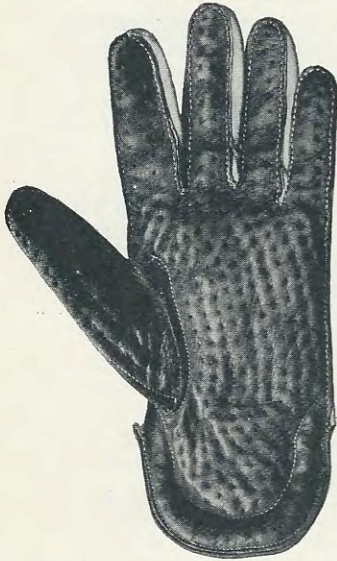


FIVES.

By EUSTACE MILES,

Amateur Champion at Tennis and at Racquets (1902), Author of "Racquets, Tennis, and Squash" (Isthmian Library).

Photographs by Mason and Basèbè, Cambridge.



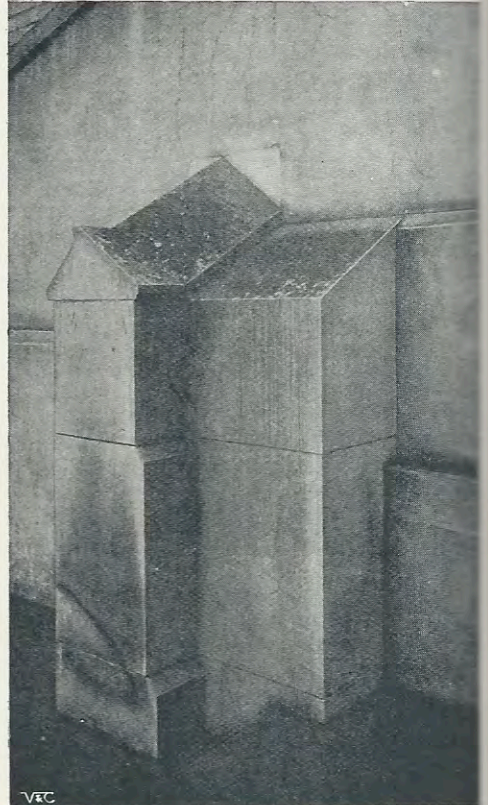
A FIVES GLOVE.

W H E N modern researches seem to be overthrowing the laws with which Science had been so pleased, such as the law of the permanence of matter, one law appears unchanged—indeed, we may say that it is more firmly established now than ever—and that is the law of differentiation;

and it holds good also for the games with the hand, ball, bat, floor, walls, and other paraphernalia. Out of a rude, unsystematic chaos of possibilities, not nearly exhausted yet, came many casual games which do not all survive to-day; but those which do survive are definite and fixed, so that they may survive still longer. They have their written rules, if not their stereotyped implements and dimensions of courts and so on. Fives is more or less definite and fixed, and it is sure to survive, because, to use the words of the Psalmist, "it is so comfortable"—at the time, and in its after-effects.

We need not stay long over its history. At first, perhaps, people caught the ball and threw it. This seems to be the nature of some Greek and Roman ball-games; and there is a Tennis handicap by which one player catches the ball and then throws it, while the other uses his racket; the player who catches the ball and throws it generally wins. In Cricket also this play survives in

the fielding. In Pelota the ball is held for an appreciable time within the implement, which is a kind of scoop. In Lacrosse also the ball is held before it is flung. In Vigoro-fielding the ball is often caught before it is hit. In Lawn Tennis the ball during the stroke rests on the racket for a longer time than at Racquets, which has probably the smartest and snappiest stroke of all. Eton Fives allows the ball to be held for a far longer time than Rugby Fives does. But instead of the primitive method, there have grown up a number of games in which the



THE PEPPER-BOX OF AN ETON FIVES COURT; FROM THE FRONT WALL.

ball is not caught and then thrown or hit, but is hit directly.

