

the balance at his banker's to sink below three figures, would frown at the idea of that banker making a habit of attending at a board of green cloth every afternoon. But, really, we are not fast. Colonel Rayner, if ever he had any wild-oats, had sown them long before his crop of white hairs came; Mr. Rice, chairman of the board of magistrates, never shews any desire, like Shakspeare's beadle, to do these things for which he punishes others; Captain Woodwall, R.N., has lost all bad naval habits, except an occasional hasty interjection, with his left leg; Mr. Long, of model-farm celebrity, is as innocent as one of his own fat bullocks; Dr. Keane is respected by all except the rabbits and frogs which come into his experimental hands, and if he has a secret penchant, it is merely for manslaughter; Mr. Ricketus indulges in punning, but this is his only vice. If you observe that it had need be, I do not contradict you. There are several others who occasionally drop into the billiard-room—men generally engaged in hunting, or shooting, or fishing, or who only reside in the neighbourhood for a portion of the year, and some of these may have reprehensible inclinations, but if so, they repress them, overawed by the virtue of the *habitués*. Of these latter, I am the youngest, and used till lately to pass, therefore, as the most frolicsome. Yet I was, and am, the slowest of the slow. The school at which I was educated was conducted on Pestalozzian principles; the private tutor who had charge of my adolescence, for I never went to college, was a mild clergyman. I have had no fiery ordeal to go through, and do not particularly regret the fact. It seems to me that all young men who have been 'wild' suffer from debt and indigestion.

One wet afternoon last autumn we had a very full meeting; three dog-carts and a two-wheeled omnibus stood under the shed in the yard of the *Red Bear* as I passed through it on my way from the bank; and six players were assembled in the billiard-room,

some taking their cues from the boxes in which they were kept securely locked, others chalking the tops, all preparing for a combat in some way or other, except Mr. Rice, whose age, trembling hand, and gaunty toe unfitted him for playing himself, though he took great delight in criticising the performances of others from the raised seat which he occupied, and at times, when the chances were considerably in his favour, shaking sixpence on the division of this or that competitor. Joe the maker gave out the balls; he was but a lad, and his voice was cracking; indeed, he had been a chorister till lately, but the failure of his organ had unfrocked him.

'Red plays upon white, he squeaked out in a shrill treble. 'Yellow's his player,' he added in a gruff bass.

Red was Captain Woodwall, who balanced himself on his leg of flesh, while the timber one struck out stiffly behind him, and dribbled his ball up to the white with that care which the commencement of every enterprise demands.

'Yellow on red' (bass). 'Green's his player' (treble).

The owner of green was the doctor, six foot two in his stockings, thin as an eel, and very shortsighted. He adjusted his spectacles, blew his nose, placed himself about two yards from the table, on which he almost lay, and looked along his cue as if it had been a gun, as he made his stroke.

Mr. Long played next. 'Tut, tut, dear me,' he said, when the ball had ceased rolling. 'I have left you tight under the cushion, doctor. I am so sorry. I did not do it on purpose, I assure you.—'I have left my ball asfe,' he added to me, who played next—'quite unintentional, I assure you; and green is such a bad colour to play on—I dislike being on it very much myself.'

'I think there's a double,' said I.

'No,' cried Mr. Rice; 'it's as safe as a church.'

'An Irish church, then!' cried Ricketus, as the ball rolled into a pocket—not the one I had in view,