Making Thrills for Coney

Nothing Left to Chance in the Domain of Roller Coasters, for the Dollars Cease to Trickle in After Every Island Accident—New Devices Used Year by Year.

TWELVE million dollars are invested in mechanical rides and coaster railways in this country, and several million people contribute their nickels and dimes each summer to make the proprietors and showmen richer. The recent wreck at Coney Island, wherein a car in swift descent went off the track and caused severe injuries to seven persons, has drawn attention to the real dangers of these "thrillers." As a veteran exhibitor on the beach Bowery remarked last week:

"Hope to goodness there'll be no more accidents this summer. The one in June cut the receipts of all the Island rides in two, and, as for the place where the accident occurred, it might as well have had a labor-union boycott passed against it, for all the business it did the next two weeks.

"How did it happen?" continued the garrulous showman. "That, my boy, was a case of a fool motorman and too much electric juice. It was his last trip of the evening, and he was in a hurry to get home. Besides, they say some of the passengers yelled, 'Let her go, Jack!' and Mister Man kind-a lost his head. Anyhow, he threw on full power rounding a stiff curve at one of the elevations, tried to recover control with his brake, and the car flew down into the next dip with one of its rear wheels away up in the air! The crash came at the bottom of the declivity, and seven of the 10 passengers were pitched out or stunned and bruised by the shock. Motormen!" snorted this showman, who is a specialist in purveying "unconducted rides" of the "safety coaster" type, "I wouldn't have them, or the third-rail power, either! You can't tell what a motorman may do, but here at the home plate I can look out and see every foot of my ride, and my assistants beside me, equally watchful, ply the emergency brakes devised to stop every car on the course in case of trouble. No, sir, I don't trust the juice, the brakes operated aboard the cars, or the fellows that handle them!"

An inquirer hunted vainly last week for some authority, public or private—official, engineer, scientist, constructor—who could be held responsible for life and limb of passengers on coaster railways. There is, of course, a general police power over obviously dangerous devices. The building department limits itself to the stoutness and durability of structures. The fire commissioner guards against fire. But the job of supervising the working of these miniature transportation systems belongs to nobody, and nobody wants it. The public service commission doesn't. Counsel to the commission grinned and shook his head when it was suggested the word "railroad" in the public service act included coasters. The news that the commission had taken to prowling about the scenic rides at Coney Island would tickle Receiver Whitridge and some other street car folk, but it isn't likely to happen.

FINDING THE TEST "GOAT."

"How do you test the safety of new thrillers?" was asked of a leader in this industry. "Engineers draw the plans? Committees of scientific experts calculate the chances and pass on the practicability of new devices?"

"I take the first ride myself," was the prompt reply. "I'm the goat. After the device has been thoroughly tested by the employees, passed by the building inspectors, and any suggested improvements carried out, it is thrown open to the public. As for scientific guidance, I know of none. There are no textbooks on the subject that I ever heard of. The laws of railway engineering don't apply. In fact, we use sharper curves, steeper gradients, than they could possibly use, and our combination of power for the uplifts with force of gravity for the descents is outside the ordinary range of their calculations. The coaster business has been built up and improved by just one little bit of invention and experience added to another."

Pleasure railways came into existence about 26 years ago. L. A. Thompson and S. E. Jackman have each been credited with the honor of being the pioneer. While Thompson was putting up his first primitive "switchback," where now runs the Sea Beach Walk at Coney Island, Jackman was building his first toboggan slide around the interior of the Globe roller skating rink at Haverhill, Mass.

Thompson improved his "switchback" into the scenic railway. Instead of the straightaway run there and back, with its climbs of ten-foot hills and descents into miniature valleys, he devised a wonderful serpentine ride, winding in and out over the beach sands, interweaving its coils above and below, rising alternately to giddy trestled heights and sinking to awesome depths with the swiftness and serieness of the traditional witch on her broomstick. To complete its wizardry, the inventor borrowed the paraphernalia of the stage carpenter. He housed certain portions of the route as stalactite caves or glimpses of Avenus; he built lofty tin mountains o'ershadowing the summits of the trestles; he ran the toy trains past waterfalls and volcanoes, through bad lands or gardens of paradise. And the great variety of scenic trips now offered at the seaside—from the old Mill of one season, which becomes the rocky road to Dublin the next, the Alps transmogrified into the great divide, or Niagara Falls scene-shifted, maybe, into the Dragon's Gorge—are all based upon this clever, theatrical idea of Thompson's.

