

ENGLISH ROWING.

An Etching by Julian Hawthorne on the English Boat Race.

A POLITICAL SUGGESTION

What the Perfection of Boating Mechanism May Lead To.

A BLACKBOARD RACE.

Nothing to Brag of in This Year's Struggle.

CHOOSING A STANDPOINT.

How the Boats Came Along at Last.

HINTS TO AMERICAN BOATMEN.

LONDON, March 25, 1875.

London, a day or two before the University race, was looking very blue. Blue is such an uncommon color on the earth that it catches the eye more than red or yellow and has a pleasantly soothing effect on the feelings. I was inclined to believe that the whole stock of blue, ordinarily appropriated to celestial use, had been bought up by speculators several days previous to the race, for there was no bit of azure sky anywhere visible for love or money, and except upon the position that the heavens had either fallen or been sold to fill the extraordinary demand on the part of the backers of Cambridge there was no understanding so persistent a veil of clouds. The river and every pond and paddle throughout the country were in like manner stripped of their dark blue on Oxford's behalf, and air and water presented a strictly neutral aspect of whitish gray. In justice to the speculators, however, it must be admitted that they made pretty and tasteful use of their abundant material. The silk moustaches and haberdashers were not the only ones to show their ingenuity, for all the chinware in the crockery shops was blue; there were blue cigarettes in tobaccoists' windows; blue landscapes commanded a premium at the picture dealers'; an eight-oared crew in blue gingerbread was leading to the blue peppermint oar in a party cook's showcase; blue boots and slippers were the most fashionable footwear; blue gloves; blue jewelry; yes, and the photographs of the actresses at the stationers' were all painted in blue satin dresses, or, if there were no dresses, then with blue eyes.

THE FAVORITE COLOR. Light blue was the favorite color this year, and the fact was accounted for with various ingenuity. In the case of the upper classes it was because light blue was more becoming to the ladies, while the tag-rag and bob-tail were adhered to, partially to it as being the badge of the weaker party; for it should be observed that the event of the race was accurately known some weeks before it took place. Indeed, this is invariably the case in such matters, inasmuch that it seems hardly worth while to row four miles merely for the sake of proving the prophesied right. Nay, had I been personally concerned on either side, I should have felt the pleasure of victory diminish or the anguish of defeat intensify, as the case might be, by knowing all about it before starting. As regards the preponderance of one party or the other, however, I will not attempt metaphysically to explain it. What is more to the purpose is that not a soul but was either for Oxford or for Cambridge. England was more Oxfordian and Cambridgian than she was liberal and conservative, and there was more enthusiasm exhibited in twenty minutes along the Thames' banks of Parliament during the lifetime of half a dozen Ministers. Why should not political questions be settled by boat-racing? The attention of the country would be secured, the opposing interests would be decided upon thoroughly tangible and intelligible grounds, and the largest and most intricate bill would be necessarily disposed of inside of half an hour. The Marquis of Darnley and Mr. Hartington would, of course, hold the ruder-lines of their respective craft, and would be perfectly at liberty to take such advantage of the current as their knowledge and skill might enable them to do, and to give their adversary their back with so soon as they should be able to force ahead of him.

GABINET COACHMANS. This proposition, of course, ought not to be adopted without some further discussion of its merits. It is refreshing to learn from the House to the river. The kind of partisanship of which the rival crews are the mainstay is very pleasant to see and enjoyable to share, and makes cynical people, who are accustomed to regret that the world does not see the way to its best advantage so clearly as we do, think of our race somewhat more kindly and hopefully. Women are almost entirely answerable for this agreeable state of things; they appear in such matters precisely in their most attractive and creditable light. Does anybody suppose that the race would be so popular, so wholesome, so fashionable, so anything that is nice, if there were no ladies to take it up in their delightful, enthusiastic, emotional, irrational, chivalric, disdainful, cunning, simple, generous way? To bet gloves and wear the colors; to ruin their lovely hair and charming dresses in the cause, and to "sweat" for the sake of a few shillings, may be considered by the majority of people as no longer at all, but a very promising and encouraging circumstance. Whether promising or the contrary is strictly in accordance with the tendency of the age, and may, therefore, be confidently counted on one way or the other. It is briefly this—that the boats are getting to be propelled less and less by arms and legs of lusty young men, and more and more by mechanical contrivances of ingenious boat builders. Of course, the origin of this tendency can be traced very far back; spoon oars are only one of its later developments and outriggers do not go very far back. But sliding seats, which came in four or five years ago, were a decided advance upon anything that had been imagined before; and this improvement had been pushed still further, and no one can tell what invention may not be looked for next. The speculative mind cannot well avoid asking itself where this scientific business is to land us. Young men, by and by, will be ejected to the crews, not for broad backs and sound muscles, but for broad foreheads and sound comprehension of mechanical subtleties. Their training diet will consist of diagrams and calculations, and they will be coached by the strokes of former crews—men of profound mathematical attainments. The practice will be chiefly upon the blackboard, and ultimately, perhaps, the contest as well. A large hall will be engaged; the audience will assemble; the crews will occupy seats on the platform; at the words, "Are you ready?" each man will produce his slate or advance to the blackboard, as it may be arranged, and the momentous signal "Go!" each will dash in, obedient to the order, and demonstrate his problem's well as he can. We may fancy, perhaps, the tumult of intellectual excitement throughout the assembly as the progress of the calculations is from time to time announced by the judges. By and by the last figure is down; amid the silence of breathless suspense the referee examines the results, balances one against the other, and announces the issue. Applause, congratulations follow; the crews pocket their chalks, compliment one another, and are escorted home by their friends. One of them, perhaps, is taken with brain fever; and thereby occasions a hot discussion in the newspapers as to whether boat racing is a healthy pastime or not. Some one, thereupon, writes a novel, whose hero exhibits the evils of over-application to intellectual athletics, and so on. All I am afraid of is that it will die out from lack of ladies, who, as I shall always believe, would rather see a man knocked down with a flat than with an argument.

