

Pastimes at Sea.

BY FRAMLEY STEELCROFT.



WE all know the veteran traveller; some of us have been bored by him. He knows everything about every ship, and he calls the captain "Jack," "Tom," or "Jimmy," as the case may

be. He is far more at home on board a liner than one of the company's own directors would be; and he usually considers that he owes a duty to his fellow-passengers—poor, miserable, helpless creatures. This duty is to amuse and entertain all on board; and without doubt the companies owe him a big debt of gratitude.

Now, I am about to consider the sports and pastimes that are organized on board the superb steamers of the Union Line, which have transformed the voyage to the South African ports into a delightful pleasure cruise. Very little of this kind of thing is attempted on the "ocean greyhounds" that race to New York, simply because the voyage is not long enough.

In the first photo. we see the national game in full swing, thousands of miles from land. The pitch is covered with cocoa-nut matting by the quarter-masters, and nets are stretched at the side so as to prevent the ball from going overboard, where the only fielders are sharks, and things of that kind. Of course, the stumps are not driven into the deck; they fit into a specially-made, weighted block of wood. It doesn't require much physical exertion to score a boundary hit; and when the great liner lurches, the traditional uncertainty of the game is made abundantly manifest—only in a way that even "W. G." never dreamt of, notwithstanding his vast experience. Perhaps the over-vigilant wicket-keeper will get a stray crack on the head from the bat; or he may receive the ball (of twisted rope) in his eye, owing to the unavoidably erratic bowling. During the progress of a ladies' match on the *Scot*, recently, the batswoman crashed backwards on to the

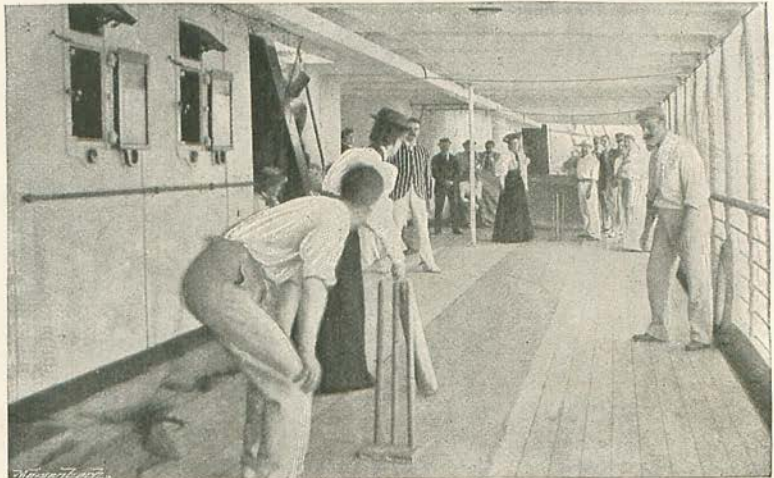
wicket-keeper, a mild, elderly person, who thought she had secured a sporting sine-cure. No wonder the poor old lady, on landing at Madeira next morning, fervently exclaimed, "Thank Heaven, I'm on *terra cotta!*"

For the most part, however, cricket on a Union liner is a quiet pastime which serves to kill time while the great twin screws, far away astern, are carving out the destination of the ship. The following matches are usually announced on the posters in the saloon: "Passengers *v.* Officers"; "Married *v.* Single"; "Ladies *v.* Gentlemen."

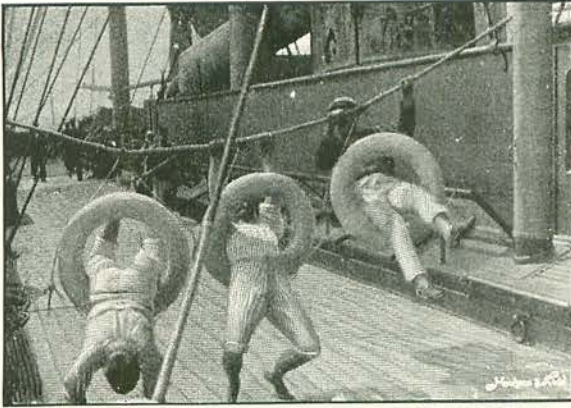
It has become a truism that a great ocean liner is a little world in itself, its human freight consisting, perhaps, of a thousand souls—literally, all sorts and conditions of men. Hence it is that when the energetic entertainment committee of a Union liner sets to work, a programme of amazing excellence is almost invariably drawn up.

