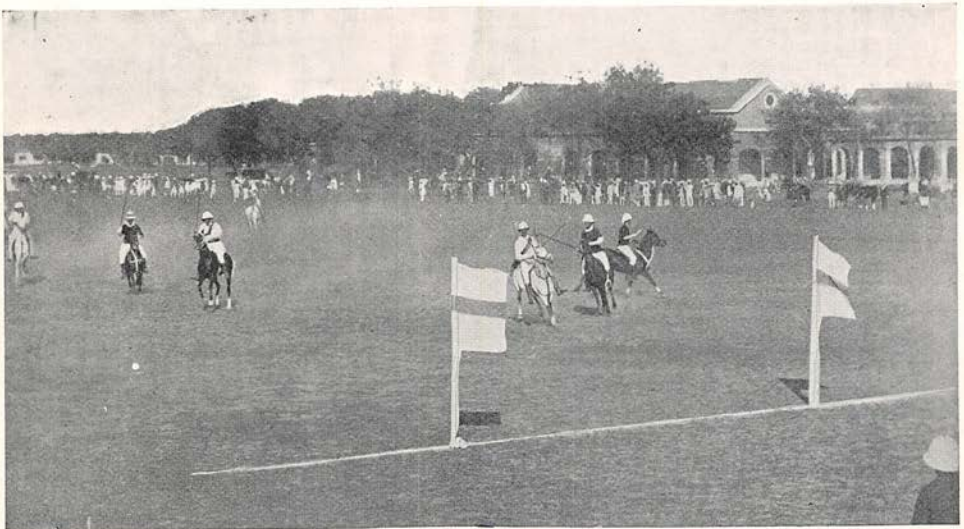


THE PRESENT POPULARITY OF POLO.

BY BASIL TOZER.

"MONARCHS have succeeded monarchs," writes Mr. Dehlavi, the well-known authority upon the antiquity of the game of polo, "nations have conquered nations, the world has seen innumerable changes, but the evergreen game of polo still survives the destructive forces of Time! It thrives and promises to be co-extensive in existence with the love of sport among men. It claims superiority over other games inasmuch as it inculcates 'good temper, presence of mind, perfect horsemanship, coolness of judgment, suppleness of muscle, and unflinching nerve.' It

pastime had its origin either among the people of Persia, or among the inhabitants of Chinese Tartary, so long ago as the fifth century B.C. Then, no less an authority than Sir William Ouseley remarks, in his "Travels in the East"—a volume published in 1819—that polo was played in almost every reign of the Sassanian kings of Persia, and that it was taken up enthusiastically by the Mohammedan rulers of Persia, as it was played by their fire-worshipping predecessors. The Mohammedans, it may be remembered, conquered Persia about the year 632 A.D., and soon afterwards settled there as its

