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STOOL-BALL, AND HOW TO PLAY IT.



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SHORT time ago there were some articles and letters in the daily papers on the subject of stool-ball, and most of us learned with some surprise that this ancient game had never quite died out in country districts.

The letters and articles were somewhat vague: still more vague were the rules of the game as given in dictionaries and books on recreations; and it became evident to the reader of both books and papers, that ancient and modern stool-ball had little in common.

In the old game a stool was set upon the ground and the player took her place before it. A bowler threw a ball at the stool with the object of striking it, and the other player beat off the ball with her hand. The game was like cricket, with a stool for wickets, and as the players were usually women, there were no runs, the scoring being counted by the number of times the player at the stool successfully beat back the ball.

Another ancient form of the game resembled rounders. Stools were set up in a circle, and a feeder threw a ball towards one of the stools, and the player endeavoured to strike it back with her hand. After the ball was struck, all the players changed places, the feeder trying to strike them with the ball as they ran from stool to stool. Both of these old forms are

interesting; but if any of our readers meditate starting a stool-ball club, we advise them to adopt the modern method, which is far more exciting, and makes a really enjoyable and suitable game for girls.

Stool-ball as played in Sussex just now bears a strong resemblance to cricket modified to suit the feminine capacity. The essentials for the game are a leather tennis-ball, two wooden bats shaped like tennis racquets, and two wickets, consisting of a pole five feet high, and fixed in front of the pole, at the top, a flat piece of wood about eighteen inches square.

An ordinary tennis-lawn is not large enough for stool-ball, which should be played in a field. There is no necessity to have the ground kept so carefully as for cricket, though of course long grass impedes both ball and players. The wickets are erected fifteen yards apart, and the players number eleven on each side. It is necessary to choose a captain to each team to prevent disputes, and two umpires are also a necessity in all important matches.

The field are placed much the same as in cricket, only closer round the wickets; the bowler stands midway between the wickets and *throws* the ball at the face of the wicket; the player strikes the ball with the wooden bat, and if she makes a good hit, runs ensue. The wicket must be tapped every time the player strikes the ball, or misses to strike it, and until she has tapped she may be put out or thrown out. If the ball strikes the pole of the wicket it does not count; to put the

player out the ball must strike the square at the top. In all other respects the rules are the same as in cricket.

Mr. James, of Oxford Union, has drawn up a set of rules for the new form of stool-ball; but any players starting on the basis of the well-known laws of cricket cannot go far wrong.

Girls living in the country who want a change this summer from the inevitable tennis cannot do better than start a stool-ball club. The implements are cheap, the dress need only be a sensible flannel costume with a loose bodice and wide sleeves, and after some practice a challenge can be issued to one of the well-known clubs at Heathfield or Horsham. The great advantage of stool-ball is that it offers healthful recreation to twenty-two people at the same time, whereas the tennis-court only accommodates four players at a time. It is also a good game to teach working girls, for the essentials cost very little, the rules are easily understood, and success is more quickly achieved than in tennis, which has now become terribly scientific.

During the long summer evenings we hope the excellent game of stool-ball will be widely played, both in private meadows, in country districts, and in the great parks which are to be found in most of our large cities. There is a song written by D'Urfey in his play of *Don Quixote*, acted in 1694, the chorus of which forms a fitting conclusion to this article—

“Come all—great, small, short, tall—away to stool-ball.”

WEST DENE MANOR.

By J. A. OWEN, Author of “Candelaria,” etc.

CHAPTER VII. THE RECTORY.

“. . . Not too austere and retired . . . that his rigidness frightened people from consulting with him. ‘Let your light,’ saith Christ, ‘shine before men,’ whereas over-reservedness makes the brightest virtue burn dim.”—*The Faithful Minister*.—THOMAS FULLER.

COMFORT and refinement were the ideas most vividly suggested by the Rectory of St. Mary's at Redminster. It was a long, low, rambling house, with bow windows opening on to the garden in all directions, and its red-brick walls and porch were covered with roses and creepers. Two sides of the house opened on to a well-kept lawn, part of which was used as a tennis ground for the benefit of the rector's juvenile friends, while the rest, gay with flowers, and shaded by two or three splendid copper beeches, was looked upon by the rector and his wife as their own special domain. Here Dr. Gray read his papers or composed his sermons in the warm weather, while his wife read or worked in their favourite spot under the large copper beech by the drawing-room window.

On this particular afternoon the party assembled on the lawn was larger and gayer than usual, for the Warhams, with Ernest Myddleton, had dropped in for afternoon tea, and the rector and his wife were doing their best to make them welcome.

“Well, Ted, my boy, it is nice to see you amongst us again, even for a short

time. You must tell me all about your life in London. Keep a good cup of tea for us, Mary; we are going to have a little chat first, Ted and I.”

“That is always your way, Alfred,” said his wife, pretending to be cross. “There is a time for everything, you know, and 4.30 p.m. here is the time for afternoon tea. I can't help your tea not being good,” she called out as they strolled off.

There was something in the rector's kindly sympathy that was irresistible, and Ted felt constrained to pour out his whole heart to him. He had said very little to anyone about his troubles since his return to West Dene. As was natural, the excitement of the first night had been followed by a reaction, and now he was feeling in very low spirits indeed.

“I could bear it, indeed I could, Dr. Gray,” he exclaimed, vehemently, “if we could but save West Dene. It is so hard to part with that, and begin life in utterly different surroundings.”

“Why not set before you the goal of making a fortune sufficient to buy back the place, if it must be sold. I have known that done before now.”

“I had a hope once of doing that, but I have abandoned it now. There are no prospects for an unknown beggar like myself in a wealthy firm like Eustace and Rivington's.”

“You don't know about that. Work well, and success may come. How do you like the work?”

“Like it? Could anyone like such work? I loathe it, and, for all I gain by it, I might as well be idle at home.”

“No, no; believe me, my boy, any work, however distasteful, is better than idleness. And you know,” he added, “we cannot expect to find the path always smooth. But there, I am not going to give you a sermon. It is so easy to preach to others, and say ‘Be patient,’ when things are prospering with oneself. But don't give up hope, my boy,” he added, kindly.

“Well, Fay,” said the rector, as they rejoined the group round the tea-table, “when do you intend to come over here and help in my parish?”

“I don't intend to come at all,” she said, laughing.

“That is too bad. I am sure there is no scope for your energies at West Dene. Helen is too indefatigable for that. Now, I know of an opening here that would exactly suit you.”

“Oh, Fay is a great help to me; you must not charm her away,” said Helen.

“Have you been very useful lately?” asked the rector.

“Of course,” she replied; “but I almost struck the other day when Helen kept me standing for half an hour in a poky little garden filled with nothing but smelly cabbages, while she played the ministering angel inside.”

“You might have come in, Fay,” said her cousin, laughing.

“Yes, but I stayed out on principle. I do not see why Tommy Green's