The various games have diverged according

played by royal personages centuries ago, one using the hand, the other the racket. As an intermediate stage, players used a glove over which tendons were stretched to give elasticity to the blow.

Fives might have begun as a sort of game when players alternately hit a ball against a plain wall. The old Belvedere Racquet-court shows this game with a racket, there being network on three sides of the plain wall, but no corners, and no side or back walls, and only boundary-lines there. But in quite early times there might have been felt a fascination about playing in a corner, the two walls giving a variety of angles. The late Mr. Julian Marshall suggested that Fives originated in play up against the main wall of a Tennis-

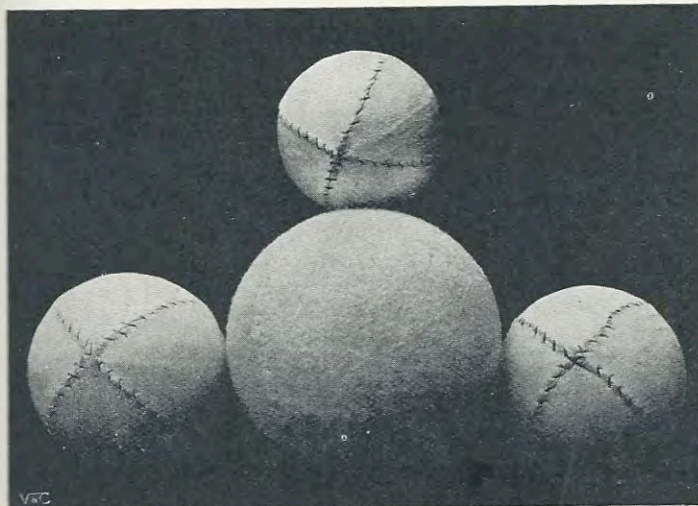
court. That, probably, is one way in which it started.

Now the game is more or less stereotyped. The balls, the gloves, the courts, the scoring, and the rules are all improved, and all

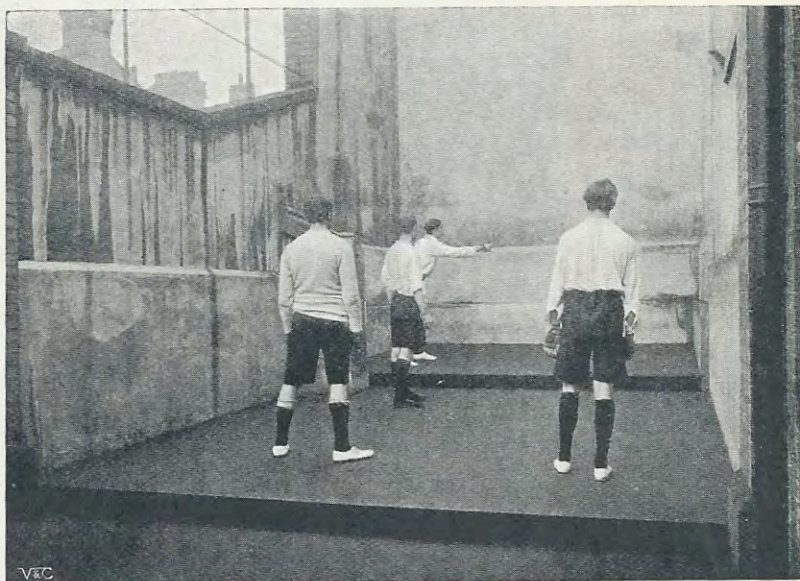
to their implement—one of the earliest implements being the stick with which one hit the stone in the road; according to the ball, which might be heavy or light, large or small, according to the court, etc., which might have in it either a line on a wall, or a raised mound or other obstacle in the middle, and might be a clear space, or might be surrounded by walls. Then, again, the game has diverged according to whether the ball was stationary or moving when hit. The stationary ball is a characteristic of Billiards, Croquet, and Golf; the moving ball of Cricket, Lawn Tennis, and Racquets.

