

SPELLICANS.*

In the *Dīgha Nikāya* we find a list of games to which certain *Samaṇas* and Brahmins are said to be addicted. The phrase is put into the mouth of the Buddha; and the list occurring in one of the very oldest fragments imbedded in the Buddhist Scriptures (in the *Sīlas*), dates back very probably to the time when Gotama was living. Of each word in this list we have the traditional interpretation preserved to us in the great commentary by Buddhaghosa, who wrote about A.D. 430. One of the games is called *Santikaṃ*, and Buddhaghosa explains it:

“Little pieces [or men of the kind used in games] or bits of crockery are put all in a heap together. Then these they remove or replace with the nail, and, if any object in the heap shakes, he [the player] is beaten.”

See the *Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī*, just edited for the Pali Text Society by myself and Prof. Carpenter (p. 85).

Santikaṃ may be rendered ‘Neighbourhoods;’ but the game is clearly what is now called Spellicans. As now played, each piece has a number on it, and each player continues to withdraw (with a hook) one or other of the various pieces until in so doing he shakes the rest. Then the other player has his turn; and, when all the pieces are removed, the numbers on those taken by each player are added up, and the player with the highest number wins.

Is anything known of the history of this game in Europe? The name for it is evidently old, and connected, not with *spielen*, ‘to play,’ but with our words *spill* (a bit of paper or wood) and *splinter*. That it should have existed 500 B.C. in India need not surprise us. A study of the migration of games might be expected to yield results as interesting as those of the migration of stories.

T. W. RHYS DAVIDS.

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