

THE BIGGEST PLAYGROUND IN THE WORLD.

BY LINDSAY DENISON.

CONEY ISLAND, THE SUMMER PLAY CITY OF NEW YORK—ITS VAST THROGS OF FUN-SEEKERS, ITS DAZZLING AND DEAFENING VARIETY OF ENTERTAINMENT, AND THE REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATION IT HAS UNDERGONE DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS.

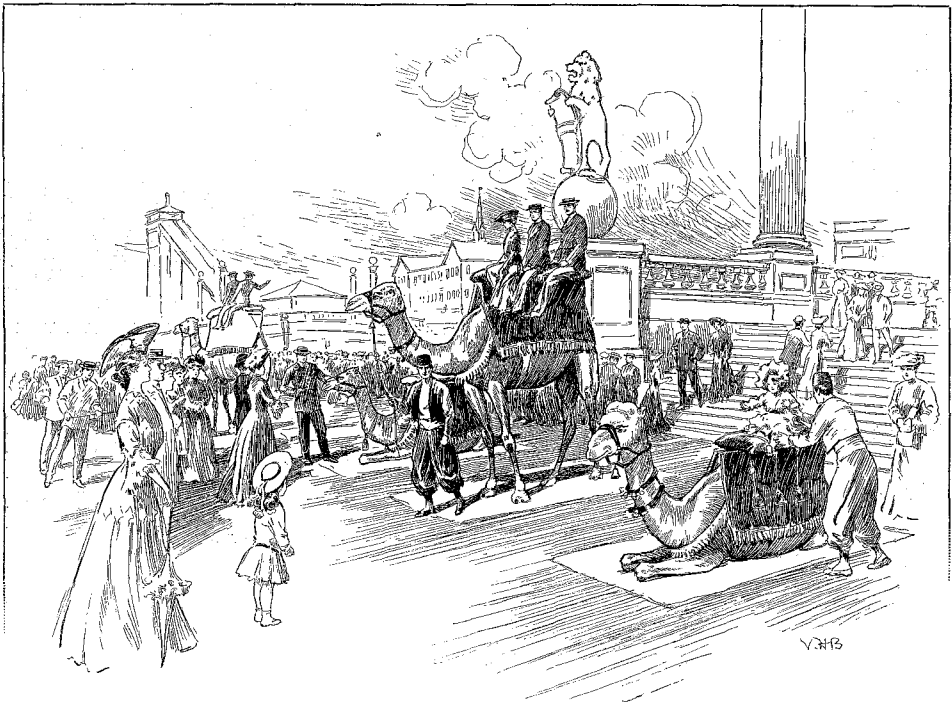
CONEY ISLAND is a unique illustration of the fact that men and women are but children of a larger growth. It is the vast summer playhouse of a great city—a playground in which boys and girls of all ages and of all classes may find such amusement as they choose.

Two generations ago Coney Island was a wind-swept waste of sand, stretched along the ocean's edge east of the opening of New York Harbor. A generation ago the waste was dotted with booths and hurdy-gurdies and bathing-houses. The island was a resort to which adventurous dwellers in Brooklyn journeyed at great expense of family, time, and treas-

ure, for a day's outing by the sea. Very few people in New York knew aught of it.

In the mean time, it has passed through changes which it would be a libel upon insect life to compare to the larva and chrysalis stages. At its worst, less than ten years ago, the most frequented part of the island was a concentrated sublimation of all the mean, petty, degrading swindles which depraved ingenuity has ever devised to prey upon humanity. Nevertheless, demoralizing and unbeautiful as it was, it was the best public playhouse the city had.

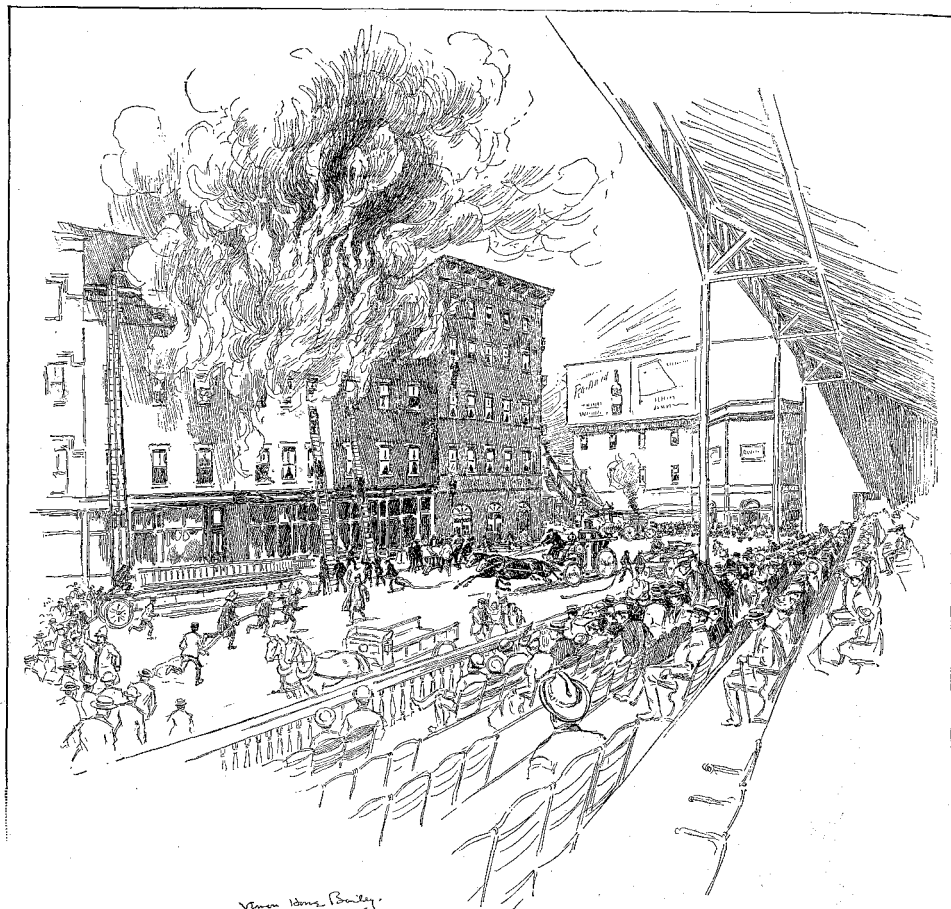
Now, where the waste was and where the catchpenny hovels were, there rise to



