

²⁶ Ibid.

room or balcony an interview is held with male applicants. When completed, the bargain included a fashionable little house on Rampart Street and a fixed income.

So many fictional accounts exist of quadroons and octaroons that only a few can be mentioned here. Dion Boucicault's The Octaroon; or, Life in Louisiana (1859), a play, has Zoe unable to marry a white man because of society's laws against blacks marrying whites. Earlier stories of the type are Lydia M. Child's "The Quadroon" in Fact and Fiction (1846) and J. H. Ingraham's "The Quadroon of Orleans" (1839). In Mrs. Child's "Quadroon" when Xarifa's lover abandons her to further his political career in Europe, Xarifa dashes her brains out against a wall rather than submit to the sexual advances of her cruel master.²⁷ Ingraham's rendition includes a pair of star-crossed lovers. When Baron Championet abandons Emile, to go to France, fate takes a hand in the affair and the Baron's son, whom Emile bore, grows up in France wanting to marry the Baron's French daughter from another marriage. Two of many post-Civil War romances in which quadroons figure are Albion Tourgee's Toinette (1874) and

²⁷ (New York: C. S. Francis & Co., 1846).

his Hot Plowshares (1883). In the first novel, a Southern gentleman refuses to marry a slave girl who was his chattel before the War, despite her protestations of deep love for him.

Although we are speaking about gamblers ashore in this section, a gambler afloat story best shows the writers' romantic adaptations of this versatile quadroom motif. In Sylvanus S. Cobb, Jr.'s "An Incident on the Mississippi," a hunter, having returned from the woods with money to buy his beloved Ianthe, learns that her master died and that she has been sold to a trader. On the boat back to the woods, he plays cards with a losing gambler who offers the overjoyed Ianthe as a stake.²⁸

The most depraved of the quadroom-as-stakes stories is "The Quadroom Sisters" in which a craven gambler named Jack Weller, with one quadroom in his possession, plays cards with Colonel Thomas Moses of Richmond for her twin. When Moses wins and the girls are reunited, we are given the unexpected news that the quadrooms had the same father as the Colonel but not the same "servile mother."

²⁸Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion, IX (Aug. 18, 1855), 106.

Two stories harken back to the old-fashioned formula of the lady-book writers: Mrs. H. F. Lee's "A Tale of New Orleans" (1845) and E. Z. C. Judson's The Mysteries of New Orleans, a dime-novel type story. Mrs. Lee's exploitation of the quadroon device includes a reformed Southern gambler in a precieuse situation, a quadroon like Pamela who states that virtue has its own reward, a paternal gambler, and an ending reflecting that in Clarissa. The plot involves Gambler-Leonetz who wins all the possessions of another gambler, including, as we discover late in the tale, a daughter named Julia, a quadroon. Now a complicating factor turns up in the person of Julia's fiancé, Morley, who has recently returned from a European vacation to claim her. Fair-minded about the dilemma of who deserves the woman, Leonetz lets her make up her own mind about the choice of him or Morley for a husband. Unable to live with one or without the other, she sends each of them a note stating that her answer will be given in her apartment that night. When they arrive on the scene, she is lying dead in a casket with tapers burning at each end.²⁹

²⁹Godey's Lady's Book, XXXI (Oct., 1845), 160-168.

E. Z. C. Judson's The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans (1851) joins the mainstream of sentimental gambler stories in having a seduction plot that echoes The Coquette and Charlotte. In The Mysteries, Adalie de Boulogny's mock-mother accepts bribes from the wealthy and lecherous Mr. Molpin to drug Adalie so that he can ravish the girl.

By way of summary, the prejudicial portrayals of the South in gambler stories includes two types of youthful gamblers: Hamlet and Hotspur. Both types reflect a stereotyped picture of the plantation and chivalric South as a region of decadent aristocrats whose social code fosters self-pity, hollow pride, and worship of the flesh pots. The Hamlet-type, moody and sensual, appears in two clusters of tales: frustrated lovers and sensualists. In these tales, planters' sons exhibit many of the characteristics of psychologically disturbed individuals. For the most part, they want to rebel against their environment but lack the fortitude to do so. That they accept their fate while trying to escape from it shows up in their hedonistic adventures in the pleasure palaces of New Orleans, a city pictured as rivaling Paris as a center of profligacy. Hotspur-gamblers resemble

Hamlet-gamblers but show more of a propensity to duel to defend their injured pride. This activity likewise impresses one as a degenerative tendency of Southern youth, the ultimate instance being their sexual molestation of their slave girls.

The quadroon-as-stakes gambler stories lie in the mainstream of the sentimental tradition in that the authors normally view slaves as the object of great pity, especially when they are beautiful and liable to abuse by cruel masters. What makes these stories seem outside the sentimental story, as we have developed it, is their distinctive quality rather than any factors inherent in the tales themselves that would make them different from the generic type.

CHAPTER V

THE GOLD RUSH GAMBLER STORY

Thou shalt not go prospecting before thy claim gives out. Neither shalt thou take thy money, nor thy gold dust, nor thy good name to the gaming-table in vain; for monte, twenty-one, roulette, faro, lasquet and poker will prove to thee that the more thou puttest down the less thou shalt take up.

--The Miners' Ten Commandments

Gold rush gambling was the third phase of gambling in the United States. The first phase began with the Texas Republic, became intensified during the Gold Rush, and further developed as the Pacific Coast and Southwest settled.¹

Sam Brannan's cry of "Gold" in the mill wash at Coloma in 1848 began a stampede that reached 100,000 men in '49. Adventurers came from all over the world, the Americans taking three main routes, one by land, across the Great Desert, the Rockies and the Sierra Nevadas, a trip of about five months; and two by sea, one by way of

¹Asbury, p. 310.

Cape Horn, which took one hundred to two hundred days and the other across the Isthmus of Panama or through Nicaragua.²

Despite the bad food and crowded conditions, most Americans from the Eastern seaboard, and especially gamblers from New York, Washington, and New Orleans preferred sea routes. Gamblers, naturally, preferred the luxury of the long trip which gave them a chance to relax as well as gamble. Gamblers are a sedentary tribe and do not savor hardship, fighting Indians, having watch duty, and putting up with all the inconveniences of mountain and desert travel. Then, too, many land groups had provisions in their constitutions that forbade gambling. and violators were punished with extra labor or expulsion from the company.³ In addition, it is not unlikely that the pioneers had little money to spend for gambling what with the ever pressing need for provisions and essentials for their wives and families.

²Ernest A. Wiltsee, Gold Rush Steamers of the Pacific (San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press, 1938), pp. 2-3.

³Vincent Eply Geiger, The Overland Journal of Vincent Geiger and Wakeman Bryarly, ed. David Morris Potter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), p. 18.

Bored passengers who play cards are the favorite targets of the gold rush diarists. One writer observes that they play from sunup to sundown, stopping only for meals.⁴ Another is impressed not only by the hold gambling has on the individuals but also with the tattered condition of the cards, the denominations of which could barely be made out. For stakes, these ocean-goers used cash, clothing, jack knives, shoes, pistols, and so forth. In his memoirs, Upham watches the passengers on the brig Osceola, bound from Philadelphia to San Francisco, amuse themselves not only with cards, dominoes, backgammon and checkers, but also with a new game, pitching pennies on the deck.⁵ In another diary note, he expresses chagrin over the checks rattling on the table in a faro game taking place in the room over his cabin. By means of a telltale exclamation mark, he gives his sense of relief when it is over: "three days later the boys broke the blacklegs' bank!" (p. 176). Bruff reports that at Chagres

⁴Oscar Lewis, Sea Routes to the Gold Fields. The Migration by Water to California in 1849-1852 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf & Co., 1949), p. 103.

⁵Samuel Curtis Upham, Notes of a Voyage to California via Cape Horn (Philadelphia: The Author, 1878), p. 50.

in the Isthmus of Panama, gambling tables are set up on the street and gamblers play monte by candlelight.⁶

Bayard Taylor, a New York newspaper correspondent, observes a gang of blacklegs who, having boarded the U.S. Mail ship Falcon at New Orleans, set up a bank of \$500 in Chagres which closes the same night when a lucky padre breaks it. After leaving Acapulco, these gentry play monte on the quarter-deck of the ship in hope of attracting unwary passengers, but the Captain stops them. On the Isthmus they offend the natives by entering one of their churches with their hats pulled down over their eyes, and march up the aisles to light their cigars at the four tapers burning at the altar.⁷

J. D. Borthwick, noting that gambling on his ship bound from New York to San Francisco is peaceful, gives the reason why:

Throughout the voyage nearly one half the passengers spent the whole day, and half the night, in playing the favorite game of Poker, which is something like Brag, and at which they cheated

⁶ Joseph Goldsborough Bruff, Gold Rush, eds. Georgia Willis Read and Ruth Gaines (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), p. 986.

⁷ Eldorado; or, Adventures in the Path of Empire (New York: A. A. Knopf Co., 1949), p. 36.

each other in the most barefaced manner . . . everyone wore his bowie-knife, the prospects of getting his opponent's knife between his ribs deterred each man from drawing his own or offering any violence whatever.⁸

The argonauts gambled more on the ships going home than they did California-bound, for now rich, they became easy pickings for the sly professionals who made regular runs between San Francisco and Panama. Many of these regulars had working agreements with the ship's officers to share the profits and captains themselves were known to run private rackets to fleece their passengers.⁹

In '49, gambling was the amusement in San Francisco, "the grand amusement," says the historian Soulé, "apparently the life and soul of the place."¹⁰ In their heyday, gamblers were some of the richest, most powerful citizens in that lawless society. Their establishments were so numerous that at night the entire town seemed lighted up by them. Fascinated by the scene, Taylor reports:

⁸ "Three Years in California," Hutchings' California Magazine, II (Sept., 1857), 123.

⁹ Lewis, p. 105.

¹⁰ Frank Soulé, The Annals of San Francisco (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), p. 248.

The appearance of San Francisco at night, from the water, is unlike anything I ever beheld. The houses are mostly of canvas, which is made transparent by the lamps within, and transforms them, in the darkness, to dwellings of solid light. Seated on the slopes of its three hills, the tents pitched among the chaparral to the very summits, it gleams like an amphitheater of fire. Here and there shine out brilliant points, from the decoy-lamps of the gaming-houses The picture has in it something unreal and fantastic, and impresses one like the cities of the magic lantern, which a motion of the hand can build or annihilate (pp. 117-118).

