

ON THE GAME OF PALL MALL.

To some readers of this Journal it may appear that the obsolete disport, known to them as a fashionable amusement of no more distant times than the Restoration, is a subject little deserving of admission within the pale of Archaeological researches. I have undertaken, therefore, with some hesitation, to offer the following notices of the game of Pall Mall, or Paille-Maille, aware that some antiquaries may fastidiously regard the subject as foreign to the legitimate purpose of this publication. It would indeed be no difficult task to carry back the enquiry to those remoter times which more properly engage the attention of the antiquary ; to treat of the archaic varieties of ball-play, the *arenata pila*, the *harpastum* of the ancient Greeks, to which also Martial makes allusion, the *pila paganica* or the *trigonalis*. I might, moreover, cite the authority of the learned Ducange, who accounted the *chicane* or ball-play of the south of France, a game apparently analogous to that under consideration, to be a subject worthy of detailed investigation. It forms the theme of one of his erudite dissertations appended to the "Life of St. Louis," in which, after mention of ancient games of the Greeks and Romans, Ducange has treated of those in vogue in the East in the times of the crusaders, according to the relation of Anna Comnena and other writers. He states his supposition that these Oriental exercises may even have originated with the French, and gives the following description of the *chicane* in Languedoc, which was played like pall mall with a long-handled mallet and a ball of box-wood.

"Pour retourner au jeu de balle à cheval, que les Grecs appellent *tzycanisterium*, il semble que ces peuples en doivent l'origine à nos François, et que d'abord il n'a esté autre que celui qui est encore en usage dans le Languedoc, que l'on appelle le jeu de la Chicane, et en d'autres Provinces le jeu de Mail : sauf qu'en Languedoc ce jeu se fait en plaine campagne et dans les grands chemins, ou l'on pousse avec

un petit maillet, mis au bout d'un bâton d'une longueur proportionnée, une boule de buis. Ailleurs, cela se fait dans de longues allées plantées exprès et garnies tout à l'entour de planches de bois. Ensuite, ce que les nostres ont fait à pied, les Grecs l'ont pratiqué montez sur des chevaux, et avec des raquettes, qui estoit la forme de leur chicane.¹ ”

I have no intention to controvert the supposition thus stated by Ducange, that such games may have originated in France. From an early period the French were addicted to ball-play, especially the *jeu de palme*, the prototype of *paume* or tennis, so called from its being practised with the naked hand, in later times protected by a glove, or, as it has been supposed, by a covering of interlaced cords, to give greater force to the blow.² Thence, as it is said, the racket had its origin, and that term has accordingly been derived from the Latin *reticulum*, a net.³ It is, however, foreign to my purpose to advert to these mediæval amusements, except to show how much in vogue they were amongst the higher classes in France and other continental countries. In the xvth century the *jeu de palme*, in its simpler form, was as fashionable amongst the French nobles, who staked large sums upon the game, as tennis was in the xviiith and xviiiith centuries. Pasquier cites the relation of St. Foix, that as early as 1427 a damsel of Hainault, named Margot, astonished the best Parisian players by her superior skill; and her *tour de force* consisted in playing with the back of her hand. That the game was in favour also in England at that period may be gathered from the tale, so often repeated, of the gift ironically sent to Henry V., in 1414. “The Dolphyn (as Hall relates the incident) thynkyng Kyng Henry to be geven still to suche plaies and lyght folyes as he exercised and used before the tyme that he was exalted to the croune, sent to hym a tunne of tennis balles to playe with, as who saied that he could better skill of tennis then of warre.”⁴

The precise time when ball-play with the wooden mallet was devised, or whence it was introduced into England, has not been ascertained. The long-handled mallet was termed by the French, as also the game itself, *palemaille*, and

¹ Joinville, Dissert. viii., p. 188.

² Pasquier, Recherches de la France, liv. iv. chap. 15.

³ Menage, Dict. Etym. v. Raquette.

