

# A SHELL GAME STORY.

## As 'Twas Told By an Experienced Grafter.

### The Three Ventures and the Order in Which They Are Made—Daly's Fourth Venture.

Soon after the gambling games had been closed at midnight last Saturday, a party of sports collected around the table in one of the private dining rooms of the Hoffman house. When they had eaten their meal, beer and cigars were served, and for a couple of hours they beguiled the time in telling stories and recounting personal experiences.

"It is your turn now," said a fero dealer to a gambler who runs a roulette wheel. "Tell us of something that occurred when you were grafting with the shells in '97 on the Skagway trail?"

"All right," replied the wheelman, "but, instead of telling what I did to others while I was in the shell business, I think that it would be more interesting to relate how I, myself, played and lost against the game.

"In the summer of 1879, indeed on the 9th day of July of that year, Barnum's circus came to the Ohio town in which I had been born and raised. Then I was employed as a clerk in the county auditor's office. For some months I had been courting the pretty daughter of an estimable widow, who taught school. On the afternoon of the day to which I refer, my sweetheart and I went to see the circus. Upon entering the grounds, about the first thing which attracted my attention was the shell game. I had heard frequently of this swindle, but until the occasion of which I speak I had never seen it worked, and knew nothing of its details. Then grafters enjoyed greater privileges than they do now. Circus owners and managers considered shell games legitimate money-making side lines, and they were let out on a percentage basis, as were the peanut, popcorn, lemonade and toy balloon concessions. The law seldom interfered. In fact, those were the halcyon days for circus grafts and grafters. I remember that I pointed out the game to my fair companion and told her that it was impossible for the players to win.

"Let us look at it for awhile," she suggested. "Very well," I replied, for I was glad of the opportunity to see it myself, and thought that I would have no difficulty in detecting the tricks. The small table was surrounded by players, and I can look back now and realize that all of these were cappers for the game. When we had approached the shellman made a venture with his shells and pea. The nuts were all in a row. He held the ball between the forefinger and thumb of his right hand. The left hand was occupied in taking money, and was not used in the manipulation of the shells and ball.

"Here is the little pea," he said as he held it up. "Now, I am going to place it under one of these shells. Watch me, and if you can catch the right shell I will give you two for one, ten dollars for five, twenty for ten."

"He picked up the first shell and remarked: 'See, I put the ball under this one.' He did so, but with a movement of the little finger he abstracted it almost immediately. I thought that I was wise in detecting this portion of the play, but a sympathetic nudge informed me that the eyesight of my companion was equally as good as mine. The grafter then lifted the second shell, and informed us that the pea was not under there. I was aware that he still retained it in his hand. He picked up the third shell and said: 'Neither is it under here.' Just as he replaced the shell upon the table, I saw him slip the ball under this nut. What I failed to see was the movement which instantly took it out again.

"Now ladies and gentlemen, here is your chance," resumed the shellman. "Make your choice, and if you guess correctly, I'll pay you two for one."

"A player gave the dealer \$5 and chose the first shell.

"What a fool," I whispered to my companion.

"Of course he is," she assented.

"Then two others selected the third shell, and handed over \$10 each.

"They are right," said my friend. "Try it yourself. You cannot lose, for I saw the ball under that one myself."

"Her suggestion induced me to bet \$5. I chose the third shell. At the request of the grafter, one of the players

lifted that shell, but the ball was not there. Neither was it under the second one. Of course, much to my amazement, the pea was disclosed under the first shell. The player who had made the first bet won \$10, and was correspondingly happy.

"Thus was concluded the first venture. It is repeated as often as the 'sucker' will play against it. When he shows an inclination to quit, the shellman proceeds to the manipulation of the second venture.

"Well, I'll give you a chance to get even," announced the grafter. "Here goes. Watch me closely this time."

"He moved the shells and ball just as he had done the previous time, but I was suspicious. One player made a bet, and selected the third shell again. The shellman noticed my disinclination to play and urged me to another attempt, but I refused. Then, a player handed over a ten dollar gold piece, which slipped and fell to the ground. The grafter stooped to pick it up; as he did so, the man who had placed his wager hurriedly lifted the third shell, and, sure enough, there was the pea. The shellman resumed his attitude, but without discovering what had taken place.

"Are you all ready?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "I want to bet. I'll bet \$20 this time."

"The money was contained in a long pocketbook, which I carried in my inside vest pocket. While I was engaged in counting out the \$20, my sweetheart, who was as interested as I, placed her hand over the third shell. I gave the money to the dealer, and he, putting his hand over that of my companion, asked me which shell I wanted. I indicated the third one. "Very well. Lift your hand, young lady," he said.

"Lift yours," she retorted.

"All right," he replied. "Now pick up the shell."

