

FOREWORD

BY BERNARD DARWIN

GOLF, THOU ART A GENTLE SPIRIT; WE OWE THEE much!' With these words the author of this engaging little book ends his thanksgiving for all that the game has meant to him, and we, his readers, owe him much for his rapturous, unabashed enthusiasm. He reminds me of some of the elder writers on cricket, and in particular of the Rev John Mitford who raised William Beldham's bat in adoring ecstasy to his lips. He dares that narrow, slippery ground that divides the sublime from the ridiculous; he is not afraid of letting himself go. In point of date he comes after those early cricketing writers, but like them he belongs to the heroic age of his game. Allan Robertson, was the first great golfer known to history, and it was a year after this book appeared that he made his famous score of 79 at St Andrews, when playing with Mr Bethune of Blebo, who thus attained a vicarious immortality. Hugh Philp, the Stradivarius of club-makers, had died only the year before. Golf, though it had been played from time immemorial, was as yet confined to a few links in Scotland (there are but nineteen golf clubs in the list at the end of the book) and, save for the exiled Scotsmen of Blackheath, had scarcely been heard of in England. It is true that the first great golfing revolution was already a thing of the past, for it was some nine years since the old feather ball had been dethroned by the usurping gutty, but that event had not yet greatly extended the boundaries of the game. Golf was still a religion of

few shrines; its votaries were a small and comparatively intimate company, who handed on its tenets by word of mouth, and the author of this book was the first publicly to attempt to proselytize. The bards indeed had been before him. 'The Goff. An heroi-comical poem,' had been published in 1743, and hard on a hundred years later George Fullerton Carnegie had taken off the leading figures at St Andrews in his pleasant, rhyming couplets. But H. B. Farnie (for he it was who disguised himself as 'A keen hand') was the first to set forth the joys and agonies of the game and his technical views on how to play it, in sober prose. In his own words, he laid down 'the first rude draft of a golfing *lex scripta*.'

His chapter on the game's history need not detain us long, for the thing has been more learnedly and elaborately done since, and we may pass on with a word of gratitude to him for leaving out Nausicaa, who has appeared all too often on such occasions. On the other hand his views on 'The modern game' are full of interest, the more so because he wrote at a time of transition when the brutal and bludgeoning iron, as he was half inclined to deem it, was threatening to oust all the elegant varieties of wooden spoons, and men's minds were disturbed accordingly. He was by nature, I think, a lover of everything that was old, and distrusted the insurgent cleek, or 'click.' Yet he could not but be impressed by Allan's mastery of the novel weapon, though weeping over the divots which it tore from the sacred turf. And so we find him hesitating miserably between the two, at one moment admitting that the baffing spoon 'is an exceedingly puzzling club' and that the light iron has its advantages when a bunker is in the way, and at another begging his reader on an important occasion to 'give his iron clubs a holiday.'

It may be that this fondness for old clubs and old times was part of a pleasant little affectation. He was, I believe, when he wrote his book, in the prime of life, but it amused him to pretend to be an old gentleman, one of a foursome of 'oldsters,' spooning the ball gently from one smooth patch of turf to another, rather than indulging in 'open swiping.' If so it was a thoroughly amiable weakness and no doubt begat a sympathy between himself and the humbler of his readers.

In one respect he was a ruthless iconoclast, as he had no good word to say for the traditional red coat, which was destined to make such an appeal to the English converts of some thirty years later. But generally speaking he was a man and a teacher of his own times. He believed in the right hand held quite loose, a doctrine preached in 1890 by Horace Hutchinson in the Badminton volume. A thumb down instead of round the shaft was anathema, as indeed it remained till Taylor and Vardon came to shatter ancient ideals; and though he had to admit the existence of iron putters he could not abide them. He was but a poor prophet when he declared that the irons of his time were 'obviously of an unchangeable character.' What would he say to the clanging armouries of today? On the other hand he seems almost to have been gifted with second sight in his description of the clubs that were excessively supple—'in fact, as the golfing vulgate hath it, perfect tangles.' Did he foresee the 'limber' shafts that for a while devastated the world before the war? Perhaps it is only that human folly, like history, has a knack of repeating itself.

Doubtless his views seem today, like himself, a little old fashioned. At its best his instruction is for the infant class rather than for the sixth form. He was perhaps happy

THE GOLFER'S MANUAL

in living when men did not trouble themselves overmuch as to the shut face or the opposing left hip. His simple creed will found no new school of golf, yet there is about him a perennially youthful keenness, an intense devotion to the game and all its jollity and friendliness, that go straight to the heart. His name is enshrined in no list of medal winners and we know not today what skill was his; but we may feel sure that he was a sturdy and cheerful partner in a foursome and, in the best meaning of the words, a good golfer.

PREFACE

THE AUTHOR HAS TO ENTREAT THE READER'S INDULGENCE for the discursive manner, and occasionally colloquial tone, in which this Treatise is written. These were in a manner necessitated. In laying down the first rude draft of a golfing '*lex scripta*,' the theoretical principles of the game not being so defined and immutable as historical tradition asserts to have been the Laws of the Medes and Persians, the author trode on delicate ground; and he has ventured to call in question several golfing canons of hoary observance, only by equal argument, and by dint of demonstration. Besides, the author intended that this Treatise should furnish a popular account of the details of the game, which might gain it votaries amongst the uninitiated by showing the scientific nature of the pastime. He has only to add that the more important points insisted on in the following pages, have been mooted and discussed by him with distinguished players, and his opinions, as hereinafter expressed, have been cordially endorsed by them.