ONE OF THE GREAT ENCLOSURES AT CONEY ISLAND—"HERE ONE MAY WATCH THOSE WHO RIDE ON CAMELS OR MINIATURE TRAINS, WHO 'SHOOT THE CHUTES' OR 'SLIDE THE SLIDES.'"

the sky a thousand glittering towers and minarets, graceful and stately and imposing. The morning sun looks down upon them as it might upon the magically realized dream of a poet or a painter. At night, the radiance of the millions of electric lights which

great Manhattan Beach and Oriental summer hotels at the other. In the days when the amusements of the place were small, and for the most part bad, the site of the wonder city of to-day was "the West End." Along the shore itself was a board-walk built close down to the



CONEY ISLAND REALISM—"TRAINED FIRE-FIGHTERS ATTACK SHAM CONFLAGRATIONS IN A CITY BLOCK MADE OF IRON SCENERY. THE FIRE-ENGINES ARE REAL, THE HORSES ARE REAL, THE WATER IS REAL."

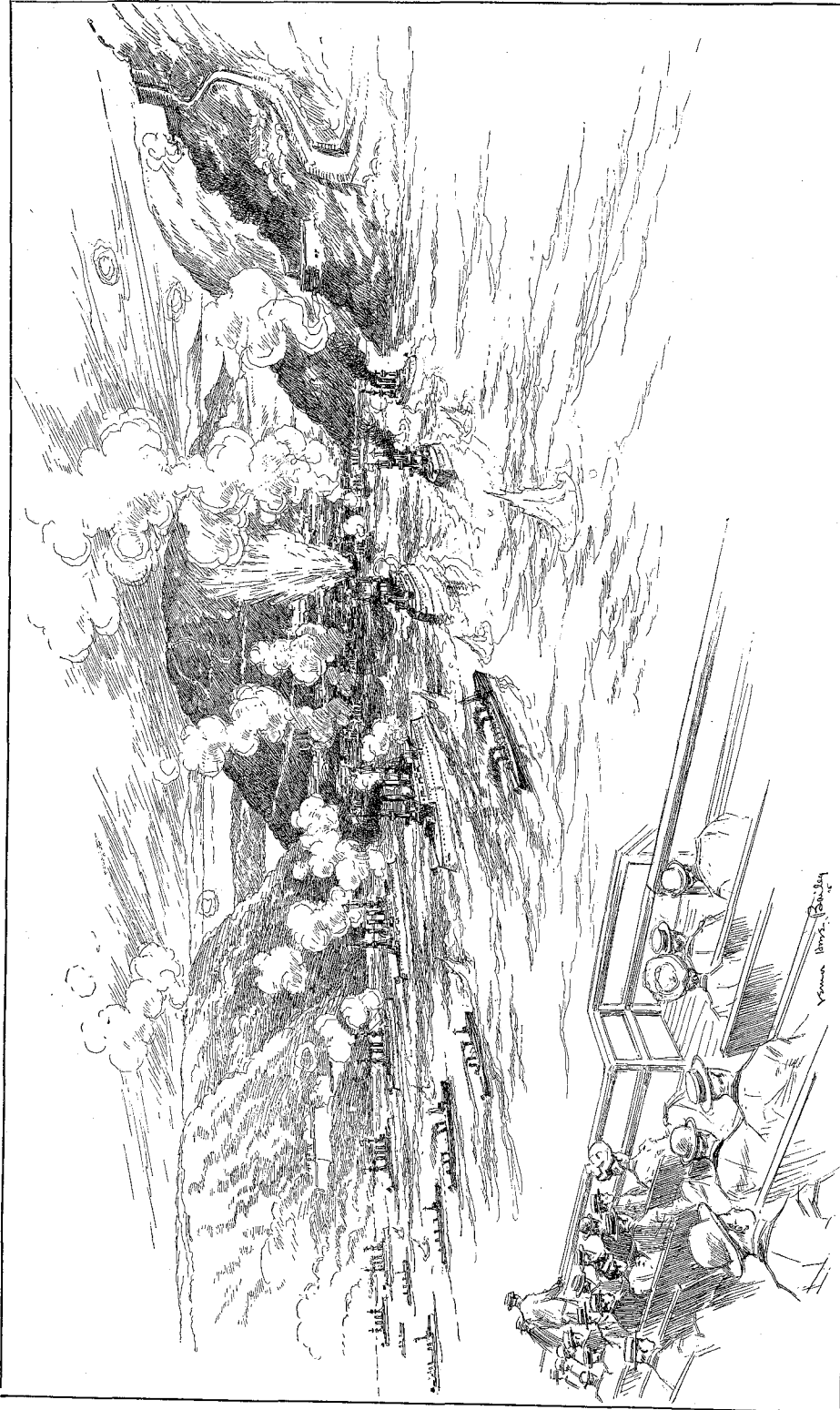
glow at every point and line and curve of the great play city's outlines lights up the sky and welcomes the home-coming mariner thirty miles from shore. To this playhouse, every day of the summer come from ten thousand to three hundred thousand merry-makers from the American metropolis.

