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THE ROYAL GAME OF GOLF

For ages golf has been pre-eminently the national game of Scotland. As its history emerges from the mists of antiquity we find football and it linked together as representative games, in fulminations against 'unprofitabil sportis,' unduly distracting the attention of the people from more serious affairs. But our game far exceeds this old rival in interest; and if it were not for the popularity of curling in its season, no rival pastime could pretend to vie with golf in Scotland.

The mode of playing golf is so well known in these days that it may suffice to explain that it is a game played over extensive commons, or 'links' as they are termed; that the implements used are peculiarly constructed clubs, so weighted at the crook or 'head' of the shaft, as to give great impetus to the small hard

gutta-percha ball to be driven along the grass; and that the object of the players – either as single antagonists or two against two – is to endeavour to vie with each other as to who shall drive the ball towards and into a series of small artificially made holes, in the fewest strokes. From hole to hole the party proceeds, sometimes one winning a hole, sometimes another, and occasionally (by evenly contested play) halving: until the whole round of the green has been traversed; when the party who has gained the greatest number of holes is declared the winner. The links ought to be of considerable extent, and the holes several hundred yards apart, so as to give opportunity for skilful driving and other niceties of the game. To those unfortunates who have only read of the pastime, it may appear hard to believe in the reality of the enthusiasm shewn by its votaries; but whenever they are privileged to come under its influence, even as spectators, they will find it is one of the most fascinating of pursuits. How can a man describe in fitting language the subtle spell that brings him out in all weathers and seasons, and makes him find perfect pleasure in 'grinding round a barren stretch of ground, impelling a gutta-percha ball before him, striving to land it in a succession of small holes in fewer strokes than his companion and opponent,' as the game might be described by one of that class of men to whom the 'primrose by the river's brink a primrose is, and nothing more.'

The fascinations of the game have enlisted in the ranks of its votaries men of all classes, many of them famous on other fields, who have made their reminiscences of their beloved

pursuit mediums for many a bright word-picture in prose and verse. Hitherto no attempt has been made to gather together what has been so said and sung in praise of the pastime; but in Mr Robert Clark's beautiful volume now before us, entitled *Golf – a Royal and Ancient Game*, ample amends have been made for this neglect, by one of the most enthusiastic and best golfers of the day. Here we have presented in a gossipy way so beloved by golfers, wealth of material, both as regards the history and literature of the fascinating game – a labour of love in an artistic guise. What the author is on the links, so seems he to be among his printers and artists and binders —*facile princeps*. The volume before us, though unfortunately too costly to be very generally available, is a marvel of beautiful typography and tasteful binding. Our author has gone for his information to the most various sources – old acts of the Scots parliament, proclamations by kings, burgh records, minutes of the more prominent golf-clubs, books and magazines; and by judicious editing of this medley has shewn the many-sidedness of the game in a way that none but a devotee could.

Mr Clark wastes no space on unprofitable speculations as to the origin of golf. All that is clear in this vexed subject is that though Scotland is the chosen home of the game, she is not its birthplace. It is, however, of little moment whether the game came in with the Scandinavians who settled on the east coast of Scotland, or whether it was brought northward over the Border as a variety of the English 'bandy-ball;' or even if we have to go back

to the Campus Martius, and look for the parent of golf in the curved club and feather ball of the Roman *Paganica*. Games of ball seem to have existed in all ages, and it is therefore probable that golf is a development of some older game, or perhaps a 'selection of the fittest' from several previously existing ball-games. It is sufficient for our purpose that early in the fifteenth century it was at least as popular with all classes as it is to-day.

When gunpowder made archery a thing of the past, the conflict between love of country and love of golf ceased, and the game went on prospering under the smiles of royal favour, surviving proclamations of various town-councils directed against sacrilegious golfers whose sin was held to be, not so much that they played on Sunday, as on that part of the day called 'the tyme of the sermonnes.' This matter was set at rest by the decree of James VI. of Scotland, who in 1618 sent from his new kingdom of England an order that after divine service 'our good people be not discouraged from any harmless recreation,' but prohibiting 'the said recreations to any that are not present in the church, at the service of God, before their going to the said recreations;' or as Charles I., when subsequently ratifying this order, puts it, 'having first done their dutie to God.'