Fives is marked out from most other games by its implement, the Fives-glove, which shows a stage between the bare hand and the bat or racket. Indeed, there is a record of a game

definite and good. There is an advantage in this uniformity, in spite of the fact that the game is not as good as it might be. If



COMPARATIVE SIZES OF THE BALLS OF RACQUETS (TOP), ETON FIVES (LEFT), RUGBY FIVES (RIGHT), LAWN TENNIS (MIDDLE).



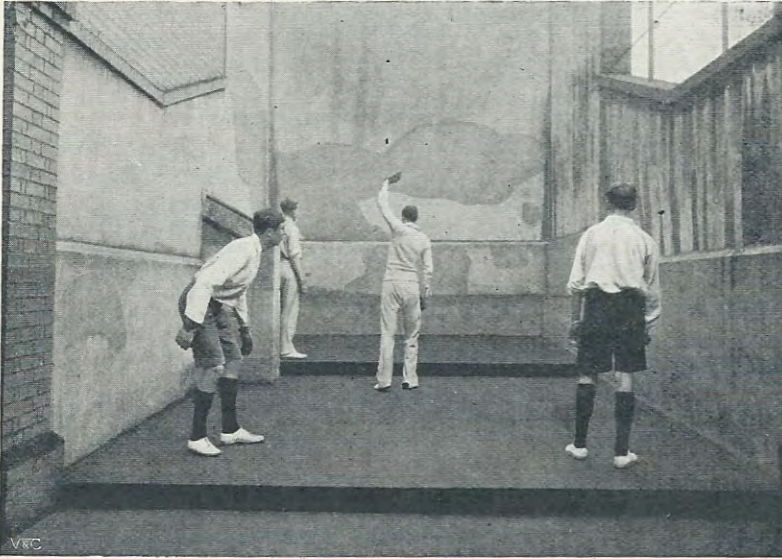
BEGINNING TO SERVE AT ETON FIVES.

there is a better game, as I think, it will prevail some day, because there is a country called America, which tries new things and sticks to the best.

At present, however, the old and es-

the outside wall of the Eton Chapel, with a projecting buttress. Another kind is the Harrow Squash-court, with its hazards, such as the pipes and the windows. The Winchester kind has a small buttress or tambour

on the left side wall. I have seen a court with only one wall, and netting round it like the old Belvedere Racquet-court mentioned just now. At my first private school at Hampstead the wall of the house had another wall projecting at right angles to it; among the hazards were a pipe, a ledge, and a window (wired over). At Marlborough the courts have three walls—that is to say, a front and two side,



A LEFT-HAND HIGH VOLLEY AT ETON FIVES.

established game is excellent for a large number of reasons. Those who have seen experts play Eton Fives will agree that the positions of such players as Ford, the Lytteltons, and others are as graceful as those of many ancient Greek statues.

The play is pleasant for the player as well as for the spectator. Then it is short, especially in the single form of the game, and cheap, especially in the four. The possibility of a single or a four or a three (which is perhaps the best game of all) gives it a certain variety, another variety coming from the different kinds of courts.

One of the earliest courts was the Eton court, which was at first merely a part of



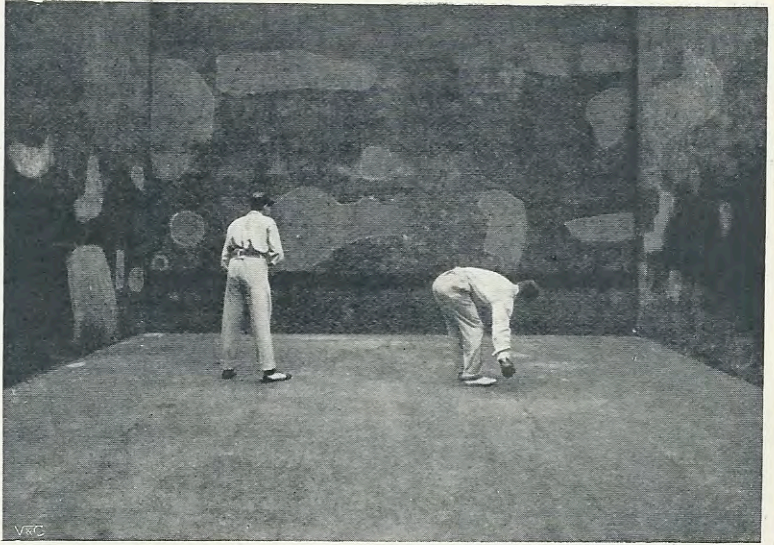
A LOW LEFT-HAND STROKE AT RUGBY FIVES.