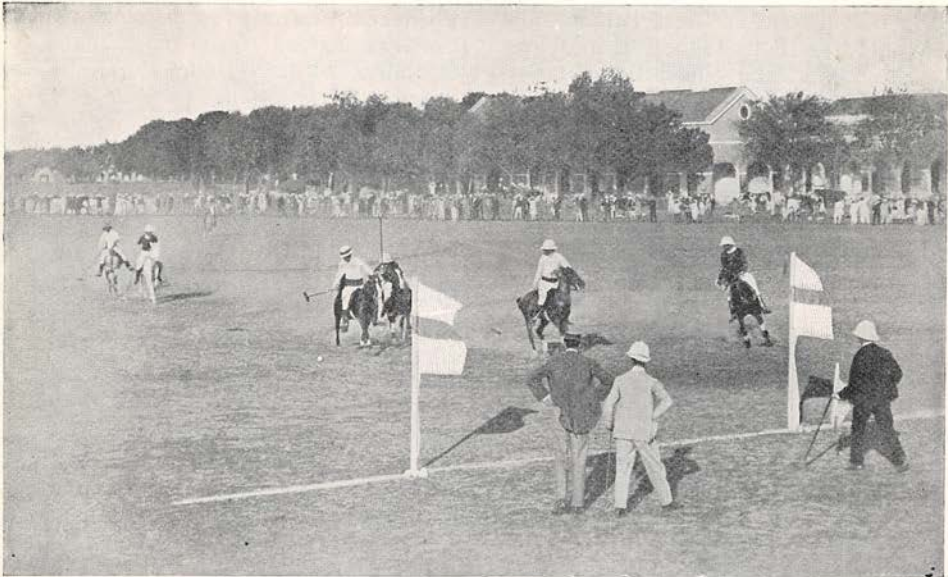


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claims superiority," he repeats, "for it has always been played by the proud hands of martial races, and, let us hope, it will ever continue so to be." That such actually is the case any person can ascertain who is sufficiently energetic and possesses patience enough to dive deeply into the mass of ancient manuscripts which contain references to the early game of polo and are at present securely stored among the archives of the British Museum. Indeed, the antiquity of polo is so very great that no one has as yet been able to discover by whom the game was invented, though many have attempted to do so. Certain it is, however, that the

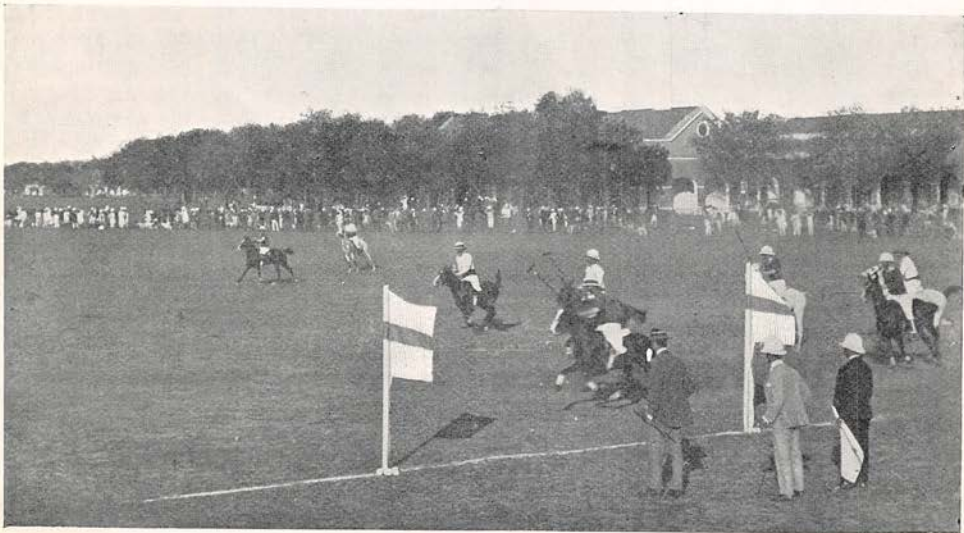
rulers. Gradually the game came to be played in Greece, in Egypt, in Arabia, in India, in Afghanistan, and in Japan; yet, though it can hardly be doubted that polo was introduced into India early in the tenth century, and introduced then presumably by the Mohammedans, it is a remarkable fact that the first *bonâ fide* polo match played in England took place less than thirty years ago.

Ever since that time, however, polo has been slowly acquiring popularity. Army men, of course, were the first to indulge in it and to help to foster our countrymen's growing fondness for the game; and no

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doubt many more Englishmen would have become keen about polo fifteen or twenty years ago but for the fact that, in those days, the average British soldier was a much less finished horseman than is the average British soldier of to-day. Indeed, anybody who will take the trouble to compare the actual horsemanship of the majority of the men who rode in the military steeplechases of about that period with the horsemanship of the majority of soldiers who ride now, can easily see for himself that what I say is but

the truth. Hence it is that polo has been coming to the front as one of our national games only during the last four or five years. This year in particular it seems to be "booming." The "boom" is, of course, to some extent due to the fact that no less than six new polo clubs have been organised in England within the last eighteen months, of which the most important are the London Polo Club at the Crystal Palace, under the management of Major F. Herbert—who some years ago was considered one of

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the best polo players in Great Britain—the Wimbledon Polo Club. Hurlingham and Ranelagh naturally hold their own at the top of the list of clubs where polo is played, and, for reasons sufficiently obvious, are likely to continue to do so for many years to come.

Yet, though Englishmen are only now becoming thoroughly alive to the fascinations of what has rightly been described as the

which comparatively few men take part, it is the lesser section of the general public that is genuinely interested in it or in seeing it played. Naturally, all Englishmen love to witness for once, at any rate, a game being played which they have not seen played before, especially if it be a game which needs skill and courage, endurance and determination on the part of the players, as is the case with polo; but this spasmodic inquisitiveness is, as a rule, soon satisfied.

