

EGG-ROLLING AT THE WHITE HOUSE IN WASHINGTON.

WIDE AWAKE.

If you should happen to be in Washington on any Easter Monday you might witness a children's sport that does not exist in any other part of America.

At the Easter season the Washington parks begin to look attractive. Hyacinths, crocuses, tulips, cydonias and many native plants are in full bloom. The grass is emerald, the air balmy.

Early on Monday morning you would see thousands of children, boys and girls, of all grades and shades, marching in the direction of the White House, little baskets on their arms. All strangers who have never heard of this annual procession wonder why so many children are up and dressed, spick and span, so early, and why one and all they have been marching towards the southeastern gate of the Executive Mansion. I am now going to tell you.

For more than a week all the boys and girls of Washington from six to sixteen years of age, have been worrying about their Easter eggs. Fathers and mothers, older sisters, friends and relatives have been helping them to get up the prettiest eggs in town, decorating them in every fashion that fancy can conceive and coloured calico and "pas" dyes can execute. No doubt you colour eggs also. But yours do not have to be examined, scrutinized, compared, by many envious eyes, as do ours.

Washington breakfasts are over early in the morning of Easter Monday: then all these artists in eggs are off for the White House, where the President lives, dressed in pinafores and gay colours: not in their Sunday clothes. Rich children go with their white-capped nurses: poor children with one another: but each and all carry the pretty basket of hard-boiled eggs.

Without any previous announcement, or saying "by your leave, Sir" they march into the President's grounds, south of the Mansion, and take possession. General Grant loved to go out and sit on the benches and watch the gay company, smoking his Havana the while. Nellie Arthur used to take part in the egg-rolling. Mrs. Cleveland found infinite delight in the fun. One Easter Monday during Mr. Cleveland's term the tots arrived too early and found the gates locked. The watchman was not on hand, so they banged and rattled until the President came down and let them in himself.

Master Ben McKee, Miss Mary Dodge McKee and Miss Marthana Harrison have, since their residence in the White House, kept up the interest of their predecessors, and Grandfather Harrison, not to be outdone, orders out the Marine Band.

The children used to divide their affections between the Capitol grounds and the President's grounds. But one season, after a long rain, they injured the sodding, and Congress drove the fairies away. I cannot tell you whether that had anything to do with the elections; but I know that many who voted for the cruel measure have since had their career cut off suddenly.

The first thing on the programme is to get acquainted, to march round by twos and by threes, and to admire one another's pretty eggs, commenting as little girls especially know how to do.

The next fun starts itself. Some little girl goes to the top of a pretty knoll and drops an egg. No one tells her to do it. You know how that is. She does the thing, and that is all. She runs screaming after the egg for fear it will be broken. The little companions join the

chase. As if by magic hundreds, nay thousands of eggs are rolling down hill, and Jack and Gill go tumbling after.

Act third is egg-racing. Two or more eggs are started down the knoll together. Perhaps fifty boys and girls will be interested. They laugh, scream, coax, scold, talk to the rival racers and even sprinkle salt on them to encourage them in their downward course. Youngsters bet on the race, chiefly eggs, and are as much interested as the old turfmen at Brighton.

There is not a particle of use in you saying "I should not see any fun in that." You might just as well tell the kitten that she is hopelessly silly to get so much fun out of a ball of yarn.

Perhaps you would enjoy act fourth better. Well, follow me to a quiet little hummock over there. A pretty priggish boy of eleven or twelve and a lovely girl of ten or eleven, not appreciating the general racket, are indulging in a peculiar sport. One of them goes to the top of a knoll and starts an egg down the slope, the other at the bottom holds an egg to receive the one descending. The egg that is broken is eaten by the young pair with much fun and banter. It takes some science to receive the broadside of the rolling egg with the point of the other held in the hand. All this fun is kept up pretty lively during office hours, from nine a.m. till four p.m., when many hundreds of grown children come to join in the sport, and to turn it into an out-of-door dress parade.

Act five is usually reserved until these old folk arrive. The principal character in this act is the professional "egg-eater." He may be a big man, but is generally a dirty little urchin from the street, and more times than not, his face is black, his hair is crisp, while his eyes and teeth rival in whiteness the glare of the eggs he is about to devour. His own resources did not allow him to lay up a store of eggs. But he is full of courage.

He approaches a large group of boys and girls and grown folks, grins, bows, wriggles, wipes his mouth and says pleasantly:

"I kin eat all you'll ginme."

This is a signal for side-splitting mirth. They take him at his word. They form a ring about him and pass in the shelled eggs as he calls for them. The show gets funnier with the disappearance of each egg. The assembled crowd cheer the hero on, and quite frequently the eggs give out before his indomitable appetite. Everybody is convulsed with laughter and prophesies all sorts of dire disaster or the grinning martyr. One little negro, last Easter, actually devoured in a few minutes twenty-six hard-boiled eggs and walked off with a wistful, hungry look upon his sable countenance.

A novel feature or two have been added to the egg-rolling custom in the last year or two. The red balloon man has found his way into the garden, and now some well-to-do gentleman buys him out, and sets them adrift one at a time, to the immense pleasure of hundreds.

In this singular Easter sport you can see how folk-customs have been amended, or how they grow. When this writer was a boy, the custom of egg-rolling was common as far as Baltimore, and was practiced in the adjacent counties of Virginia. There are those who used to greet the return of Spring, not after the manner of the Japanese by worshipping the cherry blossom, but by going out in little squads to roll eggs. The coloured people said "Lit was de bes' way to bring on lub."

With deep regret some of us have seen this local folk sport driven from post to pillar until the President of the United States is its patron saint. And now, last year, the rough play of a rough class got the upper hand and threatened to drive the children from the park. I think it would be a very great shame to frighten away from the