

LATIN ON THE LINKS

By R. STANLEY WEIR

SOME few years ago the revival of Latin for conversational purposes was proposed in England. For decades innumerable, or, at least, unnumbered, Latin had been regarded as one of the dead languages; it was thought that its resurrection to the status of a living language was both eminently desirable and feasible. If Latin is worth study at all why not make the most of it?

The movement received the warm support of Mr. Punch who, always a progressivist in general and a friend of the royal and ancient game in particular, conceived that golf and golfers both might greatly profit by the adoption of Latin as a living language. Among the advantages of its use on the links Mr. Punch instanced the minimizing of lurid language in the presence of youthful caddies; or, at least, the disguising of such language in a foreign garb so that, however violent the vocabulary of the excited or exasperated golfer, his outbursts would, in so far as the caddies were concerned, fall upon uncontaminated and unoffended ears. Alarmed, indeed, as the seriousness of the evil of too vivid language more and more impressed him, Mr. Punch suggested that just as in certain universities the use of Latin is compulsory so, on the links, a like rule should prevail.

Mr. Punch was particularly anxious that youthful caddies should be spared the affront which the too frequent use of what may be called the "damnatory clauses" of the average golfer's creed offered them. Only by a compulsory use of Latin, he argued, could the reverence due to boys which Juvenal, I think, insisted upon, be secured. Of course, he had to admit that eventually under a Latin régime, a time would arrive when caddies, becoming learned in the new language, would perceive the full and sometimes awful significance of Roman imprecations. But, in the meantime, much good would be done; or, at least, much evil avoided. Besides, there were other languages besides Latin which might be used as alternatives—Greek, Hebrew or Sanscrit. As fast as the caddies got familiar with the indexed words in one language, the fiat would go forth ordering *ex necessitate* the use of another dialect. The advantages to the morals and education of the caddies and attendant galleries were sufficiently obvious and convincing.

The present writer will defer to another occasion any illustrations of how the thing might work in other tongues besides Latin. The language of Horace or Cicero will suffice for present purposes. For example, then, when a golfer, by bad play, sends his ball into some gurgling or non-gurgling brook, (we

wish to be fair) everybody would be pleased if, with what is called 'admirable restraint,' he should content himself with remarking "Dear me, I fear my ball is in the brook!" Even if he did use a more heightened form of expression and say: "By Jove, the blessed ball is in the brook!"—nobody could seriously complain. But what he does in nine cases out of ten is to exclaim: "My jam ball has gone into the jamm'd brook!" Now such language, it cannot be denied, is utterly indefensible; and betrays shameful indifference and thoughtlessness if used in the presence of youth. How simple a matter then, if Mr. J. L. Low and the others who sit in the seats of the mighty at St. Andrews were to enact, with penalty of the loss of the hole or a stroke or two, that in such cases the following Latin equivalent must be employed: *In amnem, puto, globus meus condemnatus delapsus est.* The superiority of the word "*condemnatus*" over the vulgar Saxon synonym "jamm'd," or that other word usually spelled with two d's which rhymes with it, is perfectly apparent. The whole incident, indeed, acquires a dignity and moral elevation by the use of the Latin tongue which are conspicuously absent in the use of current vernacular.

Again, the frequent advantages of Latin over English in respect of terseness, terse as English undoubtedly is, are hardly to be doubted. "Swing back slowly" may not seem easy to improve upon, but consider the unquestionable superiority of the Latin, *Tarde retrorsum.* "Keep your eye on the ball" is admirable English in six words, but the Latin gives us the same in four: *Oculum in globo fige.* A golfer has so many things to think about—rules of the game, rules about his swing, etc., that abbreviation and economy are welcome.

The following specimens of Latin conversation are submitted in further illustration of the flexibility and adaptability of that noble tongue. Take the case of the ball topped into the limpid stream. We can readily figure to ourselves the following dialogue: Question: *Quid faciam?* (What shall I do?) Answer: *Dejice alterum globum a tergo, perdens unum.* (Drop another ball behind, losing one stroke.) The Latin provides all the advantage and relish of profanity without its reality, as the great lawyer, Curran, knew when he silenced the vituperative apple-woman of Dublin by calling her "an unmitigated hypotenuse."

One of the difficulties of golf is in the choice of the proper club. A perfectly natural question and answer would be the following: *Possuunc hiatum ferro attingere?* (Can I reach the hole with my iron?) *Cum ferro tutissimus ibis.* (You will be perfectly safe with

GOLF ILLUSTRATED



Photo by Pearce, Phila.

The fourth green of the Merion course requires one of the most delicate approaches imaginable. Although the hole is but 355 yards in length the drive must be placed well to the right and close to a fence, over which is out-of-bounds, in order to have a free shot at the hole and avoid having to approach over the sharp rising face of turf.



Photo by Pearce, Phila.