The Coney Island which the world knows by good and evil report is really but a small part of the stretch of land set down on the maps under the name, with Sea Gate, a somewhat aristocratic salt-water suburb at one end, and the

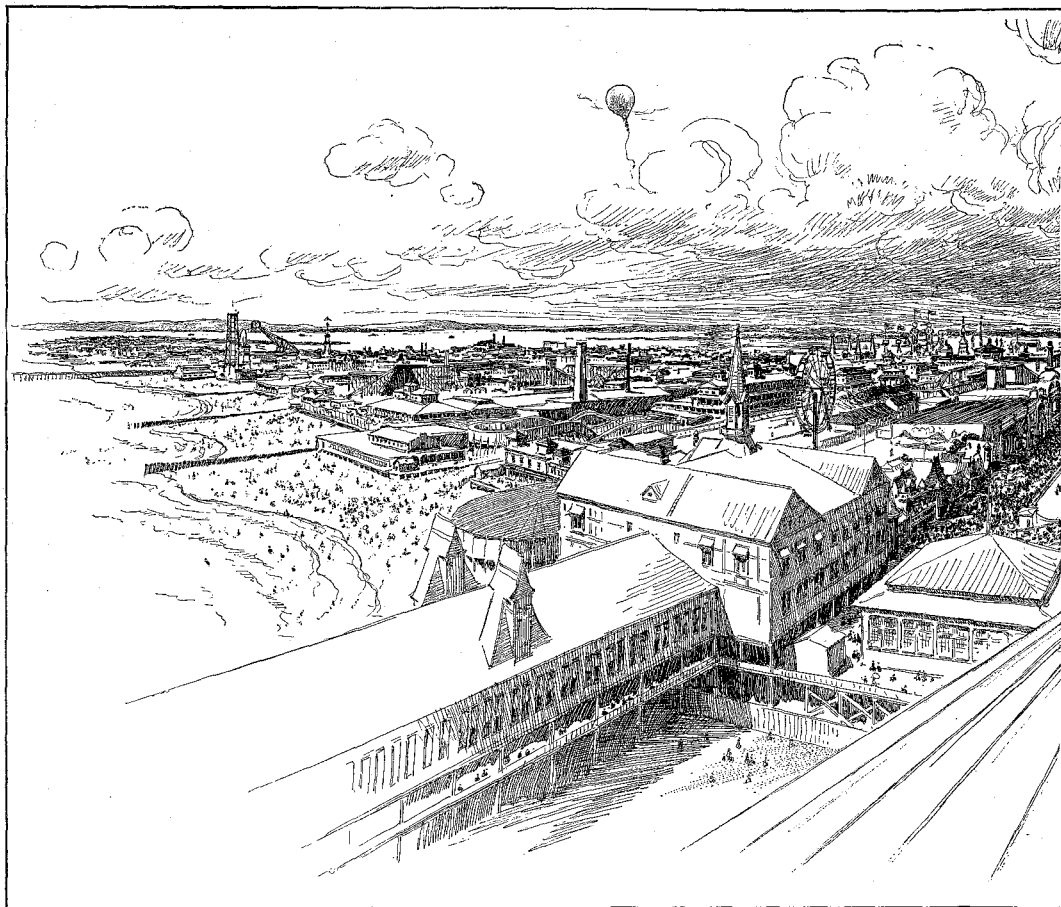
tide line; behind this were acres of dressing-houses—for it was the opportunity for sea bathing which first attracted the crowds to Coney Island. Behind the bathing-houses, along irregular plank walks which were built across the sands according to the whim of the beach proprietors, grew up the catch-penny settlement.

THE CONEY ISLAND OF YESTERDAY.

There settled the frankfurter man, the boiled-corn man, the fried-crab man, and the lemonade man. The droning carou-



THE FALL OF PORT ARTHUR AS A CONEY ISLAND SPECTACLE—"RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE ARMIES BOMBARD EACH OTHER OVER THE CRESTS OF TIN HILLS, AND FORTY MINIATURE WAR-SHIPS, UNDER THEIR OWN POWER, CIRCLE IN A HARBOR OF REAL WATER AND BLAZE AWAY."



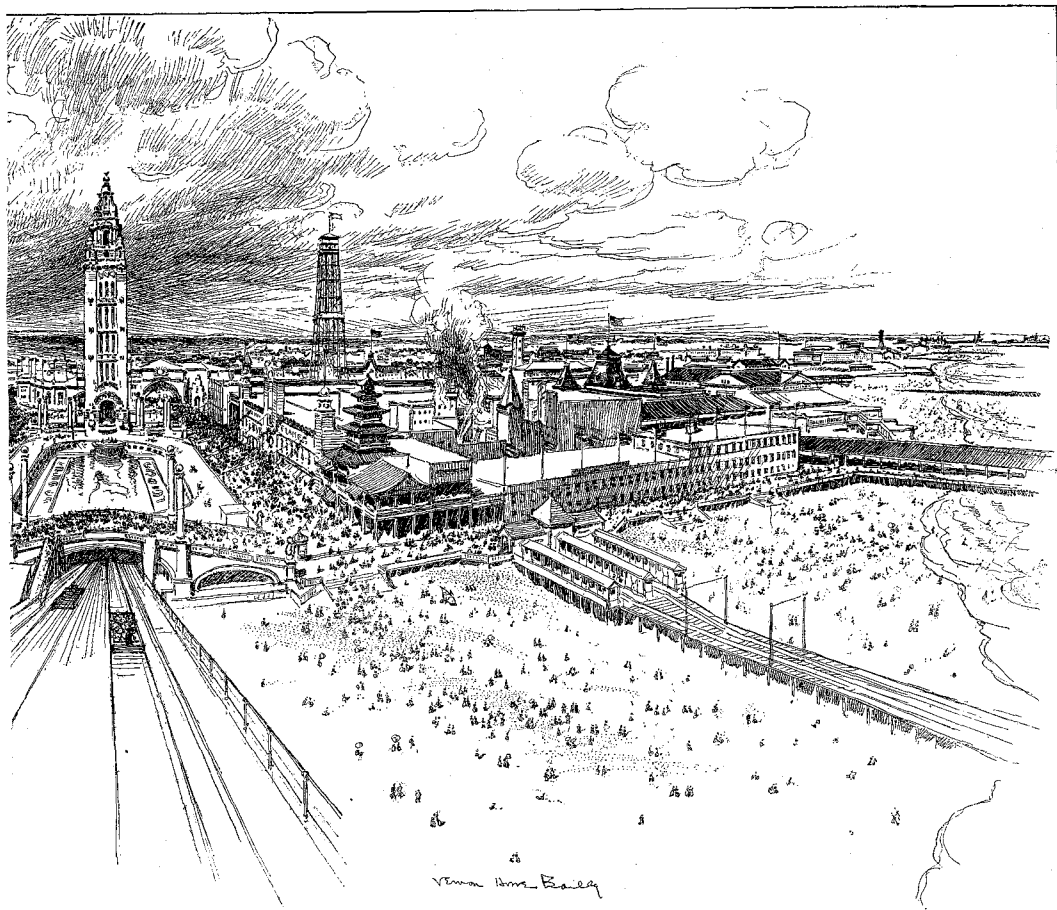
A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