By daylight the city is all confusion. "On every side stood buildings of all kinds," continues Taylor, "begun or half-finished, and the greater part of them mere canvas sheds, open in front, and covered with all kinds of signs, in all languages. Great quantities of goods were piled up in the open air, for want of a place to store them." In this crazy-quilt pattern the dregs of society attracted Hinton Helper, who says:

Villains from all parts of the world swarmed upon the new soil. Cunning sharpsters from New England, desperate vagabonds from Texas, bogus men from the Northwest, and reckless plunderers from the prairies hastened to California like crows to a corn-field. Mexico sent thither their secret assassins. The penal colonies of Great Britain vomited their refuse upon this unhappy land, and even savage pirates from the Eastern Archipelago found their way to El Dorado. The territory numbered among her inhabitants, accomplished thieves, burglars and cut-throats from every civilized

and barbarous country within reach, men who had been familiar with courts and jails, and all punishments short of death.¹¹

General Vallejo, speaking as a Spanish-American, deplores the wreckage of California:

Australia sent us swarms of bandits . . .
Peru . . . rascals, begotten in idleness and schooled in vice, who debased themselves for lucre. Mexico inundated us with a wave of gamblers who had no occupation save that of the card table, no motive but the spoilation of the unwary.

A boatload of French whores gravitated to the gambling houses and brothels and Chinese women spread syphilis everywhere.¹²

Gold and gold alone brought this human drift to California. "Gold digging absorbed everything," says M'Collum. The people had one idea and Mammon reigned, "All were his votaries, and they were as absorbed, as 'set apart' for his service, as if bound by religious vows."¹³ The crew of a United States War vessel, unable

¹¹The Land of Gold. Reality vs. Fiction (Baltimore: H. Taylor, 1855), pp. 238-239.

¹²Myrtle Mason McKittrick, Vallejo, son of California (Portland, Oregon: Binsford & Mort Co., 1944), p. 287.

¹³William S. M'Collum, California as I saw it, ed. Dale Morgan (Los Gatos, Calif.: The Talisman Press, 1960), p. 124.

to resist the lure of the precious ore, deserted ship (Upham, p. 125), and the council members of San Francisco abandoned their duties for two months to try their luck in the mines (Soulé, p. 205).

The element of chance that tempted the argonauts made inveterate gamblers of them. "Wherever you find mining, you find gambling mistletoeing," says Thomas R. Jones.¹⁴ But not merely the love of gold drove these miners to the gambling houses. If one takes as his definition that gambling is an enchanting witchery between idleness and avarice, two conditions must be met before one qualifies as a votary of chance--time on one's hands and greed. The miners, starved for entertainment and lonely, passed their idle hours walking the streets of San Francisco where only gambling houses offered amusements. Indeed, the gambling houses were the only decent buildings in town to be set aside for recreation. To the miners, they were like club houses. One could meet his friends there, write letters home, get refreshments and even a bunk for the night.

¹⁴ Thomas R. Jones, You Bet; how the Californians did it (Sacramento: News Publishing Co., 1930), p. 13.

Before we give a general description of these houses, let us note that they sprung up during the boom or second phase of California gambling. The phase that preceded it had gambling taking place in large tents or huts filled with smoking, noisy, and drunken men. In the last phase, the Vigilance Committees, starting in 1852, took matters into their own hands, and the reckless days of gambling became a thing of the past.

In the boom phase, houses like the Eldorado and Parker House on Portsmouth Square were decorated with colored calico streamers that floated from gilt and frescoed ceilings. On the walls hung paintings of nude women in obscene postures, and at one end of the big room a stand held brass bands, Ethiopian serenaders, banjo-and-bones artists, solo violinists, accordionists, and ballad singers. The Verandah, opposite the Eldorado, boasted a musician who had a set of pandean pipes fastened to his chin and a drum on his back which he beat with sticks at his elbows and cymbals in his hands. In the Diane Saloon, Coke describes a typical scene: "Picture to yourself," the diarist says,

enormous rooms gaudily decorated, filled with some 400 or 500 people of all classes, without

distinction of age, rank, or sex. "Monte," "faro," "rouge et noir," are the favourites among a variety of games. The tables are covered with money Everybody is armed¹⁵

In the more refined gambling saloons were two buffets, the first dispensing wine and spirits; the other, chocolate, coffee, tea, and sweetmeats and managed by a pretty lady in a black silk gown.

During the boom, gambling establishments all had city licenses costing fifty dollars a month; for an extra twenty-five dollars, they could stay open on Sundays. The Parker House rented for \$110,000 yearly, at least \$60,000 of which came from the gamblers who had the second floor (Taylor, p. 57), and the Eldorado brought \$40,000. Half of the keepers of tables paid not less than \$1,000 per month for one table (M'Collum, p. 159). Actually, these rents were reasonable considering that a bowling alley in the basement of the Ward House cost \$5,000 a month, an apple or a boiled egg, one to five dollars; whiskey, thirty dollars a bottle, and common tacks, \$192 a pound.

¹⁵Henry John Coke, A Ride over the Rocky Mountains (London: R. Bentley, 1852), pp. 355-356.

Gambling stakes ranged from fifty cents to five or sixteen dollars, the cost of an ounce of gold dust. No-limit games took place in private houses, but in public ones the proprietor obliged by raising the limit. If a miner with a full poke staggered in and demanded a sky-high game, the gamblers always stretched their rules to accommodate him. The common practice, however, was to play the percentage by taking a little from many, rather than much from few. This practice paid off handsomely in crowded houses where miners, ten to a dozen deep, waited in line for a chance to play. Diarists disagree about the hours these houses stayed open. Some claim all night and day, others late afternoon to daylight, and still others from approximately nine in the morning to midnight.

Gamblers with a vested interest in the houses, that is, the professionals, usually had a partner, a man or a woman. One of the pair raked in the money, piled it up, "weighed" the gold dust, priced pawns, conveyed property deeds, and the like. Often this assistant served as a roper to give signals and an oral pitch to hook suckers jostling in the hot, whiskey-and-sweat smelling gambling dens.

The following types of gamblers operated in the period from 1849 to 1852: the legitimate kept a table, paid his license fees, rent, and other expenses as did other ordinary citizens of the city; the professional, a migrant without a fixed abode dealt, capped, or bet from the outside--a drifter, society treated him as an outcast without ties to a civilized community. The third or gentleman-gambler type dealt occasionally as an amateur but played primarily for amusement, doubled in politics and proved popular at clubs because of his pleasing personality.

Women as professional gamblers became fashionable in San Francisco when the Bella Union in 1850 hired one of three hundred Parisian prostitutes sent to California at the expense of the French government who held a lottery to pay their passage out of the country. Although no race had a monopoly on female gamblers, most of them mentioned in the diaries are French, Spanish, or Mexican. Hinton Helper gives a rare description of one of these ladies working with a partner. The first three tables are occupied solely by men, but at the fourth he sees

a Jew and Jewess . . . the fifth is under the direction and management of a French gentleman

and lady; a young American girl and her paramour have charge of the sixth; while the seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and so on, are presided over by sundry sorts of wicked spirits, unworthy of being named (pp. 72-73).

Friedrich Gerstäcker just misses describing a love affair between a little French gambler in a black silk dress and a raw-boned Yankee. After losing four watches to her without winning a hand, he sacrifices a ring which, loathe to take at first, she finally sweeps in. In a whimsical ending, the author comments that the Yankee must certainly have been a traveling watchmaker.¹⁶

On the roads to the Diggings, in the mountains, and in the interior towns of Sacramento and Stockton, gambling was as rife as in San Francisco. Near Stockton Shaw watches a German barber bleed customers for five dollars a visit while the other end of the tent shelters gamblers. William G. Johnson says gamblers made fortunes and occupied the finest buildings in Sacramento.¹⁷ In one of the more amusing accounts of card playing in Sacramento, Taylor describes a Mexican playing monte on a table

¹⁶Friedrich Gerstäcker, California Gold Mines. Foreword by Joseph A. Sullivan (Oakland, Calif.: Biobooks, 1946), pp. 109-110.

¹⁷Overland to California. Foreword by Joseph A. Sullivan (Oakland, California: Biobooks, 1948), p. 184.

near a fire he started in the rain (p. 269), and here also Letts finds a monte bank open under a tent, the patrons standing up to their knees in mud.¹⁸

Let us turn our attention now to writings about gold rush gambling. These writings are of two kinds: realistic and fictional. Among the realistic accounts are memoirs, journals, and diaries, including those by Hinton Helper (Land of Gold), William Shaw (Golden Dreams), Bayard Taylor (Eldorado), J. M. Letts (California Illustrated), and a host of others. The fiction falls into several categories, for our purposes only two being important: "purely" sentimental and sensational. Although we shall list them separately here, they will be treated together in our discussion. Some significant titles in the sentimental group are B. G. Frost's Gem of the Mines (1866), Charles Washburn's Philip Thaxter (1861), and John Ballou's Lady of the West (1855). Of the dime-novel variety tales, the following contain the best gambling elements: Gustave Aimard's Gold

¹⁸J. M. Letts, California Illustrated (New York: R. T. Young, 1853).

Seekers (1860), Francis Johnson's Steel Arm (1862), and W. G. Chester's George Denny (1856).¹⁹

These novels have no literary pretensions and show all the crudities of shorter sentimental fiction plus a few additional defects their longer length affords. Among others, there are a groping for internal harmonies, structural breakdowns, errors in spelling, punctuation, poor sentence and paragraph structure, hackneyed expressions, high-sounding diction, stilted dialog, especially during parting and death-bed scenes, gory details, wooden characters, and a plethora of melodramatic devices, such as floods, fever-walks, and coincidental happenings.

Before beginning a survey of the chief themes and motifs in these stories, we should make it clear that a few gambler types are omitted because they do not appear in sufficient numbers to merit separate consideration or because they have been treated elsewhere, that is, in stories of ropers, duelists, and seducers.

¹⁹Additional novels in these categories are the anonymous Adventures of a Gold-Finder (1860), Henry Vizetelly's Four Months (1849), J. A. Benton's The California Pilgrim (1853), Friedrich Gerstäcker's Gold (1859), Alexander Dumas's A Gil Blas (1852), Henry Sedley's Marion Rooke (1865), and Edward Maitland's The Pilgrim and the Shrine (1868).

