

The Sport of Kings

BY LUPTON ALLEMONG WILKINSON

*Following the big races discloses some momentous data about
the regal pastime*

“Two things only the people anxiously desire — bread and the circus games.”

The line is from Juvenal's Tenth Satire, and Juvenal was right.

We no longer feed minority sects to the lions, except perhaps in covert psychological ways, and the cruelties we practise on men whose maladjustment to life has made them criminals are furtively hid away behind frowning stone walls.

Man's love of excitement, however, still remains and must be fed in wholesome ways. Vicarious drama must be available. The deadening routine of modern life leaves the individual with an imperative craving to experience, by identification with actors in thrilling spectacle, some of the blood-stirring pulsations that only intense and vivid competition can afford.

Probably our nearest approach to the pageantry and mass excitement of the Roman circus can be found at the thirty-odd tracks in the United States where the thoroughbred running horse competes for purses aggregating \$11,000,000 a year. Society, the big S Society of *The Social Register*, combs Paris and vies with

Hollywood to disport at Belmont, at Saratoga, at Churchill Downs and at Arlington Park the latest creations of the world's most expensive modistes. In a maelstrom of democracy, all the remainder of the social scale is also in evidence, down to the day laborer, often black as to skin and happy if he can get within a few yards of that fascinating animal, the horse, with a dollar or two to back the judgment of instinctive liking or nights of careful calculation.

HORSE racing, which has had its millions of devotees in the United States for years, moved, in 1930, to the front pages of the newspapers, to an extent not comparable to any year since 1919, when Man o' War swept all opposition before him and became a part of the nation's news. Three factors in 1930 have stimulated public interest in racing as it had not been stirred since that wonder horse gave fillip to a form of entertainment which adversities of various kinds, principally the passage of the Hughes anti-racing law in New York State, had brought to a precarious point of instability.

In the first place, 1930 saw the visit to the United States, including Kentucky, of George Henry, Lord Villiers, seventeenth Earl of Derby. The genial Englishman, for whose family the British racing classic is named, journeyed to the Blue Grass State, contracted a bad cold, asked to be carried on a stretcher to see Man o' War, now in sultanic splendor at a historic Kentucky breeding farm, and then stood in a cold rain, at Churchill Downs, Louisville, to broadcast greetings to American sport lovers after the annual running of the Kentucky Derby. But with all due respect to the titled guest of America's racing upper set, nature sent a more effective ambassador — another truly great horse.

IN 1929 Harry Payne Whitney's Whichone, a son of Chicle and Flying Witch, won the Futurity, run annually at Belmont Park, New York. This is a fixture, rich in tradition and money value, for which entries are nominated before the nominees are foaled. Whichone's share of the purse was nearly \$100,000 and he earned it so convincingly that smart horsemen began to talk about the handsome two-year-old as another Man o' War. Third in that same race was a large-framed bay, which did not get to running in the early stages but which was closing in resolute fashion when the winner flashed across the finish line. That third horse was Gallant Fox, by Imported Sir Galahad III out of Marguerite.

The three outstanding races for three-year-olds in the United States are the Preakness, run at Pimlico, Baltimore; the Derby, at Churchill Downs; and the Belmont Stakes,

contested at the magnificent course of the same name, on Long Island.

This year the big bay which finished third in the Futurity had filled out to match his conformation. He was pointed, *i.e.*, trained especially, for the Preakness. The son of Sir Galahad III was away slowly in that race and the head of the stretch found him running eighth. Three times his rider tried to weave a way through the pack, and three times the front runners blocked him off. Then the colt was taken to the extreme outside where he came around the field, charged down before the cheering crowd in a phenomenal burst of speed, and won as he pleased. A little more than a week later he broke in front in the Kentucky Derby and stayed in front all the way.

MEANWHILE Whichone, too, had thrived over the winter. On the occasion of his first out in 1930 he led home a cheap band in sparkling time. Then he won the time-honored Withers, at a mile, running last more than half the way and sweeping through the stretch as Gallant Fox had done in the Preakness.

On June 7 these two horses met in the sixty-second annual running of the Belmont, and few racing duels have aroused such widespread interest. Turf followers fancied Whichone, remembering last year's Futurity, and the Whitney horse was odds-on, 3 to 5; while 8 to 5 could be had on Gallant Fox.

