

THE ART OF GOLF

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ANNOTATED BY THE HON. MR. RECORDER WEIR.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORIGIN OF GOLF.

Golf, besides being a royal game, is also a very ancient one. Although it cannot be determined when it was first played, there seems little doubt that it had its origin in the present geological period, golf links being, we are informed, of Pleistocene formation.

Confining ourselves to Scotland, no golfer can fail to be struck with the resemblance to a niblick of the so-called spectacle ornament of our sculptured stones.

Many antiquarians are of opinion that the game did not become popular till about the middle of the 15th century. This seems extremely probable, as in earlier and more lawless times a journey so far from home as the far-hole at St. Andrews would have been exceedingly dangerous for an unarmed man.

It is not likely that future research will unearth the discoverer of golf. Most probably a game so simple and natural in its essentials suggested itself gradually and spontaneously to the bucolic mind. A shepherd tending his sheep would often chance upon a round pebble, and, having his crook in his hand, he would strike it away; for it is as inevitable that a man with a stick in his hand should aim a blow at any loose object lying in his path as that he should breathe.

On pastures green this led to nothing; but once on a time (probably) a shepherd, feeding his sheep on a links — perhaps those of St. Andrews — rolled one of these

stones into a rabbit scrape. 'Marry' he quoth, 'I could not do that if I tried' — a thought (so instinctive is ambition) which nerved him to the attempt. But man cannot long persevere alone in any arduous undertaking, so our shepherd hailed another, who was hard by, to witness his endeavour. 'Forsooth, that is easy,' said the friend, and trying failed. They now searched in the gorse for as round stones as possible, and, to their surprise, each found an old golf ball, which, as the reader knows, are to be found there in considerable quantity even to this day. Having deepened the rabbit scrape so that the balls might not jump out of it, they set themselves to practising putting. The stronger but less skilful shepherd, finding himself worsted at this amusement, protested that it was a fairer test of skill to play for the hole from a considerable distance. This being arranged, the game was found to be much more varied and interesting. They had at first called it 'putty,' because the immediate object was to putt or put the ball into the hole or scrape, but at the longer distance what we call driving was the chief interest, so the name was changed to 'go off,' or 'golf.' The sheep having meantime strayed, our shepherds had to go after them. This proving an exceedingly irksome interruption, they hit upon the ingenious device of making a circular course of holes, which enabled them to play and herd at the same time. The holes being now many and far apart, it became necessary to mark their whereabouts, which was easily done by means

of a tag of wool from a sheep, attached to a stick, a primitive kind of flag still used on many greens almost in its original form.

Since these early days the essentials of the game have altered but little. Even the styme must have been of early invention. It would naturally occur as a quibble to a golfer who was having the worst of the match, and the adversary, in the confidence of three or four up, would not strenuously oppose it.

That golf was taken up with keen interest by the Scottish people from an early day is evidenced by laws directed against those who preferred it to archery and church-going. This state of feeling has changed but little. Some historians are, however, of opinion that during the seventeenth century golf lost some of its popularity. We know that the great Montrose was at one time devoted to it, and that he gave it up for what would now be considered the inferior sport of Covenanter-hunting. It is also an historical fact that Charles I. actually stopped in the middle of a game on Leith Links, because, forsooth, he learned that a rebellion had broken out in Ireland. Some, however, are of opinion that he acted on this occasion with his usual cunning—that at the time the news arrived he was being beaten, and that he hurried away to save his half-crown rather than his crown. Whatever the truth may be, it is certain that any one who in the present day abandoned a game because the stakes were not sufficiently high would be considered unworthy of the name of a golfer.

The rest of the history of the game, is it not written in Mr. Clark's book?

CHAPTER III.

THE NATURE OF THE GAME.

Golf belongs to that large class of human games in which a ball plays the principal part. Balls of all sorts and

sizes amuse men—hard ones, soft ones, large ones, small ones. These are treated in a variety of ways. They are struck, used to strike with, pushed against each other, knocked into holes, rolled as close as possible to things, battered against walls, knocked over nets, cuffed with the hand, jerked with the finger and thumb, struck with an instrument, kicked with the feet, etc. In some games the ball is buffeted whilst in motion, in others whilst at rest. In some, one player's aim is to make it go whilst others try to stop it, or both may want to keep it moving, each hoping that the other will fail to do so. In games where it is the adversary's object to stop the ball, he keeps his face towards it and catches it with his hands; when he loses by doing so his back is turned, and he runs (except in war, in which the adversary does not wish to be struck, but should nevertheless have his face to the ball). In some games there is but one ball, about which there is a continual struggle; in others, each has it alternately. There is a common element in them all—rivalry.*

Now golf is a game in which each player has a small hard ball of his own, which he strikes with a stick whilst it is quiescent, with the intention of putting it into a hole. Abstractly he wishes to do this with as few blows as possible, concretely in fewer than his opponent. A round of the green is called a match.