The two chief themes in gambler writings using the gold rush scene are violence and reform. Violence in this setting has an omnipresence that makes it different, however, from that in big city novels where it seems merely an appendage to the story, a bit of sensationalism added for its own sake. In gold rush writings it grows naturally out of the disruptive milieu. In sketch, short story, and novel, we read of miners shot in the gambling palaces of San Francisco, Sacramento, and Stockton or of their deaths by madness, brain fever, and suicide.

The simplest type of anecdote on the theme of violence is "Mr. Karl Joseph Krafft" in which a cultured German adventurer falls from high to low degree and ends up with delirium tremors in a gambling hall on Portsmouth Square where he blows his brains out.²⁰ In another anecdote, a youthful gambler who refuses to disgorge his winnings in a San Francisco gambling den is promptly shot by the dealer who calls for a coroner and a jury from among the crowd. Soon acquitted by them, the dealer

²⁰ Putnam's Monthly Magazine, IX (March, 1857), 265-273.

starts a new round of cards while standing in the undried gore of his victim.²¹

Variations of this theme appear in Gerstäcker's Scenes of Life in California and "George Laustin." In Scenes, during closing hours a Mexican absconds with a dealer's pile of gold and is shot in the street, the gamblers confident the police will be able to follow the wounded man's trail of blood.²² "George Laustin" describes an overjoyed gambler who returns home to announce to his wife that he has broken a gambler's bank and in a maniacal seizure falls to his death headlong down a flight of stairs.²³

In a region where the unusual is commonplace, a happening has to be different to be noticed. Some of the more spectacular kinds of violence in gambler stories occur in Letts' California Illustrated and Gus Wedel's "The Gambler's Revenge." In Letts' scene a gambler named Irish Dick is caught by a Placerville mob who tie a rope

²¹William Kelly, An Excursion to California (London: Chapman & Hall, 1851), p. 247.

²²Trans. George Cosgrove (San Francisco: John Howells, 1942), pp. 103-105.

²³Wanderer, Golden Era, VIII (Jan. 22, 1860), 1.

around his neck and give Dick the other end which he is compelled to hold while he climbs out on a tree limb to jump to his death. Equally as cruel is the treatment of Blacksmith-Cane in "The Gambler's Revenge" who, for advising a camp to burn out Gambler-Johnson, is strangled by a rope that passes around his neck and through holes in the floor to Johnson standing in the room below.²⁴

The second chief theme in gold rush stories is reform. Here the familiar pattern is followed that describes the gambler's progress from gambling--to drinking--to death. The standard tale is D'Alby's "The Gamester's Doom" in which a young merchant falls under the charms of a syren dealer, loses his money for a branch office in San Francisco, turns to liquor for consolation, and blows his brains out at her gaming table.²⁵

The reform tale grouping a husband and wife appears in its conventional form in "The Gambler's Wife," Washburn's Philip Thaxter, and Ballou's Lady of the West. In the short story, a merchant goes to San Francisco with a friend to meet his wife due to arrive by boat from the

²⁴Gus Wedel, Golden Era, XIV (Sept. 16, 1866), 3.

²⁵Golden Era, XII (Jan. 8, 1860), 3.

East the next day. That night the friends visit a gambling house where the merchant loses everything. Ashamed, the husband has his friend meet the wife to escort her to his hotel room where he explains the situation. Forgiven, he returns with her to the diggings, and, with a loan from his friend, opens another store.²⁶

Washburn's Philip Thaxter is a gloomy story of an adventurer from the Eastern seaboard who goes to San Francisco where he falls ill of a fever and, about to die, is nursed back to health by a lady who pities him. With her money, he rises in power and has a real estate and gambling house business. When his fortune reverses, his wife arrives from home unannounced and in hiding witnesses his infamous career which concludes at a trial where he faces a murder charge. Forsaken now by his fair-weather friends, mistress, gambling associates, and partner, he seems doomed until his wife, sure he has learned his lesson, comes forth to save and reform him.²⁷

John Ballou's Lady of the West, a rather insipid story, features a virtuous lady from Cincinnati who, while

²⁶William R. Thomas (Nov. 1, 1854), n.p.

²⁷(New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861).

seeking her fiancé in the gold fields, works as a waitress in a boarding house for gamblers. Here she converts Gambler-Parker (temporarily) in a précieuse scene in which he babbles about his past love life and his hope of escaping his oppressive but lucrative career. To show that he has a tender heart and is a sincere convert, he rescues her from a mob of harpies in front of a whore house to which she has wandered in a state of fever. He also pays for her hospital bills and her passage home where her fiancé has already arrived. If up to now the reader misses the point that virtue has its own reward, he gets it when her fiancé, now with a fortune, becomes worthy of her hand in marriage.²⁸

Another fiancé in a reform context appears in H. J. Plomteaux's "The Outcast Reclaimed; or Strength of Pure Love." This tale, treated in an earlier section, the truest example of a lady-book gambler tale with a gold rush setting, features Flora who loves a young businessman of good reputation now fallen into the gambling habit. A plucky heroine, she adopts a man's disguise,

²⁸(Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstich, Keys and Over-end, 1855).

bankrupts her lover in a gambling house, and brings him to his senses and the altar.

Several reform stories include the old-fashioned motif of the abused wife popular in the lady books. A trace of this motif appears in "The Gambler's Wife" with stronger versions in Philip Thaxter and Blunderbuss's "Duel by Candlelight." We can eliminate these now because they have been treated before and instead say a few words about Francis Johnson's Steel Arm, Anna M. Fitch's Bound Down, J. A. Benton's The California Pilgrim (1853), and Alice's short story titled "Mary Morton."

In Johnson's Steel Arm, a dime novel, a lady is shackled in misery to a worthless gambler who lacks the courage to confront the titular hero in a showdown for her affections.²⁹ Anna M. Fitch's Bound Down concerns a bigamist whose first wife resides in an insane asylum while his second wife, in love with another man, feels betrayed.³⁰ A pigeon in J. A. Benton's The California Pilgrim lights at a gambler's table and loses a pile of silver and gold, turns to drinking, and offers his wife

²⁹(New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1862).

³⁰(Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1870).

nothing but a future of penny pinching.³¹ The titular heroine of "Mary Morton," a debilitating tale, plays a violin in a gambling house and earns extra money as a prostitute. When her husband, a drunkard and gambler, turns up in her room as one of her customers, she drops dead of a heart attack.³²

A special group of reform sketches includes gamblers with consciences. They share oral confessions with the reader and purge themselves of their guilt feelings. A few with a gold rush setting are "Old Forty-nine," "Revelations of a Gambler," and Poor Tom Cross described in a series of sketches in Putnam's magazine for 1857. Old Forty-nine, immediately after winning \$2,000 in a card game, has fears he will become a gambling addict and lose his soul in the pursuit of money. Soon his fears are allayed, however, when he loses everything in a speculating scheme and ends up a day laborer.³³

³¹(Sacramento: Soloman Alter, 1853), p. 247.

³²Alice, Hutchings' California Magazine, II (Feb., 1858), 354.

³³Hutchings' California Magazine, I (Sept., 1856), 216.

The informative gambler in Sierra Citizen's "Revelations of a Gambler" discloses that he was not born corrupt; his soul rebelled against its destiny. When an old man breaks his bank, he follows him to the California gold diggings and with some confederates robs and kills the man. With the mark of Cane now upon him, he awaits his death at the end of a rope and is repentant. He does not want his mother to know how he died and will therefore hold no grudges if someone else publishes his story.³⁴

The epitome of sentiment appears in the sketch of Poor Tom Cross. A gentleman's son from New Orleans, well-educated, generous, and with a devil-may-care attitude, he gets typhoid fever from digging in the mines and dies in a clump of bushes. On him is found an old worn-out ace of hearts with two lines written on it in pencil: "Good-by, mother! Pardon and love poor Tom," evidently prepared beforehand in case of accident.³⁵

Most of the greenhorn-clerk tales have a reform element as in the previously noted "Gambler's Wife" and

³⁴Golden Era, IV (Jan. 6, 1856), 6.

³⁵"The Green Cloth," Putnam's Monthly Magazine, IX (May, 1857), 535.

"The Gamester's Doom." One in which he resists reform appears in Bruff's Gold Mines. This anecdote, like many in the period, involves the gaming tables-to-mines motif. Here a clerk buys his boat ticket home to the East, drops into a gambling house in San Francisco, and loses everything. He then tells a pitying sea captain his story and is refunded half the price of his ticket, which he promptly carries off and loses in the same gambling house. Last heard of he had borrowed two ounces from a friend to get back to the mines.

The much publicized magnanimity of the gold rush gambler characterizes Gambler-Parker in Ballou's Lady of the West, an anecdote in Letts' California Illustrated, a sketch of Old Paul in a collection of anecdotes in Putnam's (1857), and "'Lucky' Bill, the Thimble-rigger." The generous monte-dealer in Lett's Sketch first bankrupts his customers and with their money treats everybody to a continuous round of drinks in a scene reminiscent of "The Quadroon Sisters." The money gone, the gambler mounts his horse and, like a Beadle novel gambler-hero, drifts off to parts unknown.

Old Paul likewise makes a practice of breaking banks in gambling houses. He then retires from activity

and in pipe and slippers reads his newspapers until when pinched for cash he starts his routine all over again. One day his course is interrupted when a group of citizens call upon him to run for the office of comptroller of San Francisco. He throws his entire fortune in the campaign and made a good showing until his opponent, a Texas Ranger, does tricks on his horse in front of the polling place at the Parker House ("The Green Cloth," p. 535).

