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SOME SIMPLE LITTLE CON GAMES

By RICHARD M. KEANE.

Nowadays when a flim-flammer wants to work the farmer he has to have an original proposition. Your city man will buy gold bricks or invest in "Beach" property that exists in the bottom of the sea and can only be partially inspected at low tide, but for the farmer the fakir has to have a sure enough proposition. Lately, though, if your ruralist has been steering clear of the old schemes by which con-men formerly secured his coin, he falls as readily as ever to propositions that are new.

For instance, during the past few years farmers have invested heavily in mining stocks ; some in the silver mines of northern Ontario, some in the coal fields of the western country and some in the more mythical petroleum fields of Texas or California. It would surprise a good many people to know the extent to which farmers have been dealing in this kind of investments. Cobalts have been a popular buy for the past four or five years in the East. Now the listed Cobalt stocks, some of them anyway, are a safe and profitable investment. But because four or five mines in the Cobalt country have made good, and are paying dividends, is no assurance for the investor that a number of other "mines," the names of which nobody ever heard before the "stock peddler" came along, is going to do the same. There has been a lot of cheap silver mine stock sold within the past few years, and the following story will illustrate how some of it is disposed of.

A man who looked and spoke as though he might be a village real estate agent, stepped into a stock broker's office in Toronto and inquired for silver stock. The clerk gave quotations on the listed stock traded in on the exchanges but failed to interest the customer.

"Never mind quoting on that kind of stock," said the would-be purchaser, "what have you got cheap ? I don't care whether it's listed or not ; don't care what it is or where the mine is so long as it's stock and sells cheap, say at not more than three cents a share. Trot out some of that and I'll take a hundred thousand shares."

"What use do you intend making of that kind of stock ?" inquired the broker. "Are you figuring on using it for wall paper ?"

"Oh, I'll take it back home and sell it to the rubes," was the man's rejoinder. "They'll buy any kind of silver stock up our way, providing it's cheap."

Every kind of successful swindling scheme is simplicity itself. The con-man who goes out with a complex proposition, one requiring much explaining, doesn't stand much chance of gathering in the golden simoleons.

SELLING SEED GRAINS

The seed grain business offered profit possibilities for some years and has been worked repeatedly in different parts. It is about the easiest thing in the world to "originate" a new variety of grain. It used to be largely a matter of finding a new name for an existing variety and then "introducing" it at a good stiff price. Enough farmers were always sure to bite to make the venture successful.

One spring an old scallywag came into a settlement where the writer was then sojourning. He was appointing local agents to push the sale of a new variety of potatoes. A Salvation Army officer in a near-by village was induced to take up the sale of the potatoes. Nobody, the local agent least of all, suspected that the thing was a fake, though in the light of the facts it is difficult to understand why they didn't. Figured out by the bushel the potatoes sold at thirty dollars per bushel, but nobody bought in bushel lots. The seed was sold by the pound — five pounds for two dollars and a half, of which sum the local agent got a dollar, and the "head agent," the man who supplied the potatoes, got the rest. As potatoes that spring were worth about twenty-five cents a bag the profits from the turnover are apparent. Of course the Salvation Army man thought he was helping his neighbors by introducing a money-making proposition in the line of a wonderful new potato, but as it afterwards transpired, the potatoes were of one of the varieties regularly grown in the district. But nobody got stuck for more than two dollars and a half, and, of course, soon forgot about it.

A LITTLE CORNER IN OATS

The next fakir to flirt with fortune in that settlement introduced a new wrinkle. He blew in one spring with a gilt edged proposition in seed oats. He was a modest, unassuming sort of male individual, and purported to represent a firm of oatmeal manufacturers in an Eastern American city. In their search for an oat that would produce a meal that in every way would meet the requirements of the exclusive trade to which these manufacturers sold their product, they had sent experts into every quarter of the world in search of what they required. They wanted an oat that was richer in protein, thinner in hull and more brittle in kernel than any oat that had hitherto been produced. Finally on a small island somewhere up to the north of Europe, their experts had discovered an oat that in every way possessed the qualities required. They had brought a limited quantity of seed to America, had sown it on the firm's testing farm somewhere in the Central States and after all the labor and expense involved in discovering and procuring the seed, it had failed to produce up to expectations. The change in climate had been too great. The venture had resulted disastrously. But the firm was not to be denied. Again they had sent buyers to the north seas, but the natives up there would sell only five bushels of the wonderful seed. Bringing the seed with him the representative of the oatmeal people had come into this settlement to have farmers test the grain. The district was more northerly than the one in which it had been tried before. The oatmeal manufacturers had heard of the oat growing reputation of the district, though strangely none of the natives ever suspected their settlement was noted abroad for anything but bad roads and revival meetings. Those two things seemed always with them.