⁴ Hall's Chronicle, fo. ix. b. edit. 1550.

although it appears probable that the game may have been more immediately brought to this country from France, the very name suggests that its more remote origin may possibly be traced to Italy. The term *palemaille* seems in accordance with the Italian *palamaglio*, from *palla*, a ball, and *maglio*, a mallet, whilst in old French a ball was called *pile*, more conformably to the Latin, *pila*.⁵ I have, however, been unable to trace any notice of the game by Italian writers, earlier than the xvth century. Mention occurs of the "*giucator di palea a maglio*," in the Carnival songs of Florence, by Giov. dell' Ottonaio, soon after the year 1500.⁶

The first English writer hitherto noticed as making allusion to the favourite French game of *Paille Maille*, is Sir Robert Dallington, who says, in his "Method for Travel," published in 1598, "Among all the exercises of France, I prefer none before the Paille Maille, both because it is a gentlemanlike sport, not violent, and yields good occasion and opportunity of discourse as they walke from one marke to the other. I marvell, among many more apish and foolish toys which we have brought out of France, that we have not brought this sport also into England." Prince Henry, eldest son of James I., delighted in all martial and athletic exercises, and we know from the characteristic anecdote cited by Strutt, from the relation of a person present on the occasion, that he occasionally amused himself with playing at goff, an ancient national game described by the writer as "not unlike to pale-maille;" it was a sport fashionable amongst the young nobility at the commencement of the xviii century.⁷ King James, in his "Basilicon Doron," or paternal instructions to Prince Henry, written as I believe about 1610, speaking of exercises of the body in honest games and pastimes, objects to all that are rough and violent, as the foot-ball, and likewise tumbling tricks, &c. "But the exercises that I would have you to use (although but moderately, not making a craft of them) are running, leaping,

⁵ Roquefort. Lacombe, Dict. du vieux Langage, gives "Pillemaille, maillet a jouer au mail," which approaches nearer to the Latin *pila*.

⁶ Davanzati, who wrote later in the XVIth century, speaks of idle contests *al maglio*. See Vocab. della Crusca.

⁷ Strutt, Sports and Pastimes, p. 81. Goff seems to have materially differed from Pall Mall, at least as played in more modern times. A crooked club was used, whence the sport was called *cambuca*, in the time of Edward III.

wrastling, fencing, dancing, and playing at the caitch or tennise, archery, palle maille, and such like other faire and pleasant field games.”⁸ Peacham, in his “Compleat Gentleman,” written in the time of James, discoursing of travel and of the character and manners of the French, remarks that their exercises are for “the most part Tennise play, Pallemaille, shooting in the Crosse-bow or Peece, and dancing.”⁹

From these notices it appears that the introduction of the game into England may have taken place towards the earlier years of the XVIIth century, under the influence probably of the gallant and spirited Prince of Wales, whose untimely death occurred in 1612. Mr. Cunningham remarks, in his excellent Handbook for London, that it is usual to ascribe its introduction to Charles II., but that it was brought into England from France in the reign of Charles I., perhaps earlier. We may suppose that it was not much in vogue before the middle of that century, or it may have been amongst fashionable amusements disused in the more austere period of the Commonwealth.

That minute observer of the manners and follies of his day, Pepys, records on April 2, 1661,—“To St. James’ Park, where I saw the Duke of York playing at Pelemele, the first time that ever I saw the sport.”¹

The Mall, to which Pepys alludes in this and other passages, it must be observed, was not the place originally used for this game, adjacent to the Park, and of which the tradition has been preserved in the name of the street, Pall Mall. The existence there of a Mall prior to the Revolution is clearly shown, as Mr. Cunningham points out, by the Return of the Commissioners for the Survey of Crown Lands in 1650, describing a piece or parcel of pasture called “Pell Mell Close,” which must have taken its name from the particular locality where the game had been played. They also valued at 70*l.* the “elm trees standing in Pall Mall Walk, in a very decent and regular manner on both sides the walk, being in number 140.”² This agreeable site was doubtless soon

⁸ King James’ Works, collected by Bishop Montague, 1616, p. 185.