THIS SHOWS THE VIEW FROM THE TOP OF THE WATER CHUTES IN ONE OF THE GREAT CONEY ISLAND ENCLOSURES (DREAMLAND), LOOKING INLAND FROM THE EDGE OF THE OCEAN—

sel whirled its horses under its conical canopy. Loudly was the passer-by incited to hit the colored man whose face decorated the center of the curtain, and to get thereby a good cigar. "Cane-boards," the insidious gambling devices by which spendthrifts are lured to the tossing of tiny rings over the heads of canes and umbrellas; tin-type galleries, and shooting galleries, and all the other delirious accompaniments usually associated with a traveling circus—not excepting the nimble three-shell man—elbowed one another for room. Nor were more ambitious enterprises lacking. Observation towers and gravity railroads, dancing-pavilions and music-halls—in which the standards of conduct and entertainment were none too near the ideal—grew up in blocks. In the midst of the whole queer conglomeration was a mammoth wooden

elephant. At the moment it is not possible to recall what was in that elephant, or why it was built; but it was as big as a church, and was the first landmark one caught sight of when approaching the island across the marshes.

Preachers assailed the wicked Coney Island from the pulpit. Legislatures vented orations at it in support of measures for the condemnation of the whole tract and its transformation into a public park. Reformers marched on it with warrants and axes and squads of policemen. Newspapers lashed themselves into a rage denouncing its vulgarity and iniquity. Coney Island grew worse with every year, noisier, more dishonest, more shameless, more demoralizing. The big innocent ocean became a mere excuse for the human travesties. So far was this true that in a day when yellow journals were despatching "com-



OF CONEY ISLAND.

—TO THE LEFT (WEST) THE VIEW EXTENDS TO SEA GATE AND ACROSS THE NARROWS TO STATEN ISLAND; ON THE EXTREME RIGHT (EAST) ARE THE HOTELS OF MANHATTAN BEACH.

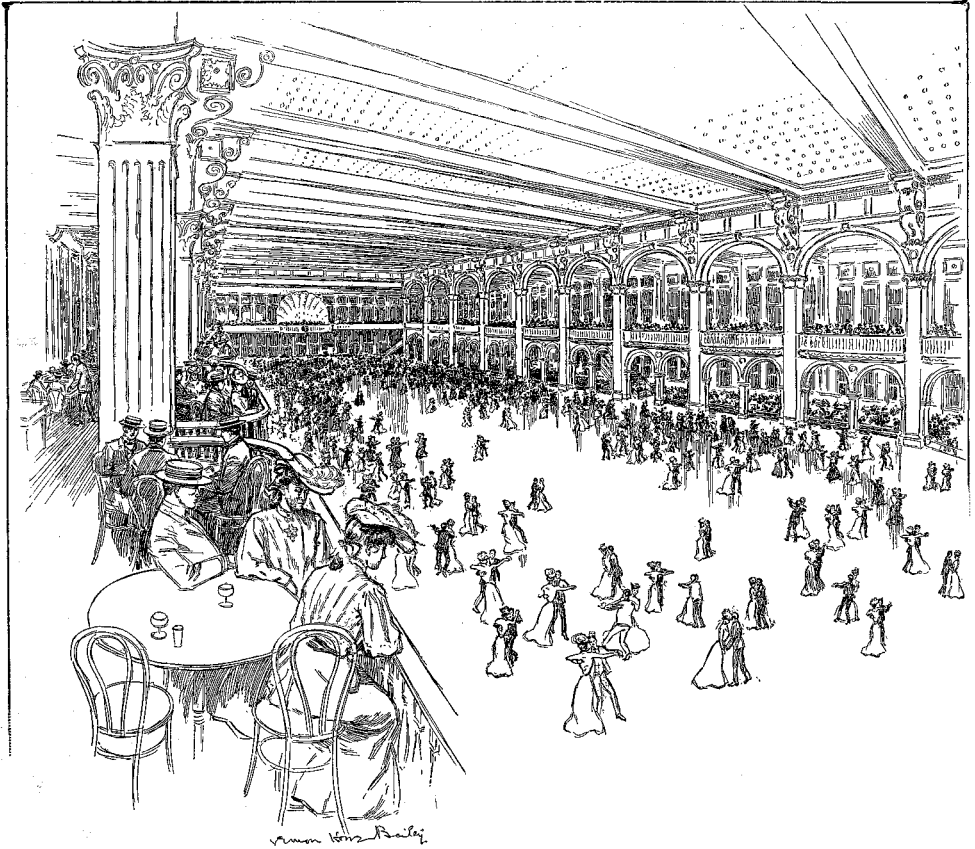
missioners" to the far ends of the earth to investigate all sorts of abuses and wonders, one satirical New York editor sent forth a reporter who was appointed a "commissioner to learn whether there is really any ocean at Coney Island." The commissioner reported to the extent of a column his conclusion that there was none.