Benevolent gamblers like the dealer in Letts' sketch and Old Paul give proof to Mason Long's words that gamblers are perhaps the world's greatest spenders. "There is no luxury a gambler will not enjoy," says Long, "if he has, or can get, the money to pay for it" (p. 143). Of course, the code demands a gambler squander his money recklessly to keep up appearances so as not to lose favor with his confederates and the public. The code also includes a concomitant attitude of carpe diem--"Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow, ye die." One of the most tender hearted gamblers in the gold rush gambler fiction is the titular figure in Blunderbuss's "'Lucky' Bill, the Thimble-rigger." In one anecdote, he wins a yoke of cattle from a pioneer in Sacramento, sells it back to the man for \$60, and then donates the other pair when he hears

the man cannot get his wagon over the mountains without both pairs. In another anecdote, Bill wins \$300 from an old man going home to his dead wife and three homeless children. Seeing the look of despair on the man's face as he turns away, Bill gives him back his \$300 and another \$200, along with a few words to the wise to stay away from the likes of Lucky Bill, the gambler.³⁶

Lest one leave the gold rush scene with the general impression that the writers looked upon the professional gambler with kindness, the consensus among them is that he is a deep-dyed villain. Indeed, the gold rush gambler is a parasite. "Where the miner goes," says Alonzo Delano, "no matter how difficult the transit, the gambler follows to tempt him to part with his hard-earned gains in a game of chance, and they too often fall victim to their nefarious practices."³⁷ Without offering an extended list, let us merely mention the opinions of a few realistic writers whose words are echoed in the sentimental novels. To Kelly, the gambler is a bloodstained

³⁶ Golden Era, III (July 1, 1855), 1.

³⁷ Life on the Plains (Buffalo: Orlon and Mulligan, 1854), p. 340.

villain; to the Reverend Daniel B. Woods, a sink of evil and the enemy of souls;³⁸ to Hinton Helper, a "deadly contagion"; and to Friedrich Gerstäcker, "carrion birds." As a social type, he occupies a position somewhere between the infamous Sydney Hounds and other derelicts and that of the respectable citizens of the gold regions.

For a final word, we should say that the gold rush gambler has two well-defined stereotypes. One fits the picture of him in Hubert Bancroft's inter pocula as a "lank, cadaverous" type who dresses in black and seems tottering to the grave. Hinton Helper, William Shaw, and John Ballou in Bound Down also employ the type as do a few Southern yarnspinners. A more romantic type is the Southerner George Denny in the novel of the same name. He stands a little above medium height and has a well-formed and graceful figure. His long brown hair falls in wavy folds over a broad forehead and his distingué air owes something to his light mustache. On close inspection, one sees something repulsive in his features, the cold gray eye and dead-pan expression of the most deadly of his species. Dressed in the height of fashion, he

³⁸Sixteen Months at the Gold Diggings (New York: Harper & Bros., 1852), p. 74.

wears a snowy white shirt and black suit that complement the sparkling diamond rings on his fingers, the telltale badges of the professional blackleg.³⁹

In summary, the primitive social scene in gold rush California produced two sentimental themes: violence and reform. This combination, present in one degree or another in all writings in the periods covered by this study, except the yarnspinner, testifies to the potency of the sentimental tradition. Despite obstacles, the gambler story retained its fundamental characteristics and accommodated itself to changing social and literary movements, such as the pervasive strain of the adventure and sensational stories. This is not to deny, however, that the gambler novels are shoddy affairs replete with cheap melodramatic devices and a bothersome homiletic atmosphere. The primary reason for this prevailing moral tone relates to the puritanic ethos of the lady writers who insist upon an old-fashioned eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth outlook.

Noticeably absent in this fiction, although one hesitates to offer a broad generalization on the basis

³⁹William G. Chester (San Francisco: D. P. Hull & Co., 1856), p. 28.

of only those sources that happened to come under his surveillance, are certain motifs which do not appear frequently enough to form clusters. As isolated stories they deserve to be omitted, although one should mention them anyway. We have in mind the old stand-by motifs of seduction, formal duels, and roper incidents. Apparently by 1849, the popular Richardsonian theme of seduction ala Clarissa Harlowe had lost some of its appeal, although it did not expire entirely, for the Beadle books made capital of it in scenes smacking of vaudeville and the paddlewheel stage.

The reform element latent in seduction, nevertheless, remained stable and dominant in gold rush gambler stories. This vigorous strain attaches directly to the main stream of sentimental fiction and drama stemming from eighteenth century plays, Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa, and Henry Fielding's Amelia.

One expected to find more duelist-gamblers in the tales. Undoubtedly, the urge to kill had not diminished on the gold rush frontier but informal rather than formal methods were employed there, unlike the codified behavior of duelists in Southern and big city novels. In the crowded gaming houses the idea of holding a code duello

is absurd, and furthermore, avarice, not honor was the issue at the gambling tables of the Eldorado, Parker House, or Diane Saloon, unlike that in The Beauty of Woman's Faith and Sixty Years of the Life of Jeremy Levis.

Ropers or cappers continued to operate both inside and outside gambling houses as is apparent in D'Alby's "The Gamester's Doom" and "'Lucky' Bill, the Thimble-rigger," but these coney-catchers did not practice Barnard's Law. One did not have to resort to trickery to get his pigeon to light; the bird flew into the cage of his own volition.

The confession factor in the gold rush gambler story forms a main tributary to the main stream of sentimental fiction dating from Richard Head's The English Rogue in the eighteenth century and gathers renewed support in the period after our study dates terminate. The sensational Beadle novels make capital of it in the late 1870's and 1880's, and a spate of adventure stories on the cattle frontiers feature the device on the frontiers of the West and Southwest.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the sentimental gambler story in America has its roots in literary and social movements that took place in Europe in the days of England's Tudor monarchs. The general tendency among these sentimentally inclined writers, both imaginative and realistic, from the mid-sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, was to view gamblers as products of social upheaval rather than as disciples of the Devil.

Attuned to this "modern" attitude, a spate of plays, to be lumped under the classification of sentimental domestic tragedies, appeared--prodigal son, abused wife, gamester, and penitent rake. Supporting this more humane attitude toward the gambler in these plays was that of the chroniclers of London street life, who, intrigued by the cunning tricks of vagrants and thieves, included in their Beggar Books and Coney-catching pamphlets accounts of gamblers. Among the better writers

in these groups were Awdeley, Harman, Greene, Dekker, and Lodge.

Closer in time and literary impulse to sentimental American gambler fiction are the novels of three great-British authors--Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, and Henry Fielding. Each of these writers contributed something to a sentimental background necessary to appreciate the short gambler story. Richardson provided the gambler genre with a magnetic villain-seducer in the person of Richard Lovelace and a harassed maiden type in Clarissa and Pamela. Sterne supplied an embroidered style and a tearful, melancholy mood in A Sentimental Journey; and Fielding offered a model for magazines in his gambler story imbedded in his novel Amelia, which featured a suffering middle class wife, negligent husband, and confidence man as a nemesis factor.

In its heyday before the Civil War, the American sentimental gambler story merged with other popular tales of the time--those featuring mechanics, philanthropists, Gothic villains, seducers, and duelists, for example; but the adaptability of the genre does not rescue it from subliterate ranking. At their lowest aesthetic levels, these gloomy tales of domestic woe reveal all the

weaknesses of sentimental fiction in general--poor motivation of characters, characters who are mere abstractions, pat plots, crude construction, disproportion, "old-fashioned" style, and trite moral aphorisms, to mention the most obvious of their faults. On their highest level of art, the sentimental gambler stories of Bret Harte, Josquin Miller, and Leonard Kip strike a familiar chord in probing the springs of human action and by humanizing the gambler to some extent. Even the technical skill of these authors, however, barely avert the tendency of the time to stereotype all fictional gamblers.

Several suggestions may be offered to improve these stylized sentimental tales. As Edna Ferber's Show Boat and Frank Yerby's The Foxes of Harrow prove, an honest love motif adds interest to a hum-drum plot. Show Boat starts out with a strong love affair but it soon deteriorates as the author falls to stereotyping Gaylord Ravenal as a villain. That the romantic gambler could be a rampant lover and an engaging villain in performance of his occupational duties at the same time, as in the modern T-V series Maverick, certainly was within the realm of the imagination of these old-time authors of the 1840's

and "Feminine Fifties," but they failed to take advantage of the opportunity.

It is not the subject of gambling per se, or gamblers branded as villains, or even the want of artistry of the writers that fully accounts for the second-rate status of American gambler fiction in the nineteenth century. Rather it is the restrictions of the sentimental tradition. To work within it and produce a first-rate story after a century of countless versions of Samuel Richardson's Clarissa in American magazines and novels demanded insights that outreached the meager gift of commercially-minded American authors content with the hackneyed formulas of the past.

Some experimentation with gambling elements appears in the Southern "yarns," but their approach moves in the direction of the humor tradition of Alfred Henry Lewis, O'Henry, and the "hard-boiled" school of novelists of the Colorado mining camps in the mid-1940's.

Another trace of experimentation with the gambler story can be seen in the dime novels of the 1870's, but the chief element in them is sensationalism by means of dangerous action. Sentiment, to be sure, is abundant in them, but it is relegated to subplots where, despite

its sexiness, surrenders its appeal as a serious plot ingredient.

An additional contribution made by dime novelists was to provide composite models for Owen Wister's The Virginian (1902). This story initiated a new movement in gambler stories based on the exploits of cowboys, plucky gals as "prairie flowers," and comic pards, in a context of physical danger. Here coalesce all the previous gambler-story traditions in America--the humor, adventure, and sentimental.

Granted, it is a far cry from Wister's Virginian to "The Errors--The Consequences--The Remorse" in the 1849 Godey's Lady's Book, but the standardized old gambler-tale formula of "The Errors" does serve as a rather accurate reflection of the taste in popular fiction of countless thousands of Americans for over half a century. Indeed, sentimental gambler stories never died; they merely transferred their ingredients to other fictional forms. That they persisted should come as little surprise in an age of "lady book" readers, but to survive in today's technological society seems startling at first blush. On second thought, the old time gambler has a certain

glamour, if you will, that appeals to sentimentalists
who yearn for the romance of bygone years.

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ADDENDUM

Addendum: Mary E. MacMichael,
"The Gambler's Fate. A Brief Sketch,"
Godey's Lady's Book, XII
(July, 1836), 41-45.