*It seems to me that golf may be distinguished from all other ball games in several important respects which Sir Walter has failed to characterize, although I am sure he would agree with me. First, it is played not with one club, as are cricket, base ball, tennis, etc., but with a number of clubs of varying size, shape and weight; second, the golf ball is the smallest ball played in any field game; third, the golf swing is, compared with other swings, a long swing. These three characteristics suffice, I think, to explain why golf is a difficult game. When we add that the striking surface of our clubs is relatively small, that the ball often lies awkwardly upon the green, very different from the smooth lies of the croquet-lawn or billiard-table, or the free course of a ball in the air, we cease to wonder at foomling.

A match is the best of nine, twelve, or eighteen games. Each game is called a hole, because it ends at the bottom thereof. The tee is not, as in many other games, the object aimed at, but the point started from. It consists of a small pile of sand placed on the ground, and solidified by the palm of the hand. On this the ball is placed. Each blow or miss is called a stroke, that is to say—a stroke is constituted purely by intention. A stroke is not the same thing as a rub, which is usually a blow received by a third party, but it is nearly identical with a shot. The latter, however, does not include a miss in the same impartial way as the former.

The distance between the tees and the holes is from a hundred to five hundred yards. After leaving the tee, you are not allowed to do anything to the ball except strike it or swear at it until you have either given up the hole or got to the bottom of it.* In each hole there is a flag, so that its whereabouts may be seen from a distance. This is temporarily removed when the player gets near it. The flags are little bits of cloth or a bunch of wool at the end of a stick or wire; but on greens where they are not habitually stolen, the whole flag is of iron, with the name and number of the hole printed on the top. These names are for the most part either geographical, personal, gastronomical or arithmetical. The

geographical names are suggested by peculiarities of the ground around or in front of the hole. If there are none, a wall or a bathing-machine in the neighbourhood may suggest a name. Holes called after people have usually been planned, laid out, and added to the course by their godfathers, who for the first ten years earn anything but gratitude, as these new holes are for a long time very rough and bad; a public-house or a refreshment-stall in the neighbourhood of a hole is always recognised as its most important feature, and it is christened accordingly. The last hole is called the last, the one at the the extremity of the links the far-hole, unless a public-house be there to make such a consideration unimportant; for it is admitted on all hands that the state of a man's stomach has much to do with his game.

The grounds on which golf is played are called links,† being the barren sandy soil from which the sea has retired in recent geological times. In their natural state links are covered with long, rank benty grass and gorse. These get worn away by sheep and golfers, and short springy sandy turf is disclosed. The part of the links thus worn is the course. Links are too barren for cultivation; but sheep, rabbits, geese, and professionals pick up a precarious livelihood on them. A good course ought to be from 50 to

*I must demur to Sir Walter's easy admission that it is permissible to swear at the ball, for, if so, it would be equally allowable to a cajole it by occult means. I submit it is equally unfair to ban or bless a ball, although it is said that the girl caddies of the Channel Islands prettily spit or make the sign of the cross against their opponents' putts, without objection. The following true tale, however, will show the danger of admitting the intervention of spirits, whether of light or darkness: Once upon a time St. Andrew and St. Patrick were playing a single. At a critical point in the game after masterly drives and second strokes by each, St. Andrew, who played the odd, succeeded in laying his ball stone dead by a most skilful approach from thirty yards off. But St. Patrick, from about the same distance, greatly dis-

gusted his rival by actually holing out! "Look here, Pat," said St. Andrew, "you know this is not fair. There ought to be *no miracles* between friends."

†*Links*. "A flat or undulating stretch of sandy soil more or less covered with grass or heather; the windings of a river or its banks."—Such is the definition of an excellent dictionary we have consulted. Some purists, not to say pedants, insist that the word "links" applies solely to stretches of sandy soil by the sea, and also that it is a noun of singular number grammatically. Usage, however, clearly justifies the use of the word as land laid out for golf, whether inland or by the sea, and also as a noun, neuter, plural. To hear anyone say: "The links is a fine one," is quite enough to make a man to top his drive or miss the easiest putt in the world.

100 yards wide, the ground undulating or even hilly. The finer the turf is the better; but it is never perfect, because golfers are always slicing bits of it out with their clubs, quicker than the green-keeper can replace them, which is not saying much. When you find your ball lying on one of these scraps, you bemoan; but it is only when breaks in the turf are found within twenty yards of the hole that the green-keeper is inexcusable.

