

*The New York World*  
July 8, 1894

***Nellie Bly At The Races***

***The Women Enthusiasts Who Are Regular Visitors at the Big Tracks  
Every Day of the Season.***

***How They Make Bets***

***Backing Horses on a System and as Well Posted on  
Jockeys and Records as Any of the Men***

***Scenes in the Betting-Ring***

***A Little Army of Messenger Boys Employed to Place Money and  
Collect Winnings for the Women***

***Fourth of July At Sheepshead Bay***

***Coming Home with the Crowd of  
Bookmakers, Gamblers, Sports and Horse Owners***

I spent the "Glorious" at the Sheepshead race-track.

The day was fine and I started off in the best of spirits. I didn't know much about horses, but I had a cheery premonition that in some mysterious way luck would be with me, and that I would be able to pick out winners with amazing ease.

I started early. I had some little knowledge of the crowds that travel on holidays and I wished to avoid the rush.

I crossed the Thirty-fourth Street ferry and found a crowd with me. I tried to believe they were residents of Long Island City, but they clung to my course and as I rushed through the gates to the cars I found them still with me.

So making great haste I rushed into a car, and with selfish but necessary foresight made sure of a seat.

At least I thought I was sure of it, but a man with a moon-faced youngster evidently thought otherwise, for he proceeded to occupy two-thirds of it, and I scowled and endured.

But he was a nice sort of a man considering that he was a father. He was much interested in a comic paper. He would read the jokes earnestly and then he would laugh aloud. I enjoyed it immensely. If the moon-faced child made a fuss, he would hit it a rattling smack with the paper and tell it to keep still. I enjoyed that, too.

Then when he finished his paper—he finds several on his knee—he condescended to permit his wife, who sat in the seat in front, to see it. And that was funny.

I wondered why he had married her, and if she was not sorry she married him and what fate would be the child's when the train stopped and a tall, thin man, with a short, fat wife and four children all of a size came into the car, and there being no vacant seats, I became their victim.

The fat woman sat on the arm of my seat and held a child perched on the back, while the others took turns at resting against my knee.

It makes all the difference in the world whom one sits beside in a public conveyance. Some people feel as hard as iron, some as if a furnace raged within them, some as if they would spread over all creation. There are a few, too few, I deplore, that one can be crowded against and yet not experience that sense of contact that is the most disagreeable of all things in public.

The woman was of the furnace kind, and I actually got a headache from the feeling of disgust I experienced from her touch.

For this reason I welcomed with delight my arrival at Sheepshead. I even took a pleasure in mingling with the men and women hurrying through the long vine-covered passage to the race track. Such a crowd there was, although it was yet over an hour until the racing began.

And why were they all there? Was it the love of horses, the hope of gain, the pleasure of gambling or the excitement of the races that brought them? I recalled crowds I had seen rushing to bull fights. They were just as hurried and fully as eager. But their emotions were prompted by the skill of the fighters backed by the sense of danger. No financial consideration entered into the question.

It is not the hope of winning money that takes every person to the race track. There are a few persons who love horses, but there aren't enough of them, if betting were unknown, to fill one row of seats at the club-house.

When the crowd scattered upon the grandstand it did not make much of a showing. The men wandered off and the women selected chairs. It is always funny to see people grabbing for chairs when there is any chance of a scarcity. Although the crowd of the day had not yet arrived, women sat on the edge of the chairs and piled wraps, bundles and papers upon others near them. They did this almost invariably, whether alone or accompanied.

An acquaintance had very kindly given me a box for the day, but I took a chair on the grandstand, first to see the masses of the racing crowd. Of course there are women and women. Three species of the kind go to the races.

First, there are the women who wear gay-colored silk gowns and much jewelry. Of course they bet. Sometimes they bet on "tips," more often their bets are regulated by superstitions or dreams. They usually bet heavily, that is for women, and they don't seem to worry when they lose, which they do more often than they win. When they win they win on a tip someone has given them.

While these women still form the majority, they are less plentiful at the races this year than ever before. Either Parkhurst or the Lexow committee is to blame for that fact.

The second kind of women are never young. They are plainly and even poorly clad. They almost all wear black clothes and have wraps along on the finest days. There is certainly no style to them, and one is forced to wonder what and who they were in youth. There is not the least trace of beauty in them, so far as I have ever seen.