The rider of the big bay broke him in front and took a snug hold. Five times competitors worked up close and each time the restraint on the smooth-running leader was eased for

just a few strides and he bounded away. Down the stretch Whichone passed all the others save Gallant Fox and seemed for some breathless moments to be catching the front one. The leader was "let down" for the last time, drew away with superb ease and crossed the finish line four lengths in front, in 2:31 and 3 5. The mile and a half of the Belmont Stakes has never been run faster. In a race of another name, Man o' War set the track record for the distance, 2:28 and 4 5. Man o' War was running on a lightning fast oval and carried 118 pounds. Gallant Fox's sterling performance was over a surface slowed by a morning of drizzling rain and he had 126 pounds up. The crowd, which had bet heavily on the defeated horse, tendered the winner the most resounding ovation that any turf reporter present could remember.

BY WINNING the Belmont, Gallant Fox brought his total earnings to \$198,730 and took seventh rank among American money winners. Zev, first in the list, won purses totalling \$313,639. The 1930 Belmont winner was declared out of the \$50,000 American Derby, run June 14 at Washington Park, Chicago, remaining East to garner the rich Dwyer at Aqueduct later in the month. Sound in wind and limb, eligible, when he has swept the Eastern three-year-old fixtures, for the \$25,000 Latonia Derby, the \$70,000 Arlington Special and other rich prizes in the West, Gallant Fox seems likely to surpass the world's money-winning record of the former French champion, Ksar, who brought his owner \$335,340. To those who

love racing he is already enrolled among the immortals.

No horse, no matter how fine, contains the potentiality of drama that a human can offer, and the third and most effective advertising agent for racing in 1930 has been a sandy-haired, 31-year-old rider, Earl Sande. Years ago a blue-eyed boy ran away from home in Idaho to ride on the "bush" tracks of the West. He came to be America's ablest jockey, noted equally for clean and skilful riding. At what was then thought to be the height of his fame, he went down in a mad spill at Saratoga and for weeks was expected to die. He recovered, and returned to brilliant triumphs in the saddle. He married the niece of Sam Hildreth, a famous trainer, and millions sympathized with him when Mrs. Sande died.

The task of making weight became apparently too much for Sande. He announced his retirement, bought some horses, trained them himself, and dropped most of the money he had saved. This year his weight went down, and he decided to come back.

WHAT a come-back! Sande has been the rider on all of Gallant Fox's victories of the year, contracting for ten per cent of the purses and receiving bonuses each time from William Woodward, the millionaire owner of the shining bay. Also, Sande, riding probably the most spectacular race of his life, won the Suburban, a tradition-hung stake for older horses, by a scant nose on Peetee Wrack, half brother to Gallant Fox. The record ovation at Belmont Park after the vanquishing

of Whichone was, as one reporter phrased it, equally a tribute to Gallant Sande.

Nature, I said, sent 1930's ambassador from horse-racing to the public. Nature has been helped by a vast deal of careful thought and millions of money. Every thoroughbred horse traces back to one of three Arabian stallions, the Byerly Turk, the Darley Arabian and the Godolphin Arabian or Barb, imported into England in the Seventeenth Century. The study of how best to blend the divergent lines has been the hobby of uncounted rich men in the centuries since. Equine eugenics works. In the past fifty years the height of thoroughbreds has increased nearly two inches and to their average weight has been added 150 pounds. Speed, the breeding goal, has accounted for new records from three furlongs to three miles.

A glance at the family trees of the two major competitors in this year's Belmont would show that, whatever part luck may play on the race course, blood-lines, crossed and re-crossed with skill, are the breeder's mainstay.

THE banker owner of Gallant Fox has bred horses for fifteen years. Such rich men, loving the horse for the horse's sake, are the backbone of racing. They have carried it through its many perils to its present popularity and prosperity; they have kept the Jockey Club a virile influence toward cleanness in the sport, and from their stewardship must be hoped and expected certain further reforms that are imperative in a field that has always had its sinister

fringe of unsavory hangers-on. Other names in the East which stand high on racing's roster are August Belmont and Payne Whitney, now dead, Harry Payne Whitney, Walter J. Salmon, W. R. Coe, John Sanford, William Averil Harriman, Joseph E. and George Widener, Gifford A. Cochran, W. S. Kilmer, Howard Cushman, Mrs. H. C. Phipps and her brother, Ogden Mills, Mrs. Payne Whitney and Mrs. Graham Fair Vanderbilt. Sportsmen all, including the ladies.

