

A Hand at Poker

By JAMES JOHNSON.

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At the age of twenty Thomas Appleby, Jr., was generally referred to as "Soft Tommy." While his father, who was one of the largest railroad contractors in the country, was known as a level headed man, his only son, Tommy, was playing "going to college" and making a fool of himself whenever occasion offered. A compilation of the idiotic things Tommy did in the course of two years would make a small volume of statistics. He got drunk, he bet on horses, he played poker, he fell in love with his landlady, he got into jail, he ran himself and his father into debt to the tune of thousands. As a windup he fell in love with a chorus girl at a New York theater, went on a drunk lasting two weeks and was disgracefully expelled from college. His old man stopped building the Colorado Midland long enough to come east and bribe the chorus girl to let go, pay up Tommy's debts, talk to him in vigorous English and then take him west to fill some unimportant position where he could keep an eye on him.

Tommy's halcyon days were over. He had to knuckle down and be good. In the course of two years he became so good and so sensible that he was permitted to go east and marry the daughter of a locomotive builder, with whom he had become acquainted while she was making a tour of the west. It was conceded on all sides that Tommy was no longer "soft." He had become interested in his father's work, been given a partnership, and he was looked upon as a coming man in the business of constructing and outfitting railroads.

Tommy and his bride were to "do" the east and then bring up in their future home in Denver, and everything went according to programme until they headed for the west. Then Tommy received word to bring along a sum of money from Wall Street. The fact that he had \$50,000 buttoned up behind his coat caused a relapse from virtue on Tommy's part. He became "soft" again. He drank and swaggared and told everybody what a big man he was in the Colorado Midland, and soon after leaving Ashley on his home coming he fell into the hands of the Philistines. Three thieves and a gambler had spotted him and were after his money. They didn't care how they got hold of it, but after awhile found that the game of poker would be the easiest way. When Tommy began drinking he became obstinate, and, leaving his fearful bride in the parlor car, he took a hand in the game started elsewhere for his particular benefit.

Then the chorus girl made her entrance. She had let go of Tommy for good. She had never cared for him in a sentimental way. She had drifted from the chorus in New York to the vaudeville in a western town of hard repute and was on her return from a trip to Chicago when she ran across Tommy and his wife. Her first emotions were those of jealousy to think that he had married, and she thirsted for revenge against the child faced bride. Then she reasoned that she never intended to marry Tommy anyway and that he and his papa had treated her very liberally, and she gave over her idea of revenge. Tommy didn't recognize her during the long day that she occupied a seat directly across the aisle, but she saw that he had something on his mind and was drinking himself up to it. The gamblers were going to make up a game for the night, and he wanted to be counted in and arrive in Denver with a few extra hundred dollars in his pocket. The protesting bride was ordered to the stateroom, and Tommy went in search of the game. He soon found it. The ex-chorus girl had sized up the newly married couple and the situation, and she reasoned them out as follows:

"Tommy the 'soft' is not as big a fool as he was, but he is fool enough to be taken in by those card sharps. From his swagger he has evidently got a lot of money with him. He has gone and forgotten me and got married instead of pining along in single blessedness, but I won't hold that up against him. That wife of his is a little innocent. She may have seen a circus once or twice in her life, but her knowledge of the world stops there. If she would take Tommy by the ear, as I used to do, instead of playing the baby, she could bring him to the mark. But she hasn't the pluck. Tommy will gamble, lose his money, and there will be a scene when he faces his father. I must do something for the helpless infants."

The game was going on in the smoker. There were only two or three passengers in the car, and it may have been that the conductor stood in with the blacklegs. At any rate, when the ex-chorus girl made her appearance in the car he politely hinted that she had made a mistake.

"Not if the court knows herself," was her reply. "I came in here to get a smell of this smoke and watch the game, and I don't think there is any rule to bar me out."

Tommy was drinking with one hand and playing poker with the other. He also kept his mouth going as to what a great man he was in connection with the Colorado Midland. The line would have never been thought of nor surveyed nor constructed but for him. He

had played poker since he was ten years old. He was no chicken. He had the money, and money talked. From her nearby seat the woman listened to his vapors and saw the gamblers fleeing him at every hand, and she said to herself:

"I used to get about a hundred dollars a day out of Tommy when he was struck on me, but these sharpers are doing a heap better. If he was born without brains it's not my fault, and yet I feel sorry for that little wife of his. This is all new on her. She is in her stateroom crying her eyes out when a wife of spunk would be in here raising old Neg. It's none of my business, and yet I can't help but feel sorry for her. It's no use to go and speak to her, for she's one of the weeping, helpless sort. What is wanted is something to give Tommy a jar."

