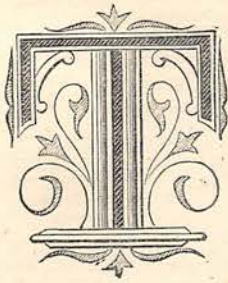


HOME BILLIARDS.



HERE is probably no indoor game possessing half so much fascination as that of billiards. There are many, not merely young men, but old ones too, who look upon an evening's whist as the highest form of amusement; but then it is to be feared that whist in itself would never give the interest

it does unless accompanied by a certain amount of gambling which, though small, yet adds its baneful zest. Too often small beginnings lead to great and disastrous ends, and the stimulant of gambling, when once indulged in, is only too apt to take a deep root and gradually grow into a upas-tree of evil.

Now billiards is a game which affords such immense interest in itself, and is so essentially a trial of skill, that, like chess, it presents no temptation to betting. The chief drawback to the game is, first, its expense; and, secondly, the fact of most billiard-tables being at taverns, where a mixture of society is met with that is equally undesirable to superiors and inferiors.

A really good amateur billiard-player would play on the average about three games, of 100 points, in one hour, and as the almost universal charge for a game of 100 is one shilling, two good players who wished to amuse themselves for a couple of hours every day would spend between them over £90 in the course of one year.

It ought therefore to be a matter of serious reflection to fathers of families, who realise the fact that boys will be boys, and who have sons grown and growing up, to consider how far a billiard-table in the house might

even save money at the end of the year rather than add to expenditure. It should always be the constant aim of parents to make home happy; unfortunately, many seem to forget this point just when their sons arrive at that time of life when a gentle control is most necessary.

Most fathers look forward with pleasure to the bright smiles caused by bringing home a new toy, let them therefore recollect that human nature is much the same at seventeen as at seven. The child of seven, without play, is universally supposed to make a dull

boy. But when that awkward time of life has arrived when Master Hopeful considers himself a man, entitled to go out of an evening without asking leave, wise in his own conceit, and fancying he knows far more of the world than his father—it is when this period of life has been reached that a billiard-table *in the house* is almost invaluable.

Those who have visited and know public billiard-rooms, know to what great temptations young men are exposed who frequent them.

Fortunately, of late, taking the billiard-tables as a whole, gambling for even small sums of money is very much on the decrease. This is partly owing to the proprietors of rooms having secret fears, as well they may have, of infringing the stern laws of the present Licensing Act, which renders them liable to lose their licence should they allow any gambling on the premises; and it is at present an open question of law whether even what is called playing for the table—*i.e.*, an understanding that the loser of the game pays for it—is not illegal.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in the way of home billiards is the size of the room necessary for the reception of a full-sized billiard-table. The room must be at least twenty-two feet long by sixteen feet wide, as should it be smaller, whenever a ball is close to the cushion there will not be room for the cue to move backwards and forwards in taking aim, but the butt of the cue will strike against the wall. There is, however, a good deal of amusement to be got out

of a small-sized table; a full-sized one is twelve feet long by six feet wide; but bear in mind that if you buy a small-sized table, you should have it in this proportion—*i.e.*, the length twice the width—or the angles of the table will be wrong; and recollect also

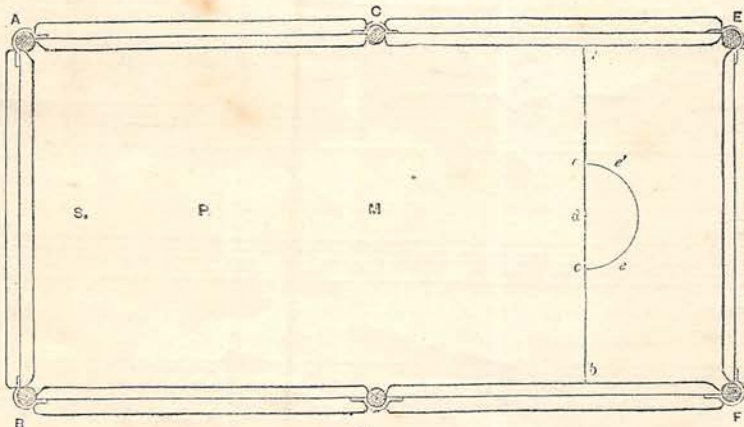


FIG. 1.

that, in the end, a good table, bought from a proper billiard-table manufacturer, who makes nothing else, is far cheaper than those wretched apologies for tables, that will most probably not keep level after the first week.