THE COMING OF A NEW ERA.

The resort grew to be so "tough" that thousands shunned it after a single visit. Out of this very aversion to the rough and tumble of the streets and alleys came the wonderful regeneration of the place. At the far western end of the West End, where things were most vulgar and squalid, a shrewd man built a great enclosure within which there were decent shows, honest prices for food and drink, and some semblance of cleanliness and

public order. A queer hobby-horse railway on which four riders, each on a different hobby-horse, started on an undulating tour of the enclosure, gave the place its name, Steeplechase Park. It prospered. The respectable fun-seekers crowded into it with their families.

Two young men who had studied the American people, and who had given shows on the "midways" and "pikes" of half a score expositions, saw the prosperity of Steeplechase Park. Midways and the like were profitable because they were close to temporary displays which brought out great numbers of holiday-making visitors. Here was the city of New York and its suburbs, with a population of some five millions of people; and it was apparent that these five millions wanted to be amused—even to the extent of enduring to be bulldozed and swindled. Instead of leaping from



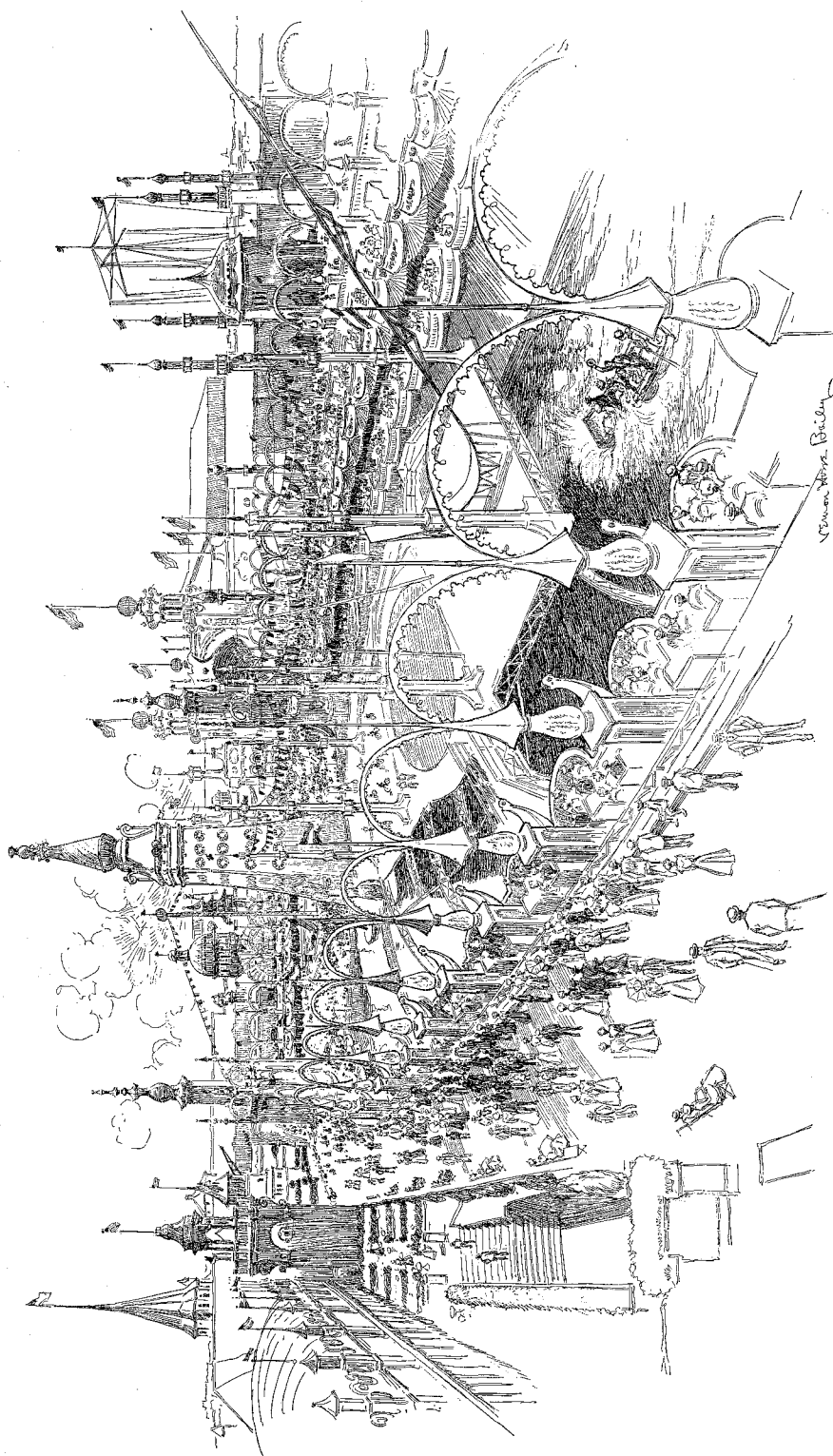
CONEY ISLAND'S FINEST DANCING PAVILION—"A MARVELOUSLY BEAUTIFUL ROOM OF SIMPLY DESIGNED DECORATIONS, ALL IN WHITE, WHICH SPARKLES WITH ELECTRIC LIGHTS, AT NIGHT, LIKE A GEM-SET CASKET."

exposition to exposition up and down the land, taking chances on the enterprise of boards of directors and the liberality of railroads, why not settle down to amusing New York?

