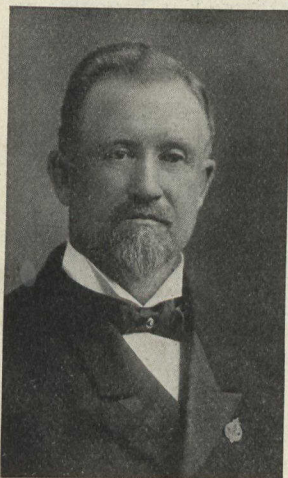


CURLING

The Most Popular Winter Game on Earth—First of Two Articles.

By H. J. P. GOOD



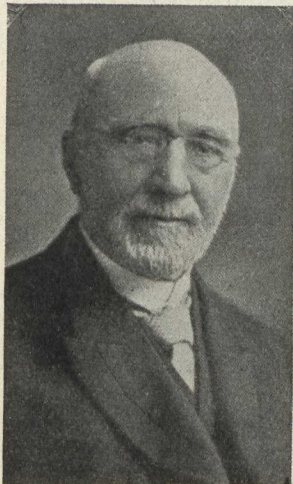
Mr. J. D. Flavelle,
The famous Lindsay Curler.

ALTHOUGH not exactly suitable for tropical climes a perusal of any decent proportion of the literature devoted to curling—a perusal of the whole would tax the lifetime of an octogenarian or perhaps a nonagenarian—would convince anybody that curling is the most numerously played game on earth—or should it be said ice? Peradventure it is hardly correct to call it the most “popular,” as it is by no means a “spectators’” pastime, notwithstanding that it is not lacking in picturesque, so far at least

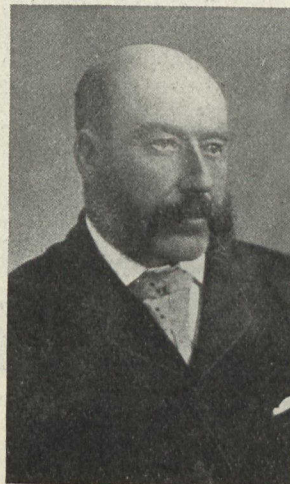
as the varied costumes, postures and groupings, not omitting the language, of the players are concerned. But that it is more generally played than any other game in the cold countries of the British Empire is undoubted. The devotees of hockey are numerous—in Canada—but there are far more lookers-on than participators, whereas with curling it is the other way on. There is hardly a town of any size in this country where clubs do not exist, and few villages where curling is not to some extent practised. Every section has its association, but no association includes either all the clubs or all the players. There are distributed throughout the Dominion innumerable unattached clubs—possibly “coteries” would be a better word to use in this connection—that owe no allegiance to any central body. These have their scratch matches and even their organised matches, but distance precludes their going in for district medals, tankards, and so on. Explorers of the far north have carried their stones with them, notwithstanding the addition they have been to their burden, of which the lighter the better, and pioneers have hastened immediately on settling to clear a space for a wee bit of the grand auld sport.

I have heard hockey described as the young man's game and curling as the old man's. There is certainly some foundation for the idea suggested, for hockey, as played hereabouts at any rate, is far too strenuous for aged bones and set muscles, but to relegate curling exclusively to the grey-bearded and hoary-headed is to slander a pastime that is quite as well adapted for the youth. As a matter of fact I am rather inclined to think that many a man would have reaped more advantage both physically and mentally had he taken up curling rather than hockey in the earlier days of his career. However that may be, that curling is conducive to activity as well as to steadiness of mind, to health and to vigour and to longevity is most certain. And these are by no means its only beneficial qualities, for as a promoter of good fellowship, as a friendship strengthener, it has no equal. No man of warped faculties can be a good curler. And that it encourages a Christian spirit—Rev. Mr. Milligan, whose tirade against the Scottish curlers for visiting Niagara Falls on Sunday, will not soon be forgotten, to the contrary nevertheless—is abundantly proven by the number of clergymen who affect the game.

