

Gaming

GAMING appears to be a universal passion.—Some have attempted to deny its universality; they have imagined that it is chiefly prevalent in cold climates, where such a passion becomes most capable of agitating and gratifying the torpid minds of their inhabitants.

The fatal propensity of gaming is to be discovered, as well amongst the inhabitants of the frigid and torrid zones, as amongst those of the milder climates. The savage and the civilized, the illiterate and the learned, are alike captivated by the hope of accumulating wealth without the labours of industry.

Barbeyrac has written an elaborate treatise on gaming, and we have two quarto volumes by C. Moore on suicide, gaming, and duelling, which may be put on the shelf by the side of Barbeyrac. All these works are excellent sermons, but a sermon to a gambler, a duellist, or a suicide! A dice-box, a sword and pistol, are the only things that seem to have any power over these unhappy men, for ever lost in a labyrinth of their own construction.

I am much pleased with the following thought. “The ancients (says the author of *Amusements Serieux, et Comiques*) assembled to see their gladiators kill one another; they classed this among their *games!* What

barbarity! But are we less barbarous, we who call a *game* an assembly who meet at the faro table where the actors themselves confess they only meet to destroy one another?” In both these cases the philosopher may perhaps discover their origin in one cause, that of the listless perishing with *ennui* requiring an immediate impulse of the passions; and very inconsiderate as to the fatal means which procure the desired agitation.

The most ancient treatise by a modern on this subject, according to Barbeyrac, was that of a French physician, one Eckeloo, who published it in 1569, entitled *De Alea, sive de curanda ludendi in pecuniam cupiditate*, that is, “of games of chance, or a cure for gaming.” The treatise itself is only worth noticing from the circumstance of the author being himself one of the most inveterate gamblers; he wrote this work to convince himself of this folly. But in spite of all his solemn vows, the prayers of his friends, and his own book perpetually quoted before his face, he was a great gamester to his last hour! The same circumstance happened to Sir John Denham. They had not the good sense of old Montaigne, who gives as the reason why he gave over gaming. “I used to like formerly games of chance with cards and dice; but of that folly I have long been cured; merely because I

found that whatever good countenance I put on when I lost, I did not feel my vexation the less." Goldsmith fell a victim to this madness. To play any game well requires serious study, time, and experience. If a man of letters plays deeply, he will be duped even by shallow fellows, or by professed gamblers.

Dice, and that little pugnacious animal the *cock*, are the chief instruments employed by the numerous nations of the East, to agitate their minds and ruin their fortunes; to which the Chinese, who are desperate gamesters, add the use of *cards*. When all other property is played away, the Asiatic, gambler scruples not to stake his *wife* or his *child*, on the cast of a die, or courage and strength of a martial bird. If still unsuccessful, the last venture he stakes is *himself*.

In the island of Ceylon, cock-fighting is carried to a great height. The Sumatrans are addicted to the use of dice. A strong spirit of play characterizes a Malayan. After having resigned everything to the good fortune of the winner, he is reduced to a horrid state of desperation; he then loosens a certain lock of hair, which indicates war and destruction to all the raving gamester meets. He intoxicates himself with opium ; and working himself into a fit of frenzy, he bites and kills everyone who comes in his way. But as soon as this lock is

seen flowing, it is *lawful* to fire at the person, and to destroy him as fast as possible. I think it is this which our sailors call "To run a muck." Thus Dryden writes—

"Frontless, and satire-proof, he scours the streets,
And *runs* an Indian *muck* at all he meets."

Thus also Pope—

"Satire's my weapon, but I'm too discreet
To *run a muck*, and tilt at all I meet."

Johnson could not discover the derivation of the word *muck*. To "run a muck" is an old phrase for attacking madly and indiscriminately; and has since been ascertained to be a Malay word.

To discharge their gambling debts, the Siamese sell their possessions, their families, and at length themselves. The Chinese play night and day, till they have lost all they are worth; and then they usually go and hang themselves. Such is the propensity of the Japanese for high play, that they were compelled to make a law, that, "Whoever ventures his money at play shall be put to death." In the newly-discovered islands of the Pacific Ocean, they venture even their hatchets, which they hold as invaluable acquisitions, on running-matches.—"We saw a man," says Cook, "beating his breast and tearing his hair in the violence of rage, for having

lost three hatchets at one of these races, and which he had purchased with nearly half his property.”

The ancient nations were not less addicted to gaming; Persians, Grecians, and Romans; the Goths, and Germans. To notice the modern ones were a melancholy task: there is hardly a family in Europe which cannot record, from their own domestic annals, the dreadful prevalence of this passion.

Gamester and *cheater* were synonymous terms in the time of Shakespeare and Jonson; they have hardly lost much of their double signification in the present day.

The following is a curious picture of a gambling-house, from a contemporary account, and appears to be an establishment more systematic even than the “Hells” of the present day.

“A list of the officers established in the most notorious gaming-houses,” from the DAILY JOURNAL, Jan. 9th, 1731.

1st. A COMMISSIONER, always a proprietor, who looks in of a night; and the week’s account is audited by him and two other proprietors.

2nd. A DIRECTOR, who superintends the room.

3rd. AN OPERATOR, who deals the cards at a cheating game, called Faro.

4th. TWO CROWPERS, who watch the cards, and gather the money for the bank.

5th. TWO PUFFS, who have money given them to decoy others to play.

6th, A CLERK, who is a check upon the PUFFS, to see that they sink none of the money given them to play with.

7th. A SQUIB is a puff of lower rank, who serves at half-pay salary while he is learning to deal.

8th. A FLASHER, to swear how often the bank has been stript.

9th. A DUNNER, who goes about to recover money lost at play.

10th. A WAITER, to fill out wine, snuff candles, and attend the gaming-room.

11th. AN ATTORNEY, a Newgate solicitor.

12th. A CAPTAIN, who is to fight any gentleman who is peevish for losing his money.

13th. AN USHER, who lights gentlemen up and down stairs, and gives the word to the porter.

14th. A PORTER, who is generally a soldier of the Foot Guards.

15th, AN ORDERLY MAN, who walks up and

down the outside of the door, to give notice to the porter, and alarm the house at the approach of the constable.

16th. A RUNNER, who is to get intelligence of the justices' meeting.

17th. LINK-BOYS, COACHMEN, CHAIRMEN, or others who bring intelligence of the justices' meetings, or of the constables being out, at half-a-guinea reward.

18th. COMMON-BAIL, AFFIDAVIT-MEN, RUFFIANS, BRAVOES, ASSASSINS, *cum multis aliis*.

The "Memoirs of the most famous Gamesters from the Reign of Charles II. to Queen Anne, by T. Lucas, Esq. 1714," appears to be a bookseller's job; but probably a few traditional stories are preserved.