

THE ART OF GOLF

By Sir Walter Simpson, Bart.

ANNOTATED BY THE HON. MR. RECORDER WEIR.

The Annotations are in Brackets.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY MR. WEIR.

ANCIENT as is the Royal and Ancient game it cannot be said to have left many ancient traces in literature. The late Mr. Gladstone, doubtless, had he played golf, might have demonstrated in his Homeric studies, that the Greek heroes engaged in singles or foursomes (between combats and speeches,) on the plains of Troy,—“windy Troy,” to quote Tennyson’s suggestive touch; but it is noteworthy that even so fine an antiquarian, Hellenist and golfer as Mr. Andrew Lang can take us back no farther than the era of Dutch tiles.

The most ancient references to our game that we can discover in literature, are from the pen of old Omar, for it was surely of golf that he was dreaming when he wrote

“The Ball no Question makes of Ayes or Noes
But Right or Left as strikes the Player goes.”

The fact must be admitted, therefore, that our golfing classics are very modern. One of the best—“The Art of Golf” by Sir Walter Grindlay Simpson, Bart. was written so recently as the year 1887, and disputes with the Badminton book the claim to first place. Like its fellow classic, the “Art of Golf,” as the very first chapter will show, is brightly written, containing wit as well as wisdom, but it has the advantage of being the work of

one mind, whereas Badminton is composite.

Sir Walter Simpson was, when his book saw the light, Captain of the Honorable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, and therefore speaks from experience and *connaissance de cause*. He does not, indeed, pretend to speak from the highest platform. “But if” he modestly remarks in the preface, “a poor cricketer, a hopeless billiard player, an execrable shot, begins golf by the doctor’s orders after three decades, flounders hopelessly for years, and then by theory and experiment evolves a golf which I shall only characterize as infinitely better than his cricket, his billiards or his shooting ever were, it is evident he knows (whether he can say it) something of that department of brick-making which does not depend upon the quality of the straw.”

Sir Walter was the first to show golfers in action by instantaneous photography, and, although there is great disparity as regards wealth of illustration between it and so recent a work as that of Mr. Beldam’s, the reformed cricketer, it deserves all the praise that rightly belongs to the pioneer.

Sir Walter properly begins his book with a pæan in praise of golf. As my remarks upon his text are to be chiefly of

a practical sort, I shall not find it necessary, nor would it be fitting, to interrupt his preliminary rhapsodies by prosaic comments of my own. I shall have my opportunity when we come to the chapters on the Nature of the Game and the Playing of it.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRAISE OF GOLF.

THERE are so many good points about the royal and ancient game of golf that its comparative obscurity, rather than its increasing popularity, is matter for wonder. It is apparently yet unknown to the Medical Faculty. The golfer does not find it in the list of exercises recommended by doctors to persons engaged in warfare with the results of sedentary habits. He is moved to pity British subjects compelled to stir their livers by walking, horse-riding, or cycling. He knows how monotonous it is following one's nose, or flogging a horse and following it, compared with flogging and following a ball. For the wearied and bent cyclist, who prides himself on making his journey in as short a time as possible, he has a pitying word. Men who assume that the sooner the journey is over the greater the pleasure, evidently do not love their pursuit for its own sake.

With any other sport or pastime golf compares favourably.

With cricket? The golfer has nothing to say against that game, if you are a good player. But it is a pastime for the few. The rest have to hang about the pavilion, and see the runs made. With the golfer it is different. He does not require to be even a second-class player, in order to get into matches. Again, the skilful cricketer has to retire when he gets up in years. He might exclaim with Wolsey: 'Had I served my golf as I

have served my cricket, she would not thus have deserted me in my old age.' How different it is with golf! It is a game for the many. It suits all sorts and conditions of men. The strong and the weak, the halt and the maimed, the octogenarian and the boy, the rich and the poor, the clergyman and the infidel, may play every day, except Sunday. The late riser can play comfortably, and be back for his rubber in the afternoon; the sanguine man can measure himself against those who will beat him; the half-crown seeker can find victims, the gambler can bet, the man of high principle, by playing for nothing, may enjoy himself, and yet feel good. You can brag, and lose matches; depreciate yourself, and win them. Unlike the other Scotch game of whisky-drinking, excess in it is not injurious to the health.

Better than fishing, shooting, and hunting? Certainly. These can only be indulged in at certain seasons. They let you die of dyspepsia during the rest of the year. Besides, hunting, you are dependent on horses and foxes for sport; shooting, on birds; fishing, on the hunger of a scaly but fastidious animal. The pleasures of sport are extracted from the sufferings of dumb animals. If horses, grouse, or fish could squeal, sports would be distressful rather than amusing.

Golf has some drawbacks. It is possible, by too much of it, to destroy the mind; a man with a Roman nose and a high forehead may play away his profile. That peculiar mental condition called 'Fifish' probably had its origin in the east of the Kingdom. For the golfer, Nature loses her significance. Larks, the casts of worms, the buzzing of bees, and even children, are hateful to him. I have seen a golfer very angry at getting into a bunker by killing a bird, and rewards of as much as ten shillings have been offered for boys maimed on the links. Rain comes to be regarded solely