

# Musings AND Meditations

By Dog Toby

## A BUSH EDUCATION.

THE boat was slowly steaming away from the wharf, and the passengers were gradually settling down in their deck chairs prepared to enjoy the last look at the magnificent harbour lit up with the golden light of the setting sun. My neighbour had taken a book out of his pocket, but after slowly turning over a few pages he put it down and gazed into the blue haze of the fast receding hills. He looked like the typical cultured travelled Englishman, and I wondered how he thought New Zealand compared with other countries. By way of introducing myself, I offered him a copy of the paper, but he politely declined it saying he had already seen it. "I cannot understand," he remarked, "why it is that you people are so fond of running down your own country. To read the correspondence in the papers, and still more the various resolutions passed by different bodies, religious and otherwise; a stranger might well imagine that the colony was wholly given up to drinking, gambling, and heathenism. You have been having a vigorous controversy as to whether you are all pagans, and a pleasing interchange of compliments has taken place between some of your clergy in reference to this matter. Then you have your no-licence fanatics denouncing your women as drunkards and your young men as bar loafers, while the different religious organisations are perpetually deploring what they call the wide-spread prevalence of gambling, immorality, and religious indifference. I have travelled much, and perhaps have seen more of the world than many of these pessimists, and I know of no country where the inhabitants possess so much real moral worth as they do in this colony. Talk of us converting your country settlers, we want a few of your country settlers to convert us." He proceeded to talk of the wonderful beauty of our coast, and dwelt on the way in which their love for the Aegean Sea had influenced the Greek poets, and contrasted their appreciation of nature with the comparative indifference of the Latin writers. "You will wonder, perhaps," he went on, "what I know about the country people in New Zealand, and you think I am like Alexander Pope, who used to describe a landscape with his back to the window. But I can assure you that I inwardly smiled when I read the diatribes of your city folk on the paganism of the bush, because I felt none of them really knew anything about the subject. I was brought up in the usual English style and learnt all about the kings of Israel and Judah, and could read the New Testament in Greek, and was slightly high church in my tendencies, as befitted a member of an old Tory family. I took a brilliant degree at Cambridge, and was elected a Fellow of my College. I did not take up any tutorial work, but devoted myself to travel, and a life of leisured culture. In due time I came out here, and wandered aimlessly round seeing the show places. Just when I was thinking of returning I met an old college chum who had settled out here, and he asked me to ride out to his place in the country and pay him a visit. I could not start just then, so I said I would go up later, and he left me explicit directions how to get there, and said I couldn't possibly miss the way. But I contrived to miss it somehow, and I found myself at night, full wandering disconsolately about a desolate region, and wondering where I was."

I learnt to know what your people really are. The family consisted of the father and mother and three sons and three daughters, and they looked after me, thought I was a complete stranger in the true spirit of the good Samaritan. But what struck me most was the eagerness the children showed to improve themselves in every way. They had had next to no advantages, and yet they had read more standard books than many a University man has read, and it was wonderful to me how shrewd many of their simple remarks on well-known works were. They seemed to live in an atmosphere of what Patmore calls duties beautifully done, and if their views on the dogmas of religion were very imperfect, they nevertheless possessed that trusting childlike faith in a heavenly Father that formed the very inmost heart of the gospel, as preached by the shores of Gennesareth. And now I know you will smile at what I am going to tell you. I had written a small volume of essays, of which I was very proud, but which the best critics had stated to be brilliant and clever, but lacking in real knowledge of life. I had a copy with me and I lent it to the eldest girl to read. When she returned it she said she had liked it very much, but she was afraid she had not been able to understand a good deal of it. She said she did so wish she could write. I told her to try, and I would give her advice on what she wrote. Very shyly she brought me a few days later a little story she had written and asked me not to be too hard on it. I took it expecting to find some amusement, the grammar and spelling were far from perfect, and the style was very unformed. But underneath these things I saw something I had never seen before. I saw the pathos and the heroism of everyday life. I saw the courage that could bravely perform commonplace duties because they were duties, and the wistful longings for something higher and freer that were nevertheless put on one side as impossible of attainment, except at the cost of suffering to others. I saw it all, and with it came a deeper and truer knowledge of human goodness. My critics have never complained since that my work has shown an ignorance of life."

He rose from his chair and apologised for leaving me, saying he felt a little chilly, and thought he would go below. As he turned to go he dropped an envelope from the book he had been reading. I stooped to pick it up to return it to him, and as I did so my eye caught the name of one of the greatest of our living writers.

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Mrs. Elizabeth Peterson, 49 Butamen Street, Geelong, says she suffered from Bleeding of the Lungs for 18 months. One bottle of Dr. Sheldon's New Discovery for Coughs, Colds, and Consumption entirely cured her.

