

A New-World Sport.

By H. A. NICHOLLS.



CERTAINLY no race has yet trodden this somewhat aged earth the units of which have developed a greater capacity for enduring hardships when there is even a prospect of success in the dim future than Britishers; and, again, no other race has ever developed such a power to make the best of life, and to obtain pleasure and sport where such appeared impossible of attainment, than the same grand old race. These characteristics, coupled with bulldog tenacity of purpose and determination, have made many parts of Tasmania and Gippsland, Victoria, a perfect garden of luxuriance, and have brought the sport of axemanship into existence and popularity until it now stands as the national sport of all the timbered parts of the Colonies.

To understand the sport it will be necessary first to describe the conditions under which the competitors live. The majority are either settlers cutting out homes for themselves, or men earning their living by felling timber for saw-mills, by splitting timber into post-rails or paling, or by felling the scrub by contract for the more wealthy class of selectors who are making clearings in the forests, or as it is locally called "the bush." This "bush" is a dense growth of vegetation, covering some of the richest tracts of chocolate soil in the world. The immense size of the trees and the luxuriance of the under-growth loudly proclaim by the voice of Nature this fact; and to place a "new chum" in the midst of one of these gigantic, lonely forests and ask him whether it was possible to have waving crops of growing corn around where he stood in but a few years' time, he would say "Impossible," and yet such transformations are year by year in progress.

Many of the settlers had but

little education, owing to their distance from schools, hence literary pursuits were denied them. Their best-loved weapon was the axe, and the pioneer of pioneers was as much beloved as the Highland soldier loves his bayonet. Their talk was mainly of their axes and saws, and who excelled in their use; therefore, a spirit of rivalry arose which led to private matches to see who could cut a given size log in the quickest time.

From this desire to excel in their work arose the Axemen's Association, which organized these trials of skill, and by the public trials before thousands of people annually a practical technical education of the highest order has been conferred upon the settlers. They have throughout the length and breadth of Australasia been taught how to do more work with less exertion, and how to do it better, thus shortening the period required to clear land or prepare timber for market; whilst the competitions have evoked an interest in their lives wholly beneficial, and have given one of the most loyal, honest, and true sections of Her Majesty's servants to prove before the world that, far from being inferior, the woodsmen are one of the hardest, most fearless classes of men in the world, whose very success is undying testimony of many years of hard toil and unremitting effort.

During their life in the bush these men



From a Photo. by

AN AXEMAN'S CAMP IN THE BUSH.

(G. P. Taylor, Tas.)

meet with hundreds of narrow escapes, until sometimes these are so marvellous that men not acquainted with their lives would not believe one man could have so many escapes and yet live. But this is only by the way, and it is of the Axemen's Association and the sport of chopping I am writing.

In June, 1891, a meeting was held in Latrobe, Tasmania, when, on plans submitted by the present writer, those attending (all settlers) resolved to form an association "for the purpose of publicly demonstrating the skill to which the settlers in the Colonies have attained with axe, saw, splitting-knife, and other tools, and to promote, as far as possible, the improvement in such skill by holding competitive exhibitions of skill," etc. As the promoter of the meeting, and bearing in mind all I knew of the hard lives of the settlers, I set to work with a will, and my first appeal was to the Governor of Tasmania, Sir R. C. Hamilton (since dead). His Excellency responded, accepting the position of patron, sending a cheque and, what was better still, wishing the new association success.

A chopping carnival was held that year, and was a huge success; another the following year, though held in a small township, was attended by one of the greatest crowds ever drawn together in the Colony, and among the guests were His Excellency Sir R. C. Hamilton (Governor of Tasmania), Lady Hamilton, His Excellency Lord Hopetoun (Governor of Victoria), Lady Hopetoun, and other distinguished guests.



W. H. CHELLIS, WORLD'S CHAMPION AXE-CUTTER OF STANDING BLOCKS.

From a Photo. by G. P. Taylor, Ulverston, Tasmania.

Since that date carnivals have been annually held, and each year large prizes have been given away, the various championships being fought out with a singleness of purpose and intensity of zeal on the part of the contestants, and amid excitement on the part of onlookers, that astonish many who attend, and stamp the sport as the national one of the Colony.

The ninth of these axemen's carnivals was held in Ulverston, Tasmania, early in December, 1899, and was as successful as its predecessors, notwithstanding that rain considerably marred the pleasure of the outing.

The championship of the world in standing block chopping—i.e., logs placed just as though the tree were still growing—was won by W. H. Chellis, of Delorame, Tasmania, with Abe Bryan, of Victoria, second; and Thos. Pettitt, of Sprint, Tasmania, third. There were about a dozen contestants, and the blocks were of stringybark, freshly cut, and all trimmed to exactly 6ft. 4in. girth.