It is by no means unusual to hear polo described as "a very cruel game" by persons who have never played it and who know nothing about it. The late Mr. Moray Brown, who was an excellent judge of polo as well as of polo-ponies, and an extremely accomplished writer upon the subject of polo and all appertaining thereto, used often to lash himself into a fury upon reading the ridiculous articles denouncing the game, articles which appeared in several somewhat influential newspapers a few years ago. One writer in particular, I well remember, while attempting to draw a vivid contrast between polo and the primitive game

called hockey, remarked that now, "instead of running on foot after the ball, the players are mounted, and it is the ponies' shins that come in for hard knocks, not their own," and so on. Another writer of the same stamp declared soon afterwards that polo was "almost as cruel a sport as steeplechasing and about upon a par in this respect with fox-hunting," and that "no man with a vestige of manhood left in him would wish

Raj Bijey Singh.

Risaldar Bhur Singh.

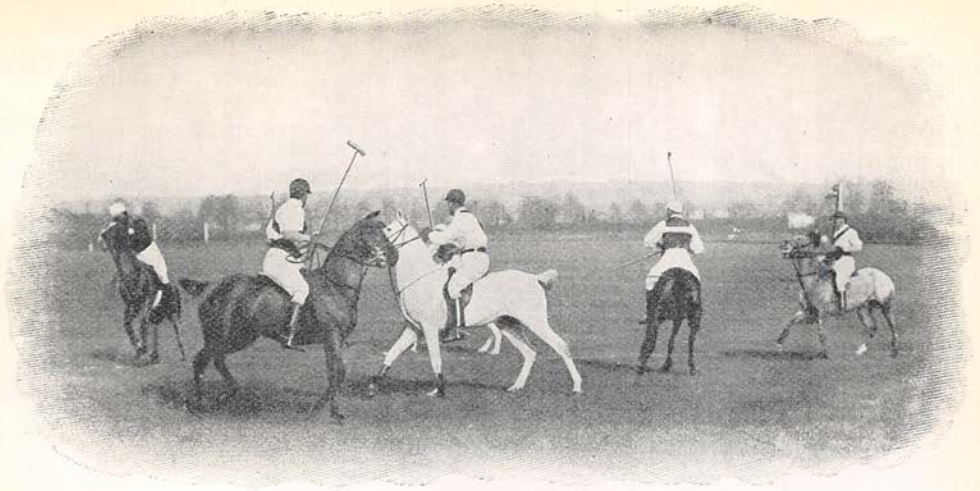


Capt. A. B. Mayne. H.H. Maharao Umaid Singh Bahadur (founder of the Club). Maharajah Jai Singh.

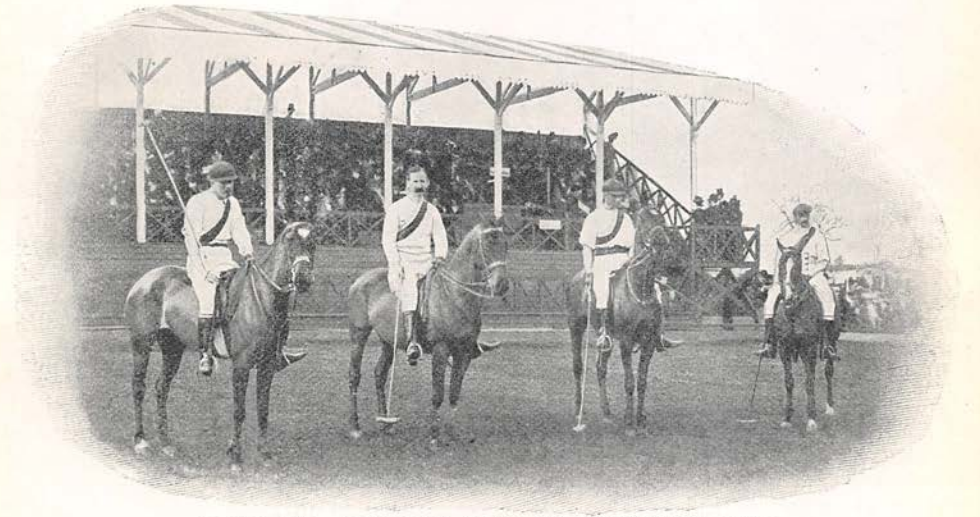
THE KOTAH POLO TEAM.