but no back walls. At Rugby and Cambridge they have four walls, some of the Rugby courts being open. There is at least one court in existence with a movable roof, so that in fine weather the sky may shine down upon the players.

But, whatever the court, the game of Fives has certain admirable features. First, there is the scooping to get up the low balls; and in the Eton court there is also the step to give extra exercise for the liver. In all games there is a healthy stretching of the extremities, and healthy turning and twisting of the trunk. There is alertness and readiness to move the two sides of the body independently, so that the left side gets at least

as much play as the right—play, not together with the right hand, as in batting at Cricket or in driving at Golf, but *instead* of the right hand. The hands themselves are hardened, yet develop a finer sense of touch. Throughout there is needed a certain control, and at Eton Fives a considerable amount of *finesse*. At Rugby rather than Eton Fives there is need of endurance and a good wind.

The space required is quite small, and

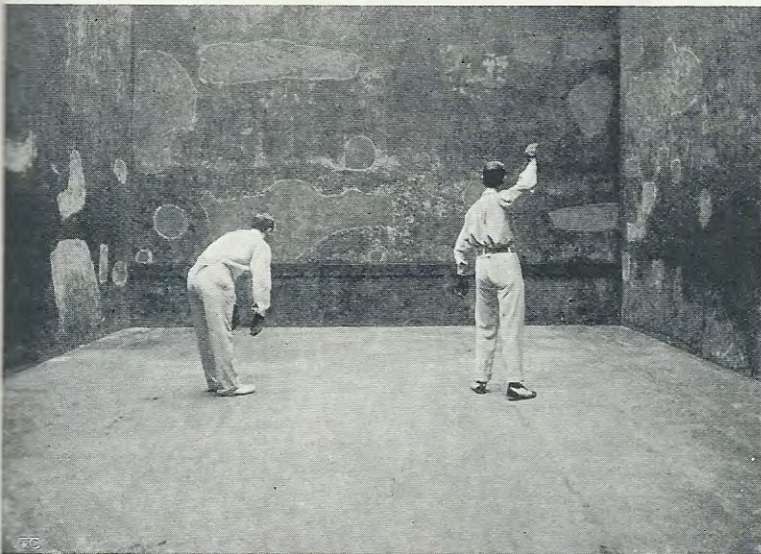


A VERY LOW RIGHT-HAND STROKE AT RUGBY FIVES.

there is no reason why there should not be evening play in cities, by artificial light. In closed courts there is an absolute independence of weather. Fives prepares for and supplements other games, and Boxing and Fencing. One must observe the opponent, and, in a four game, work with the partner. In the three game, one has alternately the independent work by oneself and the co-operative work with one's partner.

The rules of play are simple enough, the principle being that A wins a rally whenever B fails to return the ball above the play-line before the ball has bounced twice. If A is "in," he scores a point or ace. If B is "in," A, by winning the rally, goes "in" instead. The game is for fifteen points. Details of scoring need not trouble us here.

The play might be more satisfactory, I think, if certain suggestions were adopted, and the first of the suggestions would be a



A RIGHT-HAND VOLLEY AT RUGBY FIVES.

more frequent use of the three game. Suppose that there are three players, A, B, and C; perhaps the fourth player, D, has not turned up. Now, the single game is too violent for many people, the four game is not violent enough, the three game is the mean between the two extremes, with the advantages of both. A plays first against B and C; B plays next against A and C; C against A and B. So it is "all against all." While each is playing against the other two, he has hard work; otherwise he has a period of comparative ease.