Besides James VI.'s crowning act of founding the Royal Blackheath Club, Mr Clark has recalled two other instances of royal connection with the game in a charming way, as one of the illustrations in his book is from Sir John Gilbert's picture of Charles I. receiving, during a game on Leith Links, the

intelligence of Sir Phelim O'Neill's rebellion in Ireland in 1642; while another is a delicately drawn pen-and-ink sketch by Mr James Drummond, R.S.A., of the house in the Canongate of Edinburgh, which John Patersone, shoemaker, built for himself with half the stake in that famous 'foursome' – the Duke of York (James VII.) and Patersone against two English noblemen.

With the Stuarts went out for a time royal countenance of the game, till William IV. became patron of the Royal and Ancient Club of St Andrews, and presented to it for annual competition that coveted golfing trophy, the gold medal.

But though there came kings who knew not golf, the game lost none of its old popularity. Still, as before, pre-eminently the game of the people, we find it associated with many a notable scene and character in the history of Scotland. So fond of the game was the great Montrose, that hardly had the minstrels ceased to serenade him and his day-old bride 'Sweet Mistress Magdalene Carnegie,' when we find him hard at work with clubs and ball. That fifty years later it continued to be the favourite amusement of the aristocracy of the Scottish capital, we can gather from the curious books of expenditure of Sir John Foulis of Ravelstoun, who seems to have spent most of his leisure time 'losing at golfe' on Musselburgh and Leith Links with Hamilton and Rothes and others of the highest quality of the time. We read of Balmerino's brother, Alexander Elphinston, and Captain Porteous, the victim of the famous 'mob,' playing in 1724 'a solemn match at golf' for twenty guineas on Leith Links,

where, a few years later, might constantly be seen Lord President Forbes of Culloden, who was such a keen golfer, that when Leith Links were covered with snow he played on the sands; though even he has to yield in all-absorbing devotion to the game to Alexander M'Kellar, 'the Cock o' the Green,' immortalised in Kay's *Portraits*, who played every day and all day long, and then practised 'putting' at the 'short holes' by candle-light.

It is almost superfluous to say that in our own day the noble and ancient pastime is still the game of the Scots, and latterly of the English, of all classes and in all parts of the world. One little fact that incontestably proves the eminent respectability of the game is that 'the minister' can be a golfer without the least fear of the straitest-laced of presbyteries. It is said that when the canny Scot abroad 'prospects' for a new settlement, while he naturally rivets one eye on the main chance, with the other he reckons up the capabilities of the ground for his favourite game; therefore it is that golf has taken firm root and flourishes in many a distant colony. Across the Border the game is so acclimatised that formidable rivals to our native players are now trained on well-known English greens. That it may go on and prosper is of course the wish of every true lover of the invigorating pastime.

Mr Clark gives us some historical notes of the more prominent of the many golfing clubs that now flourish in different parts of Scotland, and extracts from their minute-books the leading events of their career. Now and then we come across eccentricities, such as the feats of Mr Scales and Mr Smellie

of the Edinburgh Burgess Club in driving balls over the dome of St Giles's Cathedral, one hundred and sixty-one feet high; or the even more wonderful achievement of another member of this club, who drove a ball in forty-four strokes from *inside* their golf-house on Bruntsfield Links over the hill of Arthur Seat. As a rule, however, these clubs pursue the even tenor of their way, the members finding their best happiness in playing the pure and simple game.

While the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers is generally held to be the oldest Scotch Club, so great has been the development of its sister Club at St Andrews, and so great are the attractions of golfing on the famous links of the venerable city, that the 'Royal and Ancient' takes precedence over all, and is indisputably *the* club of the kingdom. What Newmarket is to racing, or Melton to hunting, St Andrews is to golf. In St Andrews, it is not a mere pastime, but a business and a passion. It is the one recreation of the inhabitants from the Principal of the College to the youngest urchin; it has even invaded the domain of croquet, and has taken captive the ladies, who now take so keen an interest in the game, that on more links than those of St Andrews their green is a charming feature of the place. In short, in St Andrews 'no living thing that does not play golf, or talk golf, or think golf, or at least thoroughly knock under to golf, can live.'

