



SCIENTIFIC TENNIS STROKES.

BY J. PARMLY PARET.

III.—LOBBING AND SMASHING.

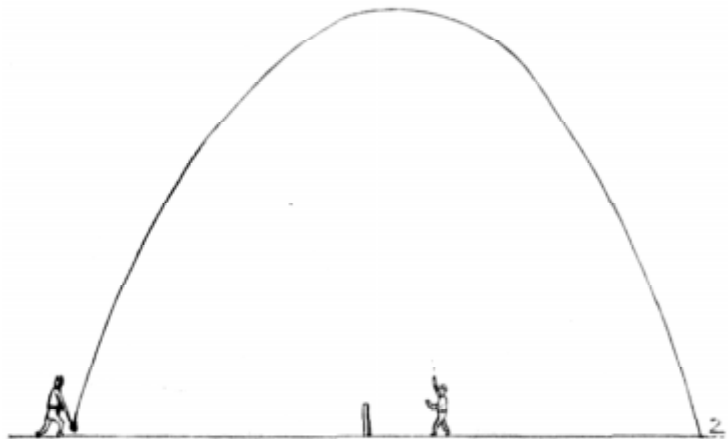
THE "lob" is probably the most strategic of all the plays which modern ingenuity has devised. The beginner usually starts by using this stroke in ignorance of its full value and object; as he advances in his knowledge of the game and graduates from the ranks of the novices, he is too apt to discard the stroke and use only swift returns. Before long, however, as he becomes still more experienced, and treats the game from a scientific standpoint, he learns the wonderful and strategic value of the "lob," for it is not only indispensable in playing a waiting game or in forcing an opponent at the net, but when hard pressed for time or breathing space it is often the very salvation of a player. He volleys, smashes and places to attack, but when these strokes are used against him he is frequently forced to resort to the "lob."

I have called this stroke a defensive play, and it is one, though it is occasionally played, when an opponent is caught napping at the net, as a placed return. Thus, by raising it a few feet over an opponent's head and out of his reach, the ball can be placed near the base line of his court, and it will be very difficult for him to return. Whenever the "lob" is used it is advisable to play into your opponent's left-hand corner. The reason for this is that nine times out of ten a player when starting for the back of his court will turn around to his right, and to reach the ball, if then played to the left corner, he must turn entirely around, while if it were played to the right side of the

court a half turn would suffice. To return the ball, swiftly, if he have not perfect command of the back-hand stroke, he must have it on his right, and to get at it there he would be forced outside of the court.

The main "defensive" use of the lob is much the same, though it can be, and often is, used when the opponent is already in the back of his court. This play can always be relied upon if it will prove to much advantage to delay the game; or if forced so as to make a successful swift stroke impossible, or at least improbable; or if you are likely to confuse your opponent through the sun's blinding him when he looks up for the ball, or from his losing the direction of the net when turning to go to the back of the court.

Herewith are given two diagrams, showing the difference in angle which should be used when playing a "lob." If the return is but a slow one, and there is time enough to properly gauge the distance and place the ball, the angle shown in the first of these should always be used; but unless the opponent is very skillful at smashing, and time or change of position is needed, the much higher



angle shown in the second diagram will prove more valuable. If played to within a few feet of the base line either will generally prevent an opponent from smashing, for the chances of success are very slim from so far back in the court.

The practice of lobbing is by most players greatly neglected. The play has saved many a game, and has often proved a player's only salvation. Almost everyone can knock the ball in the right direction, and for that matter at the right height, but it requires considerable practice to become accurate enough to gauge the distance to the base line within three or four feet. Yet this is the accuracy that should be acquired. It can be done, and is done by scores of even mediocre players. It is a simple stroke, and once mastered it can be played with almost infallible accuracy without the continual practice that many of the swifter strokes demand.

In the double game the "lob" is often used for the first return. The customary position of the net man on the server's side is such that, if the server advances far in the court after the delivery of his service, and is a good player, it becomes almost impossible to "pass" either of the opponents. Their positions being near the net, if they are allowed to volley the first return they will have secured a very strong attack. In this case the "lob" can be, used to great advantage. This play is especially advisable when playing in the right-hand court, for the opposing net man when on this side can (it being to his right) reach further toward the centre of the court, and it is therefore very difficult to get a low return past him. If the server advances very close to the net it is

more effective to play over his head, but as he must necessarily be diagonally opposite the striker out, and the net man must be directly opposite him, a ball lobbed far back over the latter's head will generally bring better results.

The "smash" is by far the strongest attack when properly played. For this reason it becomes the object of a careful player to prevent his opponent from using this stroke. No play can from its very nature be more decisive than this. The stroke generally either wins or loses the point. If close to the net, and a favorable opportunity is presented, a smash should always be successful. It is more difficult when attempted from farther back in the court. The possibilities of successfully smashing six feet from the net are shown in the first of the three accompanying diagrams. It is always perfectly safe to use this stroke when at that distance, and if such an opportunity is presented with a lobbed ball this stroke should be attempted, for from this point of vantage a large part of the opponent's court can be commanded, both sideways and lengthways.

The second diagram shows the much more limited range which the player commands at a distance of eighteen feet from the net, or just in front of the half court line. From this distance he commands less than one-half the space he did at the nearer position. A good player can, however, often smash successfully from this position.

The third diagram shows the very slim chance a player has of smashing successfully from very, far back in his court. The diagram supposes the player to be six feet from the base line.

