

POKER IN THE ETHERIAL DARKNESS

AT THE RICH BLIND MEN'S CLUB OF PARIS, THERE IS THE MOST FOIGNANT GAME IN THE WORLD.

BY STERLING HEILIG.
I HAVE seen the most poignant game of poker in the world. During the five minutes I was allowed to observe it I was almost breathless with its immaterial and silent strain. The players were like pure intelligences sitting in eternal void. The room was bright, luxurious; but the rich sports sat in darkness. I was the only one who saw the deal or draw. No one spoke but the brief necessary words. No one but I saw the players' faces!

It was at the rich Blind Men's Club of Paris, where I might not photograph the scene. Among the sports who sit in darkness there are multi-millionaires, men of great families, bearing world-known titles, heads of houses even, lost to the world by their blindness.

Among them are blind men who dress with meticulous coquetry, faintly frock-coated, gorgeously waistcoated, in high hats of "eight reflects," that might serve to a pretty woman for a mirror. There are those who wear eyeglasses, glance round as if taking interest, and put their paid guide gaily on the shoulder—not to have the look of being led!

There are others, powerful with their family influence and riches, who slouch in negligent clothes. They care nothing for publicity; their only real companions—fellow-clubmen—cannot see them. Two such, the librarian and director of the Theodoroson book-embossing plant, posed for me at cards in the general reception-room, free for the blind men of all Paris when they come for aid and sympathy to these, their powerful brethren.

In the accompanying photograph the attitudes and the expressions of the two men might lead you to think they have their sight. Yet both are stone blind.

So, the six blind sports, in their luxurious cardroom, skinned their cards with fleeting smiles of satisfaction or frowns of impatience. They had no necessity to train their faces!

Facial Expression Unnecessary.

So they used their voices for deception, or were silent. One tall, slender, slender plunger, the forgotten scion of an Israelitish family, foremost in the world's finances, received ace high on the deal. He knew what each card was before I saw them, at his shoulder; his light fingers as he took them from the table with a negligence and deftness that would baffle Mr. Shedy.

He watched his disgraced face light with grim purpose, as the others drew four, one and three cards and two dropped out. In absolute motions he raised three hundred francs, and the three men peered at him with their eyes, with painful, long intentions, as if seeking to catch the vibrations of his very mind.

Then the stout, florid man with the blonde beard dropped out; he would not pay three hundred francs to draw four cards, the two others pushed their piles of chips up. The strong, erect, muscular, hard-featured brother of the second Duke of Fraw (who lost his sight at the age of 15 years ago) was smiling over a four-flush—which his one card completed!

But the weak, white-faced invalid at his side leaned back, strangely relaxed, as he drew a more ten-spot to his pair. The Bluffer with his ace-high and two kickers took his two cards from the table—first one ace and then another!

Now the silence was oppressive. The silence was thick enough to be cut in a bluffer now no longer with three aces! The flush bet a small chip. The weak, white fellow—a leech in his big chair—silently came with him.

What would the astute Hebrew do with his three aces? Hoist up the four—and three-card draws as they deserved! The silence was thick enough to be cut in a bluffer now no longer with three aces! The flush bet a small chip. The weak, white fellow—a leech in his big chair—silently came with him.

Once, I saw the white-faced invalid lay down a straight against a three-card draw! The other time, the nephew of the greatest European financier slammed back a thousand francs against the attempt of two queens to steal a jack pot. And both plays were justified; because the three-card draw had made a full house; but was it nerve alone that moved the all-soul Hebrew sport to so magnificently back his plain pair of kings?

"If it were not that their faces give them away, at times," I said to the librarian, "I'd back those men against any full-eight players!"

Beat Full-Sighted Player.

"They've beaten full-sight players every time they've met!" he laughed in answer. "Cards and music are their intense pleasures. At them, they almost forget their blindness. Every afternoon of the year, there is a rapt, silent game of poker in that cardroom—and always six-handed! Why, one full-sight player, being cleaned out, indignantly went away suspecting that the dealers' fingers read the cards they dealt!"

"That's strong," I said, "to suspect a blind man cheating! I noticed that they deal always from the center of the pack."

"Of course," he answered. "They can't see the dealer; but they feel him. I have been blind only five years," continued the librarian, "yet even I would notice, surely, the shade of changed rhythm of a dealer's movements should his fingers become occupied in reading cards and his mind changed with remembering them!"

