

THE DIAMOND-TIPPED CUE

BEGINNING OF CHAOS IN AMERICAN BILLIARDS.

THE SECOND CHAMPIONSHIP—RULES SET ASIDE TO FAVOR RUDOLPHE—ENTRANCE FEES THAT WERE NOT PAID.

The second national championship was that of 1869. Like that of 1863, it was instituted in this city. It was meant to be progressive in other ways than the abrogation of the push shot. More than the playing rules were subjected to change. The code for the regulation of matches before play began was almost altogether different from that of 1863. The new rules were dictated by the valuable lessons five and a half years of contests had furnished, and they promised to bring about reform in several directions. It must be recorded that they failed sometimes. To continue habits is easier than to break them.

The most important of the new regulations for the government of matches, irrespective of what should constitute valid counting strokes, were one requiring the winner to take all receipts above expenses and one designed to counteract partisanship. It had been found that to allow the champion to insist upon the city of his residence as the place of contest tended to create so strong a feeling in his behalf that the challenger, if a non-resident, might be given reason to consider that he was placed at a marked disadvantage in having to encounter the holder of the emblem on his own chosen ground. While in fact the old championship was competed for in but four cities—New-York, Rochester, Montreal, and Chicago, in that order—it could legally have been played for wherever its custodian chose to fix his residence, whether in a city of half a million inhabitants or in a village of but a hundred souls. This uncertainty was not desirable. It was never an obstacle during the continuance of the old championship, but it was liable to prove such. No expert would be apt to issue a challenge, which required \$500 to make it fully binding, if he had reason to believe that his prospective opponent would force him to go into some hamlet and play. Therefore the new code defined the places of contest as Washington, Philadelphia, Richmond, New-York, Brooklyn, Hartford, Boston, New-London, Conn., Buffalo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago, and St. Louis. New-London was included because in that city resided a likely competitor in the person of Melvin Foster. All the other probable contestants were then living in New-York, Boston, Montreal, and Chicago. A champion residing in any of those cities could not play two successive matches in it. If he played the first in it he would have to play the second in that one of the others which was nearest his own residence and that of his challenger. The third he could play in his own city. Not residing in any of those cities, he could select from among them, and could also choose the same one for every contest. If both challenger and challenged lived in the same one of those cities, and the challenged party were beaten in it, the next match could be played there, as also could a third and fourth, and so on, if there was a change of champions at every contest. To the list of cities San Francisco was added toward the close of 1869, the holder of the cue having changed his residence from this city to that.

It was in San Francisco that the rule as to playing successive matches at the residence of the champion was first violated, Rudolphe, in whom the preliminary stakeholder took a kindly interest, being advised to go there by that official, who, as the writer happens to know, having got it from his own lips after he had telegraphed Rudolphe the advice that the latter really desired, was not cognizant of the rules. The mistake having been made, it was maintained by the stakeholder that a mistake was not possible to him, inasmuch as there should not have been any such rule, and, there being one, it must be a dead letter to insure his being right. In other words, it was only necessary for Rudolphe to wish to go to San Francisco. He had a perfect right to do so, regardless of the express letter of the rule, as well as of its purpose. If he was content to brave partisanship, there was no reason at all why billiards should not suffer in its fair fame through being the medium of partisanship. It was reasoning "made expressly for the occasion." Poetic justice required that there should be a disgraceful hubbub while that San Francisco game was in progress. Rudolphe claimed to have been hindered in it by the adherents of his opponent. Indeed, he went to the extreme of alleging that once, when he had sent his ball off the table and among the spectators, it was picked up by Joseph Coburn, who fired it back with intent to do bodily harm. There is some reason to believe that, under stress of great provocation, Mr. Coburn's exuberant play of fancy was not inapt to cause him to assume an attitude in which possibly there lurked bodily harm to some one, and it is perhaps undeniable that Mr. Coburn desired to see "the best man win," believing that man to be Deery; but the surest way to that end was not by killing Rudolphe, as that rounding of his tempestuous career would have summarily terminated an undecided game. Besides, it is to be doubted if Mr. Coburn, having devoted so much time to other arts, was a good enough marksman to hit Rudolphe with that ball. A few years later, in the billiard room of the Spangler House, this city, Maurice Daly tried to do it with another ball. Daly had a marked advantage over Coburn in being within a few feet of the Mephistophelian Frenchman, and yet he never singled a hair. The six-and-a-half-ounce sphere hurtled past Rudolphe's head as if he bore a charmed life. The mark of where the ball struck constituted a portion of the frescoing until the room was torn down. Had it hit Rudolphe it might have killed him. Down in New-Orleans, once, Daly caught Rudolphe where he could not lodge, and was proceeding to polish the floor with the electric friction begotten of the dark broadcloth suit the Frenchman always wore when his nightgown was not in request. Peacemakers interposed, and no gore dripped, although there is an indistinct idea that the affair came very near reaching a police court, if it did not quite get there. As far back as 18 years ago it was often wondered what it was that kept Rudolphe from thickening the ranks of the cherubim. He is in Paris to-day, and cynics declare that Paris is as near as many Frenchmen ever get to heaven. There is, at all events, no record of any French professional billiard player having sneaked up nearer.