This photograph shows the Redan or seventh hole on the Merion course taken from the back of the green. It is 195 yards in length and is modeled after the famous Redan holes of North Berwick and the National. The tee can be seen in the distance to the left where a golfer is addressing his ball.

an iron.) *Proh Jupiter! aggerem superavi.* (By Jove! I have gone into the bunker beyond.)

There is another kind of incident much too frequent on the links, we are bound to say—that is where one party plays into another in front. No incident on the links provokes warmer resentment and, on such an occasion, the language is almost sure to be fervid. The following fairly represents, as the gentle reader will have to admit, what is usually said by the party aggrieved: *Heus tu! Quid in nomine Mephistophelis facis? Non lusi secundum.* The following free translation will demonstrate the force of the contention that the use of Latin is eminently desirable in the presence of caddies. A friend of mine who is a professor of classics in a great university approves my rendering: "What in the devil are you doing? I have not played my second!"

We all have our unaccountable off days, and our feelings are variously expressed. But Punch, I fear, not only descends to slang, but commits an anachronism as well when he makes a player say: "I cannot play for nuts today!" I cannot find any authority for such an idiom in either classical or medieval Latinity. But let some one else labor the point. This is Punch's version: *Nequeo ludere pro nucibus hodie.*

It is related of Andrew Kirkaldy that when putting on the home green of St. Andrews in an important match he was much annoyed by some spectator coughing as he was about to putt. Andrew waited a moment and the coughing ceased, only to break out again when the doughty professional resumed his stance. Casting a withering glance toward the offender, Andrew remarked: "Can nobody gie yon gentleman a jujube?" In the case instanced by Punch, the offender was a caddie, and the plaint is thus expressed: *Puer meus singultu semper affligitur cum difficilem ictum facturus sum.* This I make out to mean: "My caddie is always afflicted with hiccough when I am about to make a difficult stroke."

Sonority is a fine quality of language, and where we would simply say today: "Fine recovery" or "Pretty work," the noble Roman would exclaim in his large, imperial way: *O recuperatio nobilis!* and feel, doubtless, larger and more imperial than ever. Even when much cast down, this amplitude in language did not forsake him. Where the modern golfer, in his decadent style, would mutter after a missed putt or topped drive, "Rotten" or "Most rotten," the descendant of pious Aeneas would declaim *O me putidissimum!*

Golf is not always a succession of exaltations and agonies. It often moves tranquilly as the limpid stream above mentioned. Examples of this follow: *Quot lusurus sum?* (How many am I about to play?) *Unum de duobus.* (One off two.) *Impar ludis.* (Now you play the like.) *Quemadmodum stamus?* (How do we stand now?) *Dormio per tres hiatus.*

(Dormy by three holes.) *Dimidium ergo solum requiris.* (Then all you need is a half.)

We do not know how my readers will regard Punch's conclusion of the whole matter. Many good people import the matter of alcoholic consumption into the realm of morals. A university friend of mine, not the classical one, told a distinguished audience the other day that alcohol was a pure poison, and I dare say he was right. However, as a sad but truthful picture of manners and general decadence, the following admits of no denial. *Quid dicis de poculo Scotici spiritus cum aqua aerati mixti?*

I did not need much help from my classical friend to make this out to be the all too-frequent invitation: "What do you say to a Scotch and soda?" As to the reply, I cannot set it down without exclaiming on my own account, *O tempora! O mores!* Here it is: *Homo tuus sum: nunc loqueris.* For the benefit of old graduates like myself I construe: "I am your man: now you're talking!" For the use and benefit of those golfers who may "desiderate," as the scholiasts say, a brief compendium of Latin phrases suitable for or, at least, current on the links, we subjoin what follows, with due apologies and acknowledgments to Mr. Punch:

Tarde retrorsum.

Oculum in globo fige.

Puer, da mihi ligneum baculum.

Globum more solito in apice percussi.

In amnem, puto, globus meus condemnatus delapsus est.

Quid faciam?

Dejice alterum globum a tergo, perdens unum.

Possumne hiatum ferro attingere?

Cum ferro tutissimus ibis.

Proh Jupiter! aggerem superavi.

Heus tu! Quid in nomine Mephistophelis facis? Non lusi secundum.

Nequeo ludere pro nucibus hodie.

Puer meus singultu semper affligitur cum difficilem ictum facturus sum.

Me miserum! mortuus jacet.

Quot lusurus sum?

Unum de duobus: impar ludis.

O recuperatio nobilis! Globus tuus saxcus jacet!

O me putidissimum! ictui nimium peperci.

Tollere licet globum in leporis rasura jacentem.

Puer, da mihi lineam.

Fortunam infernam habeo. Globus ex hiatu exsilii!

Quemadmodum stamus?

Dormio per tres hiatus.

Dimidium ergo solum requiris.

Quid dicis de poculo Scotici spiritus cum aqua aerate mixti?

Homo tuus sum: nunc loqueris.