The high elevations and the curves required power; no longer did the shoulder muscles of employees suffice to push the cars up the hill, as on the old Sea Beach "switchback." The employee got aboard and operated a brake or brakes and grip; and endless cable carried the car up to the summit, there the cable was let go, and the vehicle started on its series of alternate dives and rises due to the push of gravity from the first elevation. As the initial pullups became higher and steeper and the length of the rides was increased from a few hundred yards to more than a mile, third rails were substituted for cables on some of the newer railways, and the brakeman developed into the electric motorman.

Six of L. A. Thompson's "rides" in Greater New York are operated by cable and gravity, the remaining one by electricity. The corporation he heads—a million-dollar affair—has 20 mechanical railways in the United States, besides several in Europe; and throughout the list, though the cable clutch and release be automatic, there's always a man aboard each train in charge of the car-brake. The saying at Coney Island is that "L. A. Thompson is lucky," which probably means that L. A. Thompson is careful. Certainly the record of accidents shows his system of personal train guidance to have proved as satisfactory as the so-called "automatic safety" coaster.

"Old Man" Jackman, as the Islanders call him, invented the latter type. It was stated a while back that he built his first contrivance, a toboggan slide, around the inside of a roller rink at Haverhill in 1883 or 1884. The skating craze was then at its height, and the visitor to the Globe rink had his choice of gliding over the smooth floor or spinning around the exciting curves of the slide, the tracks and cars of which skirted the walls of the building. Jackman was a Yankee carpenter of little book learning, but great ingenuity. His success in his home town led to his getting the contract of making the toboggan slides for the ice sports at Montreal. Ice or seaside, slippery surface or track, made no difference to Jackman; he visited New York and Philadelphia, and within a short time was constructing his "thrillers" at all the popular beach resorts. From the simple toboggan was gradually evolved the highly complex safety coaster. And while his rival Thompson steadily kept in mind the idea of a railway and ever increased the distance of the journey, Jackman, carpenter-like, built most of his structures within the dimensions of a good-sized house or amusement pavilion. The look of even the newest ones reminds the spectator of nothing so much as of the good, old, substantial framework joiners put up for big barns and dwellings before the days of steel beams and concrete reinforcement.

A myriad sticks of seasoned timber, bolted and nailed; a wilderness of cross pieces, supports, and stays; a car track that quickly mounts to a height of 75 or 100 feet, circles the level top, dips suddenly for a partial descent, rises again in scary flight, makes a second circuit lower than the first, and so on circles, dips, and rises till like a bird or an aeroplane it strikes the ground level at last. That is Jackman's coaster. The cars run low—"Keep your center of gravity below your center of height!" says Jackman—on soft iron rails strapped to supports of yellow pine. A loading lever at the start attaches the car to the chain which carries it up; another lever unloads the car from the chain; and other grips, likewise operated from the ground below, elevate track brakes, which, by pressing the wheels from beneath, reduce the speed on the curves. An emergency brake is supposed to stop everything, when required. Heights and descents are so calculated, or so tried out by actual experiment, that the unconducted car returns, after its swift flight, at snail's pace to its starting point.

THE PNEUMATIC RAILWAY.

Besides the cars operated by carbrakemen or motormen and the automatic coasters just described, a third and novel type of mechanical ride has just been installed at Coney Island. This is the pneumatic railway, a curious return to the power projects of 40 years ago, when a company was organized and plans were drawn up for a New York underground railway to be operated by compressed air. The system used is exactly the reverse of the post office pneumatic mail tubes.

Instead of pushing the cars forward by compression, they are sucked the entire length of the tube towards the partial vacuum caused by a nine-foot diameter fly-wheel revolving at the rate of 210 revolutions a minute. The Greek philosopher who remarked that nature abhors a vacuum should have witnessed this pretty illustration of his theory. The broad back of the car, fitting snugly the shape of the tube, and doors at the farther tube exit form an air chamber. Merrily the flywheel draws out the air ahead of the car, causing the vehicle to move forward with great speed towards the point where the car body itself passes over and blocks the air vent to the flywheel. As soon as that happens, there's no longer a vacuum between the car and the tube doors. Its momentum compresses the air ahead, the pressure of which in turn swings the doors wide, and the car rolls forthwith into the open.

