

Look Out for Card Sharps on Transatlantic Steamers

There Are a Number of Professional Gamblers On the White Way to Europe and Only the Captains Know Who They Are.

PASSENGERS
on this steamship are respectfully
WARNED
against engaging in
GAMES OF CHANCE OR CARDS
with
STRANGERS.

ANY one going to Europe on the big liners may see this warning, or one in the same general terms, hung conspicuously in the smoking room of his steamship. It means that there are professional gamblers aboard ready to fleece him out of his ready cash at poker, dice, or a confidence game.

Who are the social hyenas? The passengers, more or less confident of their own respectability, look on the strangers around them with suspicion. All the men are well dressed. Many are habitués of the smoking rooms—jovial fellows with money in their pockets, racy stories on their tongues, and the inclination to while away tedious hours with poker. It takes an expert to pick out a criminal, especially a card sharp. Which of these men are thieves?

The Captain and head steward of the liner probably know them by sight, and watch their every move. So do the detectives on the piers at Havre, Cherbourg, and Southampton. So do the officials at Scotland Yard, London, and at Police Headquarters in Mulberry Street in this city. Thanks to the Bertillon system, the passengers who cross in the big liners every Summer may learn to know the card sharps as well as the police do.

There may be a thick-set man, slightly above medium height, with black hair, a face slightly pockmarked, eyes that stare inquiringly, and a large, thick-lipped mouth drooping at the corners. Look for scars on the left forearm and on the back of the left hand. If this description fits, the passenger may be "Doc Owens," or Jacob Owen, one of the best-known card players of the ocean liners. "Doc Owens" declares he has given up the game, and is out of it. He turns up every now and then, however, on liners where the passengers are fleeced.

Another six-foot fellow seems to be too dull and heavy to be a swindler. He is about forty years old, and weighs fully 200 pounds. His double chin and thick lips add to the general impression of torpor. As likely as not he will have a thin, short mustache, and dark brown hair will be brushed straight back from a forehead that has a scar upon it. A mole in front of his left ear will be a good point of identification. Such is a description of Chester Baldwin, alias, McKenzie, alias McCormack, an American by birth, a bookkeeper by occupation, a traveling salesman in appearance.

James Strosnider is very much the same type of man—six feet tall, heavy, brown haired and blue eyed. He is, however, more of the blonde type. A scar extends down the right side of his face and along the neck beneath it.

The peculiarity of brown hair and blue eyes is also to be noticed in Jerome McKay, whose journeys over seas are objects of deep interest to the officers of the big liners. McKay's long lip has a decided outward curve. His face habitually wears a look of impassive calm. When his hat is off, passen-

gers may note a scar on his forehead. If he should be dealing cards, some of the men around him might also notice that the middle and third fingers of his left hand are twisted.

A cheerful little man with beady eyes and a lower lip that hangs out in a stubborn sort of a way may give another name and tell a different story, but the police know him as Harry Cohen, and he is "Sheeny Mike" or "Black Mike" with his pals—a book-maker by occupation and a "con man" in the detectives' books.

For one thing, it is next to impossible to prevent the gamblers from boarding the big liners. As the manager of one of the companies explained last week, passage is refused the card sharps if they are known and ask for staterooms at the main booking office.

"We say the liner is full," said the manager. "But what is to prevent them going to any steamship agent and booking under another name? Or how can we stop them if they rush aboard at the last moment and say to the steward, 'Here we are; you must fix us up'? This is a favorite trick."

Once aboard ship, the booking agent continued, the known card sharp is a marked man. The head steward and his staff watch him in the smoking room, note with whom he talks, and reports to the Captain at once if the gambler plays cards. A few hours later the loungers in the smoking room will see one of the stewards enter and hang up another sign. It is three feet wide, about one-half as high, and has a legend in letters four inches high. The sign reads:

Beware of Professional Gamblers.

When the passenger sees such a sign he may be assured that it is intended for the card sharp rather than himself. As the gambler sees it, the warning means, "Hands Off." The passengers seldom hear the sequel. A well-dressed stranger may be lounging on the rail watching the smoke of a distant steamer when a steward taps him on the shoulder.

"The Captain insists," says the messenger, "that you do not play cards during the voyage."

Perhaps the warning is heeded, perhaps not. If the card sharp is found playing cards he is asked to call at the Captain's cabin, where the warning is

made a command. A complaint of a passenger leads to investigation and restitution. The Captain may appear in the smoking room and publicly break up a poker game and drive out the card sharp. In extreme cases, the gambler is locked in his stateroom and a guard placed at the door for the rest of the voyage.

According to the police, the repetition of such experiences, reported from time to time in the newspapers has gradually educated the public until passengers on the liners have become wary of jovial strangers with a weakness for poker and dice. This knowledge and the fact that he is so well known has done much to throw "Doc Owens" into the background.

One April day about two years ago, Detective Mallon was standing by the gangplank of the Cedric watching for gamblers. He knew most of them well. Suddenly a dapper little man passed him. It was just three minutes before the liner sailed, and the new arrival was in a great hurry.

"Good morning, Mallon," called the little man as he passed up the gangplank. "It looks as if we'd have a fine voyage."

Before Mallon could interfere the man was lost in the crowd on the Cedric's decks. It was "Doc Owens," whom the detective was particularly anxious to see.