Let us now consider the athletic sports that are got up on those Cape cracks, *Norman* and *Scot*. First place must certainly be given to the obstacle race, by reason of the vast amount of fun it affords. The very appliances are marvels of ingenuity. In the accompanying photo. we see the competitors scrambling through some life-belts, which, hung as they are, require a lot of getting through, particularly when the great ship is in a heavy sea-way. Observe the different ways in which these "obstacles" are negotiated.

Here is another toughish obstacle—a high net, which has to be surmounted somehow;



CRICKET MATCH—LADIES *v.* GENTLEMEN.



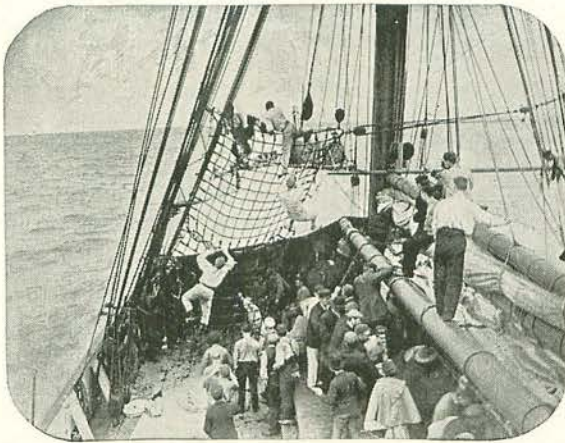
OBSTACLE RACE—CLIMBING THROUGH SWINGING LIFE-BELTS.

this is perhaps the most difficult of all, but it is obvious that obstacle racers have to be men of mettle. This particular photo. was taken on board a Castle liner. As the race wouldn't be complete without a water-jump, one is prepared in a highly ingenious fashion, as may be seen in the illustration. A sail, or tarpaulin, is

very loosely stretched between two spars, and buckets of water poured into it until it is capable of giving the unwary competitor an unpleasant ducking. On the left you will notice that an approach to this obstacle has also been rigged up, but even this approach is of the nature of a switchback, only more so—very much more so.

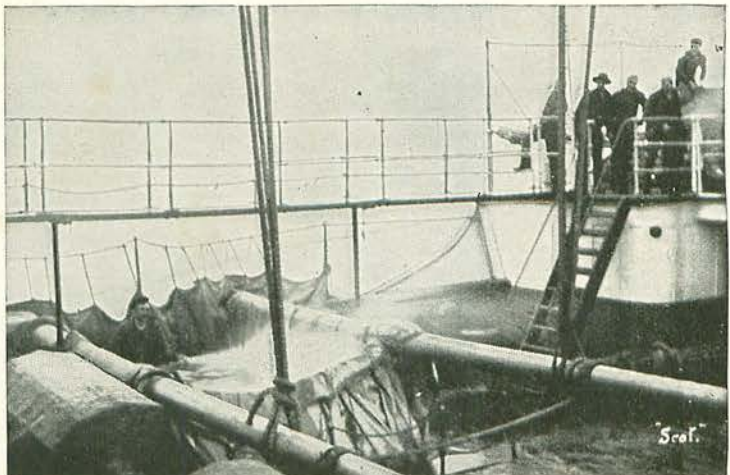
You would think that the three hardworking obstacle racers were trying to dive through the ship. They are not; they are merely trying to struggle through some sails that have been strapped down to the deck. Oh! it's great fun, especially

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OBSTACLE RACE—SCALING THE NET.

volving pastime on the high seas than that of cock-fighting, which is seen in progress in the next reproduction. A twelve-foot ring is



OBSTACLE RACE—THE WATER-JUMP.