⁹ Another writer of the same period observes, “a paille-mall is a wooden hammer set to the end of a long staffe to strike a boule with, at which game noblemen and gentlemen in France doe

play much.” French Garden for English Ladies, 1621.

¹ Diary of Pepys, edited by Lord Braybrooke. Fourth edit., 1854; vol. i., p. 163.

² Handbook of London, under Pall Mall, where many particulars will be

occupied by houses, and as early as 1660, on July 26, scarcely two months after the return of Charles II., Pepys makes the entry—"We went to Wood's at the Pell Mell (our old house for clubbing) and there we spent till ten at night."³ Immediately on his Restoration, Charles II. commenced extensive works in the Park; the canal was made and a machine constructed for raising water, a decoy formed with great variety of fowl for the royal pleasure, a snow house and an ice house, as in France and Italy, for cooling drinks; also the new Mall, on the north side, to which Charles, who was very fond of the game, constantly resorted. This was the "well polished Mall," of which his panegyrist Waller wrote, in describing the King's "matchless force" and manly posture, when his first touch sent the flying ball more than half way to the goal, like a shot from a culverin.⁴ Charles had been proclaimed in London on May 8, and entered the metropolis May 29, 1660; on September 16, in the same year, we find Pepys strolling "to the Park, where I saw how far they had proceeded in the Pellmell." In a subsequent year he writes again,—May 15, 1663, "I walked in the Park, discoursing with the keeper of the Pell Mell, who was sweeping of it, who told me of what the earth is mixed that do floor the Mall, and that over all there is cockle-shells powdered, and spread to keep it fast; which, however, in dry weather turns to dust and deadens the ball." That this fashionable disport was then much practised by gallants in the winter season appears from an incident which he relates on January 4, following.⁵

There exists a view of St. James' Park, looking towards Whitehall, which has supplied an illustration of the game

found regarding the locality and its distinguished inhabitants.

³ Diary, vol. i., p. 97. "This," Mr. Cunningham well observes, "is not only one of the earliest references to Pall Mall as an inhabited locality, but one of the earliest uses of the word 'clubbing' in its modern signification of a club, and additionally interesting, seeing that the street still maintains what Johnson would have called its 'clubbable' character."

⁴ Waller, "St. James' Park, as lately improved by His Majesty," 1661.

⁵ Diary, vol. i. pp. 107, 417, vol. ii. p. 81. Lord Braybrooke observes, that

Thomas Rugge, in his *Diurnall*, 1659 to 1672 (MS. in Brit. Mus.), mentions that "a Pele Mele was made at the further end of St. James' Park, which was made for his Majesty to play, being a very princely play." In Sept., 1661, he records that the road formerly used for coaches, &c., "from Charing Cross to St. James', by St. James' Park wall and the backside of Pall Mall, is now altered, by reason a new Pall Mall is made for the use of His Majesty in St. James' Park by the wall, and the dust from the coaches was very troublesome to the players at Mall."

of Pall Mall, given in Knight's "London." The original, from which a reduced engraving has been given in Smith's Antiquities of Westminster, p. 24, was in the possession of Mr. W. Stevenson, F.S.A., and the drawing is supposed to have been executed about 1660. A figure of Charles II. is introduced, and four persons are represented in the act, as supposed, of striking a ball through a ring at the top of a tall pole. This may be the game of Pall Mall.