'Tis a jolting, jouncing, hair-raising ride, for there are no brakes or other control, the all-steel conveyance and low wheels are peculiarly rigid and heavy, and one is lucky not to be spilled into one's neighbor's lap before the trip is half over. Also the greater part of the ride is in pitch darkness. But it has already found its place, and that a popular one, in Coney Island's queer category of amusements. Patrons may learn for one thing how they would be likely to feel if, instead of having heads and trunks and extremities, they were reduced to letter size, and yet retaining entire consciousness were shot through Uncle Sam's mail tubes at the rate of 50 or 60 miles an hour. In fact, Mr. Stotzel, the partner of the inventor and exhibitor, Henry J. Cohen, is already preparing to supply the Cincinnati post office with a vacuum express tube of this new sort. The men say they can shorten mail transportation in any large city by 24 hours and with a railway tube reduce the running time between New York and Chicago to 12 hours. Anyhow, the pneumatic ride has had no accidents as yet, unlike the luckless monorail.

The psychology of coasters, tubes and other mechanical rides, is simple. It is the "vision of sudden death," such as De Quincy, the opium-eater, experienced atop an English stage coach, jogging off its 15 or 20 miles an hour. Without narcotics to aid them, American pleasure-seekers want much faster rides than that, to make their pulses race and their heads swim. After one of the newer rides such as have been lately installed at Coney Island or in the suburbs, a writer like De Quincey would probably have had no "Confessions" to write.—Henry MacMahon, in N. Y. Evening Post.

Take, for instance, the so-called aeroplane coaster, which aims to reproduce the sensations of a Curtiss or a Bleriot swooping down to earth. One shoots precipices with heart in mouth; circles the sky (or so it seems), climbs terrific hills, thinking each moment the clutch will break, faint with the experience; then plunges down, down to strike head-on the pillars and posts that appear to approach at a mile-a-minute clip. But no! Miracle of miracles! The pillars, recede, the car passes safely under. Goodness! We're up to the blue sky again. Another—a last nerve-racking plunge—and with blanched faces and shaking limbs, the passengers glide into port of gaudy terra firma with its familiar crowds, electric lights, "barkers," and starters.

"Step out lively, if you're not taking a second ride!"

One steps out as lively as he can, and contemplates the throngs in dazed fashion. A string of ticket-buyers stretches from the box office clear across the street. Thirty or forty prospective riders, who have already paid, wait their turn impatiently on the platform. The carrousel down the block is taking in scattering nickels, the "safe and sane" miniature railway that hugs the ground, runs empty of passengers, but the contraption you have just ridden in—aeroplane coaster or it may be a "Ride to the Clouds"—is coining money for its proprietors at the rate of $75 or $100 an hour.

Of course, if patrons of these rides were actually killed as on each of the dizzy descents they half expect to be, the money-making schemes of the showmen would be defeated and the coasters would coast no more. Persons of weak heart or apoplectic tendency, attempting hari-kiri, are likely to find the coaster a quicker mode of exit than pistol, sword, rope, or acid. Physicians warn such patients against the "thrillers," and the showmen also know the danger and welcome no ill patrons. As to the average, healthy, well-nourished American, the shocking rides appear to affect him not. As proof that their "rides" are not injurious, the exhibitors point to motormen and brakemen who have piloted the cars for years without apparent loss of bodily vigor or mental stamina.

WHERE CHIEF DANGER LIES.

The chief danger lies in the construction from year to year of steeper and steeper coasters, of new "thrills" that take greater and greater liberties with power, gravity, curvature, and the laws of motion. One enterprising spirit devised a model of a train that should climb to a lofty level and then jump clear out into the void, say, 15 or 20 feet straight down onto the next set of tracks. He showed that his working model, with the mannikins inside of it, performed the leap with infinite correctness and security, and he only awaited orders to begin construction. But the older showmen balked—luckily for the public.

The building department, to its credit be it said, has forfended a great many accidents. The opening of a new "ride," recently installed at the island, was halted three weeks while the inspectors obliged the inventor to bank the curves, lay guardpieces along the tracks, and reduce by one-third his speed, which, it was said, amounted originally to 60 miles an hour! The structures and roadbed of all the roads are inspected by the department each spring, and after the accident last month a force of men was sent down to look over everything, and vigilance was redoubled. Moreover, there is daily inspection of the "rides" by employes of the managements.

