

## FIVES IN LITERATURE

Despite the fact that the game of Fives is extremely old, there are very few references to it in literature. If we omit Hazlitt's famous essay we know only of one other reference to Fives and that is at the time when Fives was really fashionable and important. In Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" there is a description of the hero, Rawdon Crawley, which is both amusing and instructive. "A perfect and celebrated 'blood' and dandy about town was this young officer. Boxing, rat-hunting, the Fives court and four-in-hand driving were then the fashion of our British aristocracy, and he was adept in all these noble sciences."

S.R.F.T.C.R. 3/33

## "Fives in Literature"

TO THE EDITOR OF SQUASH RACKETS AND FIVES.

SIR:—From time to time, I have noticed references in your magazine to "Fives in Literature," so that I myself have been on the look out for any quotation in my reading that may have escaped your attention. Quite by chance I happened upon the passage below, which comes from the second paragraph in Nicholas Nickleby. Although this may be well known to you, I do not believe you have yet referred to it.

The author has said that some ill-conditioned persons sneer at the life matrimonial, and compare the couple to the principals in a sparring match. "In one respect," Dickens writes, "this comparison would hold good; for, as the adventurous pair of the Fives' Court will afterwards send round a hat, and trust to the bounty of the lookers-on for the means of regaling themselves, so Mr. Godfrey Nickleby and his partner, the honey-moon being over, looked wistfully out into the world, relying in no inconsiderable degree upon chance for the improvement of their means."

Yours faithfully, JAMES R. FRASER.

## DID SHAKESPEARE PLAY SQUASH RACKETS AND FIVES?

By W. HODGSON BURNET

YOU will of course at once pooh-pooh the idea that Shakespeare ever played either Squash Rackets or Fives. But I am not so sure. In fact from a close study of his works I have at least convinced myself that not only was he a keen player of both games but that he belonged to a recognized club which had International fixtures.

In Henry V. i 2, he says—

*"When we have matched our rackets to these balls we will in France by God's grace play a set."*

(The difficulty he mentions of being able to get "rackets to match these balls" is one which luckily no reader of this paper who patronises our advertisers need have to face). That Shakespeare knew something about the design and construction of Squash courts there can be little doubt. Playing a match one day he remarks to his opponent—

*"The roof of this court is too high."*

(*Love's Labour Lost* ii 1).

and again, speaking of a friend who had just built one without expert advice, he says—

*"He hath a court he little cares for."*

(*Cymbeline* i 7).

Sometimes (for he was only human) Shakespeare appears to have lost his temper when playing, for we find him exclaiming angrily—

*"That's a foul fault!"* (*Henry V.* iii 2).

but after a hard won match he shows his real love of the game by saying in a sort of ecstasy—

*"This Squash—!"* (*Winter's Tale* i 2).

With regard to Fives there is distinct evidence (always of course cunningly concealed in the text) that Shakespeare had a marked preference for the Rugby game, for when asked to make up a four he says with enthusiasm—

*"Rugby? Come to the Court!"* (*Merry Wives* i 4).

muttering as he goes in evident disparagement of the Eton game—

*"No juttie—buttress!"* (*Macbeth* i 6)

I am sorry to say that in the matter of Fives gloves Shakespeare shews himself a bit of a snob for he refers (quite unnecessarily) to—

*"Those gloves the Court gave me."* (*Much Ado About Nothing* iii 4).

I am still sorrier to have to record that the Bard was addicted to the practice (referred to in a recent issue of this paper) of inserting pieces of metal in his gloves for apparently just before a match he says in a spirit of pure swank—

*"Fill this glove with crowns."* (*Henry V.* iv 8).

then turning to his opponent adds in a confident and offensive manner—

*"I dare you to this match."* (*Cymbeline* i 5).

I could give any number of further references to prove that the question in the title of this article must be answered in the affirmative. Want of space however forbids—

[So do I. Definitely.—ED.]