They carry bundles of newspaper clippings. Some have large scrap-books composed of them. They also carry a bag of some description and pencils. They seldom have any company

and no one seems to notice them in the crowd or on the stand. They bet on every race and they watch it run with the superb silence of a horse-owner. They know how every horse stands in the race from start to finish.

These women never go into the restaurant. Sometimes they produce a lunch from the recesses of their bags, but they never seem to grow thirsty. Regardless of the crowd, they eat sitting in the chair they took when they arrived and which they do not quit until the last race is run.

Going to the races is a business with these women. They make it their business, and whether they realize a profit from it or not, they alone know. They are not communicative. Other women may pick up acquaintances, but the real sporting woman will not. She is too busy or too indifferent.

The third kind of woman is well dressed and well-behaved. She goes with father, brother or husband. She goes with father, brother or husband. She usually occupies a box way up near the roof of the stand, where it is always hot and uncomfortable, although exclusive.

She may bet, but she does it languidly. Some friend tells her what horse to bet on and she depends entirely upon his judgment, and she has always depended on someone, father, brother or husband, to provide her with a living.

If she wins she takes it as a matter of course, as she takes her living; if she loses she wonders why she was so very stupid as to bet on the wrong horse. But the loss does not move her. She did not earn the money that was put up, and she will not feel its loss.

Between the races she chats with her friends who come along. She is lively then, but she does look bored when the horses are running. She may look at them as they draw near the line, but she never by any chance watches them from start to finish.

When she is thirsty she has something served to her in her box, and if she is hungry she goes down to the tables at the end of the stand nearest the clubhouse.

Before the racing began I went with an acquaintance down to the betting ring.

I was interested in the betting-ring mainly because it resembles the polls—women are excluded.

All the men go down into the ring to bet; the women bet by proxy.

I was the only woman in the ring, but the men did not seem to “shy” at the sight of my petticoats. Mostly they were too engrossed with their own affairs to notice me, but those who did were not rude or offensive. Not a single man made an audible remark which is worthy of note, considering that I was in the midst of all sorts and conditions of men.

The betting-ring proved to be an incomplete semi-circle. Upon high platforms stood the bookmakers, usually in their shirt-sleeves, with a tin box containing money and tickets beside them. On a small blackboard was posted the odds they offered on the different horses in the race. The odds offered by the different bookmakers did not tally. Sometimes there was considerable difference between them.

I wanted to make a bet myself, just to see if I could, but my escort seemed to fear the unusualness of it would attract comment, so I had to forego the experience.

Here is a brilliant opportunity for some woman desirous of being talked about to protest against the exclusion of women, and to insist upon their admission to the betting-ring.

Men in the betting-ring are much quieter and more orderly than the brokers on the floor of the Stock Exchange.

As it drew near the time for the first race I went to my box. Four squads of men, five to a gang, were sprinkling the track with a long hose. A black board in front of the judges' stand,

containing the scratches and changes in weights, was surrounded by men, and loud voiced half-grown were moving in and around them shouting, "Programmes of the races—programmes!"

Then a gang of messenger boys in uniform marched two by two from somewhere beneath the grandstand to the betting-ring. The band upon the lawn played Sousa's "Washington Post March," and by the time it had finished the messenger boys had been turned loose and were swarming over the grandstand.

One came in to me, and I didn't feel like saying I would not bet, so I glanced at the numbers of the horses and the names of the jockeys, which had just been swung up across the track.

I did not know one horse from the other, but I had noticed a picture of Taral in some publication at a newsstand on my way out, so I thought I would make a bet on him, not the horse. I didn't bet hundreds. Not a bit of it. I did not even bet tens. I bet just like a woman, although I felt that I could not lose—I bet \$21

The messenger took the money and gave me a yellow ticket, which gave his number. On it he wrote the amount of cash I gave him and the amount I wished to bet.

He returned shortly with a ticket and my change. I was just thinking that messengers were a great convenience for women bettors when I bethought me that, perhaps, there was some charge.

"What do I pay you?" I asked the boy.

"Ten cents for placing the bet," he answered, "and 25 cents when I cash a ticket."

"You must make a good deal during the day," I suggested.

"The charges don't go to us, lady; they all go to the company," he replied.