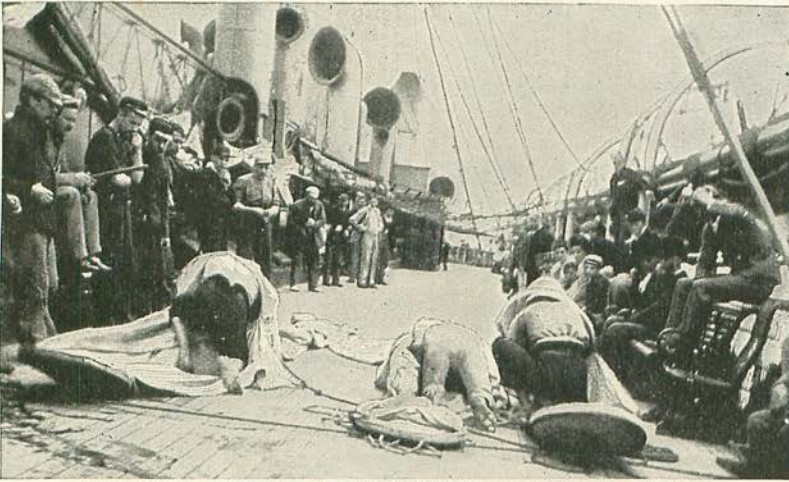
for the spectators, who cheer vociferously in order to spur on the barefoot heroes. You see, the inner side of each sail has been carefully and plentifully floured, so that the competitors emerge half-choked and in a highly interesting condition.

It's wonderful how the great ones of this earth unbend on board ship. Irving will recite, Melba and the De Reszkes will sing. Selous gave his first lecture on the Union liner *Spartan*. Rhodes and Jameson have often opened the ball on the spacious deck of a Union liner; millionaires may be seen panting in the tug-of-

war (perhaps it reminds them of the mad struggle for concessions and gold); and dusky monarchs, from Cetewayo (who handed the captain of the *Arab* a testimonial in phonetic Kaffir) and Lo Ben right down to pious King Khama, have patiently posed in the tableaux and charades.

There is no more mirth-pro-

voicing pastime on the high seas than that of cock-fighting, which is seen in progress in the next reproduction. A twelve-foot ring is



OBSTACLE RACE—CRAWLING THROUGH FLOURED SAILS STRAPPED TO THE DECK.

chalked, or whitewashed, on the deck, and in this the squatting combatants take their places. The "birds" fight with their bare feet only, their hands clasping a broom-stick, which passes under the knees, and must not be relinquished on any account under pain of disqualification. In the photograph it will be noticed that one "cock" has been fairly knocked out of the ring by his opponent.

Equally funny to witness is "slinging the monkey," which is next shown on the deck of the *Scot*. The legs of the "monkey"—usually a careful, methodical man—are first of all slung up by means of ropes and pulleys. Then the victim is given a piece of chalk (notice it in his hand), and with this he is expected to lean forward and write dictated love-letters on the ship's deck. Or he may be called upon to show his skill as an artist. At the same time, you can't expect fine *technique* and firmness of outline, considering the circumstances; for one thing, the draughtsman hasn't a free hand. The knowing "monkey" will probably wait until the ship has lunched one way, then he will attempt a little lightning

sketching before she has time to right herself. Occasionally it is not the chalk, but the artist's nose which scrapes the deck; and at such times a man is apt to forget himself, though he can't forget his injury. In the photograph shown the Lord Bishop of Natal is seen watching the uncertain movements of the slung "monkey"; the right reverend gentleman is wearing a cap, and he carries a book under his left arm. Thus, in this case, it would have been peculiarly unseemly had the sorely-tried monkey given vent to his feelings in "swear words."