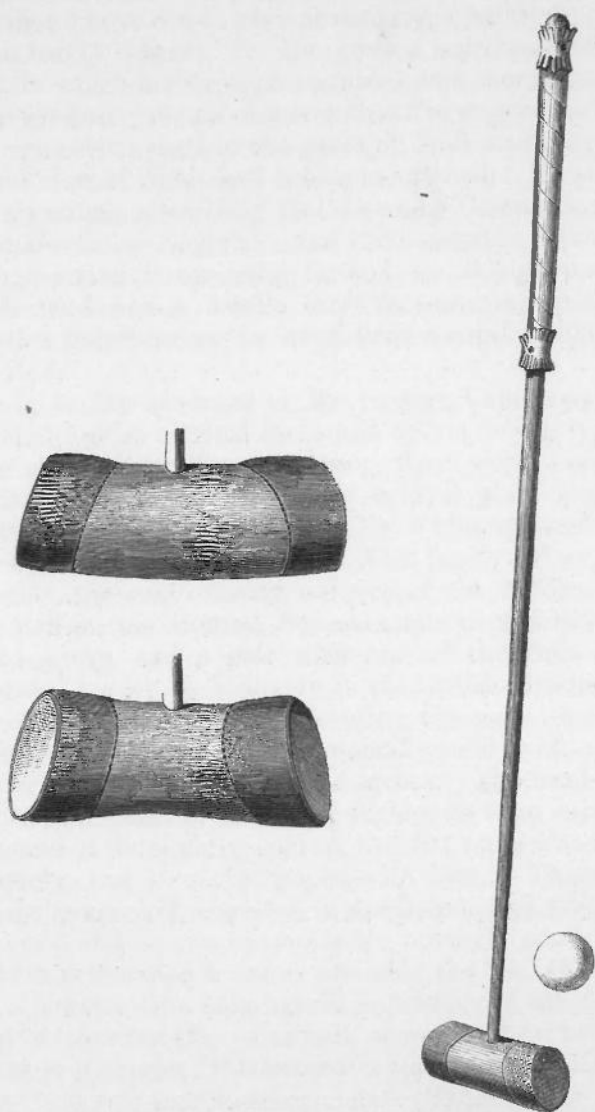
Having enumerated certain facts connected with this subject which may give it some interest in the eyes of the London antiquary, a brief explanation is necessary as to the mode of playing. It is thus given by Cotgrave, in his French and English Dictionary.—"*Palemaille* : a game, wherein a round box bowle is with a mallet stricke through a high arch of iron (standing at either end of an ally one) which he that can do at the fewest blowes, or at the number agreed on, winnes."

Howell and other writers of the XVIIth century follow this explanation. Blount, in his Glossographia, 1670, adds to his extract from Cotgrave,—“this game was heretofore used in the long alley near St. James's, and vulgarly called Pell-Mell.” Nicot, in his “Thresor de la Langue Francoyse,” compiled about the time when, as supposed, the game was introduced into England, is somewhat more explicit.—“*Palemaille* videtur nomen habere a palla et malleo, quia revera malleus est quo impellitur globus ligneus.—*Mail* vient du Latin malleus, et signifie une massue à deux bouts plats, emmanchée en potence d'un manche moyennement long. L'instrument appelle *Pallemail*, que l'Italien dit *Pallemaglio*. Estant le composé de ces deux, Palla et Mail, donne assez à entendre la figure dudit mail, de la matiere duquel ne peut chaloir, soit fer, plomb, bois ou autre, pour veu que la figure y soit.”⁶

Several old national sports have been mentioned, which seem in some degree analogous, such as bandy ball, club ball,

⁶ Florio, who compiled his Italian Dictionary about 1570, renders *palamaglio* “a pale-maile, that is, a sticke with a mallet at one end to play at a wooden bail with, much used among gentlemen in Italy. Also the game or play with it.” The Pere Monet, in his Inventaire des deux Langues, 1636, gives *Palemaille* as signifying both the game and the place where it is played.

“Mail, maille, maillet ferre, frete et morne aus deux bouts, a long manche, dont on frappe et pousse la boule au jeu de maille,” &c. It may deserve remark that in all cases he describes the game as “*lusus*—*pilæ amplioris*,—*globi majoris*, or *gravioris*,” and the “*jeu de billart*—*lusus tudicularis pilæ minoris*,”—*Palæstra tudicularis pilæ mensariæ*.”



Mallet and Ball formerly used in the game of Pall Mall.