And ceremony of the race is to be seen here, but little or nothing of the race itself. They catch the water and are gone. Now one is in front and still gaining; but we know that the relative position will be reversed at least once before the long four miles are done. There is something very unsatisfactory about this. Some persons argue that those who miss the first mile of the race must altogether miss the rest, inasmuch that the latter part of the course is a stern chase for one or the other. But that is a wrong way of viewing the matter. The beaten crew never confesses itself beaten nor acts as though it were beaten until the pistol shot has sounded which salutes the winner. On the contrary, they make unceasing and desperate efforts to retrieve themselves; and it is in such desperate efforts, though we may feel them to be vain, that the true thrill and excitement of the contest lies. If, as soon as they feel themselves overmatched, they were to "easy all" and paddle philosophically back to Putney again, then, indeed, the Putneyites would have good reason for their preference. But so long as hope springs immortal in the oarsman's heart and sympathy glows in that of the spectator; so long as oars may snap or bloodveins burst or boats swamp or "spurts" avail—so long, in fine, as the future is hid and mankind mortal—so long will Mortlake not lack patronage on regatta days. Besides, it is not always to be more satisfactory to see the contest won and lost with our own eyes than to hear about its termination from other people.

OTHER PLACES. Of course, there are plenty of intermediate points of vantage, but they only present in dilution the concentrated merits of the two extremities of the course. It is, undeniably, delightful to be a member of a lawn party at one of those charming villas which give to the river; but this aquatic enthusiasm, who come to see, not society, but rowing. Moreover, there are no such villas in the immediate vicinity of Mortlake. The neighborhood is rather peopled; level meadows constitute the left bank of the river, while the right is occupied by the "ship lun" and a variety of even less pretentious buildings. A towpath skirts the water's edge, built up with stone from high water mark to a height of five or six feet. A legion of ravenous watermen besiege this embankment, continually and vociferously adjuring the close-packed crowd which stands upon it, to let themselves be ferried to the other side for the nominal sum of half a crown per head. The general tendency of the crowd is to the river; but this consideration ought not to interest the psychological student, should the latter happen to be on hand. The side to which they are transported is so plainly inferior, in every respect, to that they are on, that it seems as if their object in going either way were the philanthropic one of giving more elbow-room to such as remain. This would be much to their credit, especially in view of the fact that the passage, during the last hour or two before the race, is excessively dangerous—not alone from the imminent risk of collisions, but because the skill in which the passage is effected is generally overclouded and by a set of passengers not precisely accustomed to contend with the perils of the deep. Nevertheless, a great majority of them do escape rowing, though seemingly only by the providential violation of some natural law.

THE "SHIP." Well, it was at Mortlake, not far from the "Ship," and on or near the stone-embanked towpath, that I finally cast anchor. Be it admitted likewise that the arguments proving this spot to be the most desirable one on the course were not either conceived or worked out until chance and my own negligence had rendered it impossible for me to get anywhere else. I arrived late—that is, about twelve o'clock—at Mortlake, having underestimated the length of the way. Every road and lane for miles out had been alive with teams and foot passengers, all heading toward one point. Gallant gentlemen on horseback, with opera glasses slung over their shoulders; family carriages, full of blue silk and satin, blue neckties and blue boots; country wagons bulging with creatures of the same general make and aspect as the former, but socially antipodal to them; graceful pony phaetons, driven by exquisitely dressed and faultlessly complexioned young ladies, who received the salutes only of disengaged gentlemen and were lightly ignored by all persons otherwise conditioned; sturdy pedestrians, dusty and tired, but full of enthusiasm—all these, and more, had accompanied, followed or outstripped me on my riverward journey. Every driver had a blue ribbon on his whip; and not a horse—were he but a costermonger's donkey—was without his rosettes. A sentiment of good fellowship had, therefore, generally prevailed. Remarks were exchanged between acquaintances, and just as I was about to take the thickest of threedreaded traffic. These blue badges are promoters of humane emotions, and do more than stump orators or pamphlets to inculcate democratic feelings. They are badges of a common feeling regarding only the aquatic interests of Oxford or Cambridge. If every human aim and faith were in a similar manner outwardly beribboned with certain colors, no doubt the iracundization of mankind would be greatly advanced.

A PICTURE. I arrived at Mortlake late, and, having pressed resolutely through a disorganized preliminary throng, I emerged on the river bank. On my left, jutting almost into the river was the "Ship Inn," all over the roof, chimneys, doors, windows, balconies, and approaches, and which people were clustered down and thick as iron filings on the pavement. Crowds always look so, no matter how much color there may be in them. As to the towpath, it was so thickly overlaid with humanity, that not for some time was I aware of its existence—it appeared a solid populous mound. Two or three barges were moored at intervals, a few yards out from the shore, and on the opposite side of the river was almost a continuous line of them, and these also were densely settled. You could not have dropped a stone anywhere over the surface of the water without hitting a boat or a human being, and the ceaseless shifting in and out of this countless flotilla, like a swarm of frightened ants, was dizzying to behold. The battalion of watermen were in full cry and activity, bearing the victim of their victim and still clamoring insistently for more. A few were clustered down and thick as iron filings on the pavement. Crowds always look so, no matter how much color there may be in them. As to the towpath, it was so thickly overlaid with humanity, that not for some time was I aware of its existence—it appeared a solid populous mound. Two or three barges were moored at intervals, a few yards out from the shore, and on the opposite side of the river was almost a continuous line of them, and these also were densely settled. 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