Aubrey Fitzhenry was brave, hardy, and handsome; would spend freely what he won lightly, and if one day fortune scowled, he would, like a wild beast, bask in the sun to rid himself of chagrin the next; if she were propitious, swagger about, gallant and gay as a lord of a manor. Like all the sons of God, he could make love to the daughters of men, and touch the heart of a gentle maiden. He was wild and reckless, it is true, but then he made up for this by so many good qualities, and was so engaging, that all unmarried ladies delighted in his company. And then he could sing ballads so sweetly and mournfully, that even the old dames leant back in their arm-chairs to weep whilst he sung. He had one of those deep, melancholy voices, which, when once heard, lingers in the ear, and when heard again, however unexpectedly, seems like a longing realized. In one of his rambles,

he met with Kate Seyton, the pride and the boast of her native valley, beyond which she had never been. Familiar as a household tone, was every step of the garden of her dwelling-place, belted with shrubs and enriched at the border by a deep ravine, over which it looked. At the bottom of that ravine flowed the river, rapid, and yet sullen; and beyond, scarcely distant two hundred yards, a range of precipitous cliffs shut in the horizon. The wild and desolate aspect of the scene was overshadowed and controlled, as it were, by the stern grandeur of these ramparts of nature: and the whole contributed to form such a picture as an artist might travel a thousand miles to contemplate. Kate, however, had looked upon it from her childhood; it had never been forced upon her mind by contrast, for she had never travelled five miles beyond the pale of her residence, and she would sit and sing, in the soft, low tone, peculiar to her voice, and beyond which she had no compass, and ply her knitting-needle, and dream, without even raising her eyes. Her voice was rarely loud enough to be caught by the opposite rocks, although sometimes it did happen that, carried away by enthusiasm, she produced a note which was repeated by the fairy minstrel of the glen.

"And he who there at such an hour had been,
Would wistful linger on that hallowed spot,
Then slowly tear him from the witching scene,
Sigh forth one wish that such had been his lot,
Then turn to hate a world he had almost forgot."

On the present occasion Kate listened with surprise to a similar effect, for her voice had died almost to a whisper; she sang another stanza in a louder key; the challenge was accepted, and a rich sweet voice took up the strain of a favourite ballad where she had dropped it. Her first impulse was to fly--her second, to sit still and watch for a renewal of the music--and her third, which she obeyed, to steal on tiptoe to the edge of the ravine, and look down into the abyss, from whence it seemed to proceed.

There was Aubrey--his face upturned like a star, watching for the appearance of that maiden, of whom he had long been enamoured. He had, unseen; been gazing upon her as she sang to beguile the time. The soft profile of the young girl had been clearly defined to his admiring gaze. There was the lovely brow, and the dark chestnut-hair, parted simply across it. The small,

regular features, the long black eye-lashes, deep eye-lid, and the pale pure expression of her face, might have formed a model for a Madonna, till she raised her bright blue eyes--speaking the simplicity and hilarity of her age--and showed her parted coral lips, with their sunshiny smile. Her slight, low figure, laced in the picturesque corset, and shaded by the cotton handkerchief, had all the grace of youth, and more than are generally found in an obscure peasant. He ascended--they exchanged salutations--they conversed; there was nothing mysterious in their communings. He was bold and vigorous of mind--and this is beauty to the fair and timid. He skimmed along the edge of the precipice, and sprung from a rock into the torrent, as fearless as a chamois, alternately vanishing and reappearing on the summit of the rocks, where no human foot had ever stood before. He was brave, and proud, and beautiful; and this glorious creature--this Apollo of a childish imagination, with radiant eyes, and glowing cheeks, laid himself at the maiden's feet, to gaze upon her face, as poets worship the moon. The world, before so monotonous, so blank, so drear, was now a heaven to the bewildered Kate. Their sentiments they avowed without disguise--their faith plighted beyond

recall. But why delay the truth? They married. Love wove his gayest wreath to deck their bridal, and hope whispered that happiness would crown their union. For a time it was so, and Kate thought that the bright and fragrant flowers that adorned her path would bloom forever.

* * * *

The day was just breaking, as Aubrey, having spent the night in gambling, emerged, with his companions, into an obscure street. His frame was exhausted by intense excitement, and the cold damp air of the season came over him with a sickening weight.

"Your losses seem to sit heavy on you, Fitzhenry," said one of his veteran associates, "but you will soon be able to put off these horrors; a little more experience and you may command fortune at your pleasure."

Some further remarks passed, revoltingly illustrative of their habits, and they separated. With a sunken and blook-shot [sic] eye, that told but too plainly of the want of rest, while the just awakening city was rising to new life, and to the glorious pageant that

already was colouring the reddened sky, he sought, in the troubled and feverish sleep of a weary spirit, forgetfulness of scenes that had robbed him of a more tranquil repose.

In a small habitation, whose situation was, indeed, beautiful, sat the wife and mother. The house stood on a gentle eminence, whence the eye looked out on a gentle mead, rich in wood and water; and the extreme verge of the prospect was lost in the blue waves of the deep, distant ocean. And yet there was something about the dwelling itself, which seemed to speak of desolation so much in unison with the heart of its mistress. Her marriage had been productive of misery. Five years had gilded down the dark and deceitful current of time, into the deep and noiseless gulph of oblivion, three of which had been happy. But a natural propensity for play, had lured Aubrey from his home of love, and the once gay and joyous Kate was neglected and forgotten; the fountain of unspeakable affection which she bore, thrown away as a priceless bauble. Look upon her as she sits there watching the stars go out, one by one, in that pale dome, as though the glory they had all night showered upon the silent earth had exhausted their eternal fountains of

brightness. Gracious heavens! What a change is there; the Kate of bygone days can scarcely be recognised. The sunny smile was gone; the rose had fled from her cheek, the light from her eye, and buoyancy from her step; but her hair was still soft and beautiful, and her voice sweet and gentle, as in the palmy days of youth and hope. The lovely child was the very image of herself at that fairy age, save that a shade of thoughtfulness, perceptible even in slumber which the mother had not then, played over the chiselled features. She leaned over the sleeping innocent, her eyes suffused with tears, and murmured, "Have mercy, oh my God, upon my child! let it not share its mother's life; that smile, 'tis all his fond, sweet smile, that won my virgin heart. Oh, keep in the pale of thy mercy, this green leaf of promise--this sweet bud of hope and delight! My child! my own, my beautiful! may the breath of flowers and shrubs--the coolness of the air--the murmur of the water--all nature, animate and inanimate, lend to thy existence a charm; and mayest thou never, never know the agony, the heartache, which has been all mine own in this chequered pilgrimage. My youth--my dream of love and happiness--my obscure and unpitied death--and, above all, far, far above all, my still dear

husband, where are you now? Oh, Aubrey! How inestimably dear, fallen as thou art, to this breaking heart of mine are thou; if you but knew the anguish that rends my bosom in your absence, and the sunshine which your presence can give, even now, to the world of my existence, methinks you would make it more spring-time with me." At that instant the child stirred, and she turned to hush it, and gaze upon that fair and beautiful face, looking like some lovely statue of Cupid; there was a sort of fascination in the contemplation, and she watched more closely. There is an awful something stirs the soul's deep places in looking upon those we love dearly in sleep; that extraordinary suspension of the communing with external things; that temporary extinction of being, so like death itself--an extinction that would make death too fearful in the contemplation, if we did not escape from it in the hope of immortality. Sleep is his youngest brother--his very counterpart; the body lies senseless, while the soul takes a new range of activity--it lives in another world. There, divested of its materiality, it looks into the secrets of nature--holds communion with higher powers. The sight is nearly allied to pain; it is not the picture of our own dissolution which presses so heavily upon the

mind, it is the prophetic spirit within us, speaking of ties to be broken--hopes to fail--affections to wither--and a thousand other cherished memories that rise up in dreadful array before the vision. Oh! what a feeling of desolation--of the breaking up of the heart's dearest associations--came over that mother's mind, as her eye wandered round the apartment. Every corner of that sweet thing--home, had its feelings, and their eternal vacancy and destruction, shot through her heart like an ice-bolt. This was the very spot in which she had passed the time since her marriage, and when every fresh idea, won by her young mind from the world around it, was a positive joy. The places where she had ranged, when every look was watched and granted ere made known, by a well-beloved being: all those bright hours--the transient sorrows--the sports--the visions--bright, youthful dreams of never-ending love--the melancholy voice of silence told her now that they were mingled with, and belonged to the solemn, the unchangeable, the irrevocable past! The trees, round about, with their immemorial branches, tall and dark, rose calm and clear in the still moonlight, like a green sea of waving masses. There was the heavy oak and chestnut, the trim poplar, with its tall straight rows--each grove,

and glade, and avenue, and lawn, looked forth phantom remembrances of the past. The whole scene was fraught with living associations; but they were associations that for every by-gone smile, called down a shower of tears. That wringing, yearning of the heart; that hopeless anguish for the return of halcyon hours--forever lost on earth, and that only lived in the memory as a remembered thing. Exhausted with watching, sleep overtook her, and fancy, or imagination, did its fairy work most splendidly. She was again, as of old, by that being whom she loved more than any thing else on earth--his brow was wreathed in gladness--her eye undimmed by a tear; again she lived on every joyous look and feature--the bright light shining from those beautiful eyes, overflowed her soul with gladness; she listened, enraptured, to the magic tones of love, and the thrilling tones of joy; the laughing hours of other days came back again with all their mirth and guileless thoughtfulness, and hope and joy were all that was before her in the cloudless perspective of the future. From such blessed meditations--replete with such anticipations of pleasure and happiness, she awoke to find herself--alone.

A heavy tread in the passage, and the sound of approaching footsteps, broke upon the ear. In an instant the tear was dashed aside--the head raised--the eyes flashed--and the mouth curved in a bright, sweet smile.

"My husband! my dear husband," she uttered, as she started forward to greet him. His face was pale and altered, and the cold dew stood on his garments like one fatigued; the damp air had numbed him, as he stood the object of so much love. He took her hand; his own was cold as ice; its touch thrilled through and through her frame.

"You are ill, love; why, oh why, will you wander through the damp night!"

"I am not ill," said he; "my body is strong enough to bear me, and you are my spirit's love. Oh, Kate! Kate! if you but knew how bitterly worthless and mean in mine own eyes your matchless devotion makes me appear, scorned and despised as I am, you would still pity and forgive me."

"Oh, Aubrey! I would rather thou shouldst in hot words of anger chide me, than hear thee talk thus. I have been sitting here in my solitude, imagining thee lost to me forever."

"Kate," he murmured, unconsciously, "thou knowest I love thee."

"Aubrey! Would I might say I loved thee; but see," and she stepped nervously to his side, then dropping her head on his shoulder, she took his hand and placed it beneath her bosom. He started, for he thought her heart was bursting from her side; but tears came to her relief, and she became calm, for she felt that his were mingled with them, and that his arms were round her as they were wont to be.

