

NOT A MERE FIGUREHEAD.

Victoria Said to Take an Active and Efficient Part in Public Affairs.

A corner of the veil which screens the inner life of royalty from the common gaze was raised the other day by Mr. Rentoul, M. P., at a meeting of ladies in support of the women's suffrage movement, says the Westminster Gazette. Mr. Rentoul said his idea had always been that the queen was a merely ornamental sort of personage, who signed such documents as were submitted by her ministers, and was restrained from doing any harm by constitutional safeguards. He had, however, recently made the acquaintance of two lords in waiting, who have been in attendance on her majesty for many years, and the information he had obtained from this source had completely altered his views as to the influence exercised by the queen in matters of domestic and foreign policy. He had learned that she is proficient in eleven European languages, and that she has during the last four or five years completely mastered Hindustani, in which she converses with great correctness and fluency with any of her Indian subjects who are presented at court. Her majesty frequently writes to every important sovereign in Europe, and her influence on the side of peace is said to have been very beneficial, her knowledge of foreign affairs being most intimate and accurate. At several critical stages in the relations between European nations the queen's personal influence has been successfully exerted to prevent war. It is even alleged in court circles that her majesty would have been able to prevent the Franco-Prussian war if Emperor Louis Napoleon had not precipitated hostilities on the Rhine before any opportunity was afforded for mediation.

LONG BEFORE PULLMAN'S DAY.

Benjamin Dearborn, in 1819, Thought Out the Sleeping and Dining Car.

The recent Pullman troubles impart a special interest to a discovery recently made by File Clerk Walter H. French, among the archives of the house of representatives, says the Washington Post. The discovery is in the nature of a petition to congress preferred in 1819 clearly foreshadowing the modern system of sleeping cars. The petition is all the more interesting because the power of steam used in the propulsion of railroad trains at that time was still in its infancy and wrapped more or less in vague mystery. The paper is as follows:

"The memorial of Benjamin Dearborn, of Boston, respectfully represents: That he has devised in theory a mode of propelling wheel carriages in a manner probably unknown in any country, and has perfectly satisfied his own mind of the practicability of conveying mails and passengers with such celerity as has never before been accomplished, and in complete security from robbery on the highway.

"For obtaining these results he relies on carriages propelled by steam on level railroads, and contemplates that they can be furnished with accommodations for passengers to take their meals and their rest during the passage, as in a packet; that they be sufficiently high for persons to walk in them without stooping, and so capacious as to accommodate twenty, thirty or more passengers and their baggage."

GOOD FIGHTERS.

Chinese Soldiers Are Fearless and Infinitely Numerous.

Our knowledge of the modern Chinaman in battle has been derived from the wars of 1883 and 1884 with the French.

According to the French narratives of the war in Tonquin, the Chinese generals were deficient in strategy; but the rank and file fought so desperately, with such utter disregard for life, that they generally won the battles, and the campaigns ended in French retreats. Admiral Courbet covered himself with glory by his operations on the River Min, which ended in the destruction of the Chinese arsenals and shipyards, but the admiral had to make all haste to withdraw his force; if he had delayed, not a ship nor a man would have escaped, says the San Francisco Argonaut.

So at the conflict on the island of Formosa. The speed with which the French landed was outstripped by the speed with which they reembarked. French officers who have seen the Chinese in the field shake their heads when foreigners talk lightly of their military prowess. In fact, the question speaks for itself. Given a practically indefinite number of fighting men, every one of whom is ready to die on the field, it goes without saying that it cannot be overcome by a weaker force.

Awed by a Glass Eye.

One of the many superstitious fears that render the laborers from sunny Italy so generally docile was recently taken advantage of by a shrewd Irish foreman employed on a public job. There was a misunderstanding likely to result in a general strike, and he assembled the men together, listening patiently to their statement of grievances. When they concluded, he called to his side the bookkeeper of the contractor, a man with penetrating dark eyes, one of them quite still because it was artificial. The foreman stated with emphasis, the only terms upon which he would compromise, and the bookkeeper kept his "evil eye" fixed on the crowd. The terms were accepted without a murmur, and the crowd hastily dispersed. The bookkeeper was entirely unconscious of performing any part in determining the controversy.

Chinese Marksmen.

The accuracy of the Chinese marksman is marvelous, when it is remembered the gunstock rests on the hip. In this way he brings down with great facility birds on the wing, and even the snipe, whose zigzag course renders them difficult to spot with the western fowling piece. In addition, too, he uses no explosive cap, but fires it with lighted fuse.

IMPLEMENTS OF GAMING.

Curious Origin of Playing Cards, Dice and Dominoes.

India and China the Source of These Peculiar Playthings - Some of the Games Played by the Mongolians.