But it would never do to let the teeming hundreds grow moody and sentimental. Just notice in the photo. the uproarious merriment prevailing among the occupants of the lower deck. One of the traditions of the Cape steamers is that, immediately after "crossing the line," Neptune himself comes on board, with grizzled beard and aggressive trident, to christen the unsophisticated



A COCKFIGHT.



SLINGING THE MONKEY.

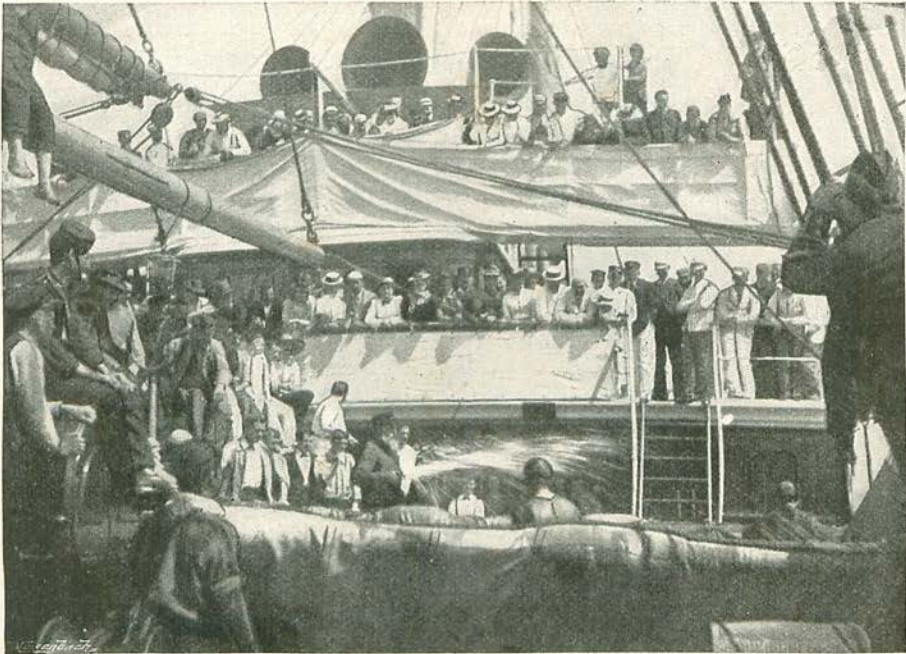
passengers. Accordingly, sails are prepared and filled with water for the accommodation of the water-god's victims. Some of these object to being thrown into the bath, but the majority take the thing in good part. At all events, the whole affair affords opportunity for a lot of boisterous "larking." And woe to the cantankerous on board ship, particularly

brief; but the amateur barristers behind wear their gowns more or less like Roman senators.

The case fought out between these legal luminaries was one of breach of promise; notice the defendant sitting at his lordship's feet, and wearing a pensive air, as one who has parted with substantial damages. The

the third-class cantankerous. But talking of crossing the Equator reminds me that hoaxing the untravelled must be included in "pastimes at sea." For example, a telescope is always prepared with a bit of thread across the object-glass, and through it many trustful passengers behold for the first time the mysterious "line."

The next photo. was taken immediately after the hearing of a fiercely-contested *cause célèbre* on the Union liner *Spartan*. The judge sacrificed his moustache to his temporary calling; and his wig, as well as the wigs of the eminent "silks" around him, was made from cotton waste, supplied by the ship's engineers. There is a fine touch of legal pomposity about the young man with the



SPORT ON THE THIRD-CLASS DECK—NEPTUNE DUCKING THE UNTRAVELLED ON CROSSING THE LINE.



JUDGE, COUNSEL, AND DEFENDANT, IN MOCK BREACH OF PROMISE CASE.

speeches were very funny; so was the cross-examination of the plaintiff, a lively little actress (one of the Gaiety Company), on her way to the Johannesburg Empire.

