

## THE HYMENEAL CUP.

I read in my newspaper of this morning, that amongst the prizes distributed to the London Rifle Brigade at the Crystal Palace was one described as the "Hymeneal Challenge Cup," which, "with a wedding-ring, was to be the property of the winner, on the condition that he should be married within six months from the competition."

Now the question at once arises. Is the prize awarded to encourage rifle-shooting or to reward marriage? Or is it supposed that the two objects have that much in common that they can be appropriately recompensed by the same recognition? Or is it a crucial test of a shooter's steadiness that, when aiming at a bull's eye, he is actually about to bring down a wife?—a consideration which might reasonably test the nerves of some men. Whatever was the precise intention of the founder of the prize, I desire to protest loudly against the system, now considerably in vogue, of rewarding by *riochet*—against that fashionable habit of encouraging one thing, that something totally different from it may be promoted. Selling trumpery at a bazaar to convert negroes or convert Jews—giving private theatricals to send a missionary to Madagascar—all these, and the like, I resolutely oppose.

Rifle shooting is an admirable exercise of skill and steadiness, and marriage is honourable in all men, but why club them together? Are rifle shots remarkable as good husbands? Is there anything of the quality that makes a man hit a target which will distinguish him in the conjugal relation? Or is the device a sure means of shewing a dangerous competitor? For seeing that a man cannot for ever go on getting married within six months, there must surely come an end to his contesting the prize.

It has often been recommended that ladies should, if possible, be got to interest themselves in these contests—that their presence and their influence would go far to popularise the pursuit, and make men more eager to engage in it. Well, we have succeeded, and what is the result? They have given the matter a directly personal tendency. Their old bazaar instincts have stood to them here; and as they formerly were wont to attach the conversion of a heathen to the sale of a cigar-case, so here they connect shooting with courtship; and while affecting to promote marksmanship, have really their eyes upon matrimony.

Now, if instead of ladies giving this cup, it had been subscribed for by a professional class—surgeons, for instance—what should we have said to the condition that the winner should retain the prize, if, within six months from the competition, he had been couched for the cataract? It might be objected that he had no occasion for the operation, that he was sufficiently satisfied with his vision, that he remedied occasional deficiency by a glass, and so forth—still the cup was only to be held on this stipulation; and however little target-practice seemed to link itself to ophthalmic surgery, the surgeons knew what they were at, even if they did not tell the public.

So will it ever be when professional instincts are suffered to mingle with great public objects. Had the lawyers got in here, they would have made a condition that a man should win a suit in equity. Of course it will be said, let the winner, if he be in love with celibacy, surrender his prize. There is no need of his complying with a condition distasteful to him. But this I call hard; he shot for a cup, not for a wife.

Marriage, too, is placed by the very nature of this contract in a position the re-

verse of flattering. It is imposed as a penalty—not held out as a reward. Give up your cup or marry. What is this but saying to a man, Here is an object you are proud of: it has formed the ornament of your side board and the envy of your friends for months back; it is the daily reminder to you of a nuptial event; and yet there is only one way to retain it—there is but one means, I will not say sacrifice, by which its possession can be assured to you—you must be couched—I mean married—within six months. And now there begins in your mind a species of conflict which cannot but tend to represent matrimony as a penal condition, and make you regard a wife as the heavy price of a much coveted object.

Imagine, too, the flurry and perturbation of a man who, though an admirable rifle-shot, has little experience of ladies, and less thought of matrimony, on being awarded this prize! Fancy him reviewing in his mind his female acquaintance, and balancing the claims of the one, and her chances of success. Six months is a short time even to prepare for a Civil Service examination, and get up your Magnall's questions and your Colenso; but what is it to address yourself to the task of courtship and win a heart? Conceive how it would add to the torments of love to know it was a match against time, and that if the fortress did not surrender by a given day, that you must raise the siege and retire! Imagine the exigencies of him who has to calculate not only the details of devotion, but the law's delays, and to combine the ardour, of love with the obstacles of the lady's solicitor!—with last of all, three entire weeks consumed in the publication of *Annals*, for the family of the bride objects to a special license.

