

The Saints at Golf

By Robert Stanley Weir



PERHAPS this more or less credulous and not too pious generation may bear with the recital of a veracious chronicle concerning two ancient and worthy saints, among the best known in the calendar—*viz.*, St. Andrew and St. Patrick.

These wise and (on occasion) wonder-working fathers were not above beguiling their leisure with the ancient pastime of golf. Dear, indeed, to their hearts was the wonderful old game! St. Andrew himself it was, as all the world knows, who gave his name to the classic links that look out upon the North Sea. Strange, indeed, if he were ignorant of golf! As for St. Patrick, it is surely enough to say that, as the best tradition accounts him originally a Scot, the probabilities in favor of his knowing the game too are well-nigh conclusive.

The story goes, then, that these saintly and, as we have written, on occasion wonder-working benefactors were, one fine day, engaged in their favorite pastime; and, as usual—for their handicaps were equal—the contest was exceedingly keen, with little, if anything, to give or take on either side. Toward the end of the match, to wit, at the eighteenth hole, an incident occurred which will illustrate the strenuous nature of the contest and, at the same time, show how an important precedent for the proper etiquette of the game—as between saints—came to be established.

St. Andrew and St. Patrick, according to the well-authenticated legend, were “all even” at the seventeenth hole and were both, in modern parlance, going strong. Playing the fateful home hole, where so many matches have been lost and won, St. Patrick had succeeded in placing his ball (a “feathery”)

comfortably “dead” with his third stroke, and, as St. Andrew, having somehow “foozled” his second, was still a good way from the green, the patron saint of Hibernia looked a sure winner of the hole and the match with a nicely executed four.

With pardonable but suppressed elation St. Patrick awaited his holy brother’s third stroke, and, as he beheld his opponent waggle his club, he experienced, saint though he was, something of that lack of displeasure with which, according to La Rochefoucauld, we are prone to regard the misfortunes of our best friends. As St. Andrew thus waggled his mid-iron, or whatever was its counterpart in those days (probably a “baffy”), he was still over a hundred yards from the hole.

“At best,” reckoned St. Patrick as he closely regarded him, “my dear brother Andrew will light upon the green with this stroke. Two putts at least will he take to hole out—five strokes in all. The match is mine?”

But St. Andrew, exemplifying the tenacity of his race, was determined not to be beaten; nay, he was determined to win. But it was manifestly impossible to save the situation by ordinary methods. Most unjustifiably, therefore, calling into play his supernatural powers he, to the mingled astonishment and chagrin of his saintly brother, and playing with an air almost of nonchalance, actually holed out from that considerable distance in the third stroke, thus winning the hole and the match by one up!

The astonishment and chagrin of St. Patrick swiftly gave place to wrath and indignation as it flashed upon him how the trick had been played.

“Look ye, Sandy!” he exclaimed, “this is most unfair! You know perfectly well there should be no miracles *between friends!*”

St. Andrew, honest man, attempted no defense. He was obliged to admit that he was at fault, that he had put his great powers to improper use.

“*Mea culpa!*” he exclaimed. “The temptation was too great.”

Moreover, as St. Patrick was equally endowed in respect of the miraculous, it was plain that there could be no scope for mere skill if a free use of saintly powers were permitted at critical stages of the game. Golf, although a game fit for the gods (or the saints), was, after all, a human pastime and should be played by purely human methods and devices. It was therefore agreed between these pious brethren that they should play fair for the future; and, accordingly, since that time it is well understood that whenever saints play golf (with one another) they must play as ordinary mortals and assiduously refrain from performing miracles.

Occasionally, however, so strong is the baneful spirit of competition in these degenerate days, we hear of holes in golf being done in two strokes and even in one! Such exploits, it may as well be known, are clear proofs of saintly agency and indicate that the miraculous has been invoked. No one not a saint ever accomplishes such feats. It is well, therefore, for those who make no pretensions to sanctity to be on their guard against playing with persons who hole out from great distances on or off the green. Such persons are saints (sometimes, it is true, in disguise), performing miracles. They are violating the etiquette of the game as agreed upon and established by the patron saints of Scotland and Ireland long, long ago. The company of such persons should be sedulously avoided; nay, more; such persons should be incontinently expelled from all self-respecting clubs anxious to maintain a high standard of morals.