On every course there ought to be plenty of hazards—that is, places where a shot is lost unless the driving be far enough, straight, or high. Off the course there are rabbit-holes, gorse bushes, railways, ploughed fields, gardens, and green-houses for crooked drivers; on it, bunkers or sand-holes for topped and short balls. The best kind of bunkers are natural. Those which are often visited usually have names, being called some man's nose or grave, or merely his bunker. To have a bunker named after you is a *monumentum aere perennius*. People like being godfathers to bunkers, although it is not usually complimentary to their driving. Where there is a lack of natural bunkers, artificial ones are dug. Walls, roads, ditches, and cops serve as hazards on the course, but these are not recognised as so desirable as bunkers.

CHAPTER IV.*

OF SETS OF CLUBS AND OTHER GOLFING APPURTENANCES.

A set of clubs may be defined as that assortment which the player's caddy carries in a cover on wet days. On fine days the player carries one club himself,

either that which he has just used or the one that he is about to employ.

I propose here to give a descriptive list of all the clubs which may or may not be in a set.

Nearly every one carries a play club, an instrument consisting of many parts. It has no legs, but a shaft instead. It has, however, a toe. Its toe is at the end of its face, close to its nose, which is not on its face. Although it has no body, it has a sole. It has a neck, a head, and clubs also have horns. They always have a whipping, but this has nothing to do directly with striking the ball. There is little expression in the face of a club. It is usually wooden; sometimes, however, it has a leather face. Clubs, without being clothed, occasionally have lead buttons, but never any button-holes. Clubs' heads are some black, some yellow, but colour is not due to any racial difference. From this description it will be easy to understand, without a diagram, what a club is like.

Spoons in most respects resemble clubs. Their faces are somewhat more open. There are long, short, and mid spoons, so called according to the length of the spoon.

Brassies differ from spoons and play clubs in that they have brass bottoms which are screwed on.

Irons and cleeks have no sole. Their toes and noses are one and the same thing. They have iron faces. They are never whipped. They have sockets instead of necks. Their mode of locomotion is called 'approaching.' This is a short swinging gait. Sometimes, like play clubs, they drive, but no kind of

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*I shall not attempt to keep pace with Sir Walter in his excellent fooling in this chapter. The reader shall enjoy the worthy baronet's pleasantries without other comment. The reference to a "portable platform" is rather a fine anticipation of Mr. Beldam's linoleum mat divided into six-inch squares for revealing mathematically one's precise stance, but so far as one

can discover Sir Walter had no dreams of the marvels to be wrought by aluminium clubs and rubber-cored balls. He is also silent about the goose-neck putter, the socket driver, the bulger and other modern devices. The royal and ancient game in common with sister arts and sciences has to pay the penalty of having survived.

club ever walks. There are different kinds of irons. A driving iron is used when it is too far to go without doing so. Lofting irons are more light-headed; they look like their work, but do not always do it. Cleeks are cleeks; they are not marked out from their creation for special uses. You may carry a driving and an approaching cleek, and a cleek for putting; but if some one steals your set, or if you die, your putting cleek may be used for driving, etc. etc.

Then there are putters. A good one ought to have the name 'Philip' stamped on it by somebody who must not tell you that he did it himself, or it must have belonged to some one else before you got it—either an old golfer who is dead (no matter whether he was a good holer-out or not) or else to a professional. No golfer with any self-respect uses a putter which he has bought new out of a shop for four shillings.

The niblick is too vulgar-looking for description in a polite treatise like this. He is a good fellow, however, ever ready to get you out of a hole.

These are the ordinary clubs, but there are many more. There are clubs with vulcanite heads, with german silver faces, with horn faces, clubs with bamboo shafts, clubs with cork grips. Old gentlemen use baffy spoons.

The 'President' is a niblick with a hole in it, which might be a very good niblick if it were not a president. It is called a president because the hole makes it clear-headed.

There are putting irons which are not irons but putters. People who putt badly use these, and are happy, although they only put it out of their power ever to putt well. There are putters made like croquet mallets, and there are perfectly upright ones. The latter are of no use to corpulent persons, as they cannot see the ball. Even the emaciated hole-out better without them.

Old-fashioned irons look like the missing link between a meat cleaver and a kitchen spoon. They all originally belonged to somebody's grandfather, and are only now to be found in glass cases or in the sets of very bad players, who, according to whether they had a golfing grandfather or not, expiscate or purchase them. The player, when getting this instrument from his caddy, does not ask for an iron in the usual way. He says 'Give me *my* heavy iron,' in a tone which causes the inexperienced adversary to despair. In reality, using an old-fashioned iron is the last expedient of those who cannot loft a ball with anything else. Even this expedient often fails, but defeat is at least avenged by the destruction of the green.