At the word "Go!" all the razor-like axes were sunk deep in the quivering blocks, and then the shouts of the onlookers commenced, each encouraging his favourite on; and as the blows fell thick and fast, and huge chips dropped like hail round each man's block, the crowd grew almost frantic. In less than two minutes most of the axemen had put in their front kerfs and turned to cut the back in; then the roars of the onlookers increased, if possible; the policemen gathering round the inclosing fences to prevent an



J. M. MACKINOLTY, CHAMPION AXEMAN OF LYING BLOCKS.

From a Photo. by Steuart & Co., Melbourne.

excited rush. As the men nearly completed their task it was seen that any one of four or five might win; but when the head of Chellis's block trembled and then fell, there arose a shout that would almost waken the dead, for was not a Tasmanian again champion of the world? though the Victorian, Bryan, was only defeated by a blow, and several others were close up. The winner was carried off shoulder high by admirers, and as he left the grounds cheer after cheer rose. Bryan also came in for hearty cheering for his plucky cutting.

The winner is a magnificent specimen of stalwart manhood, weighing 15st. 3lb. in training, and standing 6ft. 4in. high.



R. CHATWIN, EX-CHAMPION SAWYER, WHO WON THE CHAMPIONSHIP FOUR TIMES.
From a Photo. by G. P. Taylor, Ulverston, Tas.



THOMAS PETTITT, CHAMPION SAWYER OF THE WORLD.

From a Photo. by G. P. Taylor, Ulverston, Tas.

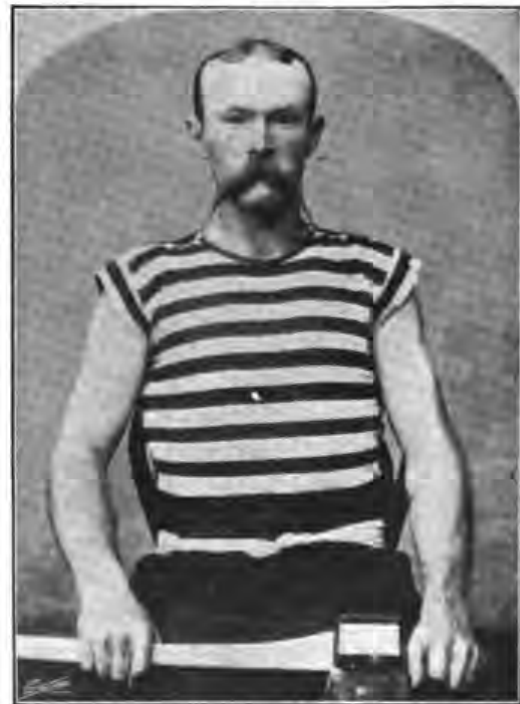
The other competitors were to a man well developed, and the measurement of their arms and legs would astonish anyone. The average weight was 13st.

Should the readers of this think that our Tasmanian is not the champion of the world, then let them send along a Canadian, an American, or a European wood-chopper, and the Tasmanian will be found ready and willing to contest the honour with him for almost any stake, and, in addition, the association will be glad to allow one or more who come thus a substantial sum for expenses.

It has been the aim and hope of many to see a meeting between a team of the best bushmen in America and some Tasmanians, and the latter have several times issued challenges, but to no purpose. When W. H. Chellis won the championship he felled the block 6ft. 4in. in girth in the record time of 4min. 8¼sec.

Another notable event was the underhand championship chop; that is, chopping through a log 6ft. 4in. in girth whilst it was in a lying position such as is occupied by a tree when it has been felled. There were fourteen competitors, includ-

ing five from New South Wales, one from West Australia, three from Victoria, the balance hailing from Tasmania. As in the standing block chopping match, the excitement started with the first blow, until J. M. Mackinolty, of Victoria, cut



THOMAS REEVES, EX-CHAMPION CHOPPER—THE MOST POPULAR AXEMAN WHO EVER COMPETED.

From a Photo. by Marchant & Co., Latrobe, Tas.

through his block amid deafening cheers, and a blow later another Victorian, Bryan, also severed his block, and a Tasmanian in C. Hutton secured third honours.

W. H. Chellis (capt.).

J. A. Sinnane.

J. Tomasina.

F. J. Boyle.

P. Henry.



From a Photo. by]

THE WINNING TEAM (ENGLAND) IN THE INTERNATIONAL MATCH.

[G. P. Taylor, Tas.

