THE PLAINDEALER

ISSUED EVERY MONDAY AND THURSDAY BY

THE PLAINDEALER PUBLISHING COMPANY

Subscription Rates:

One Year payable in advance $2 00
Six Months, " " 1 00
Three Months, " " 50

THURSDAY, FEB. 7, 1895.

A FORTUNE AT CARDS.

IT WAS WON BY JOHN SCOTT, THE "GENTLEMAN GAMBLER."

His Winnings at White's, in London, in the Last Century Exceeded $5,000,000. Though Illiterate, He Was a Man of the Most Precise Methods.

Of all the gentlemen gamblers of the close of the eighteenth century in England a single one is noted for the immensity and the regularity of his winnings. This was John Scott, who, beginning as a penniless captain, wound up his career as a millionaire general. On the subject of the campaigns he conducted history is silent, but contemporary London was full of talk of his marvelous luck with dice and cards, and the marital misfortunes of his later life gave more material for the gossips.

Writing to Richard Bentley, from Arlington street, on Feb. 25, 1755, Horace Walpole says:

"The great event is the catastrophe of Sir John Bland, who has flirted away his whole fortune at hazard. He t'other night exceeded what was lost by the late Duke of Bedford, having at one period of the night (though he recovered the greatest part of it) lost £32,000. The citizens put on their double channeled pumps and trudge to St. James street in expectation of seeing judgment on White's —— angels, with flaming swords, and devils flying away with dice-boxes, like the prints in Sadler's hermits. Sir John lost this immense sum to a Captain Scott, who at present has nothing but a few debts and his commission."

Sir John Bland, to conclude here the history of that luckless dicer, shot himself dead after losing the last of his fortune in Kippax park.

Captain John Scott was of that branch of the numerous Scott family of which Sir Walter was a member, and his ancestor in the thirteenth century was that famous chemist, Michael Scott, who won the name of Wizard. A later Scott distinguished himself in the time of Charles II by marrying, when he was himself only 14 years old, a lady who was three years his junior. The bride was Mary, countess of Buccleuch, in her own right the richest heiress in Scotland. The marriage was a secret one, and none of the friends and few of her family were informed of it until the day after. The youthful bridegroom did not profit greatly by this match, for his bride died at 13. Her sister Anne, who succeeded to her titles and estates, made a marriage with the pet son of Charles II, Monmouth, and had a numerous family.

It was 60 years later, or about 1750, that young John Scott, son of the Laird of Scot's Tarvet, entered King George's army. Two years later he was in London and in the midst of the most reckless set of spendthrifts, rakes and gamesters that English society has ever known. Sir John Bland was only one of a thousand rich young Englishmen who threw away his fortune over the gaming table at White's. The one historic loser of that era was Charles James Fox, Pitt's rival. Fox gambled away, all told, no less than $5,000,000. Scott was the very antipodes of Fox. When he died, at a ripe old age, he left a fortune as great as that with which Fox had begun, and every penny of it had been won at the gaming table. Fox was a ripe scholar. Scott was almost illiterate. Fox said that losing was the next greatest pleasure to winning. Scott never lost, or so rarely that it did not affect the serenity of his career as a winner. Fox would go home in the morning after a night in which he had gambled away £10,000 or £20,000 and immediately lose himself in a study of Sophocles or Æschylus. Scott, like the sensible fellow he was, would button his coat over the portemonnaie in which he carried away winnings of an equal or even greater amount and immediately go to bed so as to be fresh for play in the evening.

When Scott found himself in London, and amid the wild young men of his era, he determined that gaming was his only chance of getting money. When he engaged himself to throw a series of mains with Sir John Bland, he had, as Horace Walpole puts it, nothing "but a few debts and his commission." His shrewdness taught him that there was nothing in dicing, at which a stupid man has as good a chance as a bright one, and so he speedily gave up hazard and applied himself to whist, at which game heaven fights on the side of the skillful player. Never in the history of play did men gamble for such high stakes as Scott and his victims did at White's between 1753 and 1780. Scott's system was an exceedingly simple one. He gave himself the best of it in every possible way. He never went to the gaming table unless his head and his stomach were in the very best order. He never lost his composure or his good nature for an instant. He played a perfectly fair and honorable game, and at first he made it a rule never to play for more than a fixed sum, which he could afford to lose. He won so steadily that it wasn't long before he was prepared to risk any sum which even the wealthiest or the most reckless of his adversaries would venture to propose.

A story which illustrates capitally Scott's patience in the face of hard luck has been preserved. One night, while he was at the card table, news was brought to him that his wife, the first Mrs. Scott, had given birth to a girl.

"Ah," he said, "I shall have to double my stakes to make a fortune for this young lady."

But in a few hours he was £8,000 to the bad. Retaining his remarkable serenity, he said he was sure of the luck returning, and at 7 a.m. he went home the winner of £15,000. Thus the sort of play that went on at White's night after night during the years that John Scott was winning the largest fortune ever accumulated by a gentleman gambler.—Exchange.

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