

CROQUET IS STILL IN FAVOR

ON a bright Saturday morning as the wayfarer in Central Park, museum-bound, pursues a cross-road, a strange group may well arouse his interest. The group consists of four well-dressed men, hats on the backs of their heads, coats over their arms. One is pushing a lumbering little cart. They press ahead with the vigor of men bent on a mission and beside a stretch of greensward come to a halt. Folding camp chairs are lifted from a cart and set up beneath a tree. A lawn mower comes out next and one by one they take turns pushing it back and forth across a selected patch.

If these are park keepers, thinks an observer, they appear strangely out of place in their fashionable clothes, and they operate in a manner stranger still—three looking on while one labors over an arbitrarily selected bit of grass. As a matter of fact they are not workers in the ordinary sense. Their toil is only incidental to their play. The secret of their pursuit is revealed when the task is done. Wickets and balls

and mallets are produced from the cart and a croquet game is set up.

The men who spear odd bits of paper and sweep up the gutters in the park say that croquet players there are among the most dauntless of sportsmen. Golf enthusiasts may arise long before the crack of dawn to get a place in the waiting line, and tennis players may remain on the court until they almost drop;

Of a fair afternoon there may be thirty or forty croquet followers gathered in one corner of a field within earshot of the merry-go-round.

Some who play croquet in Central Park are stooped and gray, but some are young and straight.

Fashions in sports may come and go, but the devotees of the ball and mallet, it is said, remain faithful forever. One club that plays in Central Park regularly and has a large membership has been flourishing since 1894, when croquet, ousted from favor by lawn tennis in the '70s, was revived with improved implements and a more scientific form of play.