KENTUCKY, with its rolling blue grass hills, is the paradise of the breeder. More than one hundred breeding farms dot the pleasant landscape of that State and, while figures are not available on many of the costly establishments, the investment in horse-breeding in Kentucky is generally conceded to be in the neighborhood of \$100,000,000. El-mendorf, in Fayette County, owned by Joseph E. Widener, who succeeded the late August Belmont as star patron and watchdog of racing in the East; Xalapa Farm, in Bourbon County, the property of Edward F. Simms, multimillionaire oil man; the Greentree Farm, pride of Mrs. Payne Whitney; the Idle Hour Farm, where Colonel E. R. Bradley names his horses with a B and sends them East and West to compete with the finest; the Himyar Stud of P. T. Chinn; the Hartland Stud, in Woodford County, of former United States Senator Johnson N. Camden, and the Claiborne Stud, owned by A. B. Hancock, who is also master of Ellerslie in Virginia, are a few of the leading Kentucky establishments.

Virginia, where blue grass also

grows, Maryland and New York are the next most important breeding States, with California returning fast toward a former eminence. Admiral Cary T. Grayson, formerly physician to President Wilson, and "Ned" McLean, owner of *The Washington Post*, lead the contingent of racing and breeding patrons in the vicinity of Washington.

The stud fees for famous sires indicate the high value of potential stake winners. Man o' War's fee is \$5,000. Sir Galahad III and Sun Briar are held at \$3,000. Broomstick, St. Germans, Chicle, Peter Pan and the unbeaten Colin stand for \$2,000; and Black Toney, Bubbling Over, Mad Hatter, North Star III, Royal Minstrel, Reigh Count and Display are also reputed to be in that charmed circle. There are many whose fee is \$1,000.

NEW YORK, Illinois, Kentucky and Maryland are the principal scenes of thoroughbred racing, with Florida making a growing bid and New Orleans operating two winter tracks. Tracks of lesser importance hold meetings in Ohio, Missouri, Utah, California and one or two other States. Across the Canadian border is a thriving circuit, centering about Toronto, Montreal and Quebec. In the winter Havana and Agua Caliente, Mexico, compete with Florida and New Orleans. More than 8,000 running horses are now in training on the North American continent and they will earn for their owners in purses an average of \$1,750 apiece this year.

There are four race courses contiguous to New York City — Jamaica, Aqueduct and Belmont Park

on Long Island, and Empire City, owned by William Butler, of chain store fame, near Yonkers and Mt. Vernon, in Westchester County. The season begins in May, each track having a spring meeting. Then, in August, the horses and those who follow them go to Saratoga Springs for a brilliant month. September, October and early November see a second rotation among the New York City tracks. Maryland has four major tracks, each with a meeting in the spring and another in the autumn. Three tracks in Kentucky follow about the same calendar as the Maryland courses.

THERE are six active tracks in Illinois, five near Chicago and one at East St. Louis. They are busy, in rotation, spring, summer and fall. Arlington Park, Chicago, on June 30 of this year, began a thirty-day session at which the purses offered totalled \$650,000. There are no profits for stockholders at this track, no salaries for executives. It is one of the world's most pretentious sporting ventures. Otto W. Lehman, Laurence H. Armour, Weymouth Kirkland, John R. Thompson, Jr., Roy D. Keehn, Charles A. McCulloch and John Hertz are among the financial and social leaders of the Middle West who sponsor the association and serve on its board.

More than 5,000,000 annual paid admissions to race tracks in the United States represent a steady tribute of patronage and enjoyment to the high standards of competition which have been set up and maintained by the men who rule racing. It would be pleasant to paint only the attractive features of the picture

and let the ugly phases go, but there is no blinking the fact that the professional gamblers of the country have closed their talons on racing to a degree which, while rarely corrupting the sport itself, makes the operation of the tracks an unwilling auxiliary to illicit turnovers of money aggregating possibly \$2,000,000,000 a year.