The chief prize of the 'Royal and Ancient' – the gold challenge medal played for every autumn, presented in 1837 by King William IV. – is termed the 'Blue Ribbon of Golf.' To win it

is the dream of every member of the Club. Other clubs, such as North Berwick, Musselburgh, Montrose, Perth, Prestwick, Burgess, &c. have each its own time-honoured challenge trophy, that of the Royal Musselburgh being laden with more than a century of medals commemorating each winner. That English clubs too are following fast the fashion set by their older brethren north of the Tweed, is attested by the prizes now competed for at Westward Ho! in Devonshire, Hoylake in Cheshire, and at Wimbledon, &c.; though it is but fair to state that Blackheath claims with good reason to be father of all English golf-clubs, and has for long been celebrated for the keenness of its players and the prizes offered for competition. So much for the history of the game; let us now glance at its literature. In the interesting collection of prose papers Mr Clark has gathered from various quarters, we can study the peculiar features of the game and the effect it has, for the time, on the tempers of its votaries. As we have seen at St Andrews, the ardent golfer has little time for thought or conversation unconnected with the game. For the time being the be-all and end-all of his life lies within the pot-hook-shaped course he has to traverse; and not a little of his happiness or his misery for the day depends on the nature of the match he succeeds in getting. Though the game is as a rule an exceedingly social one, and admits of quiet chat and occasional good-natured banter, the *true* golfer at work is essentially a man of silence; chattering during the crises of the game is as abhorrent to him as conversation during whist; one thing only is as obnoxious as the

human voice to him then – that is, any movement of the human body near him. 'Stand still while I'm putting,' and 'Don't speak on the stroke,' are two postulates he would fain enforce. This oversensitiveness to external influences may explain the seeming ungallantry of the 'Colonel' in H. J. M.'s amusing account of *The Golfer at Home*, which appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* a few years ago. After a charming little picture of the 'Colonel' resenting, though he does not openly object to Browne being accompanied over the course by 'his women,' as he ungallantly terms Mrs Browne and her sister, he says to his partner: 'The Links is not the place for women; they talk incessantly, they never stand still, and if they do, the wind won't allow their dresses to stand still.' However, as they settle down to their game, the 'Colonel's' good temper returns under the healthy influence of an invigorating 'round,' and gives H. J. M. an opportunity of pointing out how all ill-humours of body and mind give way before the equable and bracing exercise of a round or two of the Links of St Rule. That the reader may see the amount of walking exercise taken in a round of St Andrews Links, it may be interesting to note that the exact distance, as the crow flies, is three miles eleven hundred and fifty-four yards; so that the golfer who takes his daily three rounds walks *at least* eleven miles. It is no wonder, then, that in addition to its own attractions, golf is esteemed as a capital preparation for the moors or the stubbles, hardening as it does the muscles both of arms and legs. What hunting does for the cavalry soldier as a training for more

important bursts in the battle-field, the like does golf for the infantry soldier in bracing him to encounter forced marching with ease. The Links have formed the training-ground of many a brilliant officer. Space will not allow us to dwell on the genial gossip about St Andrews and St Andrews players – amateur and professional – that we find in Mr Clark's book, further than to mention three names. First, that of the great champion of the professionals, Allan Robertson, who was 'never beaten in a match;' of the brilliant but short-lived career of poor 'young Tom Morris,' the champion player of his day – son of a worthy sire who still survives; of Mr Sutherland, an old gentleman who made golf the chief business of his life, whose interest in his fellow-men, not as men but as golfers, is well shewn in this anecdote. His antagonist was about to strike off for the finishing hole at St Andrews, when a boy appeared on the bridge over the burn. Old Sutherland shouted out: 'Stop, stop! Don't play upon *him*; he's a fine young golfer!'

It is in verse, however, that the votary of golf finds the field congenial to his subject.

