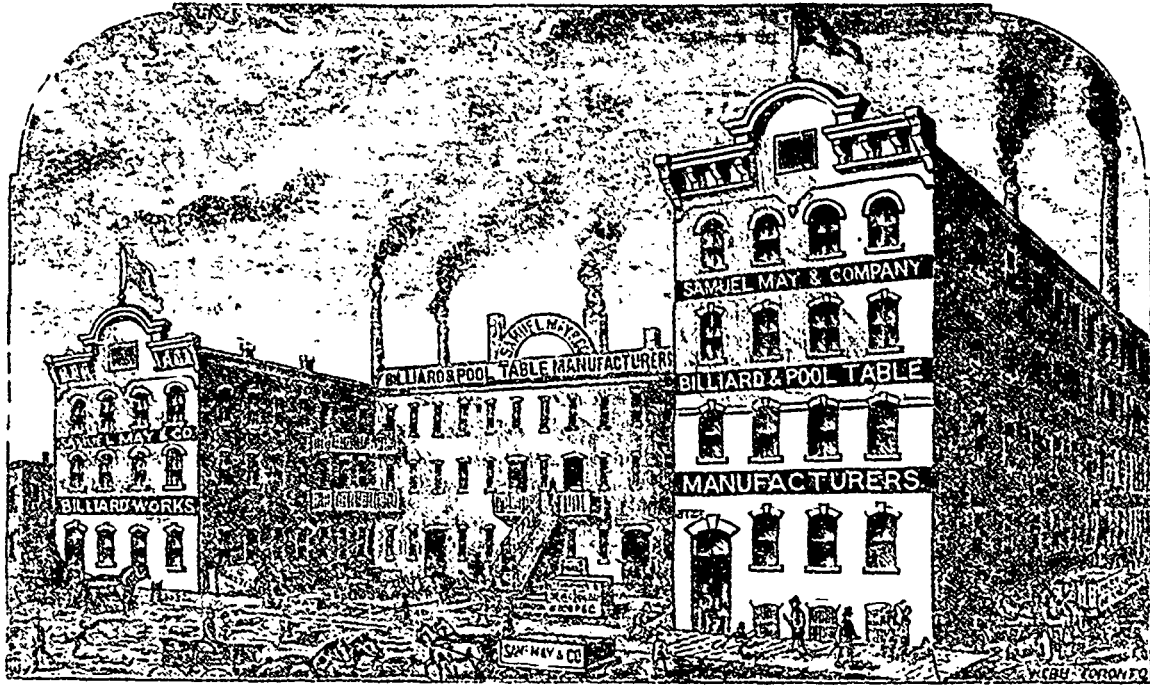




THE KING OF GAMES AND THE GAME OF KINGS.

Prior to dilating on the characteristics of the king of games, we will briefly glance at the game of kings. Whether the game was imported from the Persians during the consulate of Lucullus, or introduced from the East to Europe by the Emperor Caligula, we shall not stop to discuss, but on the contrary, shall avail ourselves of certain manuscripts. In the will of Cathure More, a sub-King of Ireland, who reigned over the district of Leinster, and who died in the year A.D.; 148, occurs the following bequest:—"To Drimoth, fifty billiard balls of brass, with the pools and cues of the same material; ten tric-tracs* of exquisite workmanship; twelve chess-boards with chess-men."