That figure is an estimate. A conscientious attempt to learn the amount of gambling on horse racing in the United States meets with as many discouragements as a similar effort to record accurately the consumption of alcoholic liquors. In either case a man with a point to prove can evolve impressive "statistics." In either case an undiluted quest for information results merely in a collation of guesses, with the certain conclusion, however, that a staggering amount of the traffic exists.

THE vast bulk of gambling on the races is illegal. In Kentucky and Maryland it is legal so far as wagers at the tracks themselves are concerned. The system used is called *pari-mutuel*. The total amount of money wagered (in three separate pools — bets for first place, bets for second and bets for third) is awarded to the bettors who hold the winning tickets, each man getting a share in proportion to the amount of his "investment." A deduction is made as the track's handling charge and to help pay State taxes, which average \$7,500 a day for each track. In Illinois an ingenious system brings track gambling within the law, and the distribution of "profits" is on the *pari-mutuel* basis.

Kentucky and Illinois are not disposed to be frank about the totals wagered at their meetings. Maryland, which is not nick-named the Free State for nothing, doesn't give an old horseshoe who knows. In 1929, at the four big Maryland tracks, the amounts bet at the spring and autumn sessions came to \$54,420,867.

THE consideration of this total leads to a somewhat inflated mental picture, unless one takes into account a peculiar, inherent fallacy. Let us imagine, for instance, the case of a man who goes with \$500 to a twenty-five day meeting at a *mutuel* track and spends a month in the excitement of trying to outguess his neighbor as to which of the outstretched noses will come first to the finish line. He wins his first race, or makes a winning bet before his capital is exhausted. Thereafter he has a fluctuation of luck, winning as often, or as much, as he loses. Let us say that he never gets more than \$1,000 ahead and that, steadily through the meeting, he bets an average of \$143 a race, or \$1,000 a day. Let us also assume that he is fortunate enough, when he cashes in his tickets on the seventh race at the end of the twenty-fifth day, to have in hand exactly \$500, the sum with which he started. This hypothetical patron has never held more than \$1,500 at one time, but he has added \$25,000 to the total *mutuel* play of the meeting. Furthermore, the track and State, through the 6½ per cent rake-off on each race, have collected a broker's commission of \$1,625 on his wagers!

The answer to this seeming paradox is that somebody else has had to

lose \$1,625 in order for Mr. Hypothetical to break even. Put another way, a man who goes to a *mutuel* track on any one day and bets an equal amount on each of the seven carded races has a percentage against him of 45, or about seven times $6\frac{1}{2}$. He must be nearly two to one smarter, or luckier, than his average neighbor in order to break even.

The \$54,000,000 does not seem quite so large after this analysis, but \$54,000,000 is real money, even in repeated wagers.

THE odds against a *pari-mutuel* player would seem a sufficiently forbidding handicap, but compared to the chances of the day-in-and-day-out customer of the New York bookmaker, the *mutuel* system offers virtual philanthropy. Even the apologists for the bookmakers admit that the prices quoted by these thin-lipped gentry are scaled on the basis of a ten per cent rake-off, no matter which horse wins. Critics of the system contend that fifteen per cent is nearer the right figure, and that place and show bets (wagers that the horse will come in at least second or third) are laid at prices guaranteeing a broker's commission of, respectively, fifteen and thirty per cent.

These figures are probably high, but there is another catch. In the *mutuel* machines cold mathematics is king. The percentage against the bettor is automatically fixed, and public. The price he gets for his winning selections is determined by how many other people at the track were right about the race. He really is in a guessing contest with his fellow patrons and he has, for the most part, the same information as they

from which to make his deductions.

The bookmakers are not satisfied with any such impartiality. They protect themselves generously on the mathematical basis, and then they bring to bear one of the most elaborate information systems in the world, to see to it that the sucker never gets a break. The highly paid trio which fixes prices from minute to minute during the twenty-five minute intervals before each race at a New York track have the benefit of every fragment of ascertainable knowledge about each horse in each race — his workouts, just how long he has been getting ready, his other engagements (sometimes indicating that he is "pointed" really for some more important stake a little later and may be merely racing himself into condition) and the amount of money which known agents or friends of the stable are betting on the entry. This, plus the benefit of the calculations of expert handicappers on the horse's maximum potentiality against his competitors of that day, all goes into the "laying" of a price.