She did so, but the ball was not there. The grafter found it under the second shell. Thus was concluded the second venture, which is advanced after the sucker has become exceedingly wary.

"You are nothing but a cheater," declared my fair friend, addressig the shellman.

"Hush," I said. "Don't say anything. Let us leave."

"Just as we were about to depart, the grafter placed the ball in the center of his canvas table, and rested the edge of one of the shells on it. The pea was plainly visible.

"I will give \$50," he cried out, "to anyone who can now select the shell which covers the little ball."

"The attention of my companion and myself was arrested.

"Several of the players told the dealer that they could see the pea.

"The grafter, without looking at the table, replied: 'My offer is still good, and open to all.'

"Why, I can see it," said one. "Will you give me \$50 if I pick it out?"

"Certainly, you and all others who do so," the shellman replied.

"Thereupon, all the players, excepting myself, pointed to the shell, which rested on the ball. The grafter addressed himself to me.

"Are you not going to take a chance," he inquired.

"There is no chance to take," I replied. "The ball is in sight."

"Well, what better do you want. I mean what I said. I'll give \$50 to everyone who picks it out."

"Take him up. It's a cinch," suggested one of the players in an undertone.

"Do, added my companion.

"There it is, I suddenly declared, pointing to the exposed pea.

"The shellman looked at the table.

"You are right this time, gentlemen," he laughingly declared. "And I'll make good my offer."

"He counted out five ten dollar bills. "Here is your \$50," he said, and proffered me the money.

"As I extended my hand to take it, he suddenly drew back the five bills.

"By the way," he said, "have you got \$25? You see I pay two for one. You have won, and I will give you this money providing you have \$25."

"Of course I have \$25," I retorted.

"Then just show me that you are a man of means," he replied. "Let me know that it was possible for me to have won \$25 from you, and I'll pay the \$50. All that you have to do is to let me see your money. Just show it to me."

"All right," I answered.

"I emptied the contents of my pocket book. My entire sum of money amounted to \$20, and \$25 of it I held in my hand in such a way as to enable him to see it plainly. "Let me look at it," he said, as he extended his hand.

"What for?" I asked.

"Let me see," he answered. "Let me count it. If the amount is correct, and the money genuine, I'll pay you \$50. Don't be afraid. I'll give you back your money in a moment, and he took the \$25 out of my hand before I realized that he had done so.

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"The other players gave him sums varying from \$5 to \$20.

"In the meantime, the shells had not been disturbed, and the ball was still plainly visible.

"You all select this shell, do you not," inquired the grafter as he indicated the proper one. We nodded approval.

"Then, with his forefinger he barely tipped the top of the shell, and it fell over the pea. I immediately covered the shell with my hand, and at the same time he placed his hand over mine.

"You can't do any funny business," I exclaimed.

"I don't intend to, sir. There," he continued as he lifted his hand, "pick up the shell." I did so, and you cannot imagine my chagrin and consternation upon realizing that the ball was not there. Again he found it under one of the other shells. After winning this last bet, the shellman folded up his table and walked away. And thus was concluded the third venture, which is made for those who have been fleeced, and who are not expected to fall against anything, excepting an apparently sure proposition. In both of the last ventures the pea is abstracted in the same way. The player places his hand on the shell—should the sucker fail to take this precaution, it is the duty of the cappers to do so—and the grafter presses his hand on that of the player. He moves the shell slightly forward. The movement is imperceptible and cannot be felt by even the most suspicious; but it forces the ball from under the edge of the shell, which is nearest to the shellman, and he deftly picks up the pea between his little and third fingers. Afterwards it is not a difficult trick for the grafter to drop the ball under a particular shell, when he wishes to show where the pea is.

I was a poor loser in those days, and I abused the shellman until he was out of hearing. Then I upbraided my female companion for inducing me to play in the first instance. She retorted by passing reflections on my intelligence. We quarreled, and I am ashamed to say, that neither of us saw the circus. She walked home alone. I returned to my employer's office. We never became reconciled. A few weeks afterwards I started West, and eventually settled in Denver, Colorado, where circumstances and my own inclination led me into the gambling business. Since then I have seen innumerable shell games, and have formed the acquaintances of hundreds of grafters; but my first experience against the game served to last me until I came to Skagway in '97. One evening, soon after my arrival there, I dropped into the Klondike saloon, a place where all kinds of sure-thing games were being operated. My visit was simply for the sake of curiosity. There a Denver sport introduced me to Daly, who at that time was manager of the house. He greeted me with the grip of a secret organization, of which I am a member. He told me that the shell game had a sucker in tow who had plenty of money, but who was extremely cautious. He proposed that I take the five twenty-dollar gold pieces which he offered to me, and that I make a play against the game. He agreed to divide the sucker's losses. I accepted the proposition. Daly, himself, relieved the grafter who had been conducting the game. I made numerous bets, and finally lost the hundred dollars. The sucker was going down the line in the most approved style. The shellman dropped a ten-dollar bill on the floor, and, as he stooped to pick it up, Daly whispered to me to play on, and that he would keep account of my money. I continued to play, and as I lost my money, he placed it in a separate pile on the table. Eventually, I played in \$300, which was all the money I possessed. I signified my condition of distress to Daly. He surrendered his place behind the table to the grafter, who had been conducting the game, when I entered. Daly walked to the front door of the saloon and I followed him.

