

TENNIS TOPICS.

BY 'VANTAGE.'

THE following is a brief record of Mr J. K. Hooper's tennis career. He commenced playing in 1886, and won his Club (University) handicap single at the end of the same season. In 1887 he was chosen to represent the Club in the singles, but suffered defeat in the final. In 1890, owing 30 to scratch, he won the racquet at Zealandia Winter Court. His first attempt for the Championship was made in 1891, but he was beaten by Mr W. B. A. Morrison in the semi-final. This was Mr Hooper's last year of defeat by Auckland players, as in 1892 he won the Championship, and repeated the operation last and this year. In 1893 Mr Hooper represented Auckland at the New Zealand Tournament played at Dunedin. He was beaten by Mr R. Harman, the then Canterbury champion. He played in the championship round this year, beating Mr F. M. Marshall, and being beaten by Mr Minden Fenwicke.

In my 'Topics,' when reviewing Miss Rees' career, I had occasion to speak of her father's athletic predilections, and was guilty of some error. I said that Mr Rees learnt his cricket from the Graces, the real fact being that the Graces learnt from him. Mr W. G. Grace, Mr W. G. Rees' cousin, and godson got his first lesson from his godfather in 1858, he being then a boy of 11, and his teacher 32 years old. In 'Grace's Life' the incident is mentioned. Mr Rees at the same time held the highest average for the five years for West Gloucester, viz., 28.

It may be of interest to Auckland ladies to know that Miss Rees is this year competing for the Championship of her club (Ashburton) against the men. So far she is runner up, and I expect to hear the result of the final shortly.

THE DEVELOPMENTS OF DOUBLES.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.)

THE question then arises: can this difficulty be met, or is the double match in future to consist simply of a recurrence of a series of certainties, coupled with a possibility (common to all certainties) of one of them being upset? In other words: can some method of play be found which will annul the advantages at present accruing to the service, and, if so, what is it?

LET us revert to the positions of the strikers-out. First, there is the partner of the man who is receiving the service. He, as has already been shown, stands somewhere near the service-line and looks on. Why he stands there does not seem very clear, except that he is in a good position for volleying. But how often is he able to turn this position to any account? Only when his partner makes such a good return of the service that the other side are compelled to play the ball where they can—so that it may come in his direction. But how seldom this occurs! If they can do so by any possible means, they send the return to his partner who is running up, and the issue once more turns upon what sort of a stroke he will make. If, on the other hand, his partner's return of the service is a weak one it is simply killed, being aimed generally either at the body or legs, or else just out of the reach of the 'looker-on.' Now, supposing this 'looker-on' were to stand in a line with (or perhaps the least bit in advance of) his partner, somewhere near the base line, he would be in a position to save at any rate some of the kills which would result from his partner's weak returns of the service: he would be better able to see what sort of a return his partner had made, and would stay back if he stayed back, or else advance alongside of him. Thus the action of the partners would be far more concerted. Nowadays it is quite a common thing for the actual striker-out never to arrive at the net at all, though his partner remains there hopefully, leaving all the time a 'hole' which a properly-aimed cross-stroke is bound to find.

OF course this suggestion that the partner of the man taking the service (or 'looker-on' as he has been styled above) should stand near the base line involves the extra exertion of running up at the right time instead of being already there, but surely this is better than being there five times out of six to no purpose. He will also, perhaps, lose a chance of killing one or two unexpectedly easy first returns from the servers, but they are not numerous enough in a good match to be seriously counted upon. His attitude, until the rest is at any rate fairly started, and started somewhat in his own side's favour too, must of necessity be defensive in most cases, and the service line is not the best place to defend from—even in a double.

Now, as to the man who is taking the service. His position is, of course, settled by the fact that he has to be in a particular place in order to make his return properly. The

momentous question with him, therefore, is not where he shall stand, but what sort of a stroke he is to make. Of course, there is very little that is new to be said on this point, except in relation to the altered position which is advocated for his partner. If he has a fair chance of success he will try to pass the man at the net down the side line. This is a very risky stroke when your partner is 'up.' But now, supposing it does not happen to score outright, the partner, standing on the base-line, will have a very fair chance of saving the hard cross-volley, which is the almost inevitable result. A more common return of the service is a low cross-stroke in the direction of the man who is running in. This, if well done, will justify both the strikers-out in running up (which they must do quickly). If, on the other hand, it is only a somewhat feeble return, then both can stay where they are and be in the appropriate position for defending. The same will also hold good with regard to short drops and other 'fancy' strokes, which, however, are of such a nature that they usually score outright or are completely scored off. One stroke remains which is occasionally used, and which, it is submitted to the reader, might be cultivated with more diligence, and that is the lob. And here let it be remembered that the new position suggested for the striker's partner is again the right one if a lob is made. The best lob of all is undoubtedly a low lob just out of the reach of the man at the net. If really well done this stroke forces the server to stop his advance and run back behind his partner to make the return for him, and that, of course, would be the signal for a general advance on the other side. Even if the man at the net goes back after the lob himself he is losing position a little, and his return is not likely to be very powerful. Or, again, it sometimes pays to lob to the server as he runs up; this stroke is particularly efficacious where men come up at the top of their speed and as near to the net as they possibly can. Unless they pull up very quickly the ball sails quietly over their heads, and they have had a run for nothing.