The court was kept in roars of laughter. At last defendant's counsel declared he should withdraw from the case. A number of motives actuated him in this step—*inter alia*, the third engineer required his wig to clean the machinery.

Theatricals, tableaux, and variety entertainments are much in vogue during the voyage to the Cape. I must remark here, however, that nothing much is attempted in the way of sports and pastimes until after the vessel has left Madeira. By this time the victims of *mal de mer* are on deck once more, and there is a clear fortnight or so before Table Mountain comes in sight. Passengers are sometimes notified of a forthcoming entertainment by means of a long procession of announcement-bearing sandwich-men, who amble along the deck with the shame-faced air that characterizes

the "real article" in the Strand.

An amusing tableau is reproduced here. It shows Don Quixote, represented by a very well-known officer, tilting at an animated windmill, while a podgy Sancho Panza is imploring him to desist.

Look at the tug-of-war—Passengers *v.* Crew. Of course, everybody can't be an athlete, and if a man would rather watch the flying-fish than the sports, he is left alone with Nature; but Nature can be monotonous at sea. Moreover, there is something for all tastes.

Now and then some daring spirit will actually start a newspaper, and it may surprise you to know that these erratic prints occasionally get very distinguished contributors. The work of Mr. Henry Lucy and Mr. Phil May has appeared in the "Tantallon Chronicle," published on board the *Tantallon Castle*; and Mr. Stuart Cumberland edited the "Weekly Athenian" during the voyage of the Union ss. *Athenian* to South Africa. Of course, the facetious

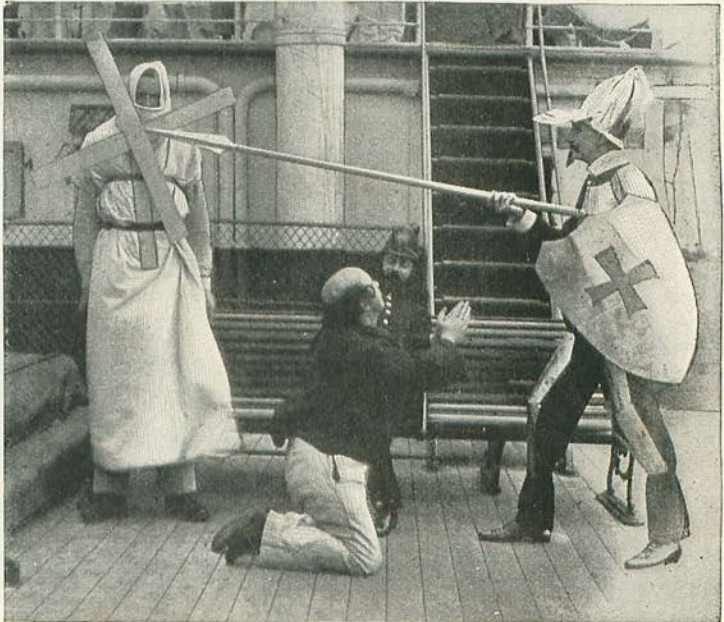


TABLEAU FROM "DON QUIXOTE."

editors announce that their journal has "the largest circulation"—on board the ship. So steady are these magnificent vessels, by the way, that passengers by the Union Line have actually clamoured for a billiard table; it hasn't come to that yet, however. At the same time, a very funny bicycle race has been attempted on the *Norman*—five or six laps to the mile. This will not surprise anyone who has strolled along the great promenade deck of that vessel.