We will suppose therefore the table to be bought, and presume it to be a full-sized one, though our directions equally apply to games played on tables that are not full-sized. We will now give for the benefit of absolute beginners a few explanations of the terms used in playing, and also a few general

directions to assist beginners in learning this most beautiful and scientific of all games.

You will first observe that the slate bed of the table, covered with a green cloth, is marked with small spots, and also with two lines, one straight and one curved. Fig. 1 represents a table thus marked. The game of billiards is played with three balls, one red and two white; the two white being distinguished from each other by one of them having two small black spots on it; these two white balls are respectively called the plain ball and the spot ball.

Each player takes one white ball, and the choice of balls is generally decided by what is called "stringing"—*i.e.*, each player places a white ball on the line $c c'$ and sends it by hitting it with the cue up the table, so as to strike the cushion on the top of the table and rebound again; whichever player can cause the ball he plays with to stop *nearest* to the bottom cushion—*i.e.*, the cushion the player almost leant against when he struck his ball—has the choice of balls and also the choice of playing first himself or of telling his opponent to begin.

On commencing the game, the red ball is placed on the spot marked s , which ought to be exactly thirteen inches from the face of the top cushion. The whole of that part of the table between the long line $b b'$, drawn across the table, and the bottom cushion, that lies between the two bottom pockets E and F , is called "baulk," and the line $b b'$ is called the "baulk line." The space enclosed by the straight line $c c'$ and the curved line $e e'$ is called the D ; on ordinary tables, the curved line $e e'$ is a semi-circle, of which the diameter varies from twenty to twenty-three inches. The game is scored by means of "canons," "hazards," "misses," and "coups." A canon is made by the striker causing his own ball to strike both the others—this counts two points. Hazards are divided into two classes, "winning hazards" and "losing hazards." A winning hazard is when the striker pockets either of the other balls by striking them with his own ball. Pocketing the red ball scores three points, and pocketing the white ball two points. A losing hazard is when the striker pockets his own ball, having first struck one of the other balls. A losing hazard, when the red ball is struck first, counts three points; and when the white ball is struck first, two points.

Canons and hazards all count, though made at the same stroke. The greatest number that can be made at one stroke is ten. This is made by striking the red ball first, making a canon, and all three balls afterwards running into the pockets. The red ball going in the pocket, a winning hazard, scores three; the opponent's white ball going in the pocket, also a winning hazard, counts two; the striker's own ball going into the pocket, a losing hazard, counts, as the red ball was struck first, three; and the canon counts two—or ten in all. This stroke very rarely occurs in a game, and when it does, of course some of the hazards are by accident.

Being "in hand" means that the white ball is off the table, in which case the owner of the ball may

place his ball in any part of the D , but he must play out of the baulk line $b b'$ before he strikes any ball.

Beginners must not think that, because some hazards are called losing hazards, the points made are deducted, or added to the opponent's score; such is not the case, and the fact is that losing hazards are the chief and best means of scoring. The term *losing hazard* owes its origin to an old game of billiards, never now played, in which when the striker's own ball ran into a pocket after striking another ball, a certain number of points were deducted. In the present game, however, losing hazards count to the player.

A "miss" is when the player strikes his own ball and fails to make it hit any other ball—this counts one point to the opponent. When, in addition to failing to hit, the striker's own ball runs into a pocket or flies off the table, the opponent scores three. Running into a pocket without first striking a ball is called "running a coup."

When a player scores, he continues to play on till he fails to score, when his opponent plays, using of course his own ball, and playing from where his ball is at rest, if on the table, or from any part of the D if his own ball is what is called in hand. Whoever first scores the number of points agreed upon wins the game. The usual number of points in a game is 50 or 100. In grand matches between two first-class professional players the number of points is generally 1,000.

A "fluke" is when the player fails to score the hazard or canon he tried to get, but gets some other score instead. For instance, suppose a player tries to knock the red ball into the middle pocket and fails to succeed, but his own ball runs into, say, the top pocket: this of course would count three, and the player would play on, his ball being in hand. The stroke would be a fluke, as he got a score he did not play for.

Beginners generally score far more by flukes than by anything else. First-class players very rarely fluke, though of course they do sometimes.

A "losing hazard off the red," or "off the white," of course implies that the red or white ball, as the case may be, has been struck. The same expression is, however, often applied to winning hazards; for instance, a "winning hazard *off* the red" really means that the red ball has been knocked into a pocket.

