

XXXVII.EARLY AMUSEMENTS.

In the early days, before the completion of the railroads and telegraph lines, when only the primitive stagecoach attracted the attention of the people three times a week, and when merchants and business men generally had but a few hours' work to do each day, games of all kinds suited to the different turns of mind and the physical capacity of the individual were improvised, and many were the amusing scenes and incidents that occurred in all the towns and villages in the county.

When Plymouth was a village of three or four hundred inhabitants, the complicated and entertaining game of marbles was the one mostly indulged in. Ministers, lawyers and doctors, merchants and others, all had their pockets full of "white alleys," and it was not an uncommon occurrence

to see these potent, grave and reverend seniors "knuckling down" final performance indicated the end of the game.

The mania for playing any game of chance is generally contagious, and, if it is not too difficult to learn, it is only a question of time as to the whole population becoming infected. Enthusiasts have been known to become so much interested in the game of marbles that lamps and lanterns had to be provided for the accommodation of the players in the street as the shades of evening drew on.

"Town Ball" was also a favorite amusement for those who delighted in violent exercise of that kind. And there were many who became exceedingly expert players. They could throw a ball as straight as a bullet and almost as swift, and there were others who could catch them if they were thrown in catching distance. And woe be to the runner who was found between the "by's" when one of these balls was thrown at him! If he escaped being hit the surgeon might have lost a job setting a broken limb. "Bull Pen" was another favorite game much the same as town ball, and many remember even to this day the hard knocks they received in trying to escape the tortures of that classically named enclosure.

Pitching horseshoes was also one of the favorite outdoor games, and he who could oftenest "ring the peg" was considered the champion pitchist. This was a great Sunday game, and there are some yet living who became experts by practicing on the holy Sabbath day. They have probably forgotten it by this time and have turned their attention to higher and holier things as the day of rest weekly rolls around, and these early indiscretions shall not be laid up against them.

And there were foot races in those days and they sometimes occurred in the middle' of the street, and there were occasions when great preparations were made for these feats of rapid pedestrianism. And to vary the monotony there was an occasional horse race, and when these occurred there was generally betting and drinking and an occasional knockdown to wind up with. And there were jumping matches, too. Run and jump, stand and jump, hop, step and jump, and a jump backward and forward. There were wheelbarrow races in which the contestants were blindfolded, and bag races, and every other conceivable kind of races the mind of man could think of. And there was "snipe hunting" with greenies to hold the bag; mock trials, and debating societies, and country dances, and social parties and the like, enough to make one's head swim to relate them all.

And as the years went on and society became more cultured, most of these amusements were abandoned, and then came the more refined games of checkers and backgammon, and euchre, and all sorts of games with cards, and chess, and the like; and all kinds of puzzles and problems and curious contrivances to test the ingenuity and capacity of those who delight to spend their time in working out abstruse and difficult problems.

These things take hold of the people like any other epidemic, and, having spent their fury, the patient recovers much in the same way as do people who have had the smallpox, whooping cough, measles, or any other disease that suddenly takes hold and subsides when the fever "goes down!" Among the most remarkable instances of this kind was what was known as the 13-15-14 craze. Nothing like it was ever known before and probably never will be again. It originated in Boston and within a few weeks spread

Like wildfire all over the United States and probably found its way across the sea. The people of Marshall County had a very bad case of it. It was so simple and looked so easy of solution that everyone who looked at it a minute made up his mind that he could do it in a short time without much difficulty. The solution of the puzzle consisted simply in getting the 15 on the place where the 14 stood, and the 14 where the 15 stood, by moving the blocks without taking them from the board so that the numbers would all stand in regular order, the last row reading 13-14-15. The little joker was simply fifteen square blocks made to fit a box holding sixteen blocks, the last a blank, so that the blocks could be moved to suit the fancy of the mover.

Large rewards were offered to anyone who would furnish the correct solution, and as it had the appearance of being so easy of accomplishment, almost everybody went at it – lawyers, doctors, merchants, clerks, laboring men, preachers, women and children, “old men and maidens and them that stooped for age,” all joined in the general panic, and so intense became the excitement that for a week or two business was almost suspended. In the course of a short time, however, it was ascertained that the thing “couldn’t be did,” and one by one the little boards and blocks were laid aside and the monomaniacs, who had almost gone crazy on the subject, resumed their regular occupations, and the excitement in the community generally disappeared as rapidly as it came.