

PIONEER GOLF IN AMERICA

By Hon. R. Stanley Weir

IT is really one of the charms of this continent (notwithstanding that some find it one of the objections thereto) that we are able to fix time and place for the beginning of many things that in Europe are enshrouded in antiquity. For example, no one can tell precisely when or where European golf began. Englishmen, Scotchmen, and Dutchmen have all, indeed, contended for the honor; but although antiquarians and philologists seem to favor the Dutchmen, and although the Blackheathens of Blackheath, England, appear to possess the earliest club records, Americans to a man concede the palm to Scotchmen for (characteristically) exhibiting the keenest appreciation of the good thing golf is. Whatever the difficulty in Europe, in America the pioneers of golf are easily traced.

In the year 1873 the Royal Montreal Golf Club came into being, and, proud of its distinction as the pioneer club of this continent, has ever since enjoyed a flourishing career. The links was laid out on the lower slopes and meadows of the hill or mount that forms so charming a background to the Canadian metropolis—the hill or mount to which Jacques Cartier gave the name now borne by the city—Mont Real, the royal or kingly mount. Here for many quiet and happy seasons, unmolested by picnickers or seekers for shade and shelter from the city heat, a group of enthusiastic Scots, carrying with them their Lares and Penates in the shape of clubs that might to-day excite mirth by reason of their singular form, established the Royal and Ancient game. Their example was soon

after followed by the ancient capital, Quebec, upon no less celebrated a site than the historic Plains of Abraham; but that is another story.

In the course of time the city of Montreal acquired Mount Royal as a public park; divers roads were constructed, and these, together with an abomination in the shape of an inclined railway, woefully cut up the ancient links. However, our golfing pioneers, undaunted by these adversities, which they forthwith turned into hazards, still pursued the daily round and common task. But the dear public was not slow to avail itself of the sylvan beauties thus opened up, and with excellent but inconvenient taste persistently displayed a marked preference for those stretches of greensward that the Royal golfers by years of constant rolling and mowing and traversing had made beautiful. After demonstrating during many moons the most marvellous skill in driving the gutty within an ace of any given group of Montrealist heads, being moved by fear of inconsiderate charges of manslaughter, or doctor's bills and damages at the least, the Royalists at length shook off the dust of their feet (acquired from the park roads aforesaid) upon their old habitat, and departed for pastures fresh, to wit, for Dixie, twelve miles in the western suburbs. Here a spacious links and comfortable quarters preserve the traditions of many years of golf and glory. But not exclusively; for so admirably fitted for the game was the abandoned links, that the very next season a fresh band of players, selecting the ambitious but not inappropriate name of Metropolitan, succeeded in reaching

a satisfactory understanding with the civic authorities, and forthwith established themselves in the quarters of the departed Royalists. Before long the Metropolitan numbered 150, with a waiting-list of about fifty more. And so, up to the very present, with every prospect of an enthusiastic future, the Royal and Ancient pastime flourishes where it was first established on cisatlantic shores.

There are but nine holes on the Metropolitan course, totalling about 1760 yards. They are, therefore, comparatively short, but what they lack in length they quite make up in sportiness. The comfortable old club-house, built of native pine, looks out upon the undulating home green, and just beyond lies the first tee. The hole, called the Dennistoun, in memory of one of the ancient fathers of the club, is but 250 yards distant. Not quite half-way, however, it is intersected by a slightly elevated park-road that interrupts the career of many a well-meant drive, whilst the gradual ascent of the fair green beyond prevents any run on the ball. Here, verily, as the ball falls so it lies. There is nothing for it but a long clean carry. The putting-green is of the punch-bowl order, effectively guarded by ridges left by Farmer Fletcher years and years ago, so that a second, unless judiciously lofted, is almost sure to suffer a kick, necessitating a third, with a good chance to conclude in four; but most Metropolitans, it must be confessed, are made happy with a five.

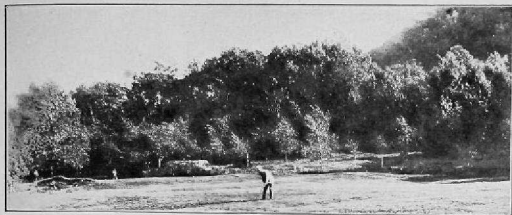
The second hole, called the Elm, is 300 yards long. A very straight drive is necessary to avoid two roads that flank it. As these rapidly diverge, however, all danger ceases after the grand stroke is played, the only remaining hazard being the magnificent elm that intercepts a too soaring brassey or cleek.