Who would suppose that playing cards were originally derived from the knuckle bones of sheep? Yet such is the fact. If you do not believe it, ask Stewart Culin, ethnologist, attached to the University of Pennsylvania, who, according to the Washington Star, has made the study of games, from the scientific point of view, his speciality. The so-called knuckle bones are familiar enough, being used to this day by children in various parts of the world. They are the ankle bones of the sheep, and are four-sided. It seems odd to find that dice in Arabic are called by a name which means ankle bones. Nobody knows how long they were first employed for playing games. One day it occurred to somebody that a cube was better adapted to the purpose. That must have happened in very ancient times, for the Romans of old had dice which were just like our own, even to the arrangement of the numbers on the faces—i. e., the six opposite the one, the five opposite the two, and the four opposite the three.

It will be observed that the sum of any two opposite numbers is always seven. This may have something to do with the fact that seven used to be regarded as a magical number. Of the respect accorded to it there is evidence in many passages of the Bible. The most ancient cubical die known dates back to 600 B. C.—that is, twenty-five hundred years ago. It was found at Naucratis, a Greek colony in Egypt. The earliest dice were made in pairs, right and left, like knuckle bones, one of which was always from the right leg and the other from the left leg of the animal. Two dice were usually employed, because they were two knuckle bones. Mr. Culin says that dice probably originated in India. From that country they were carried to China, whence they have been distributed all over the world. The Chinese are great gamblers; they invented a modification of the dice, which is called the domino. Put two dice faces side by side and you have the domino. Dominoes are said to have been devised in the year 1120 of the Christian era by a Chinese emperor for the amusement of his wives. It is more likely, however, that they merely obtained the imperial approval at that date.

There are twenty-one possible throws with two dice, so twenty-one dominoes may be regarded as natural dominoes. However the Chinese have doubled up some of the numbers so as to make a full set for playing thirty-two in all. All over eastern Asia the customary outfit of dominoes is thirty-two. Our dominoes, obtained by way of Europe, are only twenty-eight and are modified by the introduction of blanks. The domino game of Europe and America is the match game. It is played in China, but is an unimportant one among the many Chinese games of dominoes. The Chinese domino games are all of them dice games elaborated. Dominoes are also used in China, like dice, for fortune telling. That system of divination has an extensive literature of its own. The Chinese dominoes all have astrological names.

In China esemical names are given to the numbers on the dice. Six is the throw of heaven, ace is the throw of earth, four is the throw of man, while one and three are chosen to represent the harmony that unites heaven, earth and man. The throw of double five is called the "plum flower," five and six is the "tiger's head," four and six is "red-head ten," one and six is "long-legged seven," and one and five is "red mallet six." These terms remind one of those given by negroes to various throws at the game of "craps." On Chinese dice the "one" and "four" are always red, while the dots on the other faces are black. Mr. Culin cannot assign any reason for this with certainty. There is a legend to the effect that on one occasion an emperor of the Ming dynasty was almost defeated in a game by his queen. The only possibility for him to win was that the dice should turn up "fours." They did so, and he was so gratified that from that time forth the "fours" on all dice were marked in red.

Take an ordinary domino of bone or wood, enlarge it, make it of paper, and it becomes a playing card. Mr. Culin's study of the subject has led him to the conclusion that this is the way in which the playing card was originally evolved. The evolution began with the knuckle bone, which became a cubical die; the latter was transformed into a domino, and the domino, in its turn, was metamorphosed into a card. A domino with two "fives" on it represents the "tenspot" of the pack. The origin of "king," "queen" and "jack" is unknown. Possibly a little light may be thrown upon the mystery by the fact that the four sides of the knuckle bone are called in Arabic the "shah," "vizier," "peasant" and "slave." The same names are given to the numbers on the cubical die, the six being the "shah." One of the games played with dominoes in China is apparently the prototype of whist. Nobody knows when dominoes and cards were introduced into Europe. We, in America, got our games from Europe; we invent no games. Poker is an old English game modified. Mr. Culin says that there are no new games; those brought out from year to year are merely modifications of old ones. Games are originated in primitive stages of social development.

One would naturally suppose that the spinning die, called the "teetotum," must be derived from the same original source as the cubical die. Apparently such is not the case. Mr. Culin has traced the teetotum to Corea, where it seems to have had its beginning.

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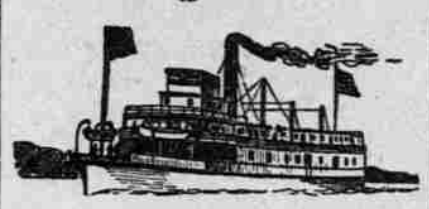
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