A few minutes later the porter of the sleeping car came into the smoker and whispered to Tommy that his wife wanted to see him. At that the gamblers sneered and Tommy swore. He sent back word that he would come when he got ready and continued his play. The ex-chorus girl went back in his place, and when the stateroom door opened at her knock she said to the anxious and weeping bride:

"Your husband is drinking and gambling in the car ahead. Are you woman enough to walk in there and fetch him out?"

"Mercy, no!" gasped the wife. "Then don't make a fool of yourself by sending messages. I know your Tommy of old. He's soft in the head, and I don't believe he'll ever get over it. You are only a baby wife, and your mother ought to have kept hold of one end of the string. Don't sob and wring your hands that way. I'm going back to watch the game and save your Tommy. He'll probably come along in the course of an hour and dump himself down on the floor. I may come later."

"But I don't understand," protested the bride as she struggled with her sobs.

"There's no need for you. Just remain right here and leave the rest to me."

"And who are you?" "Nobody or nothing." When the woman returned to the smoker Tommy had lost all his own money and had broken into what he was carrying to his father. He was as dough in the hands of the sharpers. In five hands he lost \$2,000. Then the woman stepped to his side and took him by the arm and said:

"Tommy, you are wanted in the sleeping car. Come along."

"What are you doing here?" demanded one of the gamblers of the woman as Tommy obediently rose up and lurched about.

"They call me Wild Rose in Cheyenne," she replied, "and it is said that I play poker as good as any man. This man is going back to his wife, and I'm going to take his hand in the game."

The men cursed and growled, but when Tommy had been landed in his stateroom the woman returned and sat down with such nonchalance and produced such a large "roll" that the sharpers winked at each other and then turned in to beat her. They palmed the cards; they bluffed; they conspired; they resorted to all the tricks of the trade, but they reaped nothing by it. The woman was posted in all their moves and had some new ones to show them. They became afraid of her after awhile, and then she used taunts to keep the game going. They lost steadily from the start, and if there was cheating on her part they were not sharp enough to detect it. When she had won back every dollar lost by Tommy the "soft," she rose up and carried her winnings back to the wife. The husband was asleep on the floor. The ex-chorus girl looked at him and nodded her head and said:

"Seems like old times to see him that way. Here's the money he lost to the gamblers. Take care of it and go through his pockets for the rest of his boodle. We are getting near Cheyenne. I leave the train there."

"But your name? You will tell me that and let me thank you over and over again for what you have done?"

"Don't mention it. Good night and goodby."

Tribal Suicide. All students of Malay and Hindoo history know that one of the most horrid customs in those countries is the "poo-pootan," what I should like to call the tribal suicide, says C. Thieme, correspondent of De Nieuwe Courant, The Hague. A Bull prince, with the instincts of his warrior race, declines to surrender, but prefers death, and he and all his people seek death. The Prince of Badoeng did this. He turned a deaf ear to all suggestion of a settlement, but he and all connected with him, men, women and children, committed suicide. Nearly the same thing happened in 1895 in Lombok, a neighboring island. The old king had surrendered, but one of his sons, a cripple, walked out with all his relations dressed in gorgeous garments, bedecked with all their jewelry, and with their swords and lances attacked the Dutch army, only to find the death they courted. Those who were not killed in the fight were afterward found to have also killed themselves.

As Good as a Knot. A little north side boy likes to play with needles and thread and pretend he is sewing. To please him and to keep him quiet his mother has been in the habit of letting him have the articles for his amusement while she is busy with her household duties and especially while she herself is sewing. One afternoon recently the boy was busily engaged in his favorite domestic

pursuit when suddenly the knot came out of the thread and it slipped through the needle. "Mamma," said he, handing the needle and thread to her, "please put the thread in the needle and then please put another lump in the thread."—Columbus Dispatch.

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As Good as a Knot.

A little north side boy likes to play with needles and thread and pretend he is sewing. To please him and to keep him quiet his mother has been in the habit of letting him have the articles for his amusement while she is busy with her household duties and especially while she herself is sewing. One afternoon recently the boy was busily engaged in his favorite domestic

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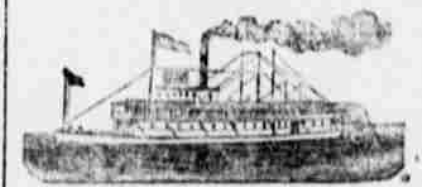
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