From originals in the possession of the late Mr. Benjamin L. Vulliamy.
Length of the Mallet, 3 feet 8 inches; diameter of the Ball, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

hockey, and goff, which has been mentioned before, called in North Britain, golf.⁷ Commenius, in the "Orbis sensualium," says that "boys use to play at striking a ball through a ring with a bandy (*clava*)."⁸ He gives a representation of the game, in which a ring appears raised on a short post or stake in the ground. Strutt observes that the ring is said to have been sometimes used in the game of Mall, and it appears in the old view of Whitehall before mentioned. He states also that a pastime resembling that shown by Commenius, existed in the North of England; and it consisted in driving a ball through a ring in an alley formed for the purpose. The mallet used had a handle three feet or upwards in length, and the game seems to have been a rural modification of Pall Mall.⁹

It is to the kindness of Mr. George Vulliamy that I am indebted for the original malls and ball of which representations accompany these notices; they were found about January last in the old house in Pall Mall, No. 68, the residence of his father, the late Mr. Vulliamy, and for more than a century in the occupation of his family. They are, very probably, the only existing reliques of the obsolete game of Pall Mall in this country. Several malls were found carefully stored away, and a pair with one of the balls has been presented by Mr. G. Vulliamy to the British Museum.¹ The former measure in length, including the mallet-head, 3 feet 10 inches, the handle being wound round with soft white leather for a space of about 14 inches. The head measures about $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches by about $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches, its form is irregularly oval, and it is slightly curved, the flat ends also being cut obliquely, and strongly hooped with iron.² There was obviously much skill exercised in the fashion and adjustment of this part, and no two examples are precisely similar. On one of them is stamped a name, probably the maker's—LATOUR, and a tower. The long handle is possibly of ash or oak, the head of chestnut (?). The ball, of root of box, measures $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter: the letter R is stamped upon it, reversed.

⁷ See Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary, under Golf. Compare Brockett's account of Doddart, the hockey of the North.

⁸ Commenius, c. 136. *Ludi Pueriles*. This curious little book was first produced about the middle of the XVIIth century.

⁹ *Sports and Pastimes*, p. 82.

¹ These long handled malls were some-

times termed "pailmail beetles," as appears by a passage in Digby "on Bodie," cited by Nares in his Glossary, under Pall-Mall.

² Richelet, *v. Mail*, states the length of the handle as four or five French feet. The French foot was about $12\frac{1}{2}$ in. English measure.

It has not been ascertained at what time the game ceased to be in vogue. Amongst the plates engraved by John Kip for the "*Britannia Illustrata*," produced by Joseph Smith, 1716—1719, representations occur of St. James' Palace and of the Park. A brief description notices amongst the attractions of the latter—"un très beau mail," shown in both plates, and occupying the central avenue of the long walk, planted probably under the direction of Le Notre, and still known as the Mall. It here appears to have been separated from the avenues on either side by a low barricade, upon the rail of which persons are seated; this served doubtless to confine the ball within bounds and to keep off intruders. Two gentlemen are engaged in the game; they hold malls precisely similar to those which have been described; and the engraver has not neglected to represent the artificial surface of the "well polished mall." No arch appears at either end of the avenue. In a later representation of the Park given in an enlarged edition of Smith's publication in 1724, entitled "*Nouveau Théâtre de la Grande Bretagne*," the Mall is distinctly shown; but it may be supposed that the game was at that time on the decline. A number of ladies and fashionable loungers, as described by Swift in his letters to Stella, appear to have taken possession of the Mall, whilst the barricade at its sides is occupied by seats.

The game of Pall Mall appears to have been much practised in various parts of Europe, and many cities had their Malls appropriated to this exercise. Sir Richard Browne, in a letter cited by Lord Braybrooke,³ describes the "Paille-Mailes" of Paris as reduced to three only—the Tuilleries, the Palais Royal, and the Arsenal; there was also one near the Celestines. Evelyn, in his *Memoirs*, speaks with admiration of the stately well-shaded Pall Mall at Blois, and of that at Tours, the noblest in Europe for length and shade, having seven rows of very tall elms. He notices also the Pall Mall at Lyons and another at Geneva. There was a noted one at Altona, and doubtless many other local vestiges might be traced of this once popular amusement.

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³ Note to Pepys' Diary, vol. i. p. 164.