The oatmeal man also hinted that if the quality of oats produced was up to requirements it wouldn't take much persuasion to induce his firm to move their plant from the Eastern American city. The village council at special session decided that if a bonus in the form of exemption from taxation and a free site would be considered by the oatmeal people, they, the council, were prepared to offer it. The man with the oats to sell promised to bring the matter to the attention of his principals.

The oat man placed his oats with representative farmers in half-bushel lots, ten farmers in all getting in on the good thing. The proposition was a straight business one. The oats were valuable. It had cost his company thousands of dollars to get the two bags of seed. They didn't propose to give it away. His instructions were to charge two dollars and a half for every half bushel placed for testing purposes. When the crop was harvested he would be on hand to receive the oats and would buy from the grower every bushel produced at five dollars a bushel. The two dollars and a half collected at the start was merely a guarantee of good faith on the farmer's part. Plenty of farmers were willing to be suckers.

True to his word the oat man was on hand in the fall jealously looking out for his company's interests. Some eighty bushels of the wonderful oats, "Red Lion" oats they were called, had been produced, and every farmer got five dollars a bushel for every bushel delivered. Samples were sent to the mills of the company for testing and the report came back that the quality of the meal produced had exceeded the most sanguine expectations of the oatmeal people. The agent received instructions to continue the "work" and the word passed that farmers again were to have the opportunity of buying seed from the agent at five dollars a bushel, the produce to be bought back in the fall at the same price. It was just like finding money, the farmers thought. They fairly stampeded for the good thing.

This time no restrictions were placed on the quantity each man should receive. A farmer could get as much of the seed as he was willing to pay five dollars a bushel for. And some of them went into it pretty steep. The eighty bushels or so that had been grown the year before and which was supposed to be all the "Red Lion" oats in existence were rapidly exhausted and nobody seemed to notice at the time that the

salesman had brought in a carload of "Red Lion" oats to supply demand. Everybody got all the seed wanted and when the salesman left that spring he had with him some five thousand dollars in cash and "contracts" from pretty nearly every farmer in the country. Of course he never came back, but you couldn't yet convince some people in that country that he hadn't intended returning when he left.

After the furore that followed the discovery of the swindle in the "Red Lion" oat deal, had worn off and agents were safely passing among the people with various kinds of propositions, one of the natives sprung a new one, invented a new easy money dodge and forthwith proceeded to work his neighbors. Strangely it too was an oat game. But nobody was suspicious. His game was either to get farmers to buy his new variety of oats outright, at a nominal price or if the farmer did not wish to deal that way, then the man with the oats would let him in on another kind of deal. He would place with the farmer as many bushels as he would take and the farmer would grow the grain on shares, one-half the produce belonging to the farmer and the other half to oat peddler.

Nobody questioned much a proposition as open and above board as this one. Anybody could see through it like they could an open window. About two-thirds of the farmers in the district recognized it at once as about the quickest and cheapest way possible for them getting into this new variety of oats. They fell for it literally in shoals. Now imagine if you can a deal like this : One man supplies the seed and the other everything else necessary to produce a crop, including the land. At the end of the season the party of the first part comes along with a team, wagon and empty bags. He and the farmer make an equal division of the grain ; the farmer keeps his share in the granary for next year's seed and the other fellow hauls his to the nearest elevator and sells.

That fall the oat peddler was busy most of the time hauling his share of the oats to market. He did not make very much from the venture after all ; that is, not a fortune, but he started a new wrinkle in swindles and such details as are given may suggest some game worth while to somebody else.

It is strange how men can be buncoed with pretty nearly the same proposition several times in succession. There are several hundred swindles that have been worked on farmers that are absolutely the same in underlying principle. They have to be, for the men who work them are the same fellows who have worked the ones preceding them, and rarely is there a con-man of sufficient genius to work out a brand new and original idea. As a rule they jog along some well defined course. Somebody at some time invented a wrinkle for beating people out of their coin and ultimately it played out. Then those who lived by it simply changed their line a little. They switched from hay forks to lightning rods, or from lightning rods to sulky plows. Anything, so long as it does not necessitate a change in the active principle of the game.

THE NEWS BUTCHER'S SIDE LINE

That is your average swindler. He hasn't got much more originality than the news butchers on passenger trains. Ever notice a news butcher trying to work some slick dodge to skin a passenger of funds ? You don't see it so much nowadays as you once did, when railroads were younger and sharpers more plentiful. But occasionally the newsy is to be found trying to increase his income by working something. Invariably it's an old game, but there are people travelling on the trains every day who'd buy phoney money if anybody came along selling it, so any old game will go.

There was a time in the history of railway passenger transportation in America when con-men, bunco steerers, card sharpers, swindlers of every kind, travelled over the lines as regularly as the trainmen did. There were times on some American roads when con-men furnished a larger portion of the traffic than any one class of the community. But times have changed. It is rarely now that one runs across a bunco man trying to operate on the trains. Conductors run them off as a rule and people anyway have been educated out of the tendency to play cards for