IF THE crowd is betting heavily on a horse which the bookmakers have reason to believe will lose, the mathematical standard prevails, and the bookies keep the figure low enough, in proportion to what is bet on other horses, to prevent any loss to them if their information is awry. On the other hand, if there is light betting on a horse which the combined informational resources of the bookmakers indicate has a better chance than the crowd surmises, the price is artificially shaved to fit what is considered by the bookies as the true chance of the entry.

Throughout the betting period scores of runners move swiftly between the bookmakers and their central clearing house. All bets are carried to the price-fixers for their consideration, both as to volume and source, and new prices are brought back, with amazing speed. These shifting prices are gobbled with avidity, and without question, by a milling crowd that jostles frantically to hand to the bookmakers little slips of paper, each containing the name of a horse, the amount bet, the amount that would be won at the prevailing figure, and the signature of the bettor.

It is not hard to understand why one of the bigger bookmakers, who recently died, left an estate in excess of \$15,000,000, nor is it difficult to credit the story that another of the "big boys" dropped \$5,000,000 in the stock market crash last year and was able to shrug his shoulders and smile.

BOOKMAKERS travel from track to track on the New York circuit, moving with the horses. About fifty operate on "the lawn" in front of the main grandstand, and a more élite twenty breathe the rarefied financial atmosphere of the club house porch. Bets are eagerly solicited, except by the club house contingent, credit is easy to establish, and there are no formalities or difficulties of any kind in the way of the would-be bettor.

On the basis of the Maryland figures, it is reasonable to estimate wagers of \$50,000,000 annually at the Kentucky tracks, \$75,000,000 in Illinois, and \$100,000,000 under the outlaw bookie system at the New York courses. What is wagered in

Florida, at New Orleans and at the smaller tracks will easily bring the annual total of track play to \$300,000,000.

Before looking for the remainder of the estimated annual total of \$2,000,000,000 it is necessary to recall a bit of racing history. The sport in the United States, beginning with early Colonial days and originally sponsored by the cavaliers of Charleston and its vicinity, spread in popularity, and in unmanageability, until, in 1894, it was almost wholly in the clutches of professional gamblers. Scandals were rife. Horses were painted, names were changed, electric batteries were placed under saddles, and, lest some of the gullible escape, meetings were held in the blinding snow of northern winters and at night under the glare of electric lights.

THE Belmonts, the Whitneys and other responsible horse owners in the East set out to effect reformation. The Jockey Club was formed, to the infinite good of racing. But the malodorousness of conditions at the scores of unregulated tracks throughout the country had brought racing into disrepute which led, during the Governorship of Charles Evans Hughes in 1919, to the passage of a law "forbidding" gambling in New York State.

Of all the attempts of reformers to change the habits of mankind by prohibitory legislation, this New York anti-racing law probably takes the prize for effecting an end diametrically opposite to the one in view.

The immediate effect of the Hughes legislation was to frighten

those who had money invested in racing. When Man o' War won the Belmont, the richness of which is based on the number of nominations, its value to the winner was less than \$8,000, as contrasted with the more than \$66,000 earned by Gallant Fox in the same stake this year. Yearlings at the annual Saratoga sales in 1920 brought less than a third of the average price they command today.

But the law, like a certain other famous piece of prohibitory legislation, passed into disuse because there was no unified sentiment to support it and much inherent human nature to oppose and nullify its execution. The bookmaker is now king at the big New York tracks, unhampered by State supervision or by discipline from racing leaders, who must preserve the legal fiction that gambling does not exist and who therefore can not accept any responsibility concerning it.

HERE is the supreme irony of the "abolishment" of race track wagering in New York. Throughout the country, pool rooms and gambling dens, estimated variously at from 75,000 to 125,000 in number, thrive and prosper because they can accept bets and pay them off at the well-protected margins of the New York bookmaker. Bets on horses running at *mutuel* tracks are accepted at these places, but the operators are frank to say that the "no gambling" tracks furnish them the odds that keep them in business. The *mutuel* percentage is so moderate, in comparison, that a small pool-room operator can not take the risk of being caught in a *coup*. The margin

of profit at the bookie prices is so great that it will sustain an occasional "killing."

J. B. Snodgrass, long a racing authority, estimated, two years ago, that \$1,500,000,000 a year was bet on races in New York City alone through the medium of handbooks. He also figured that one in six of New York City's population wagered an average of five dollars a week on horses they did not see run. If this is even half way accurate, the \$2,000,000,000 a year is not hard to visualize.

