

# FRANCIS DRAKE DEBUNKED

## Spoil-sport Historians And That Famous Game Of Bowls

(By W. F. INGRAM)

THE fact that the New Zealand Centennial bowling carnival is to be held in Wellington this month may or may not start an argument about Francis Drake. But the wise will not risk any money on the issue.

Drake's game on Plymouth Hoe is bowling's most famous tradition, but the tradition does not survive the schoolbooks.

Kingsley used it in "Westward Ho!", and Seymour Lucas's picture of the incident hangs in many a home, school, and clubroom.

The story is dramatic, but it is also humorous. C. W. Bracken, in his *History of Plymouth* records it vividly:

"Into a group of astonished admirals and captains," he writes, "Captain Thomas Fleming burst panting and blowing and exclaiming to the High Admiral: 'My lord, my lord! They're coming. I saw them off the Lizard last night!'"

"And again, in reply to his hearers' queries, 'The Armada, your worships—the Spaniards.'"

Drake was quite unmoved by the news of the Armada's coming, although he believed the Spanish Armada to be far away. "There is time enough to finish our game and to fight the Spaniards afterwards," tradition makes him say.

### Would Have Been Mad

But historians doubt the story. E. F. Benson, in his *Life of Drake*, declares that the Admiral must have been stark, staring mad and his behaviour that of a lunatic if he delayed one instant. He had to warp his ships out of the Sound in the teeth of a wind that was bringing the Armada ever closer to England.

A book published in 1736, indeed, declares that Drake went at once to prepare for battle.

"Drake would need see the game up," says the book, "but was soon prevailed on to go and play out the rubber with the Spaniards."

### Was He Playing That Day?

Some spoil-sport historians even declare that Drake was not playing bowls at all that day. There is nothing apparently in the records of the City of Plymouth to confirm the story of his game, although every good citizen of Plymouth believes it.

In a pamphlet published in 1624, only 36 years after the Armada, a Spanish Duke is made to say that the Armada moved so secretly that it reached English shores "while the English commanders were at bowls upon the Hoe at Plymouth." Tradition did the rest, and history has put the high-light in the right place.

### Origin of Bowls

James A. Manson, writing in 1912, argued that London was the cradle of the game of bowls, and that it was played with stones. The Latin "jactus lapidum" means "casting of stones," from which, it is said, comes the word "jack," in present use on the green.

Some bowlers take exception to this. They translate "jactus lapidum" as "putting the stone," or shot-putting, another game altogether.

Manson describes a manuscript of the thirteenth century in order to show the "venerable age" of the game. It contained a drawing of two players aiming at a small cone, instead of the modern jack. "From their gestures, the players seem to be taking a lively interest," he says, and this seems to be an indication that the historian is on the right track. For there is no game in the world that causes such extraordinary antics as bowls!

Whatever the historical facts are, the bowling green is the haunt of the candid camera fiend; the antics and postures of the staid business-men make pictures worth the getting, for, as Shakespeare said, it is better to be "set quick i' the earth, And bowled to death with turnips" than to retire gracefully from the sport.



PAST AND PRESENT DEFENDERS OF ENGLAND: The balloon barrage flying over the head of the statue of Sir Francis Drake on Plymouth Hoe, Devon. The Naval War Memorial is also in the picture

## MUSIC AND FLOWERS

Features In NBS's Morning Session For Women

THE morning session for women at 2YA at 10.45 which will be resumed on January 8, will be marked by a very novel feature in the form of a series of talks on music and flowers. These will appeal strongly to lovers of flowers, for they take flowers in many of their relations to life, and the speakers are not only experienced in their own lines, but some are well-known figures.

For instance, Miss Peggy Hoyt, one of America's most famous style creators, will start the series with a talk on flowers and fashions. Grover Cleveland, a leading American authority on interior decorating, will speak on flowers in the office. M. Henri Villar, Chief Purser on the French liner *Normandie* will tell listeners about "Bon Voyage Flowers." Margaret Sangster, poetess and short story writer, will discuss flowers and happiness, and Sir Hubert Wilkins, the explorer, will have something to say

about flowers in the Polar regions. Flower manners, flowers and personality, flowers in the home, your birth flower, flowers in architecture, and so on and so on—there will be a very wide range in the series. All of these talks are illustrated with music.

The Women's Session on the other days of the week will comprise three talks by "Margaret," one talk by Miss Nelle Scanlan, and one by "Belinda." Miss Scanlan, the well-known New Zealand novelist, will give more of her comments on life, entitled "Ships and Shoes and Sealing-wax." Miss Scanlan came out to New Zealand some months ago on a visit, and has been detained here by the war. She is a particularly good broadcaster, for she has understanding and wit, and a very pleasant way of putting things. The talks by "Belinda" will be on insects in the home (we don't refer to husbands). In the series that "Belinda" gave some months ago she talked about some of the insect pests that worry housewives, but this time she is to talk about friendly insects. We did not know there were such things, but "Belinda" assures us there are.

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