In addition to ordinary and extraordinary, there are special clubs (most of my own invention), few of which have as yet come into general use.

The automatic self-adjusting tee is a simple little contrivance whose name explains it. It prevents toeing, heeling, and topping, correcting errors in the swing of the club, acting somewhat in the same way as the compensating balance of a watch. It is a convenience to attach the automatic tee to your button-hole by a string which can be used to lift it to your hand after each shot, just as the organ-man jerks up his monkey when about to move on.

The portable platform for the feet, when the stance is bad, cannot be recommended. A spade to level the ground is more easily carried, and equally efficacious.

The 'Dynamite' is a very powerful weapon. It is a club in the face of which is inserted a small cartridge which explodes when the ball strikes it. With this club a good driver has been known to get past the long hole at St. Andrews in one shot. Loading for each drive is, however, so inconvenient that the dynamite has not come into general use. Be-

sides, the trouble, the expense, and danger connected with it are so considerable as to make it unpopular. It would be rash to start on a round without a surgeon to carry the clubs, and surgeons of course charge more than ordinary caddies. If dynamite came into general use the rules of golf would require to be slightly altered. As they stand at present, holes would occasionally be lost because the player could not come up to time. Ten minutes is scarcely enough to allow for trepanning, which would often be necessary, as the cartridge frequently fails to go off till the club has reached the level of the head. With a dynamite it is safer to jerk than to take a full swing. The author does not recommend the dynamite. It reduces golf too nearly to the level of grouse driving or covert shooting.

The putter scale is a light iron tripod, into which you adjust an ordinary putter, placing the tripod so that the head of the putter rests behind the ball. On the tripod there is a scale showing the distance the putter is to be drawn back and let fall for each length of putt. Of course the player has to guess the said length for himself.

We now come to the subject of golf balls, of which, as of clubs, there are many kinds—not, however, like the clubs, to be used for different shots. There are twenty-sixes to twenty-nines, guttas, eclipses, black, white, and red balls, and the magnet ball. The numbers twenty-six to twenty-nine are purely sentimental. White balls are used when there is neither snow nor daisies, red ones when there is either, black ones by the poor and the stingy. Black eclipses are less objectionable than black guttas, for at least they are round. With a black eclipse one is allowed to pretend that the love of money is not the root of all evil. The magnetic ball is one of my own many inventions. It is simply an ordinary ball containing a

small magnet which enables the player to hole-out with great precision, the iron in the hole (the 'tin,' it is called) attracting the magnet. For driving north the magnet ball is very good, but in driving east or west some allowance must be made for the skid of attraction. During a thunderstorm the carry of these balls is really astonishing.

'But,' cries the beginner despondingly, 'must I buy all these things?' He certainly may if he choose. Like some patent medicines, if they do no good, they will do no harm. The usual course, however, for the tyro is reluctantly to be persuaded to buy a cleek and a driver, and to get the loan of a ball. This is sure to decide him to go in for the game, and he buys a full set—namely a driver, a long spoon, a mid spoon, a short spoon, a cleek, an iron niblick, a putter, if he goes to a club-maker. If he buys a friend's spare clubs, they will be a more necessitious-looking lot, the shafts either twisted or too thick to twist. This does not much matter, as the whole set will be broken several times over before the tyro begins to develop notions of his own. With an old coat, nailed boots, and some balls, he is ready to start. Gloves for blistered hands, pitch to make the gloves grip, sticking-plaster for frayed fingers, a knife for sharp nails, elastic wristlets for started sinews, may be purchased either at once or as the necessity for them arises. As soon as the tyro is admitted to a club, it is his duty to buy a golfing umbrella for the use of the members.

Bad players always carry a very large set, but the converse of this proposition is not true, many good ones doing the same. Still, there are certain inferences to be drawn from sets of clubs. One need never be afraid to give a shade of odds to a player who carries three spoons. It is safer not to bet with a man who has none. Why bad players carry all these spoons I have never been able to make

out. Perhaps it is to encourage themselves with—to use and discard as each in rotation proves itself ineffectual. It is certain that one or the other becomes for the time being favourite. It is the best club he ever had; he can drive further with it than with a play club (a doubtful advantage, one would think. Would a man praise a putter which sent a two-yard putt three past the hole?). The largeness of a bad player's set is usually due to excess of wooden clubs. Approaching, being all a fluke, he leaves to

chance. The good player with notions, on the other hand, runs riot in irons and cleeks, mashies, niblicks, and putters, each of which is supposed to have specialties in the way of loft, length of carry, etc. etc. That constantly changing does not ruin his play is because of the extra care needed to hit accurately. The man of one iron is apt now and then to miss from too implicit trust in the familiar face which has never deceived him from many a round.



CELESTIAL GOLF.