The "spot-stroke" is a series of winning hazards off the red into the two top pockets. For instance, suppose the red ball is on the spot s , and the white ball about a foot from it, in a line with the pocket, on the opposite side of the ball to the pocket. The player can now easily hit the red ball into the top pocket, and by putting on what is called "screw," can cause his own ball to run back on to the same spot, or very nearly the same, as it was before. This stroke can often be repeated over and over again. Or the red ball may be sent into one of the top pockets, and the player may cause his own ball to follow through the red and stop on a similar spot on the other side of the red ball, thereby leaving an easy winning hazard off the red into the other top pocket.

A "following-through stroke" is what we have just described—viz., the striker causes his ball after striking another to roll on in the same direction. If the "object ball"—the ball played at—is struck *exactly* in the centre, the striker's ball, if a following-through stroke is played, will follow on in a straight line; if struck a little to the right or left, it will follow on to the right or left accordingly; but a following-through stroke must always be played very full—*i.e.*, the object ball must be struck very nearly in the centre. The player must also strike his own ball in the middle, and high up or above the centre of the ball.

"Screw" is a rotary motion imparted to the striker's ball by hitting it with the point of the cue rather low down, if the striker's cue is kept horizontal, by which the ball when it has come in contact with the object ball is made to run back instead of following on; screw can be so regulated that the striker can cause his own ball to run straight back by hitting the object ball exactly in the centre, or he can make his own ball rebound at a right angle by striking the object ball a little on one side of the centre.

"Side" is also a rotary motion imparted to the striker's ball, only the rotary motion is similar to that of a teetotum. The effect of side on a ball is to make it rebound after striking a cushion at a different angle to what it otherwise would do had no such side been imparted. Also side has the effect of making a ball go into a pocket easier if the spin be in a right direction; the opposite spin having the effect of keeping a ball out of a pocket.

The "cue" is the stick with which the player strikes his ball; it tapers from the thickness of half-a-crown in the butt to that of a sixpence, or of even a three-penny-piece, in the point. The point is covered with a leather top, and all strokes must be played with the point of the cue. The usual length of a cue is about four feet nine inches. The leathern top is generally rubbed over with a piece of chalk at intervals during the game to prevent its slipping. When the top of the cue slips against the ball it is called a "miss-cue."

Fig. 2 shows the position of the left hand on the table, making what is called the "bridge," in which the cue rests. The cue should be grasped somewhat lightly in the right hand about a couple of inches

from the butt, and it is of great importance, to insure accuracy of aim, that the cue be kept horizontal.

When the ball is so far away that the striker cannot use his left hand as a rest, an artificial rest is used, being a curved piece of wood or two cross-bars of wood, or ivory, fastened to the end of a light stick about the same length as an ordinary cue. This rest is more often called the "jigger."

A long cue, called the "half-butt," and a rest, long in proportion, is generally supplied for strokes that have to be played when the balls are a very long way from the place where the player wishes to stand in order to take aim.

What beginners should practise most is what is called the "half-ball stroke"—*i.e.*, in taking aim the point of the cue should be placed in a line with the centre of the striker's own ball and the edge of the circumference of the object ball, supposing a horizontal line to be drawn through the centre of the object ball.

The most useful strokes for winning games are, as we have said, losing hazards. In making a losing hazard, players should always remember that the

position of one ball, at any rate, after the stroke, is known; the striker's own ball after the stroke will be in hand, and he can take his choice of any part of the D to place his ball. He should therefore try and so regulate the strength with which he plays the stroke, that he leaves the ball he plays on in such a position that an easy losing hazard is left for his next stroke.

Making a series of strokes one after another is called "making a break."

The reason the half-ball stroke should be practised more than any other is that when the balls meet in this position—*i.e.*, the centre of one advances in a direct line with the extreme edge of the other—any slight deviation to the right or to the left causes, comparatively speaking, only a slight deviation in the direction of the striker's ball after contact with the object ball. Consequently the player is less liable to miss making what he plays for when he plays to hit the object ball at the half-ball stroke, than when he plays to hit it in any other point.

Another good maxim, which applies to all games, but especially to billiards, is—keep your temper.

AN OLD BILLIARD-PLAYER.

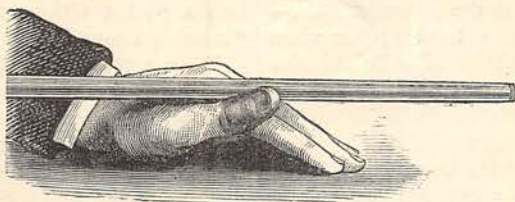


FIG. 2.