Of course, these games take place in a world outside the world, where the very darkness aided by willful silence makes hearing, and touch—touch of vibrations from slight movements at a distance, also, mark you—painfully acute; and the dawning sixth sense of man, which we ourselves feel faintly sometimes and act on sub-consciously more often, has special opportunity to concentrate itself in subjects so poignantly responsive to it.

"There are too many in this deck," said the pale invalid of a new pack, before its

seals were broken. Sure enough, it had by error three blank cards instead of one, as usual. He had felt the extra two by touch, or weight.

These cards are prepared for the Blind Men's Club by the monopolistic printer who, responsible to the French government for the card tax, supplies all clubs and gets their rebate for them on the aces or spades—to prove the slightly used packs have not been read.

They are the same cards used at other clubs, with embossed points added at the left-hand corners of the long ends; but two of these consummate blind sports actually played a game of cards with ordinary unembossed cards!

How? Why, their super-sensitive, delicate, slender fingers felt the forms of ink-prints on the faces! Any of the players could at once distinguish the feel of a picture card; and most could call out the denomination of pip cards, ace, deuce, tray, four, five and so on. Peeling the suits is more delicate—and calling suit and value of a picture-card is the height of this blind sports' wonder-trick.

Regularly, they read the embossed points of the corners as quickly as you or I would see them. The Club Library has 15,000 volumes printed in these points.

Aiding the Poor Blind.

For years past, it has been the pious accomplishment of many French ladies of high society to thus point MSS. books, page after page, in order that the previously ailing and cultured members of this unique Blind Men's Club might keep up with the science, literature, poetry and fiction of the day.

Five thousand such MSS. blind men's books form the personal treasure of the library. Each volume stands for months of patient labor done by so-called frivolous women, themselves fortunate, happy, tempted to enjoy each hour of the day selfishly.

Up to the invention of the Theodoroson Embossing Machine, it was one of the faithful works of the rich blind men's club of Paris to lend out 500 or 600 of its other press-embossed volumes to the poor blind of Paris. Now that the club has acquired French rights from Carmen Sylva and her proteges to use the wonderful contrivance, the blind of all France are lavishly supplied with gratis modern books, a monthly magazine and weekly paper.

There is scarcely need, in France, for the club to attempt what Carmen Sylva has done for the poor blind of Roumania. Even the French government, recognizing the strong family solidarity and general thriftiness that so protect them, grants financial aid to only some 200 of the 4,000 registered blind folks of France. In Roumania, when the good and brilliant Queen started her now world-famous colony, conditions were far different.

"It all began, one day, when I visited an old man's home," tells Carmen Sylva. "As I walked among the gray-haired walls, I was startled to see a fine-looking, dark-haired young man coming toward me. As his step was uncertain, I was doubly struck and asked what he was the oldest of them?"

"He was blind, they told me. He had been a printer, and he had lost sight through the strain of his trade. His employer, as long as he lived, continued paying him; but at his death, the blind man,



STONE BLIND, YET READING ORDINARY PLAYING-CARDS BY THE FEEL OF THEIR PRINT

still young, had no means of livelihood. They separated him from wife and child, and sent him to this home for the aged. For, indeed, he was as helpless as the oldest of them!"

It has had such success that \$100,000 has been set aside from its already earned profits as a working fund for the Roumanian Blind Colony into which Carmen Sylva has finally gathered practically all the Theodoroson-like cases of her limited population. The poor blind of France all work. The Rich Blind Men's Club would not have them do otherwise. Some kind of interest occupation is life for the sightless. Therefore the Sports who sit in Darkness, working through the general Association Valentin Haüy, see to it that all who need their help have occupation suited to their growing capacities. The working blind of France have strong and ready elder brothers. Let them play their game of poker! Paris, September 22.

Sublimity of Switzerland's Mountains Enraptures the Traveler of All Parts of the World

PATIENCE, DETERMINATION AND FORTITUDE ESSENTIAL TO THE PERILOUS TASK OF SCALING SNOW-CLAD PEAKS AND VIEWING SCENES MADE IMMORTAL IN THE MELODIOUS SONGS OF THE POETS.

ZURICH, Switzerland, Aug. 20.—(Special Correspondence.)—When the train rolls out of Germany the chances are that the careful observer knows it. This conviction will probably be due to the fact that the prevailing odor is no longer one of cheese- and Limburger cheese at that—and I took the longest way out of Germany, I like Germany. Every inch of it is healthy, for the greater part sane, and for a European country, perhaps, broad. This is not the case in all parts of Europe, where every country seems to be thoroughly self-satisfied.