We now ascend a slight ridge to ne-

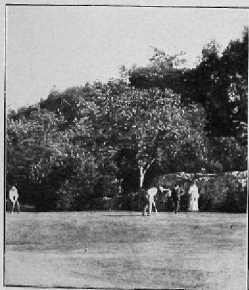
gotiate the Sidey, so named after two veterans, brothers, whom the Metropolitans thus commemorate. Nobody addresses the Sidey without fear and trembling, mixed, however, with hope, for it is a hole that can be done in four or fourteen, according to the luck or skill of the addresser. A park road cuts the course at right angles about thirty yards off at an elevation of about twelve or fifteen feet above the level of the tee. Rising abruptly on the other side of the road towers a veritable hill of difficulty. The bold and skilful driver who sends his ball soaring over this imposing mass is happy indeed; an easy second sees him upon the green with a good chance for a three or at most a four. But alas for him whose topped sphere fails to rise to the level of the road, or even, surmounting that, plunks upon Sidey Hill, only to descend backwards to the level of road, or remain enmeshed in all manner of vegetable growth. It is safe to say that golfers who are prone to soliloquy are never so fervent in utterance as when climbing Sidey.

Pausing for a moment at the next tee, to recover his breath after his recent strenuous toil, the Metropolitan golfer finds that upward, still upward lies his path. Before him the green gradually ascends to the Hill-top, flanked to the left by a swift descent to the meadow "through bush and through briar," and to the right by every variety of golfing peril. Still, to him who successfully acts upon the simple axiom that a straight line is the shortest distance between two given points, the Hill-top presents no great difficulty. The record for this very sporty hole (singularly enough held by a player surnamed Hill) is 1. Other players less auspiciously named are well content to be down (or up) in three or four.

We next from an elevation of about forty feet gaze upon the Gibraltar green,



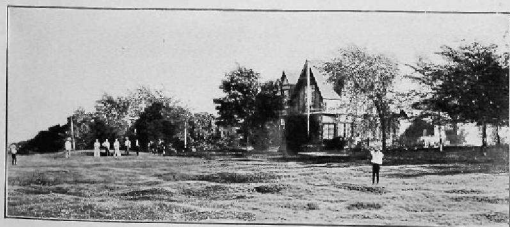
THE "MEADOW."



THE "GIBRALTAR" GREEN.



THE "ELM TREE."



THE CLUB-HOUSE AND HOME GREEN.

THE METROPOLITAN GOLF CLUB OF MONTREAL.

150 yards distant. A large pit generously strewn with fragments of limestone guards it on the right, while a spur of bed-rock which to some more or less imaginative golfer once suggested the key to the Mediterranean, whence the name, protects the entire right flank.

We now drive off from the sixth tee, with every inducement in the beautiful prospect before us to send our balls to the maximum of their flight. Walking over the unequalled meadow we make up our minds to be down in four, and good luck and skill attending us, we succeed. Similar fortune should be ours in the seventh, called the Cottage, if in our driving we pass either through or over the row of tall maples that constitute its chief hazard. Beware, however, of the grove to the left, the park road to the right front, and as you accomplish your second, the windows of the cottage just beyond the green.

The Orchard, so named because of its right flank, offers no perplexities save those presented by picnickers and holiday-makers, who show their appreciation of the efforts of the green-keepers by frequenting the vicinity of velvety lawn that serves for putting-green. Fore! is the constant cry here. On one occasion a pair of golfers who had reached the green with well-executed drives, and were rivalling each other for a three, found themselves surrounded by a bevy of French-Canadian school-girls, who, regardless because innocent of such things as golfers' nerves, began, as the perplexed Mets addressed themselves for and executed their longish putts, to sing loudly and musically, with the keenest enjoyment of the pun they were perpetrating,

*En roulant ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule,*

interrupting the refrain with shrieks of delight as A from twenty feet off just

rimmed the hole with his *boule*. As it happened, B, whose feelings, and A's, can be better imagined than described, managed notwithstanding to lay himself dead, and the hole was halved in three, both proceeding to the home tee accompanied by what the songsters deemed the most appropriate legend in the world—

En roulant ma boule.

A broad course for the home green inspires every Met to do his utmost from the tee. No difficulty offers for him who is content with fifty yards of margin. A sliced ball, however, is deservedly punished by the orchard or the rough path that skirts it, whilst a pulled ball gets into any one of a number of hazards placed by the hand of Dame Nature herself.

The nine holes have probably been accomplished, assuming that we are scratch players, in 39 or 40, although we need not feel aggrieved if we sometimes report 42 or 43. If we have not been too intent upon our game, and our endeavors to avoid the many picturesque hazards that have beset our way, we have not failed to observe the engaging aspect of Mount Royal as she soars above us close by, clad in the splendid verdure of summer, or, if it be autumn, in those rare robes of brown and crimson that only the northern woods put on. And we must have observed also the beauty of the city as we see it from the Hill-top and other points, spread out in wonderful panorama, the towers of Notre Dame conspicuous. Flowing past the city we see, too, the shining St. Lawrence, with its red-funnelled steamers now 1000 miles from the Atlantic; and the great Victoria Bridge, that unites us with the mainland; and in the distance, Laprairie and Rougemont and Bekeil; and on a clear day still farther away the blue peaks of the Adirondacks!