Photo by Herzog & Higgins, Mhow, India.

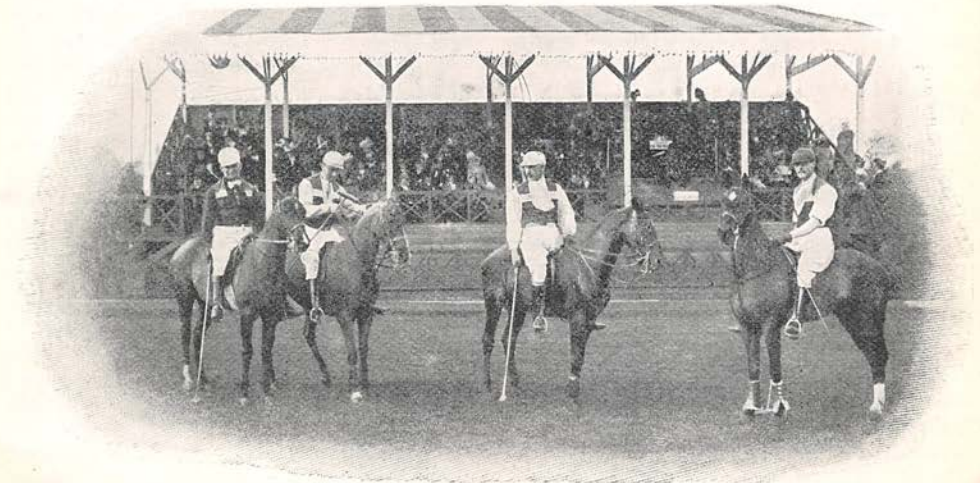
"King of Games," the popularity of polo will never be, cannot ever be, so universal in these Islands as, let us say, the popularity of cricket or of football, for the simple reason that the majority of mankind take greater interest in, and consequently prefer to watch, games being played in which they themselves might be taking part. Such forms of pastime seem to appeal more directly to their sympathies, and as polo is a game in



MID-FIELD PLAY AT WIMBLEDON PARK.



THE ROYAL ARTILLERY TEAM AT WIMBLEDON PARK.



THE WIMBLEDON PARK TEAM.



A YOUTHFUL AMERICAN POLO PLAYER.

to see polo established in England as a national sport or anything in any way approaching it." I need not trouble to point out the absurdity of such rambling statements. Polo, indeed, far from being a cruel form of amusement, is enjoyed by the ponies almost as thoroughly as most horses that have once been hunted ever afterwards delight in the sound of the horn and the sight of hounds. That it promises to become one of the most popular, if not actually the most popular, of our up-to-date out-of-door sports, I have already pointed out, so that, according to the writer whose words I have quoted, it would seem as if very few Englishmen could boast of still possessing "a vestige of manhood."

Unfortunately, the present popularity of polo has caused the prices of well-bred, fast, and thoroughly broken or trained polo-ponies to increase enormously, so that first-class polo seems likely soon to become a game in which only millionaires will be able to indulge. Who, ten years ago, would have thought of paying £500 or £600 for a single pony? Yet now we frequently hear of polo-ponies being sold for 500 guineas, 600 guineas, and 700 guineas apiece, and only recently two polo-ponies fetched respectively 850 guineas and 900 guineas. Of

course, it would be absurd to suppose that the cleverest polo-pony ever foaled could be worth that amount of money, and polo-players have in a measure themselves to blame for raising the market price of ponies to the high level that it has now reached. Even in parts of India the pony market is undergoing a similar transformation. A few years ago a clever polo-pony would fetch in the open market between 160 rupees and 200 rupees; but now, owing to the willingness—nay, the anxiety—of certain Englishmen to pay higher figures, the average price of a tip-top pony in such places as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras varies between 300 and 600 rupees, and the prices seem likely to creep still higher. In the provinces in England certain up-to-date farmers are en-

