

The Rockwood Review.

FOOT-BALL.

In view of the great interest taken in foot-ball at the present time, the following is entertaining reading :—

At the end of the seventeenth century a French traveller, named Misson, wrote a very vivacious account of his travels in England. He sagely noted English customs, fashions, attributes and manners ; and airily discoursed on the English game of foot-ball.

" In winter foot-ball is a useful and charming exercise. It is a leather ball about as big as one's head, fill'd with wind. This is kicked about from one to tother in the streets, by him that can get it, and that is all the art of it."

That is all the art of it ! I can imagine the sentiments of the general reader of that day (if any general reader existed in England at that time), when he read and noted the debonair simplicity of this brief account of what was ever then a game of so much importance in England. The proof that Misson was truly ignorant of this subject is shown in the fact that he could by any stretch of an author's privileged imagination, call the English game of foot-ball of that day "a useful and charming exercise." Nothing could be further from the Englishman's intent than to make it either profitable or pleasing.

In the year 1583 a Puritan, named Philip Stubbes; horror-stricken and sore afraid at the many crying evils and wickednesses which were rife in England, published a book which he called the *Anatomie of Abuses*. It was "made dialogue-wise," and is one of the most distinct contributions to our knowledge of Shakespeare's England. Written in racy, spirited English, it is unsparing in denunciations of the public and private evils of the day. His characterization of the game of foot-ball is

one of the strongest of his accusations :

" Now who is so grosly blinde that seeth not that these aforesaid exercises not only withdraw us from godliness and virtue, but also haile and allure us to the wickedness and sin ? For as concerning foot-ball playing I protest unto you that it may rather be called a friendlie kinde of fyghte than a play or recreation—abloody and murthering practice than a felowly sport or pastime. For dooth not every one lye in waight for his adversairie, seeking to overthrowe him and picke him on his nose, though it be upon hard stones, in ditch or dale, in valley or hill, or whatever place soever it be hee careth not, so hee have him downe; and he that can serve the most of this fashion he is counted the only fellow, and who but he ? . . .

So that by this means sometimes their necks are broken, sometimes their backs, sometimes their legs, sometimes their armes, sometimes their noses gush out with blood, sometimes their eyes start out, and sometimes hurte in one place, sometimes in another. But who-soever scapeth away the best goeth not scot free, but is either forewounded, craised or bruised, so as he dyeth of it or else scapeth very hardlie; and no mervaile, for they have the sleights to meet one betwixt two, to dash him against the hart with their elbowes, to hit him under the short ribs with their griped fists and with their knees to catch him on the hip and pick him ou his neck, with a hundred such murthering devices."

Stubbes may be set down by many as sour-visaged, sour-voiced Puritan; but a very gracious courtier of his day, an intelligent and thoughtful man, Sir Thomas Elyot was equally severe on the game. He wrote, in 1537, *The Boke* named the *Gouvenour*, full of sensible advice and instruction. In it he says: "Football wherein nothyng but beastlye furie exstreme