

"HERE'S LUCK!"

I HAVE a friend, who, in two successive years, drew the winner of the Derby in a sweep. That friend has only to buy a ticket for a lottery to have more than an even chance of being the winner. Born lucky, I suppose. I do not understand it. The lucky star, if there is such a thing, must have been flirting with the moon on that eventful night when I entered this vale of tears.

As a small boy I remember finding myself in possession of a penny which should have gone into the plate at the Band of Hope. I invested it in a draw at a wee sweetie shop. I drew the first prize—a doll. To take a doll home would have been fatal. We (there were accomplices) propped it up against a wall and, by the time we had finished, the poor thing had not a toe to stand on. Since that depressing experience nothing has ever come my way by chance, and nothing, I am convinced, ever will. Probably it serves me right.

Even in the matter of tramcars I am unlucky. On my route there are three cars, a red, a yellow, and a white. The red is my particular car. Every morning I see it flashing past as I reach the end of the drive; seven minutes to wait, during which a yellow and a white trinkle along and stop invitingly at my stance. I am so used to this procedure that were the order to change I would instantly look for a catch somewhere. It did change the other day. The usual red flashed

past. I moved twenty yards further up in the hope of getting a bus. What's this? Another red car coming down the hill! I make a wild rush, only to find it is a red car on the *white* route. Meantime I miss a bus. No, it is no use.

I know very little about shares. Once or twice I have been induced to try my hand. Same result. From the moment my name is registered down go the value of the shares. Quite recently I ventured on "silk" on the sentimental grounds that the company had a mill in the village where my wife was born. "Encourage home industries!" I said. There was a row at the shareholders' meeting the other day. They unknowingly blamed the directors. I did not attend the meeting. They might have found me out.

I have only been at three race meetings in my life. The last time was at Dublin. We decided to back the favourites, and did so for the first four races. The favourites were not even placed. For the fifth race we decided to back our fancy. The favourite won in a canter. My fancy dropped out twenty yards from the starting post—sheer exhaustion.

Once upon a time, going into the Art Institute with a friend, I filled up an Art Union coupon. "Seeing you have the pen in your hand," said my friend, "you might fill up one for me." I did. He won a £50 prize.

Travelling, it is the same. If there is a specially musty little room in a hotel it falls to me. Is there a dud waiter in a dining room? He draws to me as a duck to water. On journeys with the Choir this has become proverbial. In a company of sixty I have been over and over again first down to breakfast, and last to be served. I have gone the length of telling the

management that I was prepared to produce evidence that I was alive. No use.

On two occasions three of us travelled the American Continent together from the Atlantic to the Pacific. We used to hold a pow-wow each night in the best room of the three. It was never held in my room. At Toronto, the last night we were together, I was ushered into a gorgeous room. I dashed along the corridor to tell my colleagues that my luck had changed. I met one of them on the way. He said, "Come!" I went. The room he led me to must have been made for the Shah of Persia, so truly magnificent was it.

I do not know what particular fate or fury presides over such matters, but I do know that he, she, or it vacates the chair the moment my name is announced.

Fortunately, I am not alone. I have a friend, Harry Plunket Greene, whose case is worse, and that is comforting. He, however, has the advantage of being an Irishman, and that makes a difference. A Scotsman rails at Fate; an Irishman sees the joke. Let H. P. G. enter a Tube Station; his train has just left. Let him go for a bus; every bus in London comes that way but his. Warm-hearted as he is, he is never warm even in the hottest day in summer. When he went to Canada some years ago in the hope of working in a little sunshine as a side-line to the music, it was the coldest spring and early summer Canada had ever known—snow in June.

One day of glorious summer sunshine, when he was staying in Glasgow, I arrived to take him to see the beauties of Loch Lomond. "No use," he had told me the night before. I pointed triumphantly to the cloudless sky. He shivered. Over by Bearsden we went, and

down through Old Kilpatrick. At Dumbarton there was a drizzle of rain. "I told you," he said. When we reached Loch Lomond-side the Loch had disappeared. We spent the day at Tarbert Hotel with our overcoats on, admiring the rain. In the summer of 1927 he, with some friends, took a fishing in the North-West of Scotland. That year every part of the country was deluged except the North West of Scotland. There the rivers were bone dry, not a ripple, not a fish. We have discussed the matter together, but we "evermore came out by the same door wherein we went." There is no explaining it; there is no solution; there is no way of propitiating the fates.

If you are an Englishman you take it complacently; if you are an Irishman you laugh at the whole business; if you are a Scotsman you fight to the last ditch. If you are a journalist you write an article about it.