On the cheapest large tract of land they could find in Coney Island the two young men built Luna Park. They made it as much like a section of an exposition midway as they could. The staff-molded sculptures; the lavish use of incandescent lights; the blaze and glitter of bright-uniformed employees; the crowding together of free shows and open-air circus performances; a lagoon full of sea lions; a polished trough in which the populace sat and slid, giggling and whooping, from a raised platform to the ground—all these things put the visitors in a good mood with themselves and all the world, and moved them to a reckless patronage of any side-show that offered amusement. Air-ships, submarine boat trips, scenic railways, canal trips through dimly lighted tunnels, miniature

railways, animal exhibitions, villages of outlandish peoples—such was the bewildering variety of the side-shows.

The experiment was successful. The number of visitors from the city increased until the street-railways had to double and triple their equipments. The character of the crowds showed a great change. The man who formerly came with a gang of fellows from his office or shop to enjoy a relapse into rowdiness now brought his womenfolk and was decent. By a lucky accident, about this time a succession of fires cleared off nearly two-thirds of the miserable old scum of frame shacks and tent frames. Capitalists, catching the point of the Luna Park experiment, piled in their money to get a share of the profits. Through the winter an army of carpenters worked at enlarging the enclosures already built, in making a new one—Dreamland—on a still grander scale, and in erecting costly buildings along Coney Island's main streets for the housing of

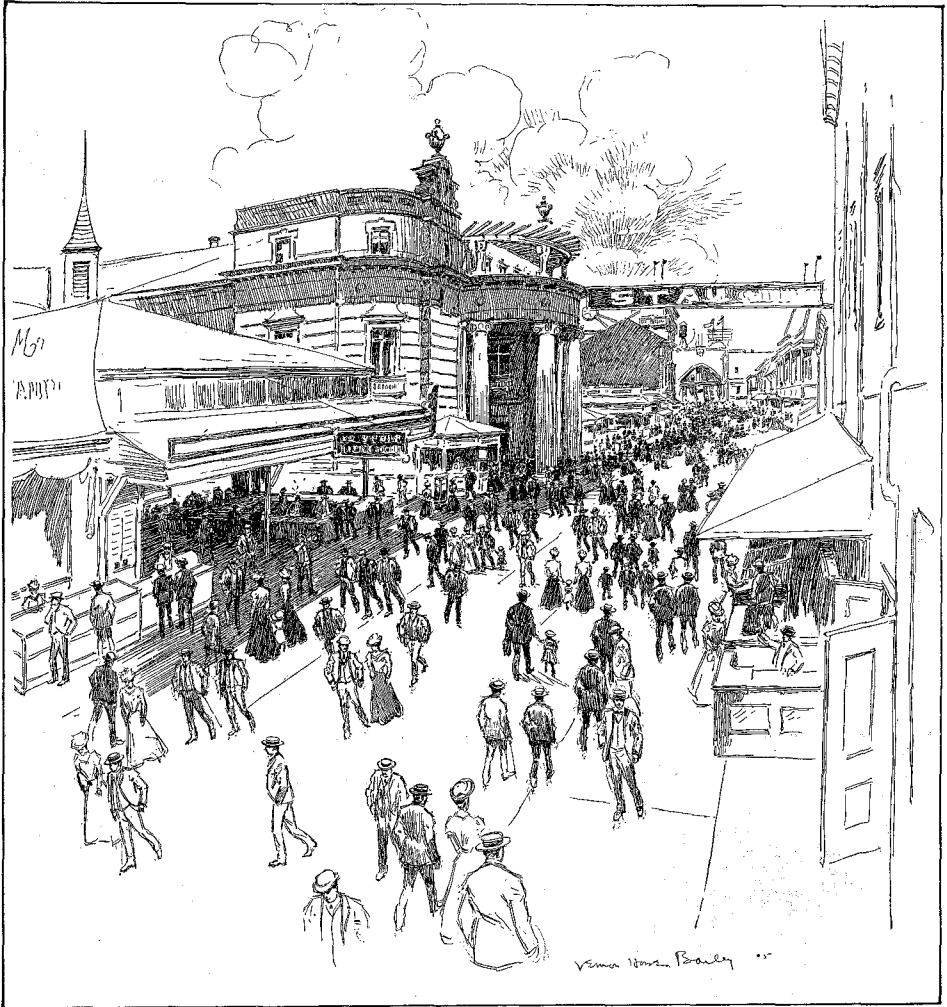


A GENERAL VIEW OF ONE OF THE GREAT CONEY ISLAND ENCLOSURES (LUNA PARK)—ALL AROUND ARE THE SIDE-SHOWS; IN THE CENTER IS A PLATFORM FOR SHOWS, AND UNDER IT THE LAGOON INTO WHICH BOATS DESCEND FROM THE WATER CHUTES."

ambitious shows such as the Johnstown Flood and the Eruption of Mount Pelée.

Restaurant-keepers and owners of dancing-pavilions caught the spirit of the times—at least, the wisest and most progressive of them did—and cleaned up

Island except to have fun. Over its railway termini might well be written, "Leave Care Behind All Ye Who Enter Here." Down from the big city—which, thanks to the hurry of the railroads to carry as many passengers as possible, is



THE BOWERY, ONCE THE TAWDRIEST AND "TOUGHEST" OF CONEY ISLAND THOROUGHFARES, BUT REBUILT IN IMPROVED STYLE SINCE THE GREAT FIRE OF TWO YEARS AGO.

and rebuilt their establishments. What preachers, reformers, and newspapers had failed to do, came with a rush at the behest of business instinct. For two years New York has had the new Coney Island for its playhouse, and has watched it grow with a pride which almost amounts to a sense of proprietorship.