The preliminary stakeholder in the new championship series subsequently resigned his office in a fit of *amour propre*. The ground he took was that when he accepted the post he supposed that he was both preliminary and final stakeholder, and that if he could not be such he would be nothing. This was evidence that he had no read the rules, which required him to turn over the stakes to a committee of three appointed to every one of the cities in which championship matches could take place, and which committee were to arrange the details in behalf of the contestants, as well as to arbitrate whenever they could not agree; for it must be borne in mind that Rudolphe had come among us, and he was never known to agree without making haste politely to apologize for the act as a preliminary to canceling it. Later on, as the representative of Rudolphe, who had secured the championship by defeating Deery in that San Francisco game the retired stakeholder proposed again to ignore the rules by having Frank Parker come to this city and play as Rudolphe wished, the Frenchman having declared New-York to be his residence and having here defeated Joseph Dion for the championship, which game barred the one between Rudolphe and Parker from being played here. It is a fact that special inducements were held out to Parker, and he expressed a willingness to yield on certain conditions, one of which was a violation of another rule, but the Chicago player was informed by his representative that the latter would not communicate any proposition not strictly in accordance with the championship code, and that his resignation was a Parker's service. This decided the Chicagoan and the contest took place in Buffalo, the half-way city designated by the rules. The incident is of value only as showing how easy is the right to those who, possessing a respect for laws, good or bad, have the desire and the backbone to go right.

The challenge of Parker to the winner of the then undecided match between Rudolphe and Joseph Dion was in the nature of a surprise. It was known to but three persons that Parker had been singled out as the likeliest available man to beat the "Mysterious Ru," as he was called soon after his arrival in this country in 1868. Parker's liability to win was due to Rudolphe's liability to underrate him by estimating his skill on the basis of his average speed whereas he was one of the few experts who could play almost as well for money as for fun which fact guided parties in this city, who were almost strangers to him, in offering to furnish one-half his stake if he would challenge. It is a part of the inside history of this challenge that, of the three persons who knew why Parker was selected, two of them laughed at the idea when his name was first mentioned although they subsequently saw the force of the reasoning of the third, and volunteered to furnish the \$250 forfeit if participation in Chicago would contribute the other money. The situation was critical. Not half so much through his own fault as because of the stubborn refusal of silly theorists held by some few Americans to demonstrate themselves on the billiard table, which theory presupposed "the absolute invincibility of a second-rate Frenchman over any first-class American," Rudolphe had become the great disturber of the peace of American billiards long after the other "war" had died out, and who Chris O'Connor and Baron Bowman, Neil Bryan and Philip Tieman were hand in hand on more with "Governor" Phelan. It was essential to a restoration of peace that Rudolphe should be beaten, as without the championship he and his adherents would be powerless to argue. On the merits he was beaten by Cyrille Dion in May, 1870; but a wrong decision, rendered possibly only because the were three referees—for the first and only in billiards, and no one of whom, singularly say, gave the decision—enabled him to retain the championship. Joseph Dion was his next challenger. Dion might win, and it would not have looked well for his brother Cyrille to challenge in advance; Deery was in San Francisco and unavailable. Foster had been singularly unsuccessful with respect to this championship, and for that reason, added to the fact that he was a