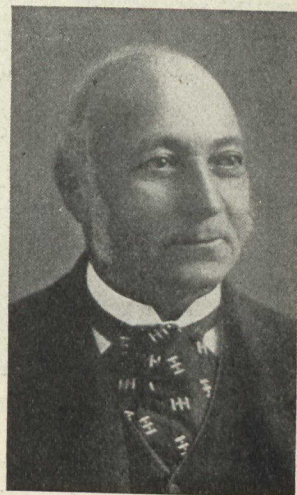
It has been said that every section of Canada has its central or governing association. This is true. The Maritime Provinces have theirs with a membership of some twenty clubs. Quebec has hers with a roll of twice as many. Ontario can boast in her association at least twice and a half as many affiliated clubs as Quebec. Manitoba can claim two score. The Northwestern Association, in spite of the prevailing magnificent distances and the frequent inconveniences of travel, possesses the loyalty of a dozen, and British Columbia a like number. I shall probably be told that hockey can boast in Ontario alone of as many as all these put together. Perhaps, but there are half a dozen curlers to one hockey player—mind I said “player”—and ice-hockey as an organised institution has no very extensive foothold elsewhere in the British Empire except in Quebec. Comparisons, however, are always odious, and, to tell the truth, in trying to make this deduction, I



Mr. J. S. Russell,
Toronto, 21 years Secretary of
the Ontario Association.



Mr. J. S. Robertson,
Sec. Manitoba Curling Association



Mr. A. A. Stevenson,
Montreal.

came exceedingly near finding myself in a difficult labyrinth of doubt. But it still appears to me that as an active, well sustained species of recreation curling has the pull. Witness the fact that in this city, where the roaring game has half a dozen more or less handsome covered rinks devoted to its use, hockey has not one that was primarily dedicated to it or one for even the use of which it is not indebted to curling. That is surely something for the admirers of the energetic, dashing game to ponder, and, in passing, I may be permitted to say that it is something not altogether to its credit.

Curling may be, as it is styled by the Rev. J. Kerr, captain and chaplain of our Scottish visitors of 1902-3 and chaplain of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club, and the author of “The History of Curling” and of “Curling in Canada and the United States”—the latter being an eight-hundred-page story of the Scottish trip—the most characteristic of Scottish sports, but it is also a game that Canada has adopted as its own and adopted so thoroughly that it has become one of three games in which this country can lead the world, the other two being lacrosse and hockey. The United States can boast supremacy in baseball, England shares with Australia the honours of cricket, but this country eclipses them all in three different sports—two indigenous and one appropriated. At the beginning curling was a species of quoits played on ice with stones smoothed by and found at water-courses. Next, as Mr. Kerr says, came the Giant, or Boulder age, when the curler took a large boulder or block

from the river-bed, inserted a rough iron handle therein, and propelled it along the ice to the desired goal. There was apparently considerable variety about the size and weight of the “stane” at this time, for we are told that 60 lbs. was the minimum and 200 lbs. the maximum. It is not astonishing that in those days the player used but one stone, for two would have out-weighed, if they did not out-size, the most ponderous of men, excepting of course a freak like Daniel Lambert, and of a surety cracked, any but most substantial ice. It was not until the middle of the Eighteenth Century that the stane took on a civilised shape, but it was not until a century later that the artistic and even dainty affairs that now skim along the ice in snug houses that are veritable winter palaces came into vogue.

Ice is of course the first requisite of curling and it is in Canada where ice can be found of the best quality. And this is not because of the coldness of our climate, but because of the ingenuity and enterprise of our people, who have provided their favourite recreation with a habitation instead of leaving it to the rude, bleak mercies of generally severe and always uncertain elements. That the sport is best enjoyed in the open air, as the afore-quoted Mr. Kerr remarks, is possible to the ultra-rugged, but it is not only possible but absolutely certain that the lovers of the game in this country prefer shelter and some degree of comfort with theirs; and statistics have not yet shown that life has deteriorated or death benefited by the preference, while it is certain that the game has reached



Barrie Curlers who Won the Ontario Tankard, 1907.

Standing—Messrs. A. E. Stapleton, Sheriff Harvey, Alex. Brownlee, Alex. Habbick.
Sitting—Messrs. D. A. MacNiven, H. J. Grasett (skip), Geo. Hogg (skip), J. G. Scott.