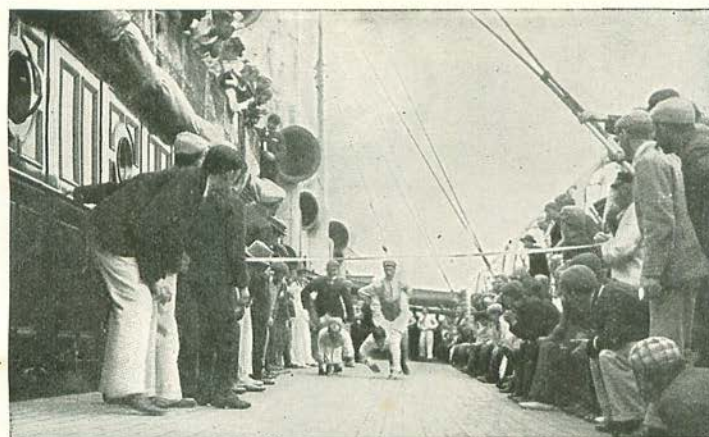


TUG OF WAR—PASSENGERS V. CREW.

the Bishop of Natal is holding the tape on the right-hand side of the photo. This race causes uproarious mirth, and the winner is, in all cases, a most sturdy fellow.

The potato-race is, as the street toy-sellers say, "a novelty and likewise a curiosity." A long row of equi-distant potatoes is placed for each starter, and at the end of each row is one of the ship's buckets. The moment the signal is given the competitors dash off, stooping to pick up the potatoes as they run. The one who first places all the potatoes in the bucket wins the prize. It is great fun, and causes wild hilarity. You will see one fellow plunging here and there picking up the potatoes with feverish energy, and at length hurling his armful of slippery tubers into the bucket—only, however, to be disqualified by the umpire for overlooking two or three "little 'uns" in his headlong flight.

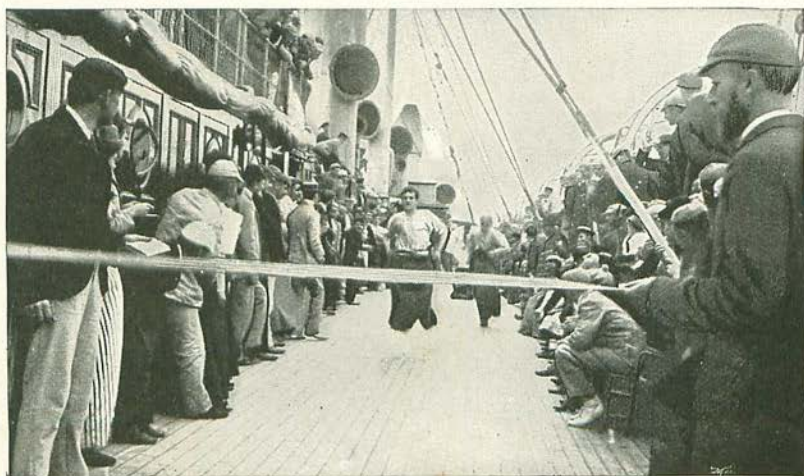
There is always a peculiar uncertainty about sports that take place on the high seas—particularly in the



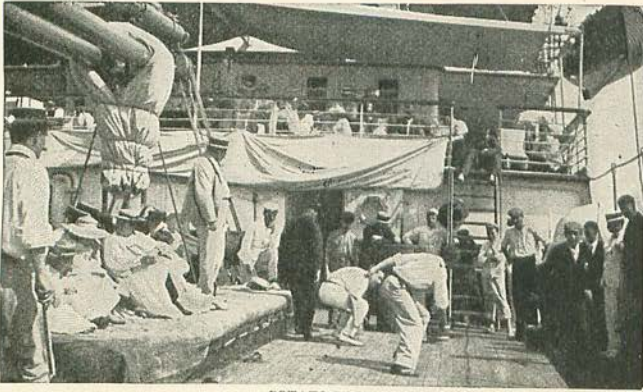
WHEEL-BARROW RACE.

The keen interest taken in the various events is manifest in the above photo., which shows an exciting wheel-barrow race; of course, the rolling of the ship adds very considerably to the gaiety of these sports, and at times the tape-holders are so overcome with merriment, as to be unmindful of their duty.