THE first and most imperative of the reforms needed in present-day racing is a frank facing by the men in control of the sport of this gambling situation as it exists. Instead of a sort of gentleman's agreement not to talk about the facts (the odds are published in all the newspapers every day!) this ostrich-like head-hiding should be abandoned. A new policy is needed. Racing men themselves should go courageously to work in New York for the passage of a law establishing the *pari-mutuel* system of wagering in the State. It would be a mortal blow to the pool-room magnates and hand-book kings; it would end the easy credit system of gambling now open to school-boy and bank clerk alike; it would represent a practical solution of an ugly problem instead of the good old hypocritical panacea of pretending the evil does not exist.

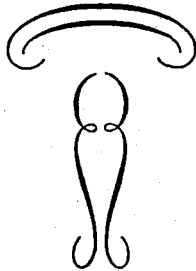
The second reform needed is the elimination of the tout. All the exposures concerning blue sky stock offerings and stock market tips from unscrupulous brokers are pale and anæmic beside the audacity of the

men who sell "information" as to which horses will win races. Racing, for its own good name, should initiate and prosecute every possible means of wiping out these leeches. The Federal Post Office Department would certainly respond to a suggestion from men of the standing of Mr. Widener and his fellow pillars of the Jockey Club. Local police in the various cities could be impelled to sweep the race-track approaches clear of the down-at-heel, shifty-eyed men who are selling what they herald as racing's dishonor.

These two reforms, from the standpoint of the public good and racing's fair name, cry for execution. There is a third worthy of the serious attention of the men who plan America's race meetings. The plea that thoroughbred racing helps to build a sturdy strain of horse for cavalry purposes, and is consequently an aid to the Government, has become almost wholly fiction. Each year our thoroughbreds, bigger

and faster, grow also more fragile. Hundreds of the finest horses break down under training. The answer lies in the fact that the great stakes are for two-year-olds and three-year-olds and most of them are at short distances. Speed, speed, is necessarily the goal of the breeder, and stamina has almost been forgotten. A horse that will go a mile is now regarded as a stayer! How it is possible, through this type of breeding and racing, to develop an animal better suited to carry a 175-pound cavalryman in the saddle all day, is a laughable and regrettable mystery.

Thoroughbred racing is on the upswing in popularity and prosperity. Eliminate the bookmaker, eliminate the tout and develop the stamina of the horse, and there will be a more deserving case for consolidation of present gains and for protection against that day when the professional reformer licks his lips over a royal chance to smash a national amusement.



Uncle Sam's Bellboys

RAY T. TUCKER

Showing how a Congressman's heart beats in tempo with the desires of his constituency

IT WAS "Congressional night" in a Republican clubhouse in an eastern metropolis, and the Honorable Member of Congress for the District had met with his constituents to ascertain what he could do to make easier or happier their pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. Actually the meeting had been called to keep him in closer contact with the voters against the Day of Reëlection, and to convince them that Providence had created him for the sole purpose of serving as their social, economic, political and spiritual aid and adviser — all things to all men in the best tradition of practical American politics.

Beneath a bizarre bouquet of partisan banners, Presidential portraits and patriotic colors sat the honorable gentleman himself, or as his announcements had read, "in person." Beside him sat his secretary with open notebook to record the desires and demands of those who had responded to the call. It was already apparent that the evening would be a success. A long queue of men and women shuffled forward to the golden oak table, slowed up as each individual confided his troubles

to the Congressman, and continued its snakelike movement up and down the dingy, narrow and stuffy chamber. Was it a Government job, an increased pension, permission to bring in a relative within or without the quota, bulletins on killing rodents, reviving drowning persons, feeding babies, or making dandelion wine? No matter what it might be, the secretary jotted down the notation with a flourish of his brass-bound fountain pen, the M. C. promised to grant it, and the "constit" passed along with a light in his eyes revealing that he had been thrilled by his temporary proximity to the great and good statesman.

ONE there was, however, who faltered at each approach to the democratic throne. All requests that he have no hesitancy in asking for anything, from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol Dome, failed to move him. In broken English he murmured that he would wait, and he dropped out of line again and again. Not until late in the evening did he approach the dispensing station, where the M. C. and his amanuensis were congratulating themselves upon the