The life of a scenic railway or safety coaster varies from 15 to 25 years. Wooden roadbeds grow spongy; iron or steel tracks wear, bolts and nails work loose, timber of the framework deteriorates, unless painted yearly or oftener; and though worn parts are renewed, the wooden structure inevitably becomes less secure as it reaches the end of its second decade. The strains and stresses are exceptional, while the stanchness and the weight of the equipment and construction are petty as compared with those of business railroads. And the "rides" are invented and operated not by skilled engineers but at the best by clever mechanics.

The need of regulation and supervision by authorities expert in these various problems of safety, durability, and transportation is obvious. Such regulation would undoubtedly follow an accident that killed or maimed many persons. It should be begun before and not after such a possible catastrophe. Granted that the mechanical "rides" are as safe as any trolley car or the train from New York to Chicago, they require scientific inspection just as do the street cars or the steam railroads.—Henry MacMahon, in New York Evening Post.

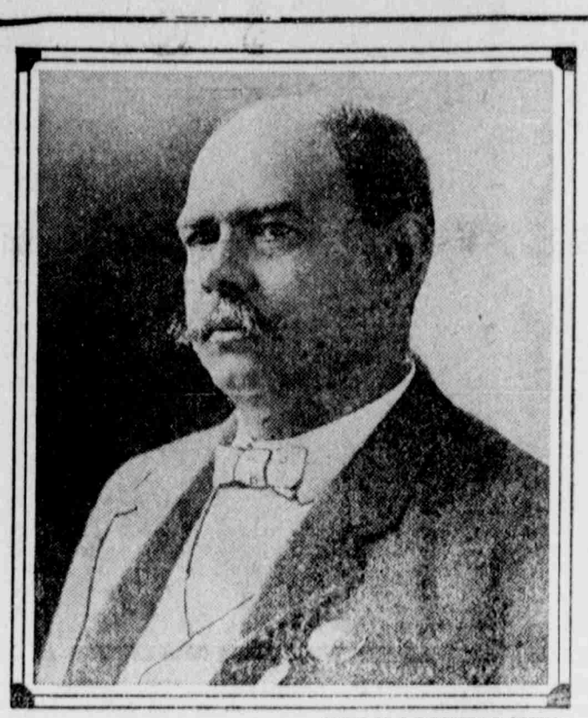

PHOTO BY E. CHICKERING, BOSTON.

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New United States minister to Liberia, Africa.

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The inventor of Esperanto, the international auxiliary language, who will attend the sixth annual Esperanto Congress to be held in Washington August 14 to 20. Dr. Zamenhof is a distinguished physician of Warsaw, Poland, Russia.

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MRS. M. E. PALMER, BOX 176, Blackfoot, Idaho.

Blackfoot, Ida., July 20th, 1910.

Dear Doctors—I have suffered for the past 5 years with pain in my back and shoulders, and also my stomach—in fact, I was almost a total wreck. I could not work nor could I sleep; and had no appetite. I had 5 physicians treat me and used lots of patent medicines, but got no relief until I had been taking Drs. Shores' treatment for the past 4 months, and I can say that I am a new woman. I do my own work now, I eat well and sleep well and can recommend Drs. Shores to anyone who suffers as I did.

I have never suffered any pain since I first began treatment, and I thank you for the great good you have done me. Here is one of my pictures if you wish to use it for the benefit of others. Sincerely,

MRS. M. E. PALMER.

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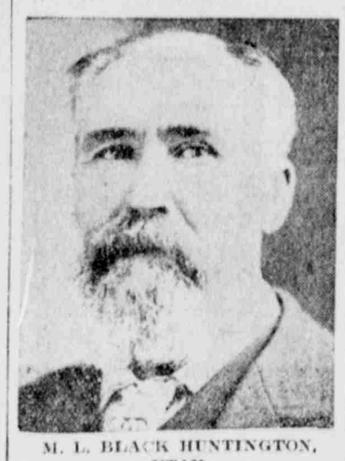

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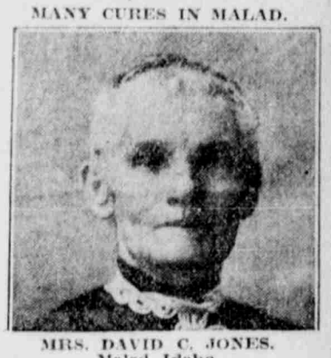
Mr. Black says: "I wish to report that after taking your treatment for two months for Catarrhal deafness, that my hearing is completely restored although for OVER TWENTY YEARS I HAVE HARDLY BEEN ABLE TO HEAR A SOUND OUT OF ONE OF MY EARS AND LAST FALL MY OTHER EAR CLOSED UP.

