THE SISTER OF GOLF

By ANDREW LANG

From the October, 1909, number of Blackwood's Magazine

PASSING of late, like Thackeray, through

"a dingy court
Place of Israelite resort,"

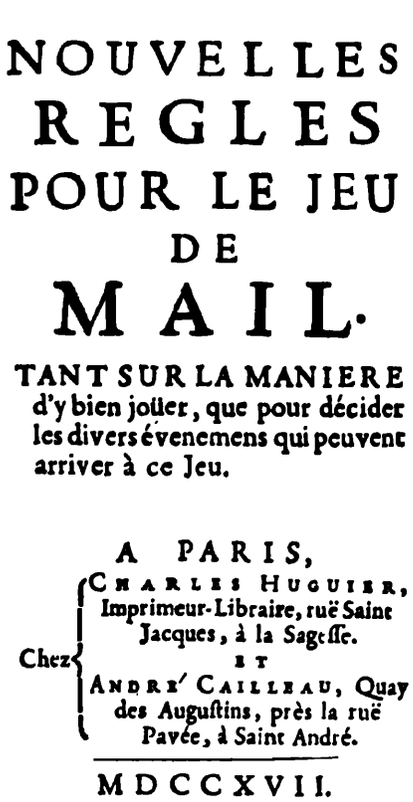
I caught a glimpse of a pretty piece of color within the window of a frame-maker's shop. I turned to look at the picture and fell in love with the subject, a very young damsel—her years may have been ten or twelve—a blonde blue-eyed child with pearls in her hair, wearing a necklet of pearls, and attired in the simple dress of 1640–1650. The portrait is a half-length. Pleasing as is the girl and agreeable as is the scheme of color, what most attracted me was an implement carried by the little lady. At the end of a slim wooden shaft was something like a long, deep, narrow, square-tipped iron spoon!

How many people must have passed and looked at the picture without guessing the name and nature of the implement. If I am right (the objections will be stated later), the thing is *la lève*, "the lofter" or "lofting iron," used in the old French game, *le jeu de mail*, our *pall-mall*. In one form of *jeu de mail* they did not putt the ball into the hole in the green, as at golf, but lofted it with the iron-headed *lève* or spoon through the *passe*, an archet or hoop of iron. The *lève* is in fact an iron spoon, with the head fastened straight in continuation of the line of the shaft, but how the stroke of *passe*, our holing out, was executed is a puzzle.

After admiring the picture I entered the shop, and found that the portrait of the child was signed *F. Archiard, d'après Flinck*. Now Flinck (born at Clèves, 1615, died 1660) was a pupil of Rembrandt and an esteemed painter of portraits, while in other lines of art he bears a good reputation. This portrait of his is in the Louvre, and, as photographed, precisely resembles Archiard's excellent copy.

It may seem odd that Flinck put an iron lofter into the hands of such a very young girl, but in 1601 an earlier Flemish artist dignified a girl of eight years old with a predecessor of the latest patent in golfing ofting irons, so contrived that it may be used with either the right or the left hand. That this club was in fashion at the date is proved by a woodcut in which a sturdy Fleming is using it in golf on the ice, where instead of putting at a hole, they putt at an erect conical stone, the *pierre de touche* of the *jeu de mail* as it is played at Montpelier, in Southern France.

The little lady with her necklet of pearls and her emerald jewel became my property at a very moderate ransom.



NOUVELLES
REGLES
POUR LE JEU
DE
MAIL.

TANT SUR LA MANIERE d'y bien joüer, que pour décider les divers évenemens qui peuvent arriver à ce Jeu.

A PARIS,
Chez { CHARLES HUGUIER, Imprimeur-Libraire, ruë Saint Jacques, à la Sagesse. ET ANDRE' CAILLEAU, Quay des Auguſtins, près la ruë Pavée, à Saint André.