then paying much attention to practice, was virtually out of the lists. Parker proved a happy thought. No one could have been more astonished than himself when he was written to. But it must go upon record that his case is the only known one in which Chicago has neglected monetarily and effusively to back up its own representative in billiards. Had she given him the least encouragement, instead of predicting that he could not win, Parker would in all likelihood have vanquished Cyrille Dion in the Chicago game that followed his conquest of Rudolphe in Buffalo. He had the usually imperturbable Canadian so "rattled" before play was one-fourth over that he was unable to reflect that an unlevel table, as he supposed it to be, was altogether to the advantage of one who, like himself, played a strident and swift ball, and wholly to the detriment of Parker, who was rather a nurser than a round-the-table player. It was a surprise to all but a few when Parker defeated Rudolphe. Some few of the Chicagoans were so piqued because they had failed to support their man that they explained their error of judgment by hinting mysteriously that Rudolphe had allowed the game to go by default. There was no motive for his doing so, and such a crime is never committed in the absence of a strong and sordid motive. He had much to lose by it, and nothing to gain, because there was no betting. It is at least doubtful if the Chicagoan would have won had not Rudolphe been distracted by matters wholly disconnected with the match; but it is at all events certain that there was nobody more liable to conquer him than Parker, who was at that period a man of excellent generalship on the billiard table, besides being nervy and tenacious. There has never been a particle of evidence that Rudolphe designedly lost.

After the cue passed out of the hands of Parker no attention was paid to its rules save in the contest between Cyrille Dion and Melvin Foster, which was the first after the emblem came into the possession of Dion through his defeat of Parker. Between that Foster-Dion game and the next one Michael Phelan died, and after that event the championship became a sort of go-as-you-please competition. Every subsequent contest took place in this city, and in one of them John C. Heenan was referee. Unfamiliar with billiards, he gave a decision that the game should be played over, and it was. Such a thing was never before known in public billiards, which is a game that upon the abstract rights, if not upon the merits, of the contestants, one must inevitably win and the other lose. Its like has never been known in billiards since. The referee was simply a mouthpiece for others, who had the knowledge to deal logically with the situation, but lacked the courage. Best to them was the way that was easiest. It was a simple matter, and not of infrequent occurrence. D. B. Scofield, now a Clerk in one of our courts, was the marker. He had unwittingly erred in scoring up the points made by one player. This had necessarily, in billiard practice, to be also the error of two other persons—the player and his umpire. Strictly, it was wholly the player's, as the marker, no less than the umpire, was simply his agent. It is not necessary to discuss whether or not at the time the marker attempted rectification it could have legally been made without the consent of the opposing player. It will suffice, without indicating which side was entitled to the game, to show that there could have been no draw in reason. If the player who had been denied certain points was entitled to them, then it followed that the other was not entitled to any points he may have made by reason of having one or more innings he would not have had but for that denial to his antagonist. If the player was not entitled to the points he had not been given at the proper time, then the other had to win if he made 1,500, which was the complement. Deciding the affair a draw was in effect declaring that one of the contestants was and was not entitled to certain points. As the game will not be referred to again, it may be added that it was played in Tammany Hall on Jan. 2, 1873, that the undecided score was 1,500 to 1,486 in favor of Maurice Daly against Cyrille Dion, and that the play-off, on Jan. 9, was won by Dion.

