

Smith, David B. *Curling: An Illustrated History*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publ., Ltd., 1981, distrib. in U.S. by Humanities Press. vii + 232 pp. Photos, bibliography, appendices, index. \$20.00 (cloth).

Until recently no author could write seriously on the history, strategy and

techniques of curling without reference to the Rev. John Kerr's *History of Curling* (1890), *Ken Watson On Curling* (1950) and Robin Welsh's *A Beginner's Guide to Curling* (1969) to list just three outstanding works. Now, however, a fourth volume will have to be included: "Curling, An Illustrated History" by David B. Smith.

Unfortunately the book tells us little about the author. There is a notation on the dust jacket that he is Sheriff of North Strathclyde at Kilmarnock and so we learn that for at least the second time in Scotland's literary history a sheriff has turned to the written word to entertain and instruct the public; the other one, no Scot needs to be told, was Sir Walter. It would be interesting to know more about the accomplished David Smith.

In his introduction he says that for fifteen years he has been immersed in the history of curling and indeed his resulting volume goes far to prove it. At times, as in for instance his chapter on curling stones, his work is almost encyclopaedic and even surpasses the efforts of the redoubtable Rev. John Kerr. Even though the chapter may be encyclopaedic it is not prolix. The information presented by Mr. Smith is of great value to the present-day reader and will be indispensable to any future historian of curling.

The illustrations, a number of them never before published, are numerous and excellent. There probably has never been put out between two covers such a collection of curling paintings (some of them reproduced in color), prints, photographs and sketches as we find in Mr. Smith's *History*. To read and study them, even without reference to the text, is a rewarding undertaking.

Curling has long been taken by artists as a subject for their pens and brushes but even more has the game inspired would-be poets and rhymers to compose "poesy" and many, many examples of their productions are given in this book. Why the game should have generated such an outflow is a mystery to this reviewer even though he himself has on various occasions been impelled to write "curling doggerel."

The chapter entitled "Curling in History and Literature" furnishes not only many poems on curling but also gives a comprehensive list of references in general literature to the game of curling. The excerpt from Burns' "Tam Samson's Elegy" is a classic in this respect even though Burns himself refers to it as "rhyming blether." There is a glancing reference to what must be one of the most delightful stories about curling in English literature: J. M. Barrie's account of the Little Minister's attempt to draw the doctor past the curling match on Rashie-bog, concluding with the doctor's remark that being in love is bad "but it's nothing to curling." Every curler should be urged to read again that brilliant chapter of Barrie's. Mr. Smith's list of writings that have to do with curling supplies an excellent reference work for those who wish to study these by-products of the game.

Mr. Smith makes good use of the "minutes" of a number of clubs in Scotland and regrets, as we all must, that many such records have been lost, including some that Rev. John Kerr had access to in 1890. Scattered quotations

from various minutes appear in Mr. Smith's History and in Chapter 11 he reproduces for the first time some very interesting entries from the minutes of John Cairnie's "Curling Hall." It would be a commendable task for some curling enthusiast with a literary bent to locate and record any curling minute books which may have survived. Some of those which have come to our attention were maintained by secretaries with a flair for humor. For instance, at The Country Club in Brookline, Mass. notations appear in the minute books not unlike those of Curling Hall:

- Feb. 15, 1900 Ice very thin. Skip Turner fell through the ice but was rescued *with his stone.*
- 2. Blizzard developed during game with Royal Montreal and owing to the artificial sight of our skip he was greatly handicapped by driving snow.
- Jan. 19, 1901 Thermometer at zero and a gale blowing. Skip lost an ear today.

There must be numerous entries of this sort in the old-time records to add to those cited by Mr. Smith and it would be a pity to lose them.

There are many more comments which could be made about this comprehensive history but space limitations preclude presenting them.

Centuries ago Francis Bacon wrote, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." Mr. Smith's history is too extensive to be swallowed and it deserves more than just tasting. It most beneficially can be chewed and digested, perhaps along with a dinner of beef and greens, by the practitioners of the auld roarin' game.

The Country Club, Brookline

Elmer O. Cappers, Club Historian