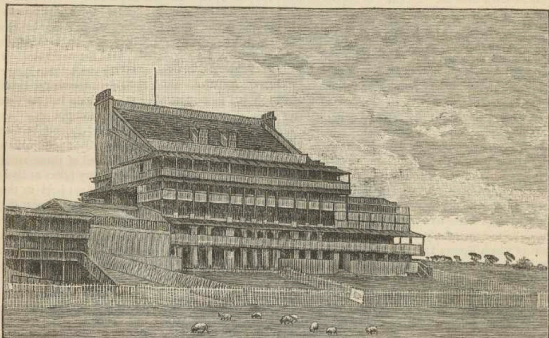


After the Restoration, racing received the patronage of royalty, and Epsom and Banstead Downs became favourite places of public resort for this kind of pastime. Pepys tells us in his "Diary," in July, 1663, how that he intended to have gone to see a great horse-race, but being prevented by his official duties, "sent Will instead to Banstead Downs."

Still, however early or late its origin in this country may have been, horse-racing is a sport which is recommended to all Englishmen by many attractions, or at all events to those who delight in

and his Court becoming so enamoured of the amusement that a house was erected for their accommodation. The distance of that course from London, however, led Charles II., in his love of the sport, to try whether the same amusement could not be enjoyed nearer at hand; and when the Court was at Epsom to drink the waters, the thought naturally struck the king that what was done so constantly and with such success on the Newmarket Downs could be done also on those of Surrey. The royal word went forth; the Court nobles and the persons of quality followed suit; and



EPSOM GRAND STAND.

open-air sports, and in the exhibition of the powers of that "beautiful and generous spirited creature" the horse, the only thing to be regretted in connection with it being that a sport so exhilarating and so suited to the national taste should be so often made mischievous by being associated with gaming and profligacy. According to one account, the earliest scene of horse-racing in England was Newmarket, which had obtained a European celebrity two and a half centuries ago, and can be traced back to the time of the Spanish Armada, when it is said that some fine horses that had escaped from the wreck of that flotilla were exhibited there and fairly "put upon their mettle." Their fleetness astonished those who brought them there, and in a short time horse-racing became an established summer sport upon the open downs of Cambridgeshire, James I.

the result was that before very many years had passed away Epsom became the rival of Newmarket, and may be said to have long outstripped it in popularity. Epsom, it may be added, as a capital of the racing world, is second only to Newmarket (which has the advantage of courses suited to horses of all sizes and ages), and it ranks above Ascot, Doncaster, and Goodwood.

The Derby stakes were first instituted in the year 1780, the Oaks being the elder race by one year. The Earl of Derby of that day—the father of Lady Charlotte Stanley, who married General Burgoyne*—was a sportsman of the old-fashioned thoroughgoing sort, and for many years had a hunting-box for his stag-hounds near to Epsom,

* See ante, p. 259.