THE FUN-SEEKER'S PARADISE.

It is essentially a place of merriment. There is no reason for going to Coney

but little more than half an hour's journey away—the tens of thousands come down hungry for laughter every afternoon and night in the week. On Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays the crowds increase to a hundred, two hundred, three hundred thousand. The fun-loving spirit cannot but get into the very atmosphere. There are hundreds who come with only their return car-fare in their pockets, merely for the joy of mixing with the crowds on the public streets and

catching the live sense of humanity and of good humor that is everywhere.

THE "BALLYHOOS" AND THE "BARKERS."

Indeed, one might well spend a day most economically if he confined himself to a study of the "ballyhoos" of Surf Avenue, the main street. The ballyhoo is the free show which is used to illustrate the talk of the barker at the ticket booth, and to guarantee, in a way, the trustworthiness of his statements. Just as the exploiter of the Turkish theater of the older and grimmer days lined up his performers and lectured on their non-apparent perfections, the Dreamland animal-trainer now brings out a leopard, a lion, or even an elephant to the street, and hints of more terrible creatures within. Japanese sword-fighters have a preliminary bout before their theater. A procession of camels and nautch girls marches out of the Asiatic village to the throbbing and crooning of drums and pipes, and marches in again. A band of brown and naked Igorotes appears in front of the Luna Park entrance, and nods and bows and slips and slides through part of a solemn war-dance, which, as is announced in tones that reach a quarter of a mile down the street, "is but a miserable tithe of the vast anthropological, educational, thrilling, and altogether unimaginable" performance about to take place inside.

The orators are a show in themselves. Here we have a young man repeating in a loud, monotonous voice the multitudinous marvels of the drama within the door. He nods almost imperceptibly; as if by accident, the curtain is drawn aside, exposing to view a bit of the stage and a glimpse of the performers. The languid youth leaps a foot in the air; the monotone becomes as sharp and as full of life as the bark of a rapid-fire gun.

"Look! Look!" he yells. "Quick! See! Get a free look! There! There, before the curtain closes! It won't cost you a cent if you hurry!"

There is a rush of half indifferent idlers suddenly become interested. The crowd outside the speaker's sphere of influence catches the movement, and in a moment he has an audience. The accidental parting of the curtains is closed. Earnestly—nay, entreatingly—he resumes his efforts to convince the public that every man, woman and child within the sound of his voice ought to buy a ticket and enter in.

If sometimes the free fun is a bit

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boisterous, there is no viciousness in it. There is never any telling what vagary any part of an American crowd may turn into an amusement—as, for instance, that which captured the mood of a party of prosperous-looking young business men, of whom one was noticeably small of stature while all the others were large and tall. Within ten minutes after they had set foot on the island it was noised abroad that "The Trusts and the Common People" had arrived. The party put the spirit of Mr. Oppen's series of cartoons into action. The fun was for the big men; it was the duty of the small one to be their plaything and to have no enjoyment of his own. They "played horse" with him, hitching him in a toy harness. They refused to enter any show—there were twelve of them—unless the ticket-taker would promise to exclude the Common People, who was always left outside with a guard. In the restaurants he was allowed only crackers and milk, while the rest ranged through the bills of fare. His resistance, at first vocal and then physical, was ignored with hoots of laughter until he fell into the very sensible determination to be good-natured and help the fun along. All through one hot evening thousands of merry souls followed the Trusts and the Common People up and down the length of the island, and rejoiced with them almost as much as they rejoiced in themselves.

No one ever knows just what sort of fun he is going to have, but some sort of unexpected fun, if he really has the spirit of adventure on him, he is pretty sure to find. And more important still, he is certain that the people around him will be in harmony with his mood.

You may step up to the thin, precise-looking gentleman who is posing for his portrait in front of the stand of a lightning silhouette artist, and may begin a lecture to the populace on the surprising architectural features of the subject's countenance, his taste in clothes, and the like. The subject may lose his temper, and probably will; but the multitude will take your side, and will protect your retreat if he becomes over-choleric.

THE ISLAND'S SIGHTS AND SOUNDS.

There is a constant braying of bands on the main thoroughfare and its branches. The frankfurter kitchen, the miniature barbecue for the manufacture of beef sandwiches, the mechanical taffy-pullers, the swishing pop-corn roasters, countless exhibitions of marksmanship with rifle and hand-thrown ball at a

hundred booths—these entertainments and countless others are free as air for those who want them. For him who has ten cents of good and lawful money and a willingness to spend it, the enclosures are open with further opportunities to laugh. Here one may watch those who ride on camels or miniature trains, who “shoot the chutes” or “slide the slides”—exploits that sometimes prove more amusing to the spectator than to the performer.

As for the shows one can see if he begins a round of the inside entertainments, who shall number or describe them? The appetite of the American people for rapid motion has produced innumerable gravity railways and chutes and whirling air-ship swings. There is every variation—a trip through the Swiss Alps, a whirl through scenes from heaven and hell as pictured by artists of somewhat crude but always highly-colored imagination, a tour of Europe, a visit to a coal mine, to the North Pole, and to every other place on or over or under the earth to which the paraphernalia of the gravity railway can be adapted.

All the enclosures, too, have dancing-pavilions, where public dancing is free. The most notable of these, shown in the engraving on page 562, is built on the Dreamland pier—a marvelously beautiful room of simply designed decorations, all in white, which sparkles with electric lights, at night, like a gem-set casket.

THE BIG SPECTACULAR SHOWS.