"Aubrey," said the wife, as she looked up imploringly into his face, "why will you not abandon this mode of life? It is this, combined with your long absences that, like a cold spectre, lays his hand upon all within his reach, and sends shivering and death into my heart's inmost cone; it is this that frightens, and finally unnerves me. You tell me of success at play; alas! if successful are you happy? Is it not at the expense of health, quiet, happiness, nay, even remorse, honour, that you succeed? Is there no principle to betray, no obloquy to follow?"

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"Audrey. What
I love thee."

"Katie," he said

"Fear not, dearest," he answered, fondly, "that dear, delightful, exciting being, Hope, assures me that we shall yet be joyful as we once were."

"Be it so," she replied, "for whilst you are a-- alas! my lips will not utter the word which crawls in my brain, and chokes in my throat. That thought, my husband, haunted me by night and by day. If I kneel to pray, that only will rise to my lips; if I would kiss our child, it rests between her eyes and mine; there is but one time it comes not--when I think not of it--when with thee, thee, Aubrey. Thou art not guilty, with thy smile bent on me; heaven is on my heart and soul; then am I thine, thine--proudly thine."

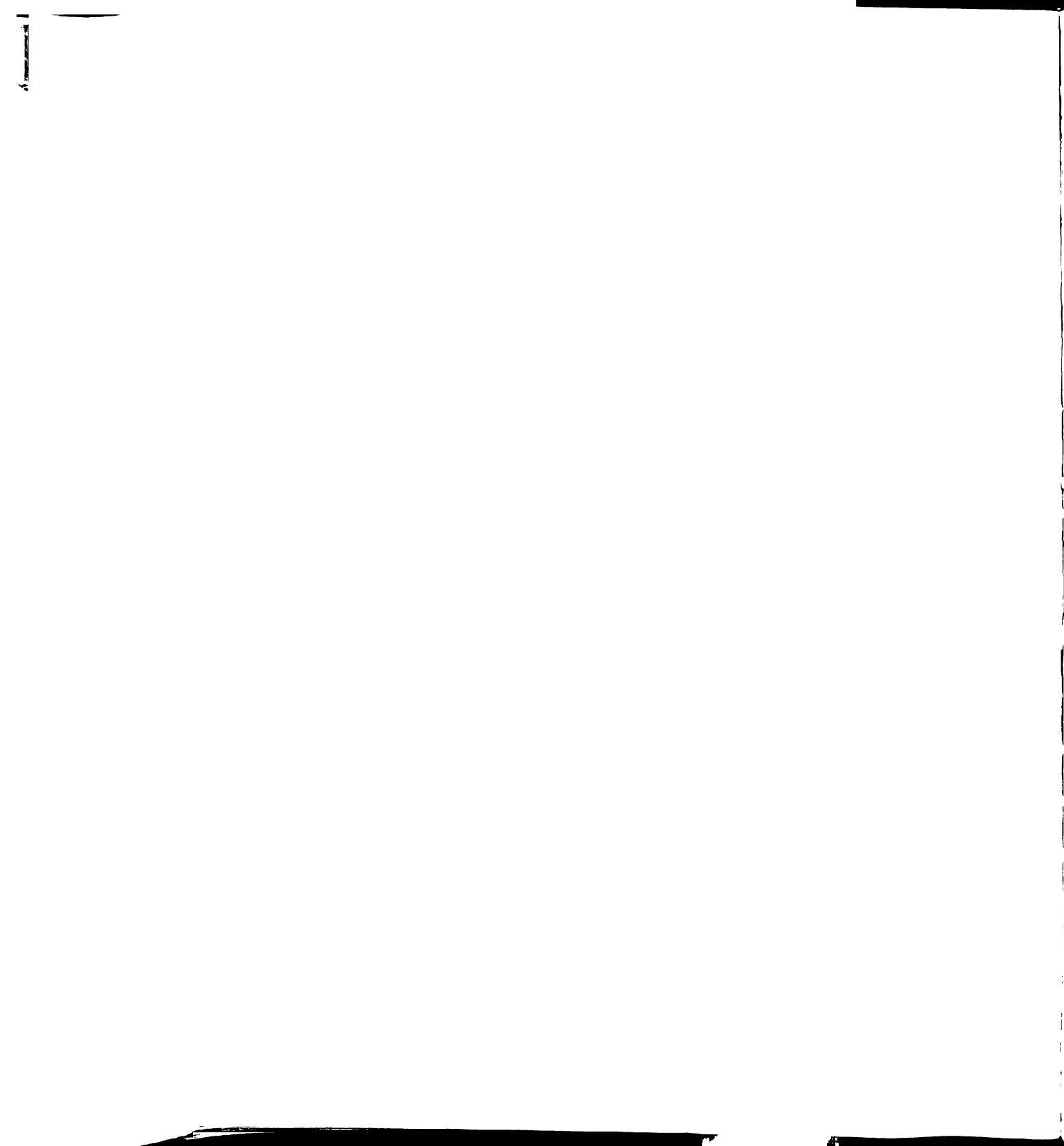
Aubrey promised, and for a time it was so, that every moment not consumed by him on absolute business, should be devoted to her, and to their child. In the cultivation of the earth, in the beauties of nature, and the society of those he still loved, he found employment, enjoyment, and content. At length he began to yield to the seeking of those haunts, that, like an evil conscience, haunted his wife, and pressed dark and gloomy upon his own soul. Each day he resolved more strongly to disentangle himself from his dissolute companions, and seek

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"Be it so, my love, be it so, my love,"
we shall yet be joyful, and I feel that
dear, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful

that calm retreat, and bestow those thousand nameless, little attentions that his wife now doubly merited; but he remained, now, longer absent than before, knowing that he had given pain he did not choose to witness, and fearing, not reproaches--her nature was too loving for that--but tears, and the wan cheek and faded smile of her who should have claimed all his kindness.

Brilliant glowed the autumn, with its many-coloured leaves; it was that calm hour, when the solemn light of the radiant stars shine through the straggling branches of old trees--when all living and timid things throw off the restraining fears of the steps of man--and when we calm our sorrows, and exalt our spirits by a communion with external objects. There is a rich music in every intonation of nature's voice, and the melody of that sweet voice is never still; all that has life has a season or an hour for its eloquent and sweet song--each bright bird, each beautiful and laborious insect, pours out its tributary streamlet into the deep ocean of universal harmony--the winds and plummy forest--waves and sinuous caverns; and shells, their miniatures--the upspringing plant, and herb, and budding flower, all mingle in the hymn of general jubilee, and the soft influence of sleepless sounds,



with their cadence, to which passion's voice ministers, and their contemplation, make the spirit gentler and wiser.

"Kate," said Aubrey to his wife, one evening, towards the latter part of November, "where is my cloak; I must go forth to-night," my word is pledged with my partners in infamy, and I will redeem it."

That pale cheek grew paler at this intelligence, but she knew it would be useless to remonstrate with her husband, for, lawless as he was, he would not break his word idly.

"Look not so drooping, wife, I promise, nay more, I swear, by Him who is Almighty and powerful, and all merciful, that after this night I will quit that accursed trade forever."

"May God, in his mercy, have it so," she added, in a low and deeply agitated tone; "then can I resign my soul into the hands of my creator, and die in peace."

With the deepest agony and remorse, he clasped to his bosom that being who had, indeed, given him so many beautiful proofs of the depth of woman's undying love--and thus they parted.

Her tenderness and affection had unclosed the flood-gates of memory, and as he called to mind her counsel and excellent warnings, he determined, internally, to abandon this mode of life and live for her alone.

With the very resolution upon his lips, which would have proved his safety, he was lost and ruined. Oh, that fatal morrow, which was to have witnessed reformation for the past, and joy for the future, never came! He had tottered for an instant upon the brink of a dark and yawning precipice; he had pushed rudely aside the friendly hand which would have saved him from destruction, and even as the ground crumbles beneath the feet, he was whirled headlong into the abyss.

It was with great anxiety that this erring man wandered forth that night; the hours seemed to pass with painful tardiness; time appeared to his restless mind to stand still; and the occasional gusts of wind which wailed wildly through the trees, sounded to his ear like the knell of death. He heard the sullen moaning of the dash of the waves at the foot of his dwelling; he thought of his wife, alone and deserted by him who had sworn "to cherish her," and of his only child, till he wept--stern as was his soul, he wept in very bitterness. Now it was,

that the pure and upright would have looked and clung to the hope which never forsakes the righteous; but there had been, too long, no place in his heart for holy thoughts; he looked not for consolation, in the gloomy hour of tribulation, where alone, it was to be found, and therefore was he desolate.

The moon, as she sailed along the heavens, imparted a distinctness to the surrounding scenery; and the tall trees, with their leafless branches, resembled so many spectres, with their gaunt arms extended to clutch the unwary traveller at every step.

The cloudless sky was studded with millions of brilliant luminaries that seemed to be shining with more than ordinary lustre, as a figure, closely enveloped in a mantle, glided into a lonely street. Had he been a lover of nature, the silent beauty of the heavens must have attracted his observation; but he was seemingly too much wrapped up in his thoughts to throw a single glance towards the gem-like orbs that glowed so beautifully in the overhanging firmament. A piercing wind swept through the street, moaning and sighing, as if it felt the pain that it inflicted. Doors and shutters were closed against the common enemy, and the streets were forsaken, except

by a fearless or necessitous few, who glided along like grim ghosts of the night. Aught, save love or murder, would hardly venture forth on this bleak night, it would seem; and yet pleasure sends forth her thousands, and necessity her millions, to brave all the dangers and troubles of this boisterous world.

The place to which our wanderer directed his footsteps, was a lonely back building, in the heart of the city of -----, but so concealed by the surrounding houses, that it might as well have been in the silent bosom of the forest. He ascended a narrow flight of steps that led from the outside of the edifice, with the familiarity of an accustomed visitant, and soon emerged from the gloom of the night, into the light and life of a gaming-room--that gay altar of dissipation and temple of pleasure, which too frequently makes those that laugh, and that within its precincts, feel more desolate than the house of mourning.

The countenances of the assembled group, bore the gloomy and absorbing earnestness of men whose hopes are thrown into a fearful hazard. Oh! that Aubrey had, ere that fatal night, detached himself, at once and for ever, from this haunt of dissipation and subsequent misery, and

stood forth a redeemed and unfettered being; his virtue would have acquired new strength daily; and those faults which soathed [sic] his maturity, been then thrown back among the rubbish of his youth.