I often wonder whether America offers the same outlook to Europeans that Europe offers to Americans. America has been made great by what it has been willing to absorb from other countries improved by its own modern, up-to-date way of doing things.

Travel, however, is not as bad as it has been described, and if one is sightseeing it does no harm to stay overnight in an interesting spot instead of rushing through in a luxurious sleeper. In this way I made my first acquaintance with Switzerland, as I reached Zurich at 7 in the evening. Curiously, exactly pretty in this Swiss town of 130,000 inhabitants, and I hurried a dinner in order to drive around the city before the setting sun had become a mere memory. Perhaps the hour of the day lent to the beauty and to the calm of the picture, but it seemed as though I had stepped into a quiet world, where there was nothing to do but to drift—as the people drifted on the beautiful Zurich Zee, it seemed as though every one were on the banks of that lake that evening. At least every one who was not in a boat on the lake. How proudly the "Lion of Zurich" stands way out in the water on the top of a massive column. "You will not forget our lion," said the cabman, as he pointed to it with pride. I said I would not, and I will probably keep my word.

I arrived in Geneva the next afternoon, but did not remain long in the city. I made my first acquaintance then and there with Mount Blanc and later with the Jungfrau. I satisfied myself upon one point at once. They are both bigger than Mount Hood, but the noble majesty with which our Oregon mountain raises its head is not suggested in the least by these monarchs of the Alps. The great accusation held against America is that everything is too big, and that we only think of size. However, Switzerland must be judged the same as far as the size of its mountains and its lakes is concerned, and the colorings are ravishing. No one has ever reproduced anything that can equal the beauties of this country, which is small enough in itself, but which is made up of magnitude.

If I were to select the one thing which represented to me the most emotional sight which Europe offered me, I should say that these were the crucifixes which are erected at short distances all over the country—in fact, all through Europe, especially through France, Switzerland and Italy. But in Switzerland they seem to carry even more eloquent messages in the rugged hills. Some are just simple crosses, but others have the figure upon them, and as these stand out in the half-dark it is impossible to describe the emotions they call forth. It is no wonder that Europe has a reverence which we have not. Its churches would create that, and this reverence reaches beyond things religious and prevents them from building up idols today and receding them tomorrow, as too frequently occurs in America. The thing we are said to lack is "atmosphere." We do lack atmosphere for two reasons—we do not take seriously the things which create atmosphere and which make history, and we have not the things from



WILLIAM TELL MONUMENT IN LITTLE ALPINE TOWN OF ALTDORF

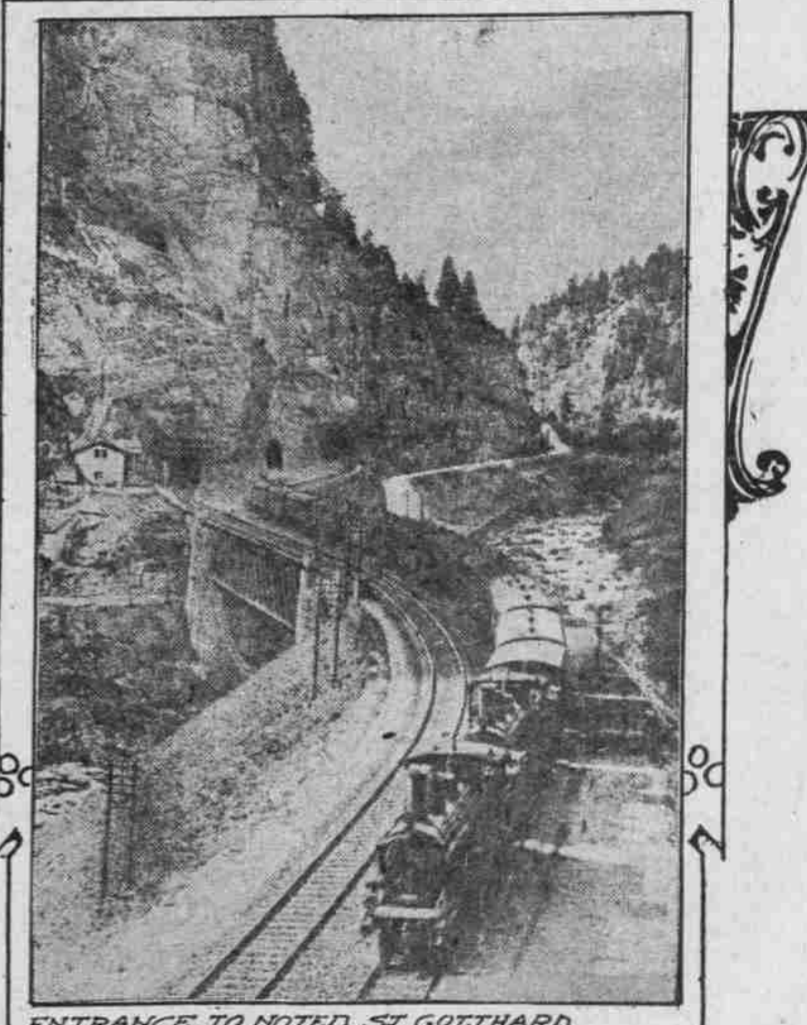
past ages which keep alive emotions. Our emotions are awake only to new sensations, and to use the term in its fullest, only to sensational events. In contrast with the wonderful splendors of nature, it is almost impossible to believe that the peasants have not come forward one moment to live in the present day. But they have not. Just as they were probably at the beginning of time, so they are as they dig the fields—men, women and children. And such fields—no until one indulges in mountain climbing, does one discover how much land is under cultivation. Indeed, at the top of the highest mountains are great farms, and there the life is the same as at the bottom of the mountains. Perhaps they do not know that they are far up on the heights; perhaps they do not know there are depths and greater heights called a world. No one travels through Switzerland without indulging the dubious pleasure of mountain climbing. I learned one of life's lessons on the mountain. I went alone—one is better off alone for many reasons—the first and most important reason being that one's entire attention may be centered upon one's self. One can rest as one chooses, or go forward without consulting the tastes and conveniences of others. One may climb as high as one likes, one may abandon the trip—if one is alone. One must travel alone any road where ambition drives, and ambition is a cruel master. Alas, for one who is gilded on the cold, pitiless slave-driver. The ice to climb gets into your blood and you become possessed to go where comfort and even reason forbids, but you can not resist. Perhaps reward have gone so far, you have climbed and stand there is just as much beyond, awaits you on the next turning, you toiled so hard. From where you now stand, what have you gained over those who