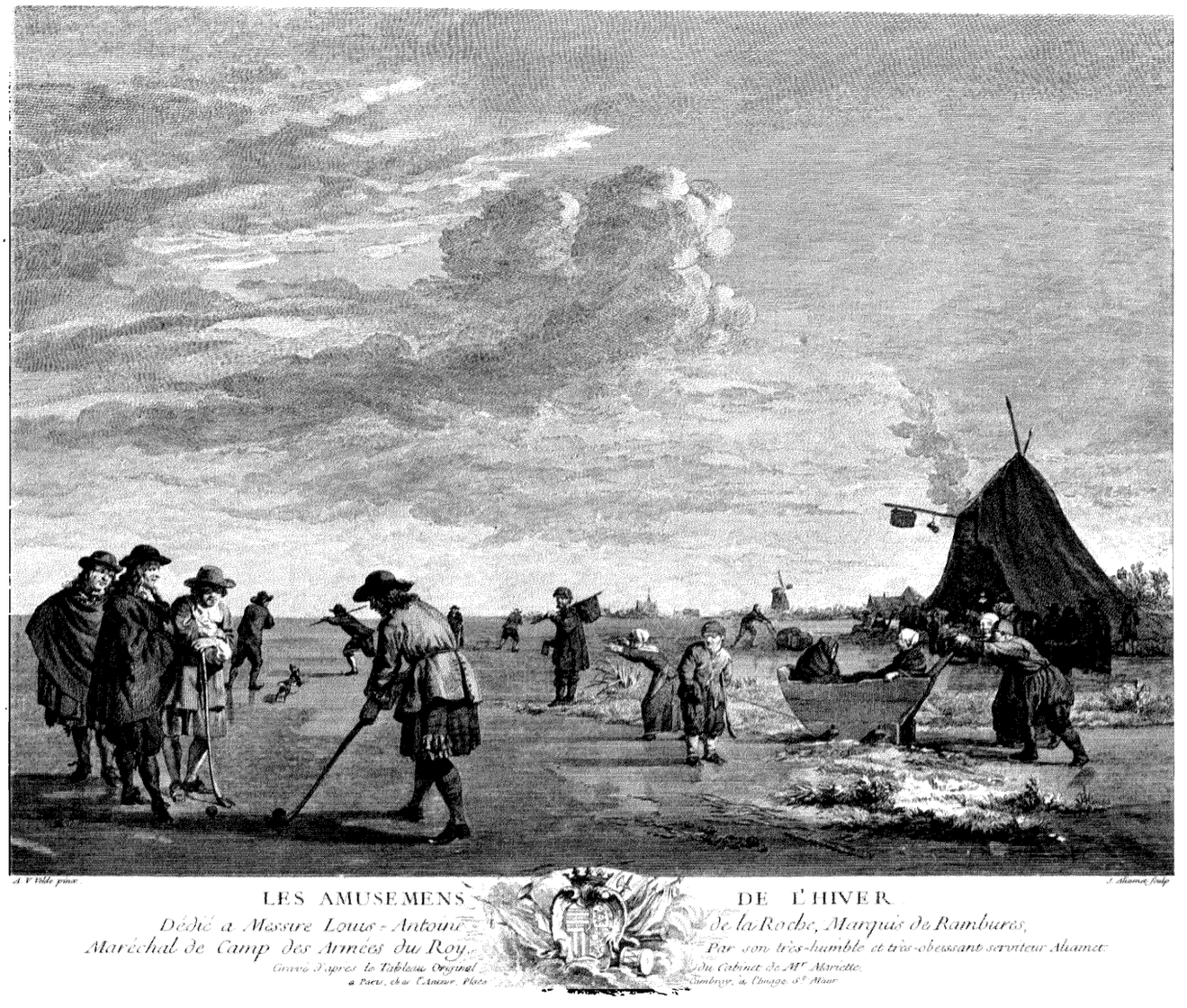
M DCCXVII.
AVEC PRIVILEGE DU ROY.

Title page to Lauthier's *New Rules for the Game of Mail*, Paris, 1717, of which only four copies are known

Now we may explain as far as we can the nature of the game in which, two hundred and sixty years ago, she had been taking part. In most respects it is surprisingly like golf. I take the account of it from the first volume of "La Plus Nouvelle Académie Universelle des Jeux" (Amsterdam, 1752). The Dutch editor has lifted his materials from an older book, "Le Jeu de Mail" of Lauthier (Paris 1717). I have seen but one copy of this rare little volume. Mr. Quaritch won it from me long ago at a sale by auction, and my friend, the late Mr. H. S. C. Everard, afterwards bought it from Mr. Quaritch. It is admirably bound in red morocco, in the style of Padeloup. Mr. Everard (whose loss to golf and the history of the game, as well as to the friends who admired his wide and curious reading, ancient and modern, and his manly and amiable character, is irreparable) was engaged on a translation of Lauthier's volume. He had mastered many difficulties, but his task, like his translation of "Quintus Smyrnaeus," remains a fragment.