But we know not what we do; we weave the garlands of joy even at the precipice of death, and disport in the sunbeam, unmindful of the storm that is lowering afar off, and will soon be at hand.

Aubrey left that room a beggar; his last cent had been staked and lost; he was irretrievably ruined. His prospect over the bare wilderness of life was, indeed, a desolate one, with not one bosom to gladden his path. All that made the past delightful, was a curse, and an abyss of misery. His heart was like the sands of the desert, parched and barren--no living stream of hope or gladness quickened it--it was a bleak and withered region, the fit abode of never-ending gloom and comfortless despair.

In the meantime, deeper sorrow than ever fell upon the unhappy being left to pine in solitude. There was a weight on her spirits, an abandonment in her heart, and a chillness in her limbs. A calm, such as comes over a wound that mortifies, had settled down upon her mind.

Memory tuned her harp of a thousand chords, and the joyous days, lost to her forever, came crowding thick and fast upon her brain; as unsullied nature, a light unbroken spirit, child-like thoughts, and merry gladness, in all their freshness, had departed. Who could restore them! The sunshine of existence was gone--the brightness of hope extinct. Life was now before her unveiled; the beautiful, the bright romance was at an end, and she had waked to grieve awhile--to mourn--to struggle--and to die!

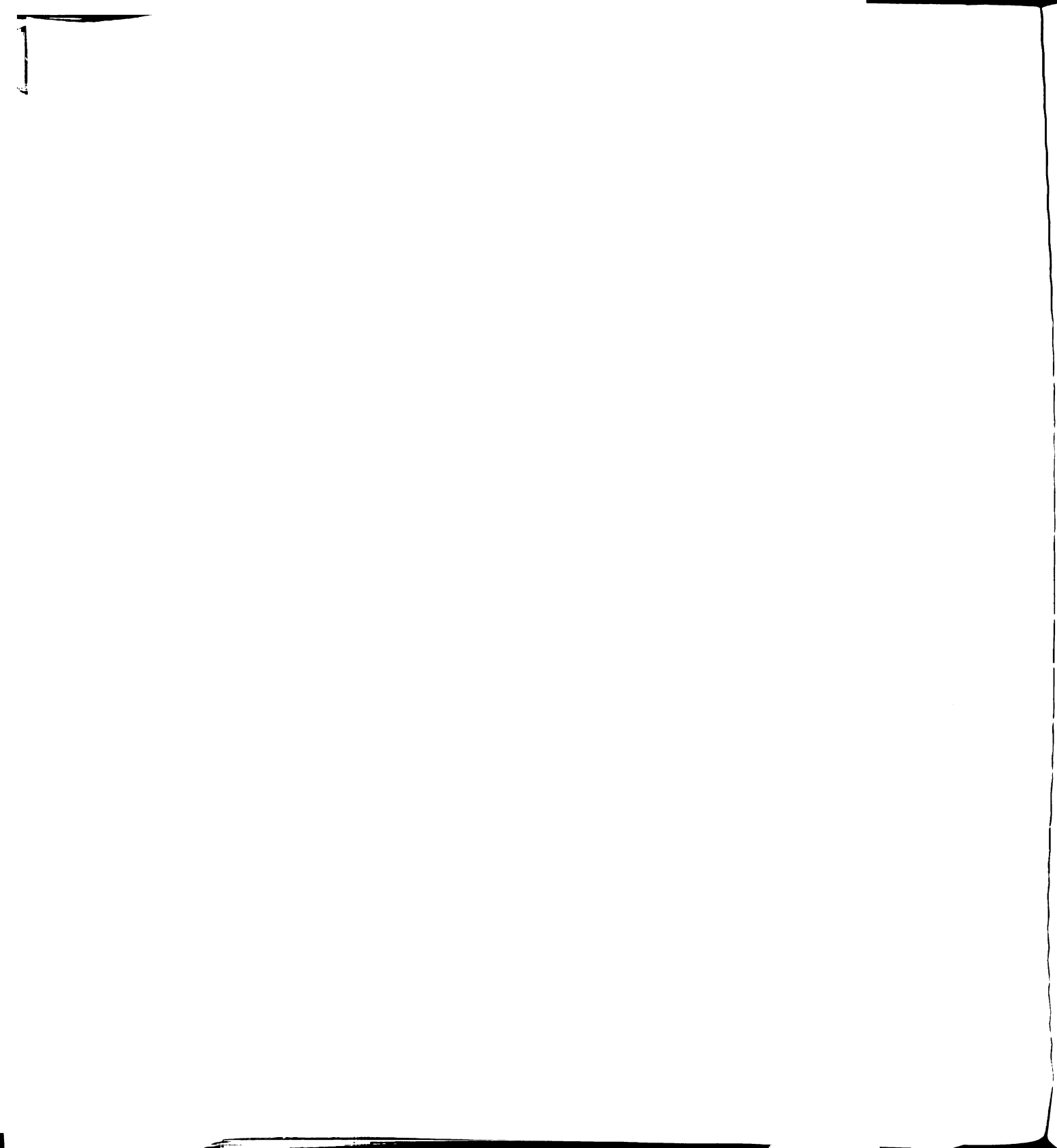
How strong is that desire of the thing called happiness, implanted in our hearts; and yet it exists not; its promises dazzle our eyes, but its reality is unknown; there may be joy and pleasure--happiness never. If we look back to each moment we have experienced happiness, how has it ever been mingled with fever and with fears. It is the mirage which leads us over the desert of life, ever fated to end in disappointment. Or, like the clear and azure waters, that in the east, seem to flow before the weary and parched traveller, yet a little further, and on he urges his weary way; but in vain--the fair stream is a delusion!

The dews fell heavily, as with hasty and rapid strides that lost one left the city, and pursued his path

homewards; the red stars were still visible in the heavens, and the dangerous damps clung to him as he wandered onward. Silence was on that crowded city, and deep sleep, for it was long after midnight; the latest lingerers had disappeared from the streets, and the lights from the long line of windows in the dwellings of the rich. Even the voice of wrangling and debauch was stilled in its own haunts--for men, the dissolute and wicked, were gone to their repose.

It was not the frown from the brow of his lovely wife that he feared; to him that had always been unclouded, and her lips had only breathed affection. She was one of those gentle beings whose sweetness withers not with the hour or the season, but endures through all vicissitudes. It was the recollection of that fervent and forbearing love that now pressed like an incubus upon the conscience of the gambler, and he bitterly reproached himself, as he thought of the many little delicacies he had deprived her of, and squandered in selfish dissipation. His imagination wandered to the past and future, and every picture he conjured up, added keenness to his pain.

In an agony of terror he reached his dwelling--once so happy, now cheerless as the tomb. That pure,



angelic being, whose very existence seemed bound up in his, why comes she not to meet him?

He entered. Silence hung o'er the hall--a death-like and breathless gloom. His senses reeled, and his brain whirled round and round with giddiness. He strode hastily to his apartment; a number of persons were passing through it with appalled looks, as if assembled there by some event of horror. "What has happened." The tone of his voice was almost a whisper, and yet so solemn, so thrilling, that it arrested the step of her to whom it was addressed.

"Look, and see." He threw an anxious and confused glance upon the marks of recent disorder and desolation. In one corner the child lay sleeping on the floor, but not with the soft quiet that is wont to lie on the lids of a babe; it seemed to have wept itself to slumber, and sobs were yet breaking heavily from its surcharged heart. Poor child! is there no one left to take care of you? Alas! the eyes that have hitherto watched over your slumbers, are closed forever. Sleep on, poor babe! you will waken no more to the kiss of maternal love.

He stepped towards the bed; his wife, still young, and bearing the traces of loveliness, lay there evidently

in the agonies of death. A dead new-born infant lay in smiling beauty near her, and a few attendants stood, awaiting in tearful silence, the last sigh. He stood aghast. His lips moved fruitlessly for awhile, at last he uttered, audibly: "I have killed you." His eye was wild and staring, yet expressionless, as he left the room. All the hopes of his ill-spent life were crushed; the only prop that had so long withheld him from his doom, had been suddenly taken away.

What fearful sound is that, which, borne upon the night-wind, breaks the surrounding stillness?

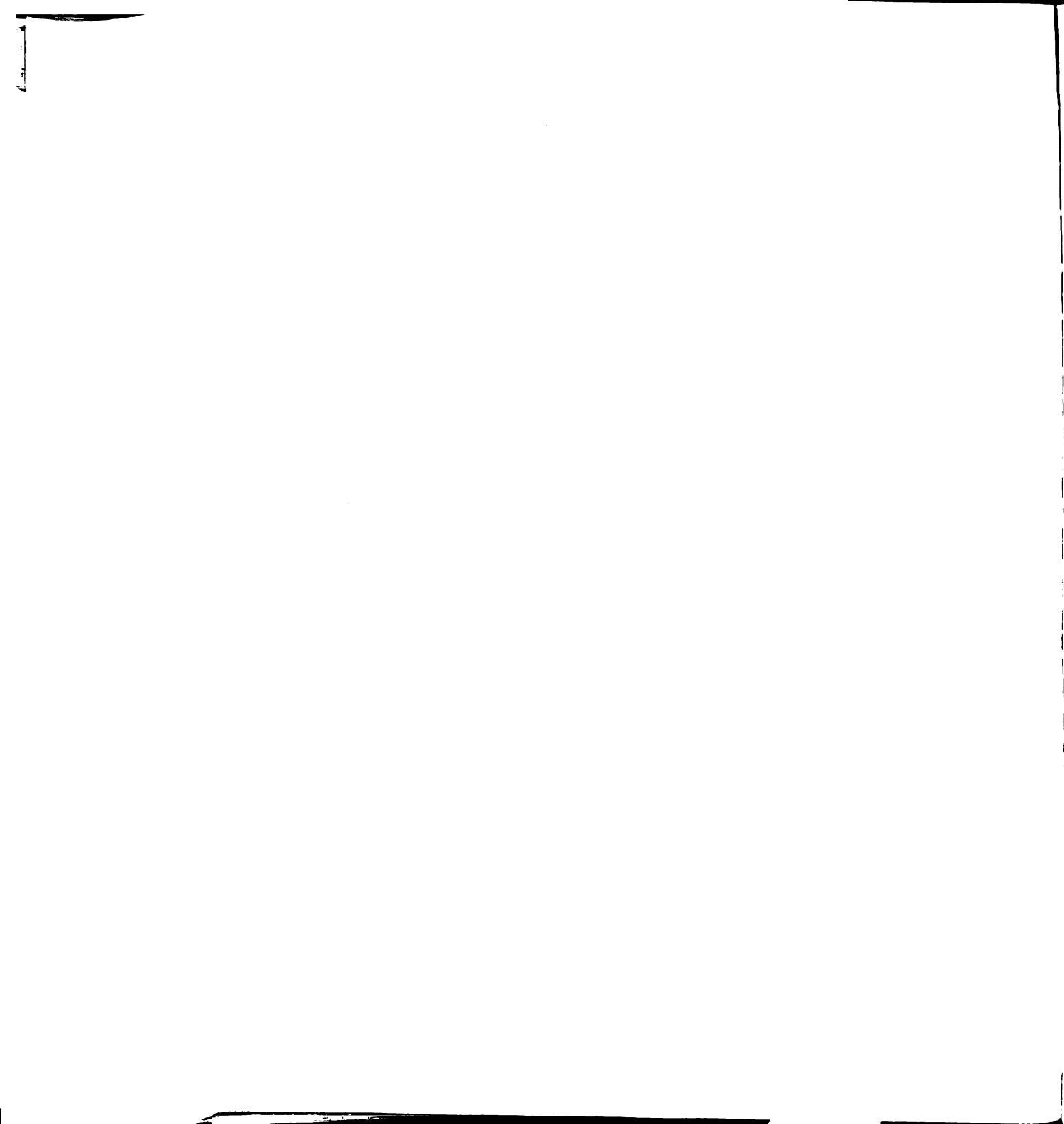
Come hither, and learn. That blood-stained floor, and out-stretched human form, discover in the features of the mangled corse, the once gay and thoughtless Fitzhenry. But yesternight he sat, amid his proselytes, full of excitement and hope; now his own hand has done the deed that nothing human can remedy.

