

Oddities.

HOOPS AND CRINOLINE.

NOW-A-DAYS, every young lady—and old ladies too, for that matter—looks like a bell, so ample are their skirts, so widely spread, so singular in aspect, that an inexperienced person might imagine the thought of so much stuff in one dress had never occurred to mortal mind before. But look back awhile, beyond the shallow waists and slender petticoats of fifty years ago; behold your grandmothers, or great grandmothers, as the case may be. And what is it that you see? Just the same sort of amplitude in which your wife, your sister, your sweetheart, indulge in this year of grace 1860.



The above engraving is a faithful copy from a fashion book of the last century, and is equal, in the humble opinion of the writer, to anything seen in our own days. Here is a lady in all the full-blown enormity with which the gentler sex delight to encumber themselves, and keep the men at a distance. The waist is dextrously pinched in, so as to oppress the proper action of the lungs; the skirt is ostentatiously spread out, so as to be at once both inconvenient and uncomfortable. Why is this? Why, but that Madame Mode has said it, and it must be worn! Hoops were known in the days of Good Queen Bess, and the satirists of the time decided them in verse more coarse than witty; they figured again in the days of George II., and hooped and corded petticoats are seen in Hogarth's picture, *A Marriage à la Mode*. Hogarth, you remember, clothes his *Venus de Medici* in a circular bell hoop, in his inimitable picture of *Taste in High Life*. Sir Roger de Coverley, describing his family portrait gallery, says: "You see, sir, my great-great grandmother has on the new-fashioned petticoat, except that the modern is fastened at the waist; my grandmother appears as if she stood in a large drum, whereas, the ladies now walk as if they were in a go-cart." Another writer, about the same period, says:—"Nothing can be more unnatural, and consequently less agreeable. When a slender virgin stands upon a basis so exorbitantly wide, she resembles a funnel or figure of no great elegance." A lawyer of the Middle Temple, in the *Spectator*, describes an adventure which happened in a country church upon the frontiers of Cornwall: says he, "As we were in the midst of service, a lady, who is the chief woman of the place, and had passed the winter at London with her husband, entered the congregation in a little head-dress and a hooped petticoat. The people, who were wonderfully startled at such a sight, all of them rose up. In the meantime, the lady of the manor filled the area of the church, and walked up to the pew, with an unspeakable satisfaction, amidst the whispered conjectures and astonishment of the whole congregation."

Thus it is that fashions repeat themselves. Now 'tis a farthingale, now a hoop, now a crinoline; the wits of pen and pencil are set to work ridiculing the monstrous absurdity; but Queen Mode is imperative, and is invulnerable to the keenest shafts. Here is the same thing that excited the caustic humour of Addison and Gay, and the humorous pencil of Hogarth. Here is floating about an ocean of crinoline, or, worse still, bird-cage petticoats, and steel hoops—what can we say of a lady so habited, but what has been said a hundred years ago:

"To conceive how she looks, you must call to your mind
The lady you've seen in the lobster confined."

THE CHOICE OF A WIFE.

The Indian sage Aurva, a great authority in matrimonial matters, gives minute directions for the choice of a wife, which every devout Hindoo does well to follow. The girl, he tells us, must be only a third of her husband's age, not very black, not yellow-complexioned, not a cripple, not deformed, not vicious, nor unhealthy, nor of low origin, but one who has been well brought up, and who speaks with propriety. She must not inherit a family malady, nor possess a masculine appearance; must neither speak thick nor thin, nor croak like a raven; must not keep her eyes shut, nor have them wide open; must not have thick ankles, nor dimples in her cheeks, nor a goose skin, nor white nails, nor red eyes, nor fat hands, nor duck-like feet. She must neither be short, nor tall, nor fat, nor thin, but very middling. Her teeth must be close set, and her eyebrows wide apart; finally, her *gait* must resemble that of a young elephant!

THE RIFLE.

WHATEVER may be the grounds for the apprehensions that have originated the present earnest volunteer movement,—the necessity of reviving national animosities, and awakening a taste for military pursuits,—or the expediency of so demonstratively expressing distrust of an ostensibly friendly Power—the impetus having been already given to popular action, it becomes the duty of calm observers to aid in guiding it, so far as they may have the power, in a judicious direction.

We deprecate any rashness that might involve the nation in a war which could be honourably avoided; but we consider that possible contingencies should be wisely contemplated and prudently guarded against. The introduction of the rifle into general use will be advantageous by familiarising the people with the practice of the most perfect of arms, and qualifying them at need, to defend their homes like men; while the youth of England will be furnished with a healthful and manly means of recreation in the open air, that, unlike most other amusements, will be of direct utility, not only to the individual, but to the nation.

From these considerations, we propose furnishing our readers with some general and useful information on this subject, as tersely conveyed as may be consistent with clearness, and illustrated where expedient with diagrams; wherein we shall speak consecutively of the origin of the rifle—the principle of its construction, as distinguished from other firearms—its varieties—how to select and use it—the estimation of heights and distances—the principles of irregular warfare—skirmishing, or light infantry evolutions—the use of the sword bayonet—the equipment and dress of riflemen—and, finally, the Government action as to volunteer corps, with the facilities proffered to them by it.