"I cannot express to you my gratitude and how thankful I feel that I can now converse with my fellow man without him having to almost yell at me.

"I send you my photo by mail today. Respectfully yours,

"M. L. BLACK,
"Huntington, Utah.

MANY CURES IN MALAD.



MRS. DAVID C. JONES, Malad, Idaho.

"I want to thank Drs. Shores for the good they have done me and my husband. I know of many cases in Malad which have been cured by Drs. Shores. My husband was one of them. In my own case local doctors did not understand my trouble. They claimed I had gall stones and other troubles, but did not help me. I wrote to Drs. Shores and began their treatment when I was bedfast and could not move myself. In two weeks I felt better and in one month was up and around, doing my housework and feeling splendid. This improvement has been permanent—although I am 67 years old, and have suffered for 20 years—fell away to skin and bones, lost my breath, had cold sweats and terrible pains—now I feel splendid, and all Malad thinks I was practically raised from the dead. Write me if you want more particulars, you who suffer.

(Signed) "MRS. DAVID C. JONES."

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Above is given the voluntary testimony of three patients who have been cured by Drs. Shores' Home Treatment alone. Think what this means to those who have no good Doctors at home—think what it means to you—when Doctors can cure such cases by mail. How much better are your chances if you happen to live nearby and can call for personal attention. Read all these statements—they come from the heart and are full of human interest. Write these people if you wish further proof, enclosing stamp for the reply. LAST, BUT NOT LEAST—CALL OR WRITE DRS. SHORES YOURSELF AND BE CURED.

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Weak, tired-out, sickly women—suffering from the ills peculiar to the sex, find Drs. Shores' treatment prompt and wonderful in results. Consultation free and confidential.

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Wives of Weissensee And the Bookmakers

How the Race Course Corrupted a Pleasant German Town and Nearly Drove its Male Population Into Bankruptcy Until the Wives Came to The Rescue and Furnished the Police With Evidence on Which 23 Layers of Odds Were Arrested and Sent to Jail—Clues Found in Husbands' Pockets at Midnight.

(Special Correspondence.)

BERLIN, July 20.—Seven short miles from the heart of this sleepless city, amid flowering meadows dream the sister suburbs of Weissensee and New Weissensee. Pretty rococo villas and less pretty flat houses, rise cliff-like from the flowering meadows; there is a round, translucid lake edged with daisies, a park, a toppling schloss, neat little avenues, fringed with innocent plane-trees; and delightful deep-sea-eyed children. And happy homes innumerable! At least so men imagined. But as Eden had its serpent and the Hesperian gardens their dragon, so the Weissenseers were plagued by the old enemy of virtuous men, who has happily, however, at last, been put to flight by the redeeming devotion of wifely hearts.

His sulphurousness laid out near Weissensee an excellent race-course, and offered tempting prizes for the fastest trotters. The venture threatened to fail. Respectable Weissensee never had heard of trotters before, and at first regarded with just suspicion the evil one's contrivance. But sport burns in all blood, and Weissensee succumbed. It began to attend the races. At first it attended furtively in twos and threes, with hats pulled down over eyes, or in disguising blue spectacles. But as the seduction grew this shame disappeared. Weissensee came in tens and twenties; then in hundreds; and at last wholesale, so that soon its whole male population spent Sundays and holidays watching the intoxicating sport. The churches were empty. Skittles lost their charm. There were no more idyllic walks with wives and sweethearts down the plane-tree avenues; and tears over absent fathers appeared in the children's deep-sea-eyes.

BOOKMAKERS GET ALL.