In 1842 appeared a clever collection of poems, entitled *Golfiana*, by George Fullerton Carnegie of Pittarrow, which delighted the golfers of that day by the humorous way in which it hit off the playing characteristics of the men he introduced into it. He begins by throwing down the gauntlet to those students of Scottish history who sigh over the musty memories and deplore the decayed glories of the city of their patron saint:

St Andrews! they say that thy glories are gone,
That thy streets are deserted, thy castles o'er-thrown:
If thy glories *be* gone, they are only, methinks,
As it were by enchantment transferred to thy Links.
Though thy streets be not now, as of yore, full of prelates,
Of abbots and monks, and of hot-headed zealots,
Let none judge us rashly, or blame us as scoffers,
When we say that instead there are Links full of golfers,
With more of good heart and good feeling among them
Than the abbots, the monks, and the zealots who sung them!

We have many capital songs in honour of the game; amongst others a parody of Lord Houghton's well-known song, *Strangers yet*, from which it will be seen that something more is necessary to make a good golfer than a set of clubs and an anxious 'cady' to carry them:

DUFFERS YET. – BY TWO 'LONG SPOONS.'

After years of play together,
After fair and stormy weather,
After rounds of every green
From Westward Ho! to Aberdeen;
Why did e'er we buy a set
If we must be duffers yet!
Duffers yet! Duffers yet!

After singles, foursomes – all,
Fractured club and cloven ball;
After grief in sand and whin,
Fozzled drives and 'putts' not in —
Ev'n our cadies scarce regret
When we part as duffers yet,
Duffers yet! Duffers yet!
After days of frugal fare,
Still we spend our force in air;
After nips to give us nerve,
Not the less our drivers swerve;
Friends may back and foes may bet,
And ourselves be duffers yet,
Duffers yet! Duffers yet!

Must it ever then be thus?
Failure most mysterious!
Shall we never fairly stand
Eye on ball as club in hand?
Are the bounds eternal set
To retain us duffers yet?
Duffers yet! Duffers yet!

In conclusion, we may remark that though golf, to the uninitiated, may appear to be a game requiring considerable strength of muscle for its achievement, it is not so; for the easier it is played, the better are the results. To apply much force to the

stroke is to imperil the chance of driving a far ball; whereas by a moderate swing of the club, the ball is not only driven far and sure, but goes from no effort apparent to the striker.

A notion also prevails that golf is a game suited for young and middle-aged folks only. This is a delusion, for no outdoor pastime is more fitted for elderly people. To attain *great* excellence in the game, the player must commence early in life; but to become enamoured of its joys requires but a beginning, and that beginning may be made by men who have long passed the meridian of life. We could point to many elderly gentlemen whose lives are being lengthened by the vigour-inspiring game, and who, when their daily round or rounds are finished, can fight their battles o'er again in the cheery club-house, with all the zest of youth. When games such as cricket have been found too much, or perhaps the exertion of tramping the moors too severe, the sexagenarian may safely take to the easy but invigorating pursuit of golf, and 'bless the chiel who invented it.' If he misgives his ability to cope with the exertion, or fancied exertion, of pacing a few miles of green turf and wielding a club, our advice to him is to place himself in the hands of a professional golf-player – plenty of whom are to be found wherever there are links – and try; and in a wonderfully short time our veteran may find himself interested, perhaps absorbed, in a game the delights of which he has lived all these years without having been able till now to realise!

FROM DAWN TO SUNSET

PART III

CHAPTER THE SECOND

Deborah waited and watched – a gloom unutterable weighed on her spirits – and no Mistress Fleming came. At last old Jordan Dinnage arrived at the castle alone, looking scared and sorrow-stricken.

'The master is very ill,' said Mistress Marjory, as she waited on Jordan. 'These be bad days, Master Dinnage. I doubt if he lives till morning. Doctor says he won't; but doctors know naught. In general, if doctors say "He'll be dead by mornin'," it means he'll live to a good old age; I've seed it often. But mark my words, Jordan Dinnage: there's not much life in our dear Master; *he's goin'*. This comes o' leavin' Enderby. I felt it; I knew'd 'twould be so. *This comes o' Master Sinclair's leavin's*. O Jordan Dinnage, it's wrong, it's grievous wrong, this leavin' Enderby, for this grand blowed-out old place, an' these flaunting livery-men an' maids. Master Sinclair's curse is on us!'

'Nay, nay, Mistress Marjory; these be women's superstitions.