As for Lauthier himself, the researches of the Marquis d'Eguilles, who retains the friendship for Scotland of his ancestor, the French military attaché to Prince Charles in 1745, have discovered that he held a small place in the Court of Louis XV.

Lauthier praises the *jeu de mail* exactly as enthusiasts now praise golf. "It is the most pleasant and healthy of games; it is not violent; at *jeu de mail* you can play, talk, and walk in good company," as Madame de Sévigné writes to M. de Grignan that she had just been doing on June 13, 1685. The true golfer, however, does not now talk as he plays: in solemn silence all pursue the migratory ball. *Jeu de*



Dutch Kolf on the ice from a very old engraving

mail, played in fine weather, "cures or prevents rheumatism," says my author, and is suited to all ages from childhood to old age: mere swiping is not the only object, though the perfect player is he who drives sure and far. As for the attitude, you should imitate the best players, stand easily, neither too near your ball nor too far from it; the knees neither slack nor rigid; the body not erect, yet not too much bowed, and you must drive with a swing, turning the body and head from the waist, "*but always keep your eye on the ball.*" Driving in this way, your club makes a wide circle. "*Slow back!*" The wrists must be thrown into the stroke; the pose of the body, arms, and legs must not be disturbed, so as to preserve the harmony of action, and the adjustment taken at the first glance in relation to the ball. This seems very good advice for the golfer, who has to resist the constant tendency to alter the adjustment of his body, legs and arms in the course of the stroke.

Our author is all for "the St. Andrews swing," and dislikes the style of those who "play mainly with the arms, and take only a kind of half drive." They will never be strong and graceful players; though if Andrew Kirkcaldy be not precisely a graceful, nobody can deny that he is a powerful, driver.

Some lift the club too high above their shoulders; others only half lift it, and drive as if they were giving a stroke with a whip. Some straddle strangely with their legs, others rise on their toes and appear apt to topple over; others raise the left elbow—and indeed this is a fault still most incident to cricketers, who, at cricket, want to keep the ball down in forward play. Here it is to be observed that Lauthier had little reason to be satisfied with the artist who illustrated his book. The swing is badly rendered in the design reproduced in M. Arthur Lillie's "Croquet" (Longmans, London, 1897). The mallet is held perpendicularly above the head of the player, and this is not the only fault we have to find.

Our author justly insists on style, which is as

Attitude of the body
at the start
From the original engraving in Lauthier's *New Rules for the Game of Mail*, Paris, 1717

essential, he says, as in fencing: the correct attitude, he declares, has its rules, which cannot be infringed without loss of force as well as of elegance. "*Jeu de mail* is a noble game, exposed to public criticism: therefore it should be played in accordance with the rules of style. The stroke should be easy and free, the arms neither stiff nor overstretched."

The rules of the grip are elaborate—the right thumb must be across the handle of the club; but every man has his own grip, I think, whatever our minute writers on golf may inculcate. Every man has his own "stance" too; our tutor insists that the ball should be opposite the heel of the left foot, and that the right foot should not be "refused," or drawn too much backward, nor the body too much stooped. You ought not to stand too long waggling (or "addressing your ball"); "one waggle, with practice, is enough; those who waggle the longest foozle the most, and lookers-on laugh, for they like to see a prompt and graceful player."

All this advice might have been written for golfers. Too many waste time ludicrously in waggling and staring at the ball. (I have used the word "waggle" to translate *tattoner leur boule.*)

As to clubs, a man should choose one proportionate to his height and strength. If the club be too long (like our lately fashionable "fishing-rods") or too heavy, the player will "sclaff," or "take the ground" (*on prend la terre*). If the club be too short, he will top (*il prend la boule par les cheveux*).

The clubs, it must be remembered, were hammer - headed, like light supple croquet - mallets, and "the business end" presented less of striking surface (much "baffed") than the golf club does. The balls, made of boxwood roots, were of various weights and sizes: a man who used a long and heavy club supplied himself with balls heavier than common. On sandy soil heavier balls were preferred; lighter balls were used in damp weather: they were attentively weighed and measured so as to find out the most satisfactory fliers. There was a famous but ugly ball styled *la Bernarde*, after Bernard, its first owner: it weighed a little over seven ounces, and when the President Lamanon got it he refused to sell it for a hundred pistoles. Louis Brun, who could drive to a distance of four hundred paces, found that *la Bernarde* would go fifty paces farther than any other ball. "With this ball, he said, he would out-drive the devil."