Then there are firemen's exhibitions, in which trained fire-fighters attack sham conflagrations in a city block made of iron scenery, after a rather elaborate acting out, by a crowd of two or three hundred people, of the life in a city street, just to make the display more realistic. The fire-engines are real, the horses are real, the water is real, and the leaps of men and women from the roofs of the buildings into the life-nets are real. There are spectacles like “Creation,” in which a panorama of the beginning of the world is presented. In the new Brighton Beach Park, which is well over toward the aristocratic Manhattan Beach, is the Boer War, where actual participants in the South African struggle fight their battles over again twice a day. The battle-field covers thirteen acres, and the musketry and cannonading are heard miles up and down the coast. Most pretentious of all this year's spectacles is the “Fall of Port Arthur,” at Luna Park, where Russian and Jap-

anese armies bombard each other over the crests of tin hills, and forty miniature war-ships, under their own power, circle in a harbor of real water, flying the flags of the Czar and of the Mikado, and blaze away at one another and the fortifications.

The Brighton Beach Park, when finished, will be as large as was the whole Midway at Buffalo. The shows already on Coney Island are greater than was the Pike at St. Louis. It is a city that will not fade away or tumble in on itself at the end of an exposition season. It has become a permanent institution, with a fixed population of its own.

THE CONEY ISLAND NATIVES.

It is a queer population, too. An uncanny shock comes to one who hears two good women gossiping over their back fences, on the outskirts of the settlement, about Mamie's trouble with the black-maned lion and Tom's efforts to cure the boa-constrictor's indigestion; of the way the magnesium powder in “Fire and Flames” ruined Tina's dresses faster than one had time to make them, and of the injury Jim suffered from the premature explosion of a cartridge in a Boer gun; of the danger of pneumonia to a young woman who sits all day in a ticket-booth, shielded from drafts by nothing more substantial than a cheese-cloth cap and gown, and of the temptations which beset a son who is hired to waltz with unaccompanied young women at a dancing-pavilion.

It has a butterfly life, this community. It is dead seven months of the year. But as surely as the spring will bring back the butterflies, so surely will all the fun and queeriness of Coney Island be with us every summer. Because it is still new in its present form it is as yet a city of frame and staff, relying on its show fire departments and on tin sheeting to protect itself from a disastrous blaze. But as profits are turned into invested capital, brick and stone will take the place of the flimsier materials, and the parks will reach out more and more into the slums—which have never been wiped out altogether. The playhouse will become a permanent temple of fun for the people.

Already, in other populous centers from the Atlantic to the Pacific, other amusement cities are building. It has been established as a fact, and as a safe basis for investment, that the American people will pay freely and eagerly for fun that is clean and honest.

THE PLAIN MISS PRETTY.

BY ETHEL SIGSBEE SMALL.

I.

I T was not that she was unconscionably plain. By the side of ordinary mortals she even appeared rather more favored than most girls; it was only in the presence of her beautiful sister that she deserved the adjective which always accompanied her name. Then one saw that her nose was a little too short and her face a little too long; her rather large mouth, pleasant as it was, appeared extravagant beside her sister's exquisitely molded lips.

The elder Miss Pretty was a beauty. She was one of those rare creatures, the petted children of nature, on whom no gift has been too great, or too small, to lavish. I saw her first at the horse-show. My eyes held spellbound, I spoke to my companion, Algy Vannerdale.

"Who is she?"

"Miss Pretty," said Algy. It seemed he had been watching her, too.

"Miss Beautiful!" I murmured, and waited for Algy's unsympathetic chuckle.

The chuckle did not come, however. I looked at Algy. His soul—all he's got—was in his eyes, which still feasted on Miss Pretty. Somehow it irritated me.

"I'd like to meet her," I said. "I think her beautiful—the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. But if you have any claims, or are thinking of having any claims, I'll forego the introduction."

"That's all right, old man," said Algy. "I am thinking of having claims—I'd give my soul for claims, but then so would every man she knows, and she knows a good many. My intentions, therefore, needn't prevent you from entering the lists, from being introduced, or from being in earnest. We're all in earnest so far as that goes."

"So instead of one I am to have one hundred rivals," I said, as I watched the sunlight on Miss Pretty's Titian hair. "Ah, well, she's worth fighting for! Known her long?"

"She only came yesterday. That's her mother with her."

"And the girl?"

"What girl? Oh, that's the plain Miss Pretty."

That night Algy very gallantly made me known to the most wonderful being in

the world. She was in white; from the cool transparency of her gown her shoulders rose ivory-white and satiny. I am not conspicuously young, either in years or matters of the heart, yet I felt ill at ease in the presence of this dazzling woman. She did not talk much, so far as I remember, but looked at me from eyes so clear and deep and glistening that I nearly forgot to ask for any dances. She had none to give me, as it happened. I grew desperate, and asked her if she would golf with me the next day. It was bald and rather malapropos, but I was past caring. She turned those wonderful eyes on me.

"My sister golfs; I do not."

Here I was introduced to the plain Miss Pretty, and as the situation seemed so clearly to demand it, I extended my invitation to her. She accepted. I took a dance with the plain Miss Pretty—I had plenty to choose from; her card was but half full—and we sat it out, as she said she was tired. I watched the dancers and Miss Pretty talked. I heard very little until she mentioned her sister's name. Beatrice! How it suited her!

"Mine is Mary Anne—that suits me, too, don't you think?" the plain Miss Pretty asked.

I assured her it did. It was not until her sister had passed out of eye range that I realized what I had said. Then I hastened to make matters better—or worse; but she laughed at me.

"Good-natured," I said to myself, "but plain—quite plain!"

She wore a gown high in the neck, always unattractive at a dance. Evidently shoulders like her beautiful sister's did not run in the family. I dreamed of the beautiful Miss Pretty that night. All night I saw her hair, her lips, her eyes, and I vowed that if she had twice as many lovers, I would win her in the end.

II.

THE plain Miss Pretty golfed very well. Her slender figure looked trim in her starched shirt-waist and ankle-length skirt. Freckles somehow do not offend under a canvas hat. On the way to and from the links, and often during our game, she talked of her sister.