The second change might be the use of softer balls occasionally; the men use them, for example, at Columbia University in America. These softer balls last longer and make the game cheaper. They also give harder work and lessen the time of exercise for the very busy. But, of course, they have not the Spartan "manliness" of the hard-ball game.

We suggest, as we have often suggested before, the use of all kinds of rooms. Several friends of ours use their stable and harness-rooms for the purpose. More than one friend uses his roof. Others use the outside walls of their houses or stables. To erect a court on an unused piece of ground would be a matter of little expense if a

dozen men subscribed; and if a dozen ladies hired the court in the daytime, there would be scarcely any individual expense at all.

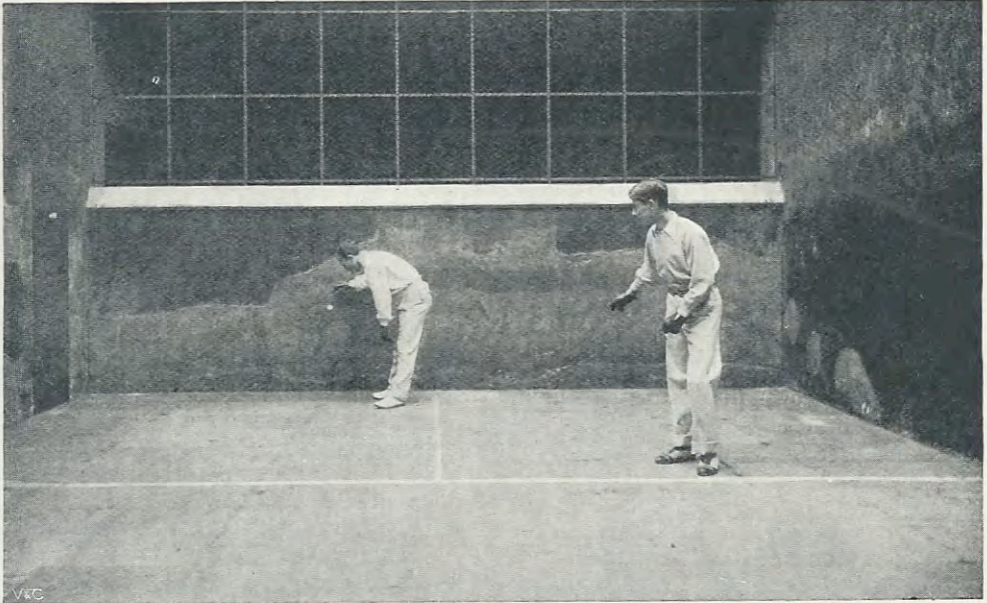
To vary the game, many hazards should be used or devised. Of course, a stableyard would naturally have its own hazards—the windows, etc. Otherwise, movable hazards, triangular pieces of wood and so on, could be introduced, as in the Squash-courts of the Bath Club.

Then, I think, there should be a movable play-line. Skilful players would like it low, so that they might make killing strokes. Beginners would prefer it high, so that they might have long rallies and plenty of fun. By a system of pegs and holes the play-line can easily be made movable.

It seems that once the player who was "in" sent up his own service, and was not "fed" by his opponent. Now, a great deal of time is wasted, because, if the opponent sends a ball which you do not like, you have the right to ask him to send the ball you do like, and to wait till he sends it. If this is the case, why should you not send your own ball as you like, and then be compelled to take it? At Eton Fives I have seen a man have two, three, and even six unsuccessful shots at taking a ball thrown up by the



BEGINNING TO SERVE AT RUGBY FIVES.



A STROKE OFF THE BACK WALL; RUGBY FIVES AT CAMBRIDGE.

man who was "in." This is sheer waste of time. Why should the striker-out not be compelled to throw up his own ball and take it himself?