One of the most conspicuous episodes that brought the gamblers into disrepute was the loss of \$1,500 by the young Earl of Rosslyn while on his way from this city to England in the Cunarder Etruria five years ago. The Earl was accosted by three men who posed as well-to-do Americans. They were soon playing cards for all kinds of stakes, and Lord Rosslyn was the chief loser. He was afterward sued on a check for \$150, given, it was said, in part payment of his gambling debt. Two attorneys were the plaintiffs, but "Doc Owens" was believed to be behind the suit. Lord Rosslyn won the case because there had been no consideration for the check.

About the same time "Doc Owens" had his legal fight to prevent his picture being placed in the records of the Police Department. He said there was no reason why it should go there, and its presence injured his reputation. Judge Leventritt decided, however, that no one could object to having his picture at Police Headquarters, provided it was not used for other than official purposes.

In the following year the name of "Doc Owens" was coupled with the story of a quarrel over cards on the liner Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse that nearly ended in a tragedy. It was said that "Doc Owens" was on the passenger lists under another name. Another passenger, C. A. Partene of this city, was reported to have lost \$1,500 at cards. He publicly accused the man with whom he had been playing of cheating and of being a card sharp. Beside himself with rage, the gambler seized Partene and dragged him toward the rail as if to throw him overboard. The deck hands knocked down the gambler and thrashed him severely before he would give up the quarrel.

Then came the beginning of the end, so far as the older card sharps were concerned. They became so well known that it was next to impossible for them to "work" the passengers of the big liners. Besides "Doc Owens" there were Joseph Kahn, or Cray, familiarly known as "Paper Collar Joe," whose name was connected with those of Adam Worth, Charles Becker, and Pat Sheedy in the theft of Gainsborough's "Duchess of Devonshire" in London in 1896; Baldwin, with a record of four years in a Canadian prison on a charge of theft; Frederick Williams, sheet-writer and wiretapper; "Black Mike," "Big Jim" Strosnider, who served five years in the New Jersey State Prison on a charge of false pretenses, and whose name appeared in the story of the embezzlement of \$12,000 from Dr. John A. Harris, a broker, at the Gainsborough Apartments two years ago, and Cecil A. Brackett, who combined gambling and the business of a diamond broker. The names and pictures of all these men were placed in the police archives, where all who chose might read.

Then younger and unknown gamblers appeared on the ocean liners. According to the police, the well-known card sharps dropped out, but some of them employed new men to work for them while they engineered the games.

An incident on the Deutschland two years ago serves as an example of the many told of the newer type. A game of poker was started in the smoking room and lasted for three days without a break. "Doc Owens" was a passenger on the liner, but took no part in the game. Two of the players, however, had been recognized as card sharps from Chicago, and the wiser passengers would not play.

At last the game lay between one of the experts and a New Yorker. The losses of the latter footed up to nearly \$700, when he opened a jackpot. In his hand were three jacks and a pair of kings. Certain that he would recoup for his losses, he raised and raised again. Then he "called" the other man. His opponent threw down three aces and a pair of jacks. That ended the poker games for the voyage with a charge of cheating. The pack had been stacked; there were five jacks.

Month after month such stories are repeated. Only the details and the amounts of losses differ. Seldom do such swindles reach the courts or lead to the punishment of the offenders. The victims are loth to prosecute. They decline to give their names. They will not admit that they have been fleeced.

Scotland Yard has a long list of swindlers who "work" on the ocean liners, many of them using the sea voyage as the opening wedge for a final coup in a hotel in London or on the Continent. There is Frank Tarbo, a Mexican crook, who was driven out of New York a few years ago. He is a loud-mouthed fellow with a villainous countenance, and poses as a Mexican who wants to sell a mine. Another is Arthur Pierce, an Australian by birth, but known here as "English Arthur." He usually pretends that he is a rich American cattle dealer going to Europe to see the sights. The way he mangles the King's English aids in the deceit. Others on the Scotland Yard lists are Frank Carew, an Englishman of good family, who passes as a gentleman; "One Armed Owen," a clever card sharp; James Walsh, Alex Hassell, who was with Tod Sloan when he assaulted a waiter at Ascot, and two Englishmen, "Percival," alias William Sinclair, a mild-eyed, bald man with a thick under lip, and Hugh L. Courtney, thin faced and with a melancholy aspect. "Dago Frank" and Charles Fisher, two New York burglars, have also turned their attention to steamship swindles.

Since the steamship swindles have been given widespread publicity, these crooks usually confine their efforts while aboard ship to "spotting" their victims and scraping an acquaintance that leads to a big game in London or Paris. Invariably well-dressed and affable as they are, usually good story tellers, and with accounts of themselves that defy criticism, the professional crooks have many chances to learn of their intended victims. The appearance of the traveler's trunks, his dress and style of living aid the swindler in making his estimate. The smoking room offers opportunities for camaraderie. There is always more or less gossip about conspicuous passengers. When the swindler has scraped an acquaintance, it is easy to lead the conversation to questions of income, bank accounts, and letters of credit, or of how much money the traveler intends to spend while abroad.

When England is reached, the victim is invited to the crook's chambers. The swindlers usually frequent the large London hotels or restaurants that are popular with Americans—Prince's, the Savoy, the Carlton, the Berkeley, the Bristol. Living in the same hotel with the victim, it is an easy matter to perfect the swindle, and there the game is ended.