Those long drives were made in an alley-Mall with a flat prepared surface, like our own Mall behind Pall Mall. Mr. Pepys, with his devouring curiosity, learned that pulverised seashells were used in the making of such Malls. Louis Brun would not have driven a ball to the length of four hundred paces on the broken and grassy surface of our links. The Mall was fenced off by park palings, and usually bordered by trees in an avenue. Heineken, the modern German author of "Sportspiele im Freien," thinks that some avenues which lead to nothing near old country houses were originally Malls.

Club-heads were made of green oak. The great makers were Georges Minier & Son, of Avignon.

How the body should be turned from the waist upwards in making the stroke
From the original engraving in Lauthier's *New Rules for the Game of Mail*, Paris, 1717

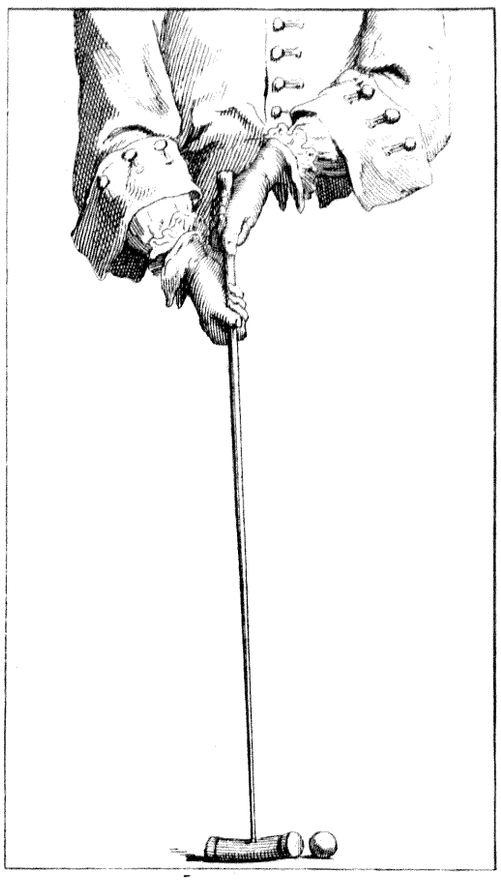
In Provence and Languedoc the length of the shaft of the club was from the player's waist to the ground. The players of the Court, and those of Paris in general, allowed themselves to tee the ball before each stroke, except when holing out (*quand on tire á la passe*; that is, in lofting the ball through an iron hoop). The players of the capital used clubs with shafts as long as from the shoulder-pit to the ground. The player is advised to wear gloves, and not to be so indelicate as to appear on the ground without his waistcoat. He should not wear a cap, but a small triangular hat.

It is not easy to understand the "playing at *passe*," which answers to our putting at the hole. The *lève* or iron spoon was used, and a steel ball (*boule d'acier, boule de passe*) was lofted through the iron hoop. In lofting, the ball should be on a level with the toe of the player's right foot. To stand with the ball between the feet, and spoon it up, as some use at croquet, is an action of which our author disapproves as "very ungracious." In Cotgrave's old Dictionary (1611) the play at *passe*, through the iron, is said to be done with the ordinary boxwood ball: the steel ball was a later refinement. To fit the iron spoon or *lève*, the steel ball used in playing for *passe* must have been small.

The game might be a single, with one player on each side—the winner, of course, was he who drove and went through the *passe* in the smallest number of strokes—or there might be four-ball or even six-ball matches.

How one should be when shooting the passe in order to finish the match

From the original engraving in Lauthier's *New Rules in the Game of Mail*, Paris 1717



How the hands should be placed in order to play well

From the original engraving in Lauthier's *New Rules for the Game of Mail*, Paris, 1717

This game was played on the levelled surface of the Mall, but there was also the game across fields or along roads, where you had to play the ball out of any kind of hazard, as at golf. This golfing kind of *jeu de mail* was named *la chicane*, from the Persian term for polo. There was no *passe* at *la chicane*. The object was to strike a marked stone (*pierre de touche*), or to go through a narrow passage—perhaps a gateway: if both players did this in an equal number of strokes, he whose ball went farthest was the winner. We do not hear of the use of iron-headed clubs in hazards; in these the *lève* might not be used. Men had to cry *gare!* before striking, as we cry *fore!*

By 1772, as we learn from Sudre's "Jeu de Mail," of which a new edition was published in that year, the Mall game was out of fashion, and the pastime was our golf, played at a stone in place of a hole.