Another interesting event was the champion sawing match, the men to cut through a similar sized log (6ft. 4in.) in the quickest time. There were only a trio of competitors, but in spite of this excitement ran very high, and there was great cheering when Thos. Pettitt, of Sprint, Tasmania, cut through his log in the marvellously quick time of 1min. 49sec., defeating the holder of the championship, R. Chatwin, of Kindred, Tasmania, rather easily.

Another match that to those who understand not what men can do appears marvellous is the double-handed sawing match—*i.e.*, one man on each end of the saw. A log 2ft. in diameter has to be cut, and this event was won by Chellis and Hutton, of Tasmania, from a large field, they cutting through a 2ft. log in 34½ sec.

To see these men sawing, anyone might easily be pardoned for thinking they were cutting through cheese rather than stringybark logs of the same quality as some of the paving blocks now being used somewhere in London. It might also be noted that this pace is faster than can ordinarily be cut by steam.

The winning saw in each of the sawing events was sharpened by Mr. A. Goold, of Sprint, Tasmania, who has earned a world-



From a Photo. by]

THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH—LYING BLOCKS.

[G. P. Taylor, Tas.

wide reputation for his skill in this particular.

But the most interesting features of the Axemen's Carnival of 1899 were the matches in axes and saws by international teams. These contests were inaugurated for the purpose of giving the manufacturers of Great Britain an opportunity to prove to the world that they

could produce axes and saws equal to the tools made by the Americans. For years the latter have practically monopolized the trade of Australia, for the simple reason that they were "up to date."

For this the winning manufacturer in each case was to receive a gold medal, whilst the winning teams won large prizes. Each manufacturer who entered sent his lot of axes or saws, and these were sharpened to "correct pitch" prior to the day of the contest. For axes, eight teams competed, three representing England, Elwell, Brades, and Gilpin, axes; whilst for America, Kelly, Sharps,



From a Photo. by] PREPARING FOR THE SAWING MATCH. [G. P. Taylor, Ulverston, Tas.

Plumb, Underhill, Hubbards. In the first round the results were :—

Elwell Axes (England), 28 points, beat Kelly Axes (America), 27 points.

Brades Axes (England), 31 points, beat Hubbards Axes (America), 24 points.

Sharps Axes (America), 28 points, beat Gilpin Axes (England), 27 points.

Plumb Axes (America), 32 points, beat Underhill Axes (America), 23 points.

SECOND ROUND.

Brades, 29 points, beat Elwell, 26 points.

Plumb, 31 points, beat Sharps, 23 points.

FINAL HEAT.—Brades (England), 29 points, beat Plumb (America), 26 points.

The final was a magnificent match for the supremacy between England and America; the teams were as follows :—

ENGLAND.—W. H. Chellis (captain), J. A. Sinnane, J. Tomasina, P. Henry, and F. J. Boyle.

AMERICA.—J. Buckingham (captain), C. Hutton, S. Johnston, N. Manson, and A. Simpson.

Chellis was the first to get his log down; Hutton and Buckingham followed, and then Sinnane's block fell, and the teams were even. Toma-



From a Photo. by] THE SAWING MATCH IN FULL SWING. [G. P. Taylor, Ulverston, Tas.

sina for England next brought his block to grass, and a blow later Johnston for America did likewise, and again the points were even. Henry then downed his block amid cheers, and England led and was not again overhauled, and the English axes gained a wonderful victory by three points.

As soon as the match was over, the writer in a few words spoke of the contest, saying he was proud of England's win, and called for cheers, which were given for America, for England, for the manufacturers, etc. Loud and long-continued cheering was indulged in, and it is a noteworthy fact that these cheers were given beneath a flag bearing the combined national flags of Great Britain and America entwined, sent to the association by the Kelly Axe Company, of America.

In this day of unions there seems quite a possibility of a greater union, as suggested by that flag—a union of the English-speaking races of the world; and if that should come about under one great confederacy,



A COUNTRY CHOPPING MATCH.
From a Photo. by G. P. Taylor, Uverston, Tas.

no matter what the form of Government, the Anglo-Saxon race would then dominate the world absolutely, notwithstanding the slight reverses a small portion of our army has met with in South Africa up to the time of writing. There is nothing but good could come of such an alliance or federation, and it is surely coming, though possibly the writer may not live to see it.

Although England defeated America for pride of place with axes, such was not the case with saws. Three American makers entered and one English, but the latter failed to come to the starting point, and the Atkins's saws of America scored a notable victory over the two other American makers.

Of course, there were many other notable events, and the association paid away a large amount of prize-money; and as many a selector won a fairly large cheque, the amount so gained will help to carry him along until the day his farm is sufficiently clear to keep him.



A STUMP IN A SETTLER'S BACK YARD—SHOWING THE ENORMOUS SIZE OF THE TREES.
From a Photograph.