



THE BOAT-RACE COURSE.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE UNIVERSITY BOAT-RACE.

Cuncti adiut, meritaque expectant præmia pulchra.—VIRG. *Æn. V.*

The Crowds of Spectators brought together to witness the Race—The "Blue" Fever—Interest to Londoners occasioned by the University Boat-Race—Scenes of the Road from London on the Boat-Race Day—Popularity of the Boat-Race among the Ladies of England—Scenes on the River—The Press-Boat and the Umpire's Steamer—By Rail to the Scene of the Race—Putney and Mortlake on Boat-Race Day—Description of the Race—Past History of Rowing as an old English Amusement—The Race for Doggett's Coat and Badge—A London Regatta—The First Students' Race upon the Thames—The Earliest Race between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge—Accounts of subsequent Races—Table showing the Results of the Race from its Institution.

It may be easy enough to describe the general outline of the banks of the Thames about Mortlake and Barnes, but to sketch the holiday which comes round in March or April, and the crowds of spectators, would require the pen of a Dickens. The surging multitude annually brought together, no matter at how early an hour in the morning, and blocks up the thoroughfares of Hammersmith, Chiswick, Putney, Barnes, and Mortlake—diverse as are its types, infinite as are the varieties of its character—has evidently been the result of some one common object of national and universal interest. High and low, rich and poor, young and old, all seem to be swayed by one common impulse: to witness a trial of skill, strength, pluck, and endurance between the representatives of those two universities which have been called "the eyes of England." What matters it that the sight of the

struggle can last only for a few minutes, and that, so far as concerns nine-tenths of the spectators along the banks, the race is over and past in "the twinkling of an eye?" That moment is, however, to them the most thrilling of all the year, not even excepting the "Derby" at Epsom.

For days and almost weeks beforehand London looks very "blue" indeed. The light blue of Cambridge and the dark blue of Oxford meet our eyes in the shop-fronts of half the tradesmen at the West End. If the sky is not blue above, at all events we can point to the blue bonnets and ribbons of our wives, sisters, and cousins, as an excellent substitute for its presence. As a lively writer on the boat-race remarks, "There is blue everywhere: in the silk-mercers' and haberdashers' shops, in the shape of ribbons, and bows, and dresses; in the china shops, in the shape of