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By Mrs. J. V. NOEL.

POPULAR AMUSEMENTS.

THE popular amusements of a nation constitute a fair index of its character; and the Spanish bull-fights give a better idea of the disposition of the people of that peninsula than could be gathered from the pages of a score of historians. In the Old World, as a general rule, the amusements of the people, with some slight modifications, are the same as those that beguiled the idle hands of their forefathers—many centuries previous to the time when the great Genoese navigator gave a New World to Castile and Léon. Some of the games practised in Europe at the present day can lay claim to remote antiquity, and were in vogue long before the dawn of the Christian era. The Egyptians were much attached to the game of ball, but played it in a manner different from that of the British Islands. Some of their paintings represent adults engaged in the game of hop-p, and others portray a couple of combatants absorbed in a game of chess. The in-door amusements of this wonderful people bear, even after the lapse of 2500 years, a marked resemblance to those of our own time. They were fond of giving evening parties, and we have seen a *fac-simile* of one of those social gatherings, taken from the tombs of Thebes and Beni-Hassan, which, allowing for difference of costume and of a few unimportant accessories, are almost a counterpart of those of the nineteenth century.

The Egyptians invited each other to parties for the purpose of enjoying musical entertainments, and witnessing dances. The orchestras included harps, guitars, drums, flutes, long and short, single and double trumpets, castanets, and tambourines. The guests seated themselves exactly after our fashion, on chairs and fauteuils like our own, and young girls and boys waited on them, and supplied them with fans and refreshments. The women were splendidly attired, and their hair, which was sometimes false, was arranged in a very attractive manner. Temperance principles were not always observed at their feasts, for several satirical works of art represent men carried home from them on the shoulders of their sober friends, and, with the Egyptian love of caricature, rich ladies are depicted in a condition which, now-a-days, would call for the intervention of the police.

In the privacy of home life, the Egyptians had numerous games with which to while away their hours of leisure; and the British Museum contains a rich collection of dolls, puppets, chariots, leather balls, dice, and whirligigs, which have been found in little mummy cases in excellent preservation; and which contributed to Egyptian pastimes, at a period when the nations of the

greatest part of the European continent were as wild as their own forests, and dwelt in huts constructed with less skill than the habitations of the Canadian beaver.

The in-door amusements of Europe and America are much the same; but, as regards out-door amusements, Europeans possess the superiority—climate no doubt, has much to do with this, but we must also take into consideration the temperament of the people. The Englishman, the Frenchman and the German indulge in out-door sports for the mere pleasure of the thing, while the people of this continent, as a general rule, seem to engage in them as a matter of duty; as if labouring under an obligation to do so, and thus they rob themselves of all the zest, all the delight, all the advantages which result from the complete abandonment, for the time being, to the amusement that is uppermost.

The people of this continent, American as well as Canadian, pay far less attention to out-door amusements than the people of the Old World. We are of a temperament much more mercurial than theirs; and an amusement, in order to be popular, must be exciting. A man who crosses a rope suspended over Niagara Falls, and who gives the spectators a chance of seeing him tumble headlong into the torrent, will attract a hundred times the number who would assemble to witness a boat-race between the best rowers of the continent, or a cricket-match played by the All England eleven. The theatre that produces a good melo-drama, after the French fashion, and made up of a sufficient number of duels, poisonings and intrigues, with two or three dashing members of the demi-monde introduced, to give piquancy to the plot, will be crowded from pit to dome; while the theatre, that is guilty of the anachronism of bringing forward one of those plays with which Shakespeare spell-bound the most gifted audiences since the days of the Athenian drama, will hardly realize enough of money to pay for the printing of its programmes. The absorbing idea, in this quarter of the globe, is money-making, and our amusements are stunted in order that our pockets may be rendered plenteous; there is wealth to be made in the stifling air of the counting-house, and so we give no second thought to the wealth that may be secured in the deep forests, and in the broad fields. It is the old story of the men, who, in the good old days of the company, were wont to go to India, live there some twenty years, come home with a diseased liver and a million of money, die conveniently some couple of years after arriving, and leave all their wealth to their grateful relatives.