The game would be much more enjoyed, because much better played, if those who were keen about it took up its movements as a form of physical culture. Let them go through the different movements of an imaginary game in their bedrooms. This is magnificent exercise for the body, because of the above-mentioned stoopings, extensions, twists, turns, etc. It gives an exercise not altogether unlike Boxing. If people sacrificed two minutes a day to this imaginary play, they would be less likely to leave off the game itself because they were out of training or out of practice. Certainly they would raise their standard of play by keeping their muscles flexible. Of course, this would not be practice in timing the ball, nor in tactics, but it would be practice in making the right movement when the ball came. It would also be an outlet for superfluous energy.

But, above all, we need hundreds of city and country clubs for evening play. One person cannot afford a court; a hundred easily could; so could Government; so could philanthropic millionaires.

And now as to materials and dimensions, in order that the reader may estimate the costs for himself or get an estimate from some builder. Let us begin with the materials.

The hard balls cost less than sixpence each, the gloves cost a few shillings. It is a good plan, by the way, to put antiseptic plaster on the hands in case of bruises. Shoes cost anything from a few shillings up to thirty shillings a pair. We need not give prices for flannels, though Fives without them is an unwholesome game.

The court is the most serious item in cases where an already existing wall, or two or three walls, cannot be utilised. With hard balls the ordinary wooden court is too noisy, unless the edges of the wood on the front wall are turned towards the players, as they are in the St. Paul's School Racquet-court, in America. But the cement courts are without doubt far the best, even if they are far the most expensive. Mr. Bickley, the inventor of the best cement for Racquet, Tennis, Squash, and Fives courts, is of opinion that the court at Lord's (forty-two by twenty-four feet) is too large; whereas another court which he has made (twenty-one by thirteen and a half) is too small; and he cites a court in Hampshire (thirty-four by twenty) as a good measurement. As to the size of the walls, sixteen feet gives better ventilation, but twelve feet is almost sufficient. In the "Isthmian" volume on "Racquets, Tennis, and Squash," I have shown that there is no need for expensive cement all over the court. A wooden surface in certain parts will economise money. There should be ventilation below

the play-line on the front wall, as there is at the Bath Club, which certainly should be taken as having model courts for evening play. On the back wall there should be a line above which balls must not be hit; or, as in Mr. W. H. Grenfell's court at Taplow, there might be a line on the floor, and any ball from the back wall bouncing between that and the front wall should count as "out."

My only objection to the ordinary court for evening play is that it is lighted directly. True, at the Merion Club, near Philadelphia, the light is concealed from the eyes of the players; but still, nothing can equal the indirect light thrown up on to the ceiling, and thence down on to the floor—for we must think of our eyes and the eyes of the next generation.

If anyone has built such a court, he can use it for other purposes besides Fives: for example, he can use it for Squash, and, with a net across the middle, for Badminton. He can use it for Boxing and Fencing. He can use it for ordinary exercises. If it has a movable roof, it can serve as an air and light bath for the morning. Many other advantages will suggest themselves; and we cannot close this article without a word with regard to our national stupidity, our want of proportion, in our designs of houses.

Attention has often been called to the fact that we generally use our best room as a drawing-room for visitors during a few hours of the day. The nursery should be the best room of all; then should come the sleeping-rooms. Scarcely, if at all, behind them in importance is the recreation-room. The less country life we have, the more play and physical education we need in our houses. It is amazing to consider that, out of the millions of houses in so-called civilised countries, scarcely a few hundreds have their own little room made sacred to exercise. Is it not every bit as important as the kitchen, and far more important than the drawing-room? Why should not one have a plain little room, with a line, let us say two feet from the floor, on one of the walls. Against this wall one could play Fives or some other game. When one felt disinclined for that, one could practise another kind of exercise. A Punch-ball could be suspended from above, and several other simple kinds of apparatus could be easily moved in or out of the little room according to need. But of all the exercises, few will equal Fives, because it is brief and exciting, and good for most of the important muscles of the body, and a form of play that is manly without being brutal.