

wedge himself in, and patiently wait until starvation gave him the freedom of the happy hunting-ground.

**THE ROMANCE OF THE ONION.**

Undoubtedly, the onion is the oldest vegetable known to mankind. The native plant, the *Allium Cepa*, the parent of all cultivated onions, is not a native of this country. Cortez, when relating incidents of his brilliant conquest in Mexico, is reported by Humboldt to have said that he saw onions in the market place of the ancient Tenochtitlan, and that the Mexicans called these onions *xonacatl*. But, careful inquiry shows that the name *xonacatl* does not apply to our cultivated species of *allium*. In the seventeenth century only one single *allium* was reported from Jamaica, and that was our species, and was in a garden with other vegetables from Europe. Acosta, in his 'Natural History of the Indies,' says expressly that the onions of Peru were brought from Europe. To Europe, then, we must go on the track of the first onion, and any European will say that onions have always been cultivated here.

Shakspeare mentioned the onion. In his 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' Bottom, the weaver, giving final direction to Quince, the carpenter, Flute, the bellows-mender, Snout, the tinker, and Starveling, the tailor—all humble folks, who were about to present a play before the duke and his party—after telling them to go home and to attend to this and the other, says:

'And, most dear actors, eat no onions, nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath; and I do not doubt but to hear them say it is a sweet comedy.'

When Helena, at close of the 'All's Well That Ends Well,' finds at the same time her husband and mother, the old Lafew exclaims:

'Mine eyes smell onions; I shall weep anon.'

In the introduction to the 'Taming of the Shrew,' the lord sending instructions to his page to enact the part of wife to the drunkard whom they are to befool, says:

'Bid him shed tears. . . . And if the boy have not a woman's gift, To rain a shower of command'd tears, An onion will do well for such a shift.'

Shall we find our first onion in England? No; its very name tells us that it is not a native of Britain. Onion is merely the English way of

pronouncing the French *oignon*, and by the French, at some time or other, the Onion bulb was brought into England. Chaucer, writing five hundred years ago, mentioned the onion as a well-known domestic vegetable. Another three hundred years takes us back to the Norman Conquest, and I think we may take another two hundred and say that a thousand years ago the onion was making its way into England. A thousand years sweeps away the history of England, and leaves a small island, torn with

the strife of its recent Saxon conquerors and harassed with sea pirates; an island almost unknown to the nations on the Continent. Another thousand years and Britain is an island lying far away from civilisation.

Two thousand years takes us back to the border-land between ancient and modern history. Another thousand and a few years more and we hear the groans of the Hebrews in Egypt as they drag the heavy stones for the massive forts of Ramesses and



THE STATUE OF BISHOP HARPER.

[SEE 'ILLUSTRATIONS.'



BEACH CYCLING.

[SEE 'ILLUSTRATIONS.'

Pithom, or make their tale of bricks under the sharp gaze of guards who stand over them with rods. Then a successful conspiracy is made, and the Hebrews under Moses and Aaron throw off the yoke of Pharaoh and defeat him on the shores of the Red Sea; and we hear the songs of triumph of those emancipated slaves as they take their first steps in freedom. Unthought of difficulties appear. The journey to the Land of Promise is not one long holiday of pleasure. Some present privations seem harder to bear than the late fearful slavery, and praising the good old times, they revile Moses and ask him bitterly, 'Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers and the melons, and the leeks and the onions and the garlic.' And these onions whose flavour could be better remembered than the hardships of tyranny, can they be of the same species as our onions of to-day? Certainly they are. They are grown in Egypt to this day, and called now by the very name used for them by masters and slaves when Israel was there in bondage.

Seven thousand years have passed since the building of the first pyramid. Yet even then Egypt was an old country; its people civilised. Ten thousand years ago the onion was brought into Egypt, and from where? It was brought from India. History can tell us no more. The sacred writings of the Hindus and the oldest records of the Chinese mention the onion as a cultivated plant, but always cultivated. If we would find our first onion, we must leave history and find some other line of inquiry. We join the botanists and continue our search, and we find ourselves climbing the mountains of Afghanistan and Beloochistan, and exploring the table-lands behind Hindu Kush mountains. And there, in the birth-place of mankind, we find our onion the *Allium Cepa*—from which have sprung all the onions grown all over this wide world. On the mountains of Egypt the onion is called *batzel*, the name it goes by in Egypt at the present day.

Onion was enough. First Boarder: Were you here last summer? Second Boarder (crossly): No. Think I'd be here now if I had been here last summer?