There were four important changes in the playing rules of this championship. The exclusion of the push shot need not be dwelt upon. The size of the table was reduced from 6 by 12 to 5½ by 11. The table was, as before, a four-pocket, but the size of the jaw was formally made 4 inches, and not more than three successive carroms could be made in any one "jawing." The fourth change equalized carroms by counting three for any single one and six for every double. Prior to this two points had been reckoned for a carrom on white and either red, three for a carrom on the two reds, and five for a carrom on both reds and the white. The alteration was a crotchet of a journalist, and it was made rather in deference to his wishes than because of any demand for it among professionals. Nobody objected to it at that time. The idea sought to be attained was strictly just, and it was urged by one who had shown capacity in his peculiar sphere. But it was overlooked that that very capacity presumptively unfitted him to shape the pursuits or professions of others. It was easy enough to show by the processes of simple arithmetic that in a game of 1,500 points one man might have to make 750 different carroms to win, while the other would have to make but 500, and upon this premise was based the readily-reached conclusion that the luck of one man in getting the two reds to play upon would offset 33½ per cent. of the superior skill of the other. There is nothing the matter with this theory, whose superficial charm is certainly inviting, except that it can never be borne out in practice. The nearest approach to it would be on a carrom table, and even there the white and either red would not be hit more than about 15 per cent. oftener than the two reds. Any marked advantage of one set of balls over either of the others presupposes that the player will aim to play the former wherever readily possible. It would be difficult to demonstrate that the change has not proved a disadvantage to billiards, rather than a blessing. It was a step toward monotony, and a long one. Variety was clearly the aim of those who devised the four-ball game; and right here let it be said that this game is no more of American origin than the three-ball is strictly of French. The four-ball game originated in France, where six-pocket tables were once abundant. It was called at first "The Game of the Revolution." It was simply an intermediary between the English game and the Russian, the former comprising hazards and carroms with three balls, and the latter carroms and hazards with five. The four-ball game began to lose its interest as soon as it was counted in threes and sixes, and it lost more of it when it began to be counted in ones, with two for a double carrom; for then a miss had either not to be penalized at all or it became as costly as the pocketing of the cue ball. The equalization of carroms made the game less interesting not only to the spectators, but also to the average player, who, if he missed the disappointment that at times might result from having to play a white and red, also missed the more than compensating gratification at other times of counting quickly off the two reds. By the old method the chance of getting the reds was always a stimulus. It is too late now to secure personal testimony, and in the absence of it perhaps it may be as well to assume that the men who devised the four-ball game were not altogether fools when they made some carroms count two and others three. The change in 1869 was an attempt to secure perfect equity in a game in which there must always be an admixture of chance. It really directed profounder attention to the luck or chance that is positively ineradicable, and which must be so in order that the game shall endure. It is only necessary to reduce a diversion absolutely to rule to kill it. It ceases to divert when it becomes altogether science or pretty much labor. In our growing too wise in our pastimes there lurks the danger of becoming too wearisome.

The championship of the Diamond Cue was of course established through the medium of a tournament. That introduced a feature new to billiards in the guise of an entrance fee. It was merely nominal, being but 5 per cent. of the prize money, \$1,000, contributed by Messrs. Phelan & Collender, who also gave the Diamond Cue. The tournament was really an open one, the entrance fees being designed as a bar to triflers, who might have sought notoriety by presenting themselves as competitors when they lacked the skill to justify participation. This entrance-fee system has made no progress in billiards. It has been imitated in perhaps but one national tournament since, and certainly in not more than two. The tournament of 1885 in this city called for \$250 from every player. It is believed that they heard the call. The tournament of 1869 exacted but \$50. Of the eight who entered, it is certain that four or five paid it before the play began. It is also certain that anybody who won a prize had to pay his entrance fee after the tournament was over, if he had not handed over the \$50 before. In the tournament of 1885, which was arranged so that four of the five players would surely win a prize at least equal to the \$250 entrance fee, while the fifth would, by the system of dividing the net receipts equally among all, be quite likely to get a prize that would cover his fee, all of them paid it after the tournament was over. In other words, when they came to receive their prize money they did not get back what they had never paid in. The most important function performed by the entrance fees was to add them to the announced prizes before play began. Thus the five appeared to be playing for \$2,250, whereas really they were contending for but \$1,000, given by the Brunswick, Balke & Collender Company, and whatever net receipts the tournament might develop. This will explain why there were so many as four prizes among so few as five players in 1885, and why the unexampled plan of dividing the gate money so that the winner of no game received as much as he who won every one of his games was adopted, instead of the orthodox one of dividing the receipts in the same ratio as the original prize money. The fact is, it is practically impossible to institute a national tournament of billiard players on the entrance-fee system. The weaker players, as in 1869, are the ones who will pay, because there is an indifference as to whether they enter or not. There can be no tournament, because of the expense attached, if the strong players refuse to participate, and so they pass their words for entrance fees and pay if they win. In order that nobody shall lose, some such system of dividing the prize money like that of 1885 must be adopted. Entrance fees in billiards are always an injustice. The strong benefit at the expense of the weak. Either Phelan & Collender made good for some of the entrance fees in 1869, which entrance fees were divided pro rata among winners, or they had to come out of the net receipts, which also were divided pro rata among the winners. It is of no consequence to ascertain what was done. There had to be a wrong either to prize winners or to Phelan & Collender, no matter which horn of the dilemma was taken.