Mistress Deborah did rightly. A goose she would ha' been to fling all this grandery and gold guineas in the ditch, for fear o' bad luck, 'sooth! It's no more that, than thou'rt a wise woman! The Master'll pull through; an' if he don't, better die a prince than a beggar.'

Marjory shook her head. 'Give me honest beggary. An' where's Mistress Dinnage? Be sure Lady Deb 'ud be glad o' her company now. Why didst not bring her along, Jordan? It speaks not much for her love.'

Jordan reddened. 'Not a word agen Meg, Mistress Marjory! She'll be comin' soon. I must see Mistress Deborah.'

'Well, come now. An' heaven send Master Kingston soon.'

Deborah met the dear old man with outstretched hands. 'Jordan, I am so glad to see ye! Where is Margaret?'

Jordan shuffled from one foot to the other, and twisted his hat round in his hands. 'Well, Lady Deb – Mistress Deborah – I've not brought Meg along.'

'I see ye have not!' cried Deborah impetuously. 'But where is she?'

The old gray eyes, growing dim with age, looked straight and honestly on their young Mistress, yet humbly too, as he answered in a low voice: 'Where she ought to be, Mistress Deborah – off to her young husband, Master Charlie Fleming.'

'Jordan, Jordan! Is this true? Her husband? Ye bewilder me. Are they wedded then? Is she gone to Ireland?'

'Sure enow! O Mistress Deborah, I come to ask forgiveness! It

isn't for the like o' Jordan Dinnage to have his daughter Mistress Fleming; but dear heaven knows I know'd naught, an' never sought it out, nor had high notions. Mistress Deborah, I ask forgiveness, an' I hope the master'll forgive me.'

Deborah took the old trembling hand. 'The master is in no state to blame or to forgive. But, Jordan, thou may'st give me joy o' this. It gladdens mine heart in my sore troubles like a sunbeam on a dark, dark cloud. Forgive thee? Ay, I am proud to be Margaret Fleming's sister; an' well believe my father would bid her welcome too – faithful honest Jordan. Now come, Jordan, come, and see how he lies. He knows me not, and he calls ever upon Charlie. Hast sent my letter to Ireland? Hast the address?'

'Ay, ay; it's gone.'

'Then I will write again to-night. Heaven send he may come in time. Sometimes, Jordan, he lieth in a stupor; again he calls for Charlie or for me.'

Reverently pulling his white forelock, with his old habit of respect, to his fiery but beloved master, Jordan stood at the foot of the bed, and saw the shadow of death on the face of Vincent Fleming.

'My boy,' murmured the dying man, with his eyes upon Jordan – 'my boy Charlie!'

Old Jordan gazed helplessly and sorrowfully from him to the doctor who stood by, and Marjory, who entered. 'What's to be done?' he muttered. 'It kills him!'

'Patience, patience!' whispered the solemn doctor; 'he may see

his son yet. There is great hope for him, Mistress Fleming; keep good heart.'

'Not hope of his recovery, Master Allan,' said Deborah, with stern and still despair. 'I know death when I see it. You have held out hope before; yet make him live till my brother comes. Ye hear me, Master Allan?'

'Ay, Mistress Fleming; I will use my poor skill to the utmost. Bear up. I will return to-night, Mistress Fleming;' and with a courtly bow, he left her.

But for Deborah, she kneeled beside her father, and with old days and old memories her heart was like to break. Jordan was weeping bitterly; she heard the old man's sobs; but on her own heart a still Hand was laid, enforcing strength and calmness. For two things she prayed: that Charlie might come in time; and that her father might be himself before he died, to hear that Charlie had ever been true to him. And so through the long night she watched; and old Marjory oft slept and nodded, as age and dulled senses will; and though Sir Vincent at times called plaintively for his Deb, his 'Rose of Enderby,' his more frequent plaint was for his boy.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

In those days there were wild doings in Ireland. 'Liberty and Reform' were the watch-words which did then, and ever will, electrify the fiery, rebellious, ardent spirits that flocked under

one banner to struggle and to die. Irish and French met and fought together against the iron hand of England; thousands perished; the fated isle ran blood.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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