It was on the return of the Templars from the second crusade, that they introduced the game of billiards more generally; the game presented the two-fold attraction of an amusement, and a health-preserving exercise; as such it commended itself to the monks of the period, and we venture to conclude that the student-order of the present day would display more wisdom than they do, if instead of the violent exercise by which they cultivate muscle at the cost of brain, they were so far to imitate the monks as to direct their attention to this scientific game. They might then discover the possibility of blending gymnastics with science, of teaching the eye to judge of distances, the mind to calculate forces, and the arm to execute with rapidity the dictates of the will; they might learn that this game expands the chest, and affords a practical basis for the appreciation of mathe-

* Tric-Trac (which is the French and German name for backgammon) was a game somewhat similar to the backgammon of to-day: it was a favorite diversion of the clergy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and so important a qualification for a gentleman was a knowledge of the game considered that Sir Roger DeCoverley when seeking a chaplain "of piety, learning and urbanity," stipulated that his reverence should at least know something of backgammon.

matical and geometric truth. We next hear of the game of billiards in the reign of Louis XI. of France, who preferred this pastime to the bloody tournaments of his day. Mary, Queen of Scots, was a passionate lover of the game, and on the eve of her execution, wrote to the Archbishop of Glasgow that her "billiard table had just been taken from her as a preliminary step to her punishment." As the King of France married the Dauphin to Mary, it is supposed she became acquainted with the game during her sojourn in Paris. The Empress Josephine was so fascinated by billiards, that during Napoleon's gloomy moments she was wont to challenge him to a game, and he is said never to have appeared more happy than when so engaged. The adaptability of the game to both sexes will no doubt eventuate in it being generally adopted in the houses of the affluent. Among the feminine devotees of the game occurs the name of Madame De Stael, the Duchesse De Berri also, by her attachment to it, rendered it fashionable among the elite of Paris; there are probably at the present day few houses of any pretension in Europe, where the billiard room is not regarded as indispensable. With respect to the salutary effect of the game, the late Sir Astley Cooper remarked that:—"In country houses, removed from the theatre and the balls of the metropolis, operas, soirees, and other amusements peculiar to large cities, billiards would not only supply the place of these excitements but would contribute something healthier and purer to the desired enjoyment. We should all sleep more soundly (he added) if we made it a rule to play billiards for an hour or two each evening before going to bed. Our wives and children would be more healthy and happy, and more fond of home, for there is nothing that so endears the family circle, as the recollection of amusements shared in common."

Were we not restricted as to space, it would be easy to furnish illustrations confirmatory of the testimony of Sir Astley, but it behoves us rather to dilate somewhat on what has been accomplished in Toronto, by way of fostering the game of billiards, in the eminently practical fashion of manufacturing the tables. Eighteen years ago

Messrs. Riley & May became the pioneer billiard manufacturers of this Dominion; at that no very distant period, there was no necessity for a manufactory of the kind of greater dimensions than eighteen feet by twelve, and Mr. May's own hands, with the aid of a single workman, were adequate to the demands of the establishment for manual labor. At the present time the manufactory which is depicted at the head of these columns will convey some idea of the extension of the business, the portion to the right has been erected by Mr. May, the present head of the firm, and its five flats will be occupied by about one hundred and thirty men. The ground floor will be chiefly occupied by the show rooms, while cabinet-makers, fitters, slate-finishers, marquetry cutters, ball-turners, cue-makers, upholsterers, varnishers, etc., will occupy the upper floors. The floorage of the establishment exceeds 30,000 square feet, and it is all but superfluous to add that every improvement in machinery that ingenuity and experience could suggest has been introduced, so that they who are sufficiently interested in the game of billiards to witness the various processes by which a table and its furnishings are produced, will always be welcome to inspect the factory. There is one feature of the billiard table on which Mr. May specially prides himself, and that is the cushion for which he has taken out patents, in relation to successive improvements; the great difficulty Mr. M. has had to overcome is that of procuring STRAIGHT FIRE-TEMPERED SPRINGS, this he has surmounted by inventing a cushion which has a RIBBON OF ROLL-TEMPERED BRASS CUT STRAIGHT FROM THE SHEETS; this brazen ribbon in combination with the finest Para rubber, imparts increased and uniform elasticity to the cushion throughout; billiard players will not need to be told how absolutely dependent they are, for enjoyment of the game, on that uniformity of elasticity in the cushion which renders the table so fascinating. The manufactory extends from

81-89 Adelaide St. West,

TORONTO.