The finish of the sack-race on board the *Scot* is next shown;



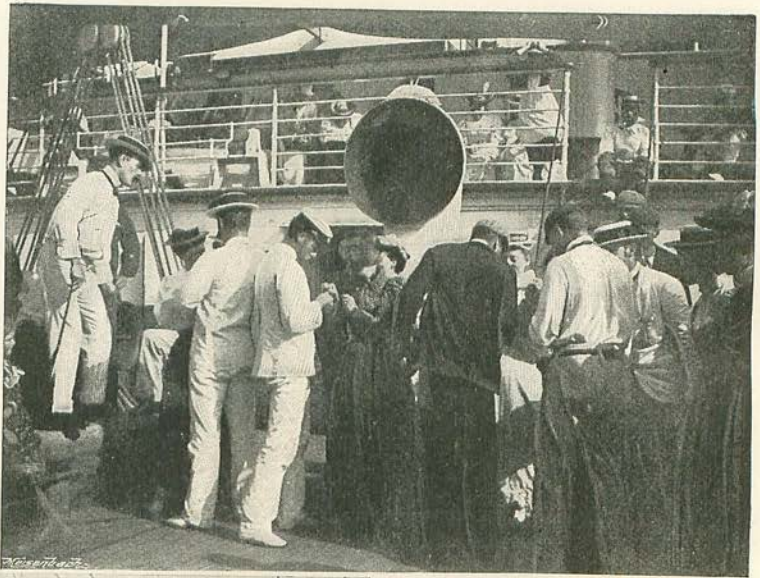
FINISH OF THE SACK-RACE.



POTATO-RACE.

case of the ladies' egg-and-spoon race, which is shown in the next photo. The fair starters are placed in a row, and each is provided with an egg, which is to be carried in a spoon held at arm's length. The lady who reaches the winning-post first, with her egg intact, is declared the winner. Needless to say this race is not necessarily to the swift; rather is it to the adroit and strategic. It is very funny to watch the competitors. One will hold the spoon low down, so that if the egg *does* fall out, it won't get broken; another will make a frantic dash, trusting

place them in the pin-cushion at the winning-post. Patience, above all things, is requisite here.



NEEDLE-THREADING RACE.



LADIES' EGG-AND-SPOON RACE.

to luck and the ship's steadiness; while a third will perhaps deposit the egg in some gentleman's lap, greatly to his disgust.

Another mirth-provoking contest between the lady passengers is the needle-threading race. The competitors first of all race to a certain part of the deck, where a number of needles of uniform size and some lengths of thread are held in waiting; then they thread the needles as fast as they can and hurry back to

Fancy dress balls are amazingly popular on board the South African liners, the costumes and properties being fashioned with much ingenuity. The group shown on the next page includes many members of a touring theatrical company.

The next photo, reproduced depicts a baby show on board the *Norman*; the winner of the first prize occupies the place of honour in the centre.

No form of diversion is more popular on these enormous "ocean greyhounds" than the



FANCY DRESS BALL.

sweepstake on the daily run. Every morning the passengers nominate an auctioneer—usually the wittiest fellow on board—and this functionary prepares a lot of tickets bearing numbers which are reposed to represent the distance (in knots) travelled by the vessel during the preceding twenty-four hours. These numbers are drawn for, and then follows the daily auction shown in the photo-

done duty as auctioneer. Thus, what with a vast and superbly appointed ship, having the



BABY SHOW.



SWEEP AUCTION.

graph. The lucky buyer of the "c'rect card" reaps a rich harvest at noon when the captain gives the exact figures; 10 per cent. of his or her winnings, however, is given to either the National Lifeboat Institution or the Union Company's Widows' and Orphans' Fund. The spacious deck of the *Norman* is the scene of the illustration. Mr. "Barney" Barnato and many other prominent South African folk have

cuisine of a fashionable club; a captain who knows his highway like a waggoner *en route* for Covent Garden; and exuberant fellow-passengers, who are as much at home as though they were on Epsom Downs, who shall say that life is dull on board a modern ocean liner?