ORIGIN OF THE RIFLE.

Till recently the rifle has been the distinctive weapon of two countries, similarly distinguished for independence and manliness, but differing greatly in their position with reference to other nations, in topographical character, and in the conditions thereby imposed on warfare.

The Tyrol is a small mountain region, difficult of access from the broken nature of the ground, but in immediate proximity to great military monarchies. The United States is a vast plain of alternate wilds and primeval forests, watered by mighty rivers, and separated from Europe by 3,000 miles of ocean. Both countries were scantily peopled, and dependent for safety on undisciplined levies; but, whether the enemy to be resisted might arrive in a few hours, or after traversing great tracts of sea and land, the defence adopted was, in both cases, the same. That an undisciplined peasantry might contend with success against organised masses, it was useful to develop the intelligence of the individual, and provide him with arms that would admit of his profiting by the accidents of the ground, to destroy the advancing foe in detail, and thus nullify the advantages otherwise derivable from superiority of discipline and mass. The deadly efficiency of the rifle in the hands of the Tyrolese and Americans, against veteran troops, proves the wisdom of its selection.

The discovery of a weapon that has had so important an influence on men, may be said to have been accidental. Though gunpowder had changed the mode of warfare, yet musketry had the drawbacks of being both slow and uncertain; for an archer could discharge a dozen arrows to further distances, than a musketeer, and with greater accuracy, while the musketeer was loading his unwieldy weapon. The means of remedying these defects engaged many

ingenious minds. There is a vague tradition of the use of rifled guns at Hamburg in 1498, but no certainty of their existence until 1567, when a German mechanic thought to facilitate the tardy process of loading, by grooving the gun-barrel in a direction parallel to its axis. Incidentally this contributed to accuracy of fire, by steadying the ball. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, another German, a gunsmith of Nuremberg, conceived the brilliant idea of communicating rotary motion to the ball, by giving the grooves a spiral direction, and casting the ball larger than the bore, that it might be indented by the grooves in loading. Thus the idea of the rifle was completed, though it was yet rude and imperfect in form. Greater accuracy was the consequence of this improvement, but the rapidity of fire was proportionably diminished, and this prevented its general adoption by infantry, to whom rapidity and concentration of fire are primary considerations, however admirably it was adapted to circumstances demanding caution, and admitting of leisurely deliberation, where the combatant selects his own ground, and lies in ambush to take his foe at disadvantage.

Though the theoretical reasons for the accuracy of fire thus secured, were not known for a century afterwards, yet its merits recommended the improved arm for use in the chase, while in the Tyrol and America it was received with peculiar favour. Somewhat similar conditions and necessities rendered it equally valuable to the chamois hunter among the icy pinnacles of the Alps, and to the English colonist amid the American wilds, frequently dependent for food, or security from the savage or the panther, lurking in the forest, on his boldness and dexterity as a marksman.

Various modifications in the construction of the American rifle were gradually introduced, suggested to individual hunters by their experience in the wilderness. The charge of powder was wisely reduced as much as was consistent with the effectiveness of the ball. The piece was lengthened, in the futile idea of thereby increasing the accuracy of the fire, whereas the final direction is received from the muzzle only, the least irregularity in which will cause deflexion. It was rendered heavier to prevent recoil and discomposure of direction by pulling the trigger; and finally, the bore was proportionably diminished, until the ball was of the size of a pea, that the range might be extended; and it is now established that such is the secret of increasing the range. Thus the attention of Americans was exclusively directed to improving the barrel of the rifle.

During the revolutionary war, such was the dexterity of the colonists with this arm, that it made up for any want of mechanical precision in military movements. Wherever artificial or natural advantages admitted of their making a stand, their deadly fire decided the day. Mercenary riflemen were brought from Denmark and Germany, to aid the royal troops, without avail. In the subsequent war of 1812, from the same causes, the Peninsular veterans were similarly foiled by militia, hastily levied, but familiar from boyhood with this formidable weapon. The Tyrolese hunters and herdsmen, in the same way, repelled French invasion during the wars of the revolution, though their rifle was less excellent in construction than the American.

In the course of time special rifle corps were organised in the various European armies, to be employed as skirmishers and videttes; but no improvement was made in the rifle that could render it more generally available in warfare by regular troops until lately. The painful experiences of the English during the Caffir war, and the French in Algeria, led to earnest experiments with a view to improve the efficiency of the rifle; and by modifying the form of the ball rather than of the piece itself, both wonderful accuracy of flight and extension of range have been at length attained; the result of unwearied efforts having been to demonstrate satisfactorily the superiority of conical balls, as offering least resistance to the air they traverse, and approximating in their flight more nearly to the line of sight.

DISTINCTIVE PRINCIPLE OF RIFLE CONSTRUCTION.

Every missile is subjected necessarily to certain natural forces that affect its flight, and missiles projected from fire arms to additional deflections, resulting from defects in their own structure, or in that of the barrel whence they are emitted. The only object in rifling a barrel is to correct the line of flight of the bullet; it does not produce increase of range or velocity. It is the shape of the bullet which, while conducting much to accuracy, tends to produce greater velocity; wider range being the result of narrowing the bore.