APART from these considerations, there is no doubt that the lob is the safest stroke of all in a difficulty. And it must be once more urged that the strikers-out are in a difficulty. They start at a disadvantage, and very seldom succeed in bettering themselves. This has been already shown, and is proved by results. Even the hardest hitters and the finest placers seem to break down over the return of the service more often than they succeed, and the logical result is that the service game always wins. Now the lob ought to be a safer stroke than any other, because, in making it, the presence of the net may be wholly ignored. Of course a lob must rise fairly high, and be aimed to pitch far back in court; a bad lob is almost inevitably 'smothered.' But then it must be remembered that no stroke, unless it is one of the best of its kind, is of much use in a double, so that if your stroke is fated to be a weak one it may just as well be a weak lob as anything else.

OF course it would be absurd to say that a lob is the only answer to the service; that is evident. The player must naturally be guided by circumstances, and take every opportunity given, for instance, by weak services, by slow running in on the part of the server, or by the neglect of the man at the net to cover his fair share of the court. All that is urged is that the lob, as a means of defence against the preponderant advantages attaching to the service, might be more cultivated, and that its more frequent use, coupled with the change of position advocated for the defenders, would tend to lessen in a great degree, if it did not absolutely nullify, these advantages. The theory has yet to undergo the test of experience. It may quite well be proved to be wrong. But, if its enunciation has the effect of setting players to find out the right way out of the present difficulty, and that right way—whatever it may prove to be—is ultimately found, the purpose with which this brief essay has been set down will have been most satisfactorily attained.

LIFE'S EASTER DAYS.

THERE are more Easter days than the glad bells
Ring out, or chanting choirs in choral sing,
Where snow white lilies all their censers swing;
When resurrected hopes burst the frail shells
Which prisoned them, evolving from their cells
Reviving life; rare, radiant blossoming;
With more of joy, than all the past foretells.

God gives us Easter days besprent with bloom,
And when we seek our dead with tearful face,
(Our buried love, the friend of happier years,
We find the stone is rolled from sorrow's tomb,
An angel sits in grief's accustomed place,
And glorifies with faith the shrine of tears.

EMMA P. SEABURY.

A BIT OF RAIN-MAKING.

LIEUTENANT BOYLE T. SOMERVILLE, of the English navy, recently returned from the Hebrides islands, tells the following interesting tale regarding the work of a professional native rainmaker. Towards the end of the year, just after yam planting, there came an unusual period of drought, so that an inland tribe in the island of Aubrya went to its rainmaker and demanded his immediate attention thereto. He at once set to work to weave a sort of hurdle of the branches and leaves of a tree famed for its rain-producing qualities, which, being finished, was placed with proper incantations at the bottom of what should have been a water hole in the new parched bed of the mountain torrent. There it was then held in place with stones. Down came the rain; nor did it cease for forty-eight hours, by which time it had become too much of a good thing. Soon the rain-producing hurdle was quite ten feet under water in the seething torrent, and the people, much to their dismay, saw that their yams and the surrounding earth were beginning to wash away down the hillsides. The lieutenant continues: 'Now mark what comes of fooling with the elements. No man of the hill country was able to dive to the bottom of the water-hole to pull up the hurdle with its weight of stones, so the merciless rain still held on. At last the shore natives, accustomed to swimming and diving, heard what the matter was, and some of them coming to the assistance, the compeller of the elements was recovered from its watery bed, and—the rain stopped.' It is such a coincidence as this—happening, perhaps, once in a decade—which causes this people, now thoroughly Christianized, to refuse to give up their rain doctors, although all other outward forms of rank superstition appear to have been freely abandoned.

AN AMUSING ELECTRICAL ANECDOTE.

In his autobiography the late Sir W. Siemens relates an amusing anecdote. An Arab called his attention to the fact that when at the top of the Pyramid of Cheops, when he raised his hand with fingers outstretched, an acute ringing note was heard, the sound ceasing as soon as he let his hand fall. 'I found his assertion,' he writes, 'to be true. As soon as I raised one of my own fingers above my head, I felt a pricking in the fingers. That this could only be caused by an electrical phenomenon was proved by the slight electric shock felt on trying to drink out of a wine bottle. So I wrapped a full bottle of wine that I had with me in damp paper, and thus converted it into a Leyden-bottle, which was soon strongly charged with electricity by the simple device of holding it high above my head. The Arabs had already become distrustful on seeing small lightnings, as it were, issue from the wine bottles held up by myself and companions, and now held a brief consultation. Suddenly, at a given signal, each of my companions was seized by the guide who had led him up, who now tried to force him to go down again. I myself was standing at the very top of the pyramid, when the sheik of the Arabs came to me and told me, through my interpreter, that the Arabs had determined that we were at once to leave the pyramid, because we were practising magic, and it might damage the chance of their earning a living. On my refusing to obey orders the sheik caught hold of my left hand. I had awaited this moment, and held up my right hand with the bottle in the attitude of a magician, afterwards lowering it slowly towards the point of the sheik's nose. When quite close to that feature I felt a violent shock run through the bottle to my own arm, and was certain that the sheik must have received the equivalent. At any rate, he fell speechless on the stones, and a few anxious moments passed before he rose suddenly with a loud cry, and sprang down the gigantic steps of the pyramid with long strides. The Arabs, seeing this, and excited by the sheik's constant cries of "Magic! magic!" released my companions and followed their leader, leaving us complete masters of the pyramid.'

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