IMPOSING FIGURE BETWEEN LUCERNE AND VIERWALDSTADTER LAKE



WHERE ALL THE WOMEN COME TO DO THEIR LAUNDRY IN DALPE—4000 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL



ENTRANCE TO NOTED ST. GOTTHARD TUNNEL NINE MILES LONG—25 MINUTES FROM DAYLIGHT TO DAYLIGHT

are quietly waiting for you at the bottom? And when you reach the top—what then? There is another hill beyond, and another—and another—and so on indefinitely. And you have fancied that there was a top. You have believed that with patience and determination and fortitude there was a chance to get to the top. There is nothing to do but to crawl back to the level and forget the height, forget the faint feeling that came with the word—?

The great St. Gotthard tunnel is one of the wonders of Switzerland, and to those who know the engineering on the Southern Pacific, it is only necessary to say that before the long tunnel is reached anywhere from 15 to 20 shorter ones open the same view as in California, except that you can see your own track some six or eight times, at takes 25 minutes to pass through the nine-mile tunnel, and I think daylight never seemed so grateful as it does at the end of those long minutes. Soon after leaving this wonderful bit of country I arrived in one of the most attractive spots in the Alps—Rodi Fiesco—little known to Americans, but a lounging corner for the best families of Italy. In a remote village I was received with due honor and a superb American flag was floated for me, as the guest of Mme. Luisa Capplani, the author of "Practical Helps and Hints for Perfection Singing." Mme. Capplani has a magnificent villa here and in Summer many of her American pupils find their way to Switzerland to avail themselves of Alpine air and her instruction. Of the charms of Rodi-Fiesco, there is nothing too extravagant to say, as it has everything in the way of rugged beauty. Surrounded by the most wonderful mountains, it is also here that the noted Ticino River rushes its mad way through the gorges a few yards away from the villa from which the torrent can be heard ceaselessly. This is the Alps in its purest, most simple manner, and the simplicity is as much a part of one's enjoyment here as anything else. It is almost like being in Italy, because the Italian language is heard on all sides, and it is a good locality from which to prepare for the Italian joys to come.

Here I learned so much that by the time I reached Milan I felt as though I could ask for anything I wanted, taking care, of course, to modify my wants to the vocabulary over which I had control.

EMILY FRANCES BAUER.

The steel piers of the new East River bridge, which is in the course of construction a short distance above the old Brooklyn bridge, are now a prominent object and excite the interest of all who cross the city's bridges or boats. This will be the fourth bridge to span the East River.