The ball is now played along a road; a player loses a stroke if he drives into the adjacent country. The club, as in pictures in illuminated MSS. of 1400–1500, is sometimes an oblong block of wood, into which the shaft is fixed, and the ball is struck with the side of the head, as at golf—not, as in Lauthier's book, with the hammer-head of a mallet. The hammer-headed club, however, appears to be the favorite at present in Southern France.

The old French rules of *jeu de mail*, as it was played in the eighteenth century, are curiously interesting, for the game, as far as driving went, was closely analogous to golf. Now, though we constantly read of golf in old Scottish Acts of Parlia-

ment, memoirs, letters, and so on, from 145[7] onwards, we have no early account of the rules, or of style, attitude, and modes of playing. Of these things we gain our first glimpse from the French books. We learn that, when the game was played on the surface of the long alley, or Mall, bordered by a fence and by trees, with a *passe* at each end, all was under the rule of the Master of the Mall, who had his lodge adjacent. He hired out balls, clubs, and iron spoons (*lèves*) to people who did not bring their own. You paid ten *sols* for the use of them from six o'clock A.M. till noon, or from one o'clock P.M. till evening. There was a small fee for playing, and the wage of the caddy (*porte-lève*) was included. For losing a ball, ten *sols* were the fine, but the *boule de passe*—the steel ball—cost twice as much, and the *lève* was more expensive than the wooden club. Apparently the steel ball was put down when the player came within fifty paces of the *passe* or elevated iron hoop or ring, but this is not certain.

The caddies, like the old Scottish "fore-caddies," went far ahead of the players, shouting *gare!* as we cry *fore!* and watching the course of the ball, and the place where it alighted. If the ball went out of bounds, they put it down opposite the spot where it left the course.

As for the rules, if a player "missed the globe" (*faire une pirouette*), he lost a stroke, as at golf—that is, the miss counted as a stroke. If the club-head or shaft broke, it counted a stroke if the head passed the ball: the shaft would be apt to break if it touched the player's shoulder. "A rub on the green" went for nothing if caused by one of the players or by a caddy (*porte-lève*); all "rubs" caused by hitting a stranger or an animal had to be accepted. This is the reverse of our own rule in such cases, and I have known a hole claimed by opponents because my partner drove a ball into his dog. But as the dog had not been one of our party, but had rushed to join us at the seventeenth hole, uninvited, we argued that he was *not* one of our party. This is a very delicate point.

A man loses nothing by accidentally playing a stranger's ball, but he loses a stroke if he strikes the ball of one of his party, or of an opponent, who must put down a ball, without penalty, in the place where his own was lying. The first drive (*début*) on each occasion may be tee'd, on sand, as with us; or, as with us, on an artificial portable tee (of wood or cardboard in *jeu de mail*). There were accumulative penalty strokes for driving beyond the bounds of the Mall: a man who hit out thrice accumulated four penalty strokes, and eight if he hit out four times. He then gave up the hole, and no wonder! The term "hazards" was used just as by ourselves, "*toutes sortes de hazards*," and "repairs of the green"—as when a ball lights in a drain or in "casual water"—did not count as hazards; the player puts down his ball near the place, and plays without loss of a stroke. If a ball breaks when struck, the stroke does not count, but a cracked ball must be played with till it actually breaks up.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to understand the rules for negotiating the *passe*—the lofted shot through the iron *archet* at the end of the Mall. One thing is certain, the party behind might not drive into those who, as we say, were "on the green,"—were within a certain distance of the *passe*.