The amusements we seek indoors, can scarcely be styled amusements at all. We allude principally to that form of social entertainment, which are known as "parties." A better plan of spending an evening unprofitably could not be devised. A number of persons of both sexes find themselves in an apartment, hot and suffocating, and not many degrees removed from the condition of the Black Hole of Calcutta. They are introduced to each other, and try to look at ease when passing through that terrific social ordeal. When they begin to converse, in short sentences, the weather, or the dresses of those present, forms the substratum of the dialogue. After the pulse of every one present has been raised to fever heat, by the overcharged atmosphere of the room, and when the monosyllabic conversation begins to flag, music is announced, and a self-confident young lady, with the courage of the king of Ashantee's Amazons rushing to a charge, marches boldly up to a wheezy piano, and commences to labour it in such a manner, that if there are any persons among the auditors who have an ear for music, they are disposed to

question if the gift of hearing is altogether an unmixed blessing. For the most part these social gatherings are remarkable for nothing but small talk, weak tea and execrable music, and the only persons whom they profit, are medical men and milliners.

That species of amusement which is most conducive to physical health must be sought for out of doors. It may be said that the severe winters of the North American continent prevent out-door exercise; but this is a fallacy, for, with the exception of short intervals, when it snows, or when the weather is excessively cold, there is nothing to prevent both sexes from indulging in snow-shoeing and skating. Both of these amusements find favour with Canadians, but are not so generally practised as they deserve to be. The city of Montreal possesses several snow-shoe clubs; it is their focus, and we believe there is also a club composed exclusively of ladies. Every year, a short time before the commencement of spring, there are snow-shoe races, the prizes for which comprise silver cups, medals, and purses. The latter prize is generally contended for by the Indians, and it may be interesting, in a physical point of view, to observe here, that they hardly ever enter for any race but the one for four miles; as they have found out by experience, that in races of a mile they have been beaten by white competitors, while, in the four mile contest they can tire out and distance their pale-faced rivals.

Those who regard physical education as one of the remedies for some of the "thousand natural ills that flesh is heir to," must be gratified at the impetus giving to skating during the past few years. This delightful exercise seems to be the especial favourite of the ladies on both sides the line 45°. Numerous skating "rinks" have sprung into existence in Canada, but the broad basin of the ice-bound St. Lawrence affords the cheapest and healthiest opportunities of enjoying this pastime. In New York, the Central Park affords unrivalled facilities for skating; and the American ladies, who are adepts in the art, are not slow to avail themselves of the chances offered to them for displaying at the same time their skill and their personal attractions. And surely it is better to be thus employed, during the day, than to be confined in an over-heated room, moping over a sensuous novel; for of this, our fair readers may rest assured, that there is no greater enemy to beauty than our Northern winters, when these winters are passed within sight of the stove; just as, on the other hand, beauty has no greater friend than the same season, if the advantages it offers for out-door amusements are seized upon as they present themselves, and not allowed to slip carelessly away.

A great number of people from this side of the Atlantic seek amusement every year in visiting Europe. They do so, we suppose, because it is fashionable. A European tour might be made profitable, for that continent contains much that is grand in nature and magnificent in art, and has been the scene of the greatest actions in which the human race has ever been called upon to participate. But we fear that the majority of tourists visit Europe not so much for the sake of improvement as for the satisfaction of being able to say that they have been over that continent. For our own part, we believe that the two reminiscences of European travel, that survive the longest are these—first, that the hotel-keepers seem to have entered into a combination to fleece every traveller; second, that the accounts furnished by the Guide-books, of famous localities, are greatly exaggerated. Some spots on the Rhine may repay a visit, and it may also be worth while, if the traveller is of a statistical turn of mind, to compute, at the eating-houses,