The fact is, the Weissenseers betted, and lost. Ignoring the permitted "totalisator" system which swindles you slowly and honestly, they laid their money with betting men from Berlin, who unlawfully made books on English and American lines; and of course, started for home each evening with beaming faces and inflated wads. Very different were faces—and wads—in Weissensee. Everyone was hard up. Husbands had no money for theaters; children played without toys; the umbrageous beer-garden went bankrupt, and summer hats dwindled like Halley's comet. "Business," growled peevish husbands, "has gone to the dogs." What was worse—in the bookmakers' wake came enameled ladies from Berlin, who smiled to the erring husbands; and soon it was seen that while Weissensee's headgear shriveled, the enameled ladies' hats waxed in radius and radiance. Things were becoming black.

It was the fault of the devil, his race-course, and the corruptions of the Babylonian metropolis. Griselda herself would have lost patience. But the hour of deliverance was nigh.

The wives of Weissensee met in council for self-defense. Dissensions were forgotten, and ladies who had never hitherto exchanged nods, kissed one another so ardently that powder filled the air. What was to be done? Expostulations, curtain-lectures, cozenings, and threats, it was agreed, had been tried sufficiently and in vain. It was reserved for Frau Leiner, a local doctor's wife, to propound a remedy. As the husbands, she opined, had succumbed not to the innocent trotters, but to the allurements of hazardous bets, the only solution was to send the bookmakers to jail.

"If the police can't catch the bookmakers, how can we?" asked a dissentient.

"The police can't wash babies, but we—at least, I can," snapped Frau Leiner. And the meeting, she counseled, should elect an espionage committee, track down the law-breaking bookmakers, and then having shown its finesse in detective work, for the coarser work of capture call in the police.

At first the amazed meeting gasped. But lovely woman is receptive to ideas. A moment later the despairing wives wavered; next they judiciously discussed, and finally they unanimously approved of the unparalleled proposal. Amid a shower of kisses and powder the meeting dispersed.

CLUES IN HUBBIES' POCKETS.

The beginning was hardest. There were no clues. But the resourceful wives enlisted a youthful advocate, who had been only once on the race-course, and was not wholly lost. He was deeply in love with Frau Leiner's rosy daughter; and, with one of those overwhelming caresses for which good men pledge their souls—and poor men their overcoats—Fraulein won him into the plot. Thus were secured the initial facts. It took time to find the rest. In midnight silence, while snoring husbands dreamed of backing winners for a million, their guardian angel slipped out of bed and stole their pocket books; searched for the bookmakers' names, copied suspicious addresses, and scrupulously analyzed every ambiguous note. They found incidentally, it is said, scented notes from Berlin's enameled femininity, but this was suffered in silence for the sake of the common cause. Once a week the committee met, and collated the material, and so on industriously until the identity of the sinful bookmakers was known thoroughly. Then after a month of unremitted labor the blow thunderously fell.

A memorandum signed by 20 distinguished wives of Weissensee reached the police, with names, addresses, descriptions, and beauty marks of the bookmakers, and lists of their crimes. Next Sunday Weissensee race-course was more than usually thronged. In addition to the local males, and the usual Berlin concourse, there were a score or so of sharp-nosed strangers who seemed to take keenest interest in the races for they sought out the law-breaking bookmakers, and asked them to lay them odds. In the excitement no one noticed that 50 fierce-wiskered policemen had tramped on to the course; and when the favorite "Schnellzug" trotted victoriously to the finish, the sharp-nosed strangers tapped the bookmakers' elbows, and said, "You had better come along quietly!" And half an hour later three-and-twenty breakers-up-of-homes were entrained for the capital, to be lodged in inhospitable jails.

WOMEN VICTORIOUS.

And all ended like a novel. In court Frau Leiner and 13 triumphant sisters swore the bookmakers' liberties away. An impressed judge paid them compliments; an impressed jury, thrilled by feminine ingenuity, forgot to yawn.

"But how did you get the address of the prisoner, Arthur Knipper?" asked the judge.

"Oh, it fell out of my husband's pocket when he was asleep," was the answer.

And the impressed judge smiled, and paid still further compliments. And of all men present who heard the interesting tale only the bookmakers felt sad.

The husbands of course, were delighted. They were saved from themselves. There was a marked decline of spectators at Weissensee's last races. Instead, there were processions of loving couples in the plane-tree avenues and around the daisy-edged lake. And regenerated Weissensee is full of laughter and light.

The mood of his sulphurousness is not so certain. It is feared that he is digging still further pitfalls to ensnare the children of men.

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