Lauthier's illustration of playing at the *passe* is probably erroneous. The player's right foot is advanced, the *lève* is a slim little club like that of the child in Flinck's portrait, the player holds it in his right hand, and is not lofting the little steel ball, but merely putting it, as at croquet, through a narrow iron hoop fixed in the ground. There is no sign of the stone erection called a *tambour* by Lauthier. The player holds his wooden ball in his left hand. The manner of playing at the *passe* is thus obscure. As a rule, people reckoned on being "within *passe*" in three or four strokes. I think that "within *passe*" was a distance of fifty yards from the *tambour*, which appears to have been a circular open structure of stone, with the *archet* or iron hoop in the center. If a long driver drove within *passe* in two shots, while three or four were "bogey"—were the regular number—he had to take back his ball to a distance of fifty paces from the *archet* or iron hoop, which was always played at from a distance of fifty yards. Yet in Lauthier's illustration the player at *passe* is within a few feet of the narrow iron hoop. It was not easy to drive through the iron hoop at so great a distance as fifty paces, with an instrument so ill-adapted to the purpose as the straight iron spoon.

The rules of *passe* are in fact unintelligible to all who have not seen the game played, but very delicate points of dispute were to be decided "by the caddy" (*porte-lève*) "*or any other disinterested person*"! The author takes an unusual view of the disinterestedness of the caddy, who is not universally regarded as the most impartial of witnesses or umpires.

It is plain that a man who is "stymied" by a stranger's ball might lift it, but stymie is enforced when the ball which stymies you is one of your own party's, "even if it be a *Tabacan*,"—that is, a ball of very small dimensions.

Who can understand this rule?—"He who holes out, playing the even, or one off two, wins; and he who holes out when playing one off two, *obliges*, that is to say, he wins; if the next player playing the odd fails to hole out, and if the latter holes out, he is the winner." No doubt this means something, though it sounds crazy, and I give the French for the bewilderment of golfers: "Qui passe au pair, ou au plus, gagne; et qui passe à deux de plus, oblige, c'est à dire, qu'il gagne; si celui qui reste à un plus après lui manque à passer, et si ce dernier passe, il gagne tout."

If another ball stymied yours at close quarters, you might not "play the following stroke" as at billiards, but you must play your own ball with the wooden club, not the *lève*, otherwise you lost the hole. But if the ball that stymies you is in actual contact with your own, you may take your iron spoon, and play both balls through at once. In no case must you get your ball into your iron spoon and simply lift it bodily through the ring or *passe*. ("Porter la lève dans l'archet en *crochetant*[1] comme on dit.") This is cheating.

It seems to me that you actually spooned up your ball *into* your *lève*, and then jerked or *tossed* it towards the *passe*, as at *la crosse*—not lofting it by a stroke, as at golf. This seems to result from the rule, "if the ball escapes from the *lève* without being played, the player loses a stroke."

These three photographs were taken at Montpelier in Southern France and represent the only known survival of the game of *Mail*. It is that form of it which Lauthier calls *la chicane* played along the highways and byways of the countryside. Here we see the game being played along artificial roads to which the modern enthusiasts were driven by the increase in traffic due to motors

The number and difficulty of the rules will be highly esteemed by those metaphysical golfers who bombard the Committee of the Royal and Ancient Club with questions passing the wit of man to solve! The Committee would be grateful if those inquirers would expend their subtlety in translating the rules of the *jeu de mail*.

My author says nothing about lady players, and does not even contemplate their existence. He gives suggestions for the making of short Malls in the grounds of country houses, but this appears to be an invention of his own. Ladies did play. Queen Mary was accused of amusing herself at *jeu de mail* a few days after the decease of her husband, Darnley, who was so unfortunate as to die early, when his house was blown up, in circumstances never satisfactorily explained. Probably she used a private Mall at the house of Lord Setoun. The little Dutch girl in Flinck's portrait has so many jewels that her father may have been a rich man, able to afford a small private Mall of his own.

In our own Mall the Duke of York (James II) played constantly, and conversed with Mr. Pepys on National Defence. James was a very long driver; he could drive the Mall in one stroke, and an iron shot—a short stroke at least—and he was also a famous golfer and a keen curler. After Dutch William came I do not know that the game of Pall Mall continued to be played in England; and except in the Montpelier form of *la chicane*, across country or along a road, it is quite extinct on the Continent. Nevertheless it was, as Lauthier says, "a noble game," and croquet seems (*Continued on page 50*)

[1] *Crocheter*, to force a lock.

THE SISTER OF GOLF

(*Continued from page 21*)

to be its very dull and decadent descendant. Saint-Simon says that the *jeu de mail* was going out when he wrote, about 1730–1740, and tennis also was ceasing to be the great game of France. People took to an indoors life of flirting, playing cards, and talking philosophy, and the great age of games in France was the fifteenth century, though I do not know any mention of *jeu de mail* till a century later.