What agitation, what agony, will all this involve! How stern and unfeeling it would make a man to maiden bashfulness, and those thousand little coquetties that attract even while they irritate! How barbarously abrupt and curt it would render him, say by the middle of the fifth month, when he saw how little he had done, and how much must be crammed into six weeks!

Old proverbs are continually receiving new illustrations, and here we have the cup and the lip in a fashion we never dreamed of.

Let us turn for a moment to the lady's side of this contract. How will it suit the absorbing selfishness of love to feel that the suitor is not merely in pursuit of a heart, the centre of his affections, but a centrepiece for his dinner-table?—that it's the double event he stands to win on.

Will the damsel be more easily won who knows that her softest glances are associated with a bull's-eye? Will it place her amongst her own sex in that interesting light which ladies thoroughly understand how to dispose artistically, of playing with a lover's affections, when any one who looks at the almanac must know the exact day of the month the game shall cease, the race be won, and the winner declared?

What is to become of all Love's wilful ways and changeful caprices, when matrimony, like a bill, will be due six months after date, and no renewal possible?

Nothing, so far as I see, has been said for those already married. Whether it is thought that the condition of the nerves will not render them dangerous competitors, or that they are legally excluded from competition, I am unable to say; but surely a man with a *decree nisi* in his pocket might have a special clause in his favour. Burned children do not always dread fire, and a "petitioner" is not uncommonly successful. I am, I own, not a little curious as to the

result of this stipulated possession; and if the winner should retain the cup, I modestly prefer a claim to a portion of bridecake, over which I have already done my utmost to sprinkle some sugar, which unthinking people might take for salt. — *Cornelius O'Dowd, in Blackwood for April.*

## THE WAR TALK.

The Washington correspondent of the *New York Times* thus treats the coming war with England:—

"A leading member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in a recent conversation on the subject of the Alabama claims and the probabilities of a war with England, scouted the latter proposition as utterly absurd and preposterous. Among the reasons advanced by him against a war with England were:

First, it would necessarily be a naval war, for the invasion and conquest of Canada would only be the work of a week. Being a naval war, the destruction of the commerce and shipping of both countries would be the only result. England has three times the number of steam vessels that we have, all her passenger and mail steamships being available at twenty-four hours' notice as a war flotilla.

Second, a war with England would cost the United States at least \$2,000,000,000, which would eventually end in repudiation. Meanwhile the incidental loss and suffering to both countries would be incalculable.

Third, the United States cannot afford to hold the British North American possessions as conquered provinces. Four millions of discontented people on the north, and as many millions more on the south would produce a state of affairs anything but pleasant."

These in brief are a few of the reasons which render a war with England improbable if not impossible.

THE EFFECTIVE STRENGTH OF THE FRENCH ARMY. The *Moniteur de l'Armée*, a French official organ, has the following:—"The effective of the French army on a peace footing is 400,000 men from the 1st April to the 1st September. In a week all the men on furlough can be made to join, and the general effective will then be 567,000 men. In the month of July, after the formation of the contingent of 1868, the effective will be increased by 77,000 men, making the total 644,000. If from the 644,000 we deduct the men who do not serve—those in hospital, on leave, in prison, in a word the permanent deficit, which is 72,000, and the 50,000 who must remain in Algeria—there will be 522,000 men to be put in line if circumstances should require. As for the *materiel*, each regiment of infantry has in reserve arms, clothing, and equipment for 4,000 soldiers, and the other branches of the army are in a similar position."

The Turkish Admiral, Hobart Pasha, writes a letter to the *London Times* on the liability of private property to be captured at sea. He says that private property on land is respected during war, and he believed merchant ships ought to be treated as private property on land is, and that only those goods in which a belligerent finds the material for his belligerency, ought to be touched as lawful prize.

The last stroke in the demolition of the fortress of Luxemburg was given on the 3rd inst., by the firing of two mines by means of electricity. The effect was tremendous and levelled the whole structure,