deavouring to neutralise entirely the deplorable effects of the agricultural depression by breeding polo-ponies, and the attempts of some of them have so far proved fairly successful. It is very doubtful, however, whether in the long run the breeding of polo-ponies will be found to be a remunerative form of "farming," except by the men who have, so to speak, a large *clientèle* of polo-players, and not players merely, but players who frequently buy fresh ponies, a thing that some of our provincial polo-players do but rarely. And even then the farmer cannot, or at any rate he should not, expect to command prices in any way approaching the figures given above; for, after all, how many farmers are there who are able to train a pony as he needs to be trained for polo? How many farmers, I ask you, have ever seen polo properly played? How many have seen it played at all? I well remember a year or two ago asking a middle-aged husbandman what he really thought the game of polo was like, for at that time he was seriously considering whether it might not be worth his while to breed a few ponies for what he termed "the polo market." After pondering for several minutes and awkwardly scratching his head, he replied that he "couldn't say, not for

certain, what polo was like," but that some of his friends had told him that it bore a striking resemblance to "this 'ere game of croak-it (croquet), only played a-horseback."

Is it likely that women will ever take to polo? The question is asked as regularly as the polo season comes round, but as yet nobody appears to have answered it satisfactorily. As a fact, women have "taken to polo"; they have taken to it more than once, but unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, polo has not taken to them. So long ago as the eleventh century, according to an ancient manuscript to be seen in the British Museum, "ladies of high birth and distinction played polo," and in the year 1887 some sporting girls in Ireland attempted to revive the custom, but failed lamentably. Captain Younghusband, in his capital book, entitled, "Polo in India," gives us rather an amusing description of a game of polo played in India by some Englishwomen. He tells us, with somewhat grim humour, that the two men, one on each side, who were appointed to guard the interests and look after the safety of the women, had rather a hard time of it. The sides were "Married Women *versus* Unmarried." After two or three minutes' play one of the fair players cried out that

she could not see the ball with her veil on. Instantly there was a halt, the veil was removed, and play went on. A few minutes later another damsel shouted out she could not play with her gloves on. Again the game was stopped, and the gloves were removed. A third one entrusted her handkerchief to her male partner, who, poor obedient thing, having no pockets in his tight breeches, found it difficult to take charge of. In the first attempt, therefore, the game did not go off well; but after a short interval for tea, which brightened up the players, the second turn proved a success, for which the captain complimented his fair friends profusely. This season a club, to be known as "The York and Cumberland Ladies' Polo Association," is being organised in the north of England. Whether it will prove a success remains to be seen. Personally, I "hae me doots," for I do not see how polo can ever be played properly either by men or by women riding in side-saddles. The promoters of the new organisation are sanguine of success, however, and we all know that when an Englishwoman makes up her mind to do a thing, she is, in the vernacular of the prize-ring, "very bad to beat."

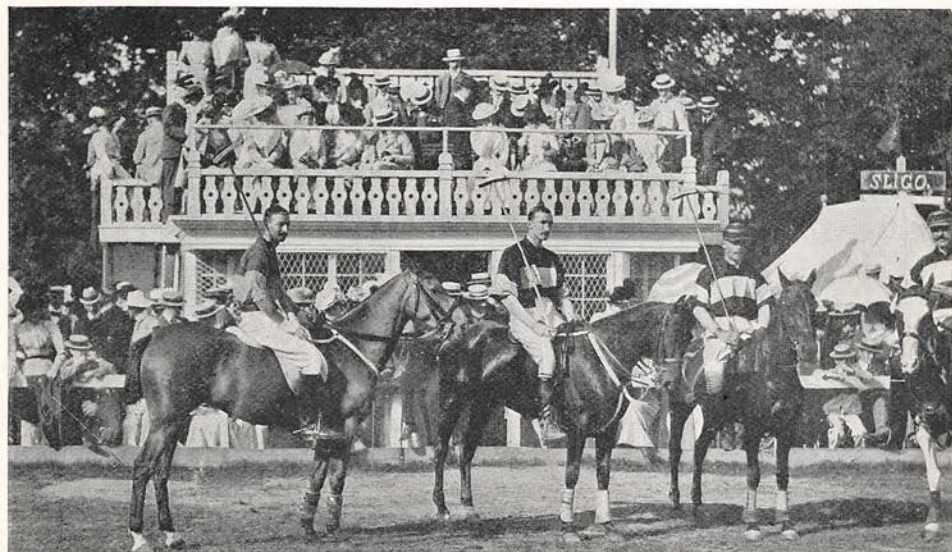


Photo by]

[F. P. D'Arcy, Dublin.

THE INNISKILLING DRAGOONS POLO TEAM IN PHOENIX PARK, DUBLIN.