How little does a gambler reck of his work: or of the horrors which result from a practice, of which many think so lightly. The aim of a gambler embraces the robbery of a fellow-being, and the ultimate ruin of self. However successful he may be, his end at last is crime. How many still persist, by this baneful practice, in

destroying the good feelings of a mind, whose opening promise was fair; many souls, who partake largely of kindly and noble elements, who, if they could dissolve the illusions of vice, might be rescued from this guilty enthrallment. With a determined effort, let them throw aside their partners in iniquity, and detach themselves, at once and forever, from their pestiferous influence. If they have talents it will call them into public favour; if of too mercurial a temperament to remain inactive, let their attention be drawn to the politics of the day, and in the frequent discussions opposing opinions call forth, the higher tone of their minds and sentiments may be displayed, the precocity of genius brought into action, and they may finally ameliorate the conditions of their fellow-citizens, and instead of having the name of a gambler, blazoned forth as a monument of everlasting infamy, their names may be recorded, and handed down to posterity, as among the benefactors of mankind.

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"The Gambler's Fate" has the characteristics of an eighteenth-century sugar-coated moral tract. The tone is gloomy; the diction ornate, the characters wooden, the



point of view "female" and the subject, marriage to a ne'er-do-well. The anecdote has a two-part structure: the first deals with the heroine's maiden life, including her solitary, lonely, and melancholy propensities, and the second, her married life.

The first part relates to the popular eighteenth century cult of filial obedience. According to the basic tenet of this creed, an unmarried lady has the social and moral obligation to check on her fiancé's background, especially concerning his companions and nocturnal habits. To gain this end, any means is acceptable. One of the best is to have a friend or relative spy on the gambler-fiancé and report his findings to the lady. In Kate's case here, as an orphan she has no one to call upon; nevertheless, in terms of the hard world of lady-book writers, she deserves her punishment. She has committed the unforgivable sin of rushing headlong into a marriage without preparing for it. Sentimental fiction writers make much of this issue of whether a reformed rake makes a good husband, and the answer in most cases is in the negative.

The second and longer part starts out with a reference to the male gambler. This strategy is

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misleading, however, as is the title, for the story is about a lady who dissolves in her own tears and dies in childbirth. Fitzhenry exhibits a few human characteristics but on the whole he functions as an abstraction. He loses his individuality and becomes inseparable with the institution of gambling. If one doubts Fitzhenry's homiletic purpose in the tale, he will be convinced of it in reading the tag ending.

Kate's literary progeny is found in two writing traditions. As an abused wife she links with the type in the sentimental plays of Steele, Cibber, and other eighteenth-century authors. As an abused wife in the tradition of fiction her ancestor may be patient Griselda popularized in Chaucer's exemplum; and as an abused gambler's wife, she may have a fictional prototype in Henry Fielding's novel Amelia (1751).

A few other ingredients in "The Gambler's Fate" have a basis in the sentimental tradition as we have established it in our study. First and foremost is the figure of Fitzhenry's companion. Although he speaks only a sentence to Fitzhenry, there is a strong hint that he is a roper for the proprietor of the gambling house Fitzhenry frequents. His type forms a coil of gambler

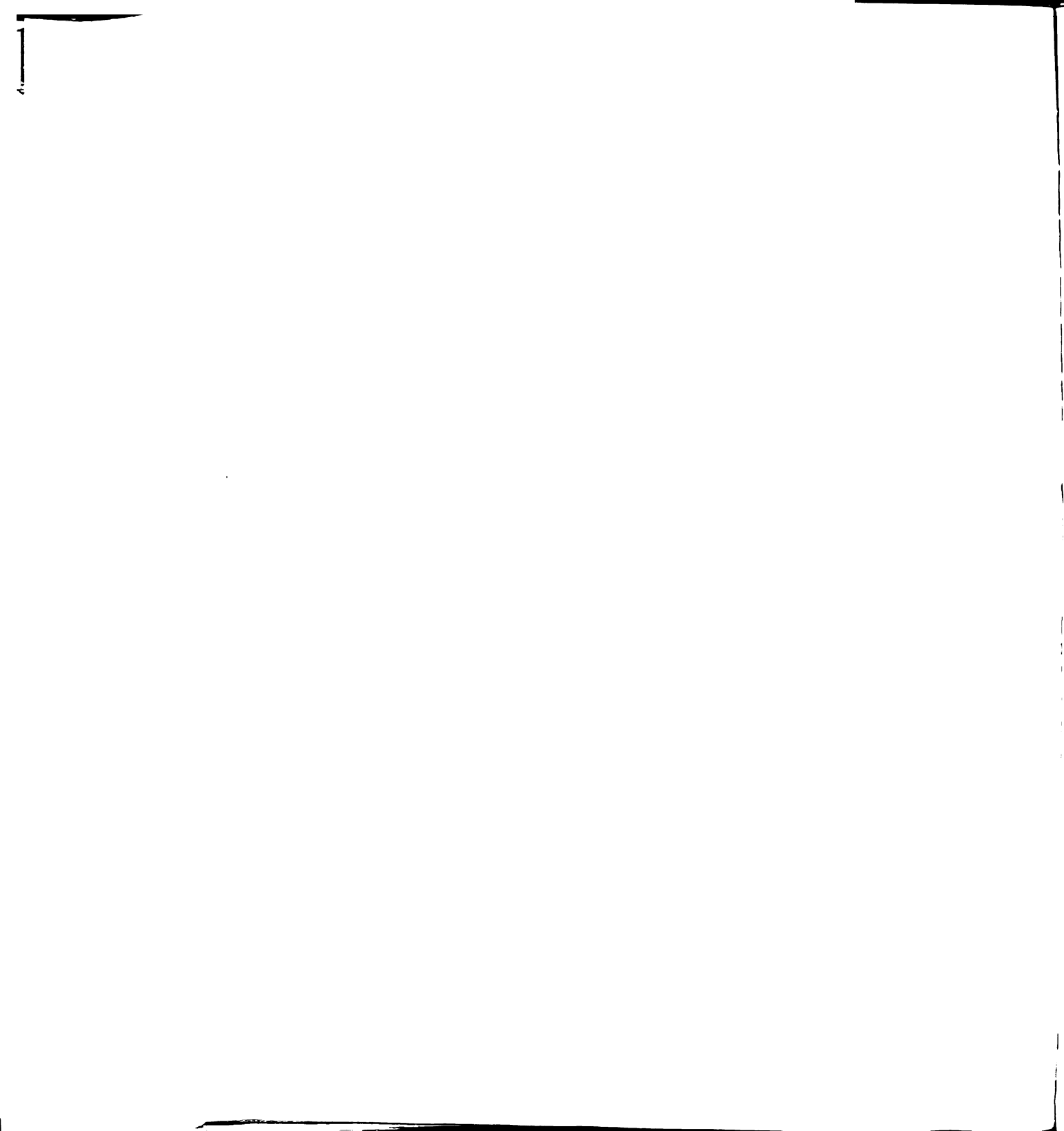
tales, the chief of which is the greenhorn cluster. The ancestor of this greenhorn species traces back to the days of Elizabeth of England and the coney-catchers that hung about the Churchyard of St. Paul's on the prowl for gulls to fleece.

Another sentimental device in gambler fiction emphasized in "The Gamber's Fate" is the use of children. This feature does not appear as often as one might suppose in our period. In tale after tale we read of ragged, hungry, and wild children but only in passing reference. None of the tales that have come under my attention emphasize children in pathetic scenes to the same degree as does Miss MacMichael's. Bret Harte does not rely on this device to any extent either, although his disciples Joaquin Miller, Leonard Kip, and others seem fond of it.

As a final comment, "The Gambler's Fate" belongs in the mainstream of American gambler fiction dating from Dorval (1801) and Mattilda Thayer's The Gamester (1805). The 1836 date affixed to MacMichael's story may as well be 1810. In that early period, the same kinds of techniques, characterization, and style was popular, including Wordsworthian raptures which seem out of place in a story with an 1836 date. Yet, the point perhaps should not be

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pushed, for the gambler story belongs to a species of magazine fiction with a petrified formula lodged in a form of publication that engaged in piracy and shameful borrowings. What showed up in Godey's of 1836 may have been the same or slightly revised story in The American Bee before the turn of the century. Nevertheless, despite its rigid format, the lady-book story adequately serves as a standard of reference for gambler fiction before and after "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" (1870), by Bret Harte, the Homer of American gambler-story writers.



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