

LATIN ON THE LINKS

(By R. STANLEY WEIR, K. C., FORMERLY RECORDER OF MONTREAL)

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 by 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 uncomprehending 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 regime, 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 and Sanscrit. As fast as the caddies got familiar with the indexed words in one language, the fiat would go forth ordering the use of another. 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 Cicero will suffice for present purposes; and it has occurred to him to illustrate how the thing might work. For example, when a golfer, by bad play, sends his ball into some gurgling brook, 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, and might admire the alliteration. But what he does in nine cases out of ten is to exclaim: "My jamm'd ball has gone into the jamm'd brook!" Now such language, it cannot be denied is utterly indefensible; and betrays shameful indifference and thoughtlessness used in the presence of youth or ladies. How simple a matter then, of 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 amnen 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 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: *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: *Possumne hiatum ferro attingere?* (Can I reach the hole with my iron?) *Cum ferro tutissimus ibis*. (You will be perfectly safe with 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 perfervid. The following 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 and a mixed gallery. 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!"

Sonority is a fine quality of language, and where we would simply say to-day "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 most 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 tranquility 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*. (Dormie by three holes.) *Dimidium ergo solum requiris*. (Then all you need is a half).

The last hole in the ordinary game of golf is the 19th. Before Prohibition days the common form of salutation, except at my club, Kanawaki, where Prohibition has always reigned, it being an Indian Reserve, was "What do you say

to a Scotch and soda?" But the old Roman would have phrased it in a much loftier way: *Quid dicis de poculo Scotici spiritus cum aqua aerati mixti?* And to this invitation I have frequently heard the rejoinder in the following words: "I am your man; now you are talking." This extremely vulgar slang acquires a dignity in the Latin tongue and is a further argument for its adoption: *Homo tuus sum; nunc loqueris.*

There are so many clubs with long waiting lists that I offer as a suggestion not merely a pass examination on the rules of golf but a test of knowledge in the Latin tongue. In these ways merit would have its reward and the dignity of golf would be immeasurably enhanced. At all events, the free accusations so frequently made by the uninitiated that golfers are a profane folk would probably cease.

Don't Take Golf too Seriously

DON'T take your golf too seriously is the advice given by a well-known golfer who has figured in tournament play for several years and who admits now to having wasted the early years of his golfing career because he took his games as a matter of life and death.

"I never commenced to really enjoy the game," he said, "until I found out it was only a pastime instead of a business. At first I was so keen on winning that I could not rest at night when I was to play a match the next day. Every little old cup that I played for seemed to be the most important thing in the world at that time. If I failed to win my family had to suffer, as I became a regular grouch around the house.

"I was also a grouch on the links, and men have told me since that they fairly hated to play with me. I got no fun out of the game unless I happened to win. I really preferred to play with players that I could beat instead of one that played better than I did, and failed to recognize that I was not gaining any ground by playing with dubs. I was playing so desperately all the time that I never had the opportunity to try out new shots, and my golf was what you might call 'get there golf.'

"My style was awkward and I used the wrong clubs. I never consulted a professional, because I was too busy making the round of the links—too eager to beat my man or make a good score. When the happy awakening came, I found that I had never really enjoyed a game as I do now. Strange to say, after I lost that win-or-die spirit my game did not deteriorate, but it improved a great deal. I can make the same score today without half the mental or physical effort, and I feel more satisfied over the shots I make, because they are more nearly what a golf shot should be."