"We only get what people give us in tips."

A man stepped out upon the judges' stand and blew upon a cornet. Then the horses, with their doubled-up jockeys, not sitting in their saddles, but standing on their stirrups, and worse bent over than a crack wheelman, came stringing out and down to the place from which they were to start.

"Since you believe in luck," observed the escort as he returned at this moment, tell me before the race which horses will win."

"Taral will win and Simms will be second." I said. "I don't know anything about the horses, but I know that."

The race was upon the turf and a very pretty race it was. As I had bet upon Taral, I watched him all the way and felt very I-told-you-so proud but not surprised when he won and Simms came in just back of him.

"Well! you hit it right," my escort said, in tones of surprise, and then I did wish I had believed more in my own foresight and had "plunged"

It's one of the nasty feelings one has afterwards when one has not the courage to back an intuition. The boy came back for the ticket to cash it, and when this was done I fearlessly made a second bet. In blindness and ignorance I had picked out two winners in the first race, and I could see no reason why I couldn't do so again.

I thought I would back Taral again, and I did to my grief. My confidence in luck vanished when Agitator—the horse he rode—came trailing up to the post.

I had heard about getting up and walking around a table to change one's ill-luck at cards, so I decided to get up and walk around to change my luck. I went down below where seats are free, and became interested again in the crowd.

I saw two women in deep mourning betting, and near them were two priests who apparently could enjoy a horse race. Beyond them was a woman nursing a baby in long clothes, and before her sat a big, coarse creature with a costly gown, enormous diamonds and a purple nose. She hailed and was hailed by a fat star-gazer, a familiar and homely figure.

“Hello!” she cried loudly and friendly and smilingly.

“Hello!” he returned cordially. “Have you come out to lose your money?”

An uneasy person was a newspaper man, a man who is known as a newspaper man from less work and poorer work than anybody connected with the profession.

He is always trying to make himself seen, known and talked about and cultivates a strange, wild growth of facial ornament that Indians pluck out by the roots. This man had a dozen or more copies of a journal containing a contribution signed by him. He slyly moved from place to place, leaving behind him each time a copy of the journal.

Changing around I found did not alter the fate that pursued me. I lost regularly on every other race, with one exception, and that was Sir Walter.

His owner, Dr. Knapp, sat in a box adjoining mine. I was told that he had bet \$10,000 on his horse, so I thought I would go in on the game. I did so, and then watched Dr. Knapp instead of the horse during the race.

His bronzed and bearded face never moved a muscle from start to finish, although he watched carefully through field-glasses every move of the horse.

When the horses came near the line there was a drawn look for an instant around Dr. Knapp’s brown eyes, but it faded away and was replaced by smiles as everybody around began to yell with delight, stopping when it was over to grasp the doctor by the hand in hearty congratulation.

The last race—the steeplechase—was the prettiest race of all. The crowd seemed to warm up to it as crowds warm up to a bull-fight, and no more attention was paid to the two riders who took tumbles than is paid to injured bull-fighters.

The moment it was over there was a great rush for the trains, very few persons seeming to have any tickets to cash. Everybody gathered upon the platform and tracks to wait for the trains. They seemed slow in coming, and everybody looked tired and the women looked cross.

I had a headache, and I looked at the crumpled finery of some of the women and wondered how I could have thought it looked gay earlier in the day. It seemed all at once to have grown gaudy and shoddy.

Once the railroad authorities did not deign to call out the different trains and the racing people took any one and left the result to chance. Now, tickets for one way are not good to return by the other, and the brakemen call out the name of the trains.

But people do not wait for the information. They run away up the track and board the moving train and grab seats, and then when the destination is called out, they jump off again if it is not the right one.

Women are either unnaturally loud on the way home or suddenly silent. Almost all of them have headaches and wonder why they came. Men smoke and chew tobacco and swear and talk horse. To hear them, not one of them lost, and they all knew it all.

The worst managed important railroad in the world gets the passengers in at their convenience, but on no scheduled time.

And then I landed in town and was too sick to eat my dinner, and wondered why on earth I thought I knew more than bookmakers and horse-owners, and why I went out there and lost my money and sunburnt my nose and got a headache.

I don't want to go again, and, I believe there are only the two kinds of woman who do.