I was not a very good horseman, and I suppose I was riding with too loose a rein, for the horse suddenly stumbled and fell and I was thrown heavily to the ground. I was in great pain, and scarcely able to move, and I don't know what I should have done if a trap had not happened to pass by just then, in which I was driven to a neighbouring cottage. I had to stay there several days, as I had injured my arm rather badly, and it was during that visit that



### LANDMARKS OF THE GAME.

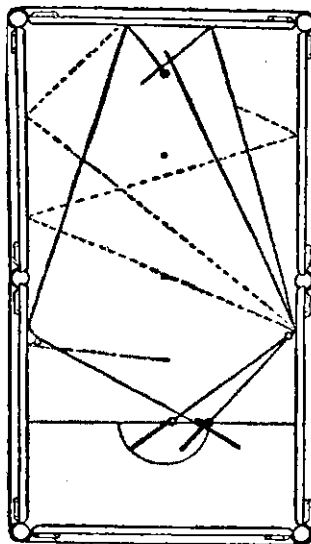
Like the old county families, the game of billiards has its traditions fairly strongly marked. It quickly struck a sympathetic chord in the breasts of sporting aristocrats when first introduced into this country some time during the eighteenth century from France. The new game became most popular, and, as had been found necessary in the reign of James I. with regard to bowls, an Act of Parliament was passed prohibiting any journeyman, labourer, apprentice, or servants from playing under certain prescribed penalties. As a result, a comparative few, composed of the "bloods" about town and their entourage, monopolised billiards. The gaming clubs and the best hotels and inns only could boast of a table. In those gambling days billiards came under the general ban, and not without reason. Pure enough in itself, it suffered by contamination; by being made the medium of the sharper and trickster; these associations clung more closely to the game than ivy to a tree. There was no shaking them off. Thus it came about that the mere mention of the word "billiards" caused the piously-minded and those professing so to be to lift their hands in lamentation at the sins and wickednesses of this world. For a game to have outlived such detraction influences and deeply-grounded prejudices must bespeak of its innate merits. There is none better nor more scientific. It provides a beautiful study, a mental recreation, and it may be set to serve a grand lesson in self-control. Yet only in the last few years have billiards and billiard-playing taken their proper place in the forefront of our sports and pastimes. To go back into the mists of a century or so ago is to find London the hub of the game here in England. It had then had something like a fifty years career. Billiard tables of the pocketed pattern had found their way to America before the War of Independence. High officials had transported them there; probably taken them from their town houses. The game was fairly well established in the fashionable circle. It is curious to reflect upon the difficulties of the wooden beds and list cushions, the square-headed mace which did duty to push the player's ball up and down the table. They are reflected in the condensed character of the games played, varying from 7 points to 21 points up. The high-banked cushions were a source of certain failure

when the cue-ball rested against them. In despite of all the drawbacks there was, even under these conditions, a certain magnetism about the play. It became the cult of the sporting fraternity. In due course there came the leather tips and the accompanying chalk, known as "twisting-chalk," which do duty today. These improvements advanced the cause of billiards in a remarkable degree. They led to a much higher standard of play, and the school of players, amateur and professional, upon whose teachings the base of the present-day game, in all its ramifications, is set.

Piccadilly and the Haymarket, those lively haunts of the old days, first welcomed the billiard-table to London. There were big matches for big money stakes quite 100 years ago, when jewelled ladies and their gallants wagered their guineas by the thousands. The Americans vied with us at the pocket game, and more than one expert player made the perilous Atlantic passage to try conclusions with our best. By gradual degrees the provinces became imbued with a fondness for the board of green cloth. In this wise Brighton and Manchester, towns which figure largely in billiard history, managed in due course to supplant London for a time as the headquarters of the game. When Brighton was at the height of its popularity, Jonathan Kentfield, the father of billiards, and the first recognised champion, made his claim good to be considered the first exponent in the land. He has left behind a work that tells how intimately he knew his art. Billiards owes much to him, as he invented the slate bed and rubbered cushions, improvements which were taken up and manufactured by Messrs. Thurston and Co., now some seventy years ago. After a twenty odd years' hold on the championship, Kentfield resigned the title to John Roberts, a player of remarkable native ability, who gave the Lancashire city a connection with first-class billiards which had since been kept in line by successive generations of players.

In the course of a few years billiards reverted to London as its chief centre, and it has remained there ever since, notwithstanding many high provincial inducements. It was in Saville House, Leicester-square, on the site now occupied by the Empire Theatre, that John Roberts, sen., displayed his talents, and where his son, John Roberts, jun., later destined to be the leading figure in all practical billiards, learned to play his inimitable game. The father was all brilliancy and dash, with a curious partiality for knocking the balls off the table, a performance he could accomplish at will. His play was redolent of double strength forcing strokes, made in the most nonchalant and suspiciously accurate fashion. In his earlier years John Roberts, jun., betrayed the same characteristics. He had all the freedom and power of cue possessed by his father. They had probably come to him by the force of good example. But the younger John had to temper his stroke-power and revise his methods before he became an outstandingly great player. His eyes must have been widely opened at the delicacy of touch, the screw effects gained by those nifty little strokes so artistically rendered by William Cook, the young man who succeeded in beating old John Roberts for the championship in a famous match in the year 1870. This was played at the St. James's Hall, Piccadilly, which for several subsequent seasons was the selected battle-ground for all the leading matches.

The Guildhall Tavern, in the City, Gatti's Restaurant, in Villiers-street, Strand, and the Royal Aquarium, Westminster, became, in their turn, the resort of the great players. Matches and tournaments, pool and pyramids (the great round games of those days), were contested by the chief professionals. There is a fund of anecdote connected with many of the contests. The evolution of many set strokes, which now figure in the midst of break arrangements, and are passed over as ranking in the commonplace, can be traced to the seventies and early eighties, when a match of 1000 up once a month in the season was



The old and the newer way of playing from the D when your opponent safely misses under the side cushion and the red ball is on the spot. The continuous lines show the movements of the cue-balls, and the intersected lines the run of the played object-balls.