"How much did he lose?" I inquired.

"Who?" he asked.

"Why, the sucker I answered.

"About \$300, I should say," replied Daly.

"More than that," I said. "He must have lost \$500 while I was playing."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why, the fellow with the mackinaw clothes," and I pointed to the sucker.

"Daly turned and followed my indication. "That fellow," he said, "is one

my cappers. I was speaking of you."

"Oh, you were!" I ejaculated. "Do you mean to say that you have used your fraternity knowledge to rob a brother?"

"I don't belong to any fraternity," he replied, "except the brotherhood of man."

"I was dumbfounded. Daly stepped on the sidewalk, and strolled down the street. I stood in the doorway for a minute and then realized that I had been turned for all I had. Thus concluded the fourth venture, as it is operated by Daly exclusively, and which is made for wise sports like I was then, and like you were before I told this tale. Some few weeks later I started a shell game of my own on the trail. I tore off plenty of money, but all the shell game winnings ever made could not repay me for the losing that I suffered in my native town, a little over 20 years ago."

**What Solomon's Temple Cost.**

"A Biblical student in this city," says our Washington correspondent, "declares that if the descriptions of Solomon's Temple are accurately given in the Bible and by secular authorities, the total value of that edifice and its contents must have exceeded \$50,000,000,000. In the first place, the value of the materials in the rough is estimated at \$12,500,000,000 and the labor at \$3,000,000,000. According to Villalpanda 10,000 men were engaged in dressing cedar lumber, 80,000 were engaged in cutting stone and 60,000 in bearing burdens for a period of seven years, who, in addition to their wages, received 50 cents a day for food. According to the same authority, which is corroborated by Josephus, the vessels of gold were valued at 140,000 talents, which, reduced to American money, is equal to \$2,326,481,015. The vessels of silver are calculated at \$3,231,715,000, the vestments of the priests and the robes of the singers at \$10,000,000, and the value of the trumpets of gold was \$1,000,000."—Chicago Record.

**That Dawson Woodpile.**

The Detroit Journal gives in sober earnest the following:

"A returned Klondiker says that Dawson City has adopted a novel and effective cure for crime. It is a monster wood pile, and it is enough to awe the most hardened offender. A man convicted of any offense is compelled to saw wood. He saws ten hours a day steadily, day after day, until his sentence expires. He must saw regardless of the weather. In the most intense cold, the hardest rain, the fiercest snowstorm he is compelled to continue his sawing, and, if the day has not ten hours of light, lanterns are provided to enable him to put in a full day. When the pile of sawed wood begins to get low, the authorities sentence men to sawing for very light offenses, and the result is that everybody behaves for fear of getting a dose of sawing."

**Just Like Grown-Ups.**

"Children, children, don't make such a frightful noise!" said the mother.

"We're playin' trolley car, mamma," said Mattie soberly.

"Yes, I know, dear; but it isn't necessary to make such a terrible noise."

"Yes, it is mamma. We've got to where Hattie insists on payin' the fare, and so do I."—Pittsburg Bulletin.

**Intelligent Brute.**

Grimes—Rather a slow going animal, that of yours.

Stilson—The horse is all right don't you forget it. But he is devoted to me, you know. Why, he anticipates my every wish. He is all the time expecting I will say whoa, and so he whoas. See?—Boston Transcript.

**Brimful.**

I can't help thinking about the emptiness of the world," sighed the misanthrope.

You should have been with me in Hawaii," answered the traveler. "You wouldn't think it was so empty if you had seen that eruption of Mauna Loa."—Washington Star.

**Time to Flit.**

"I'm going to move."

"Rent too high?"

No; landlord wants me to pay it."—New York Journal.

as strewn with precious metals as is the Klondike. From Atlin to Dawson, gold, silver, copper, and iron are found in abundance which is the river valley. Hundreds of thousands of years ago, where life is unsafe, while on the Klondike, the Klondike can be applied. On the same date that the Klondike was destroyed by a tempest, Dawson's Klondike was destroyed by a tempest. Dawson's Klondike was destroyed by a tempest. Dawson's Klondike was destroyed by a tempest.

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