



I

#### HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE GAME

THE ORIGIN OF THE GAME OF GOLF IS HIDDEN IN the mists of antiquity. That this popular pastime, or a sport nearly resembling it in its general features, was of very ancient practice, appears from the casual allusions of various old authors. The simple requisites for the game, a bat and ball of peculiar conformation, have been in common usage (fashioned, it may be, in a rude and primitive way) amongst all races for time immemorial, as affording some species of athletic sport; and it needs but little speculative enquiry to arrive at the belief that Golf, as it is played in modern times, is but a refinement and improved form of a very ancient amusement.

The Romans, for example, had a rustic pastime, which they called '*Paganica*', played with a crooked stick or bat, and (what brings the affinity still closer) with a leather ball stuffed with feathers. It does not appear, indeed, that the *Paganica* required a large tract of ground for being properly played, or even that the object of the game was, as it is now, to propel the ball into small holes placed at wide intervals; still, in its general aspect, as a game where a *golf ball* (for it was even so) was driven by a rudely-shaped club, the Latin pastime *Paganica* seems to have been the embryo of modern golfing.

From this period a long hiatus occurs in the history of

the sport. In the social annals of the days of Edward III of England, mention is had of a northern game called *Bandy-ball*, played with a crooked bat or club, and with a ball as its name imports. To this species of mediæval golfing, the latinised name *cambuca* (variously spelt *cambuta*) was applied. The bat or club used to strike the ball was descriptively termed the *baculus incurvatus*, a phrase applied likewise to the *virga episcoparum*, or episcopal crozier. From this latter use of the Latin synonym, we are inclined to infer that the club used in the game of Bandy-ball must have been a solid stick, the head being curved naturally or artificially, but not attached as in the golf-clubs now used; most probably, too, it lacked the appliances of lead and bone, thus reducing it to the humble level of a shinty or hockey stick of the present day. On the whole, we very much doubt if Bandy-ball more nearly resembled the Scottish pastime of modern times than did the Roman Paganica.

The next link in the historic chain is found in a very odd charter-house indeed, the last place perhaps where an antiquarian golfer would seek for information regarding his favourite sport, namely, in an Act of Parliament of the time of James II of Scotland. The game is therein called Golf, the name it is now universally known by. This term is undoubtedly of Teutonic origin, there being several words akin to it in the German and Dutch dialects; for instance, '*kolf*', signifying a club in Dutch, (holf, Danish).

Under this new title (if indeed the game of golf, properly so called, had ever been practised before) the sport appears to have been widely known in Scotland at the accession of the first James, if not before that epoch. Our reasons for supposing this to be the case, arise from

the passing of the Act before alluded to by the legislature of James II, A.D. 1457. It is intituled an Act 'anent Gowffing;' and thereby, after setting forth 'that it was an unprofitable sport for the common good of the realm and the defence thereof,' it was enacted that each Sheriff should set up within his Sheriffdom, butts, for the practice of Archery as a more useful national amusement; and certain fines were expressed as the consequences of violating the provisions of the law by continuing to indulge in the forbidden pleasures of Golf. Now, James II, although somewhat arbitrary and impetuous in his measures, was a provident and long-headed Scot; and would not have legislated so strictly against the practice of an innocent amusement, had he not seen or feared that its excessive popularity was likely to wean his people from the warlike trainings which were the safeguard of Scotland in those stormy times. Again, this popularity must have been the work of many years; thus setting back the probable date of the introduction of Golf into Scotland before the reign of James I.

We have no information whatever concerning the clubs which were used in those days, or even about the Links or Heaths over which the game was played. That both were sufficiently rough is very likely. One circumstance respecting the arena of Golfing achievements is worthy of notice. The Links which are now played over in Scotland are in many instances of comparatively recent origin, especially those which border on the sea-coast; being formed from alluvial deposits, or by the receding of the ocean or sea. The most extensive Golfing course in the kingdom, for instance, the Links of St Andrews, was, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, if not still later, overflowed by the German Ocean at high tide. This appears incidentally

from several deeds of demise granted by Bishops and Priors of the Cathedral of St Andrews, as superiors of certain tracts of land and premises conterminous with what now forms the Golfing ground. Bishop Hugo, who flourished towards the end of the twelfth century, in a charter of confirmation granted to the Priors and Canons of St Andrews, of certain tofts and crofts in the neighbourhood, makes mention of Balgove *cum salinâ*. The exact location of this salt factory being thus clearly indicated, no doubt can be entertained but that the ridge of land so designated, formed at that time the beach at high water. Still later in ecclesiastical conveyancing special reference is had to the *rock* of Balgove, with the salt-pans situate thereby:—(*vide* Register of the Priory of St Andrews during the Priorships of Simon and Bisset, &c., printed for the Bannatyne Club, and collated in Lyon's History of St Andrews.)

Others of the Scottish Links resemble that of St Andrews; consisting of low hummocks of sand, ridged by the action of the waves; whilst inland, a bold line of rising ground shows the probable coast at a time when the waves rolled higher than now. Such links could hardly have been practicable as Golfing courses in the earlier days of the game.

We may remark here, in reference to the St Andrews Links, that the ocean is again exerting its fury to submerge the course; and that, even within the memory of old residents, an incredible amount of ground, or rather sand, has been washed away by the action of the waves. We can only hope that such measures may be taken by those interested in the preservation in all its integrity of the St Andrews Green (and what Golfer is not?), as will prevent the possibility of any more salt-pans being set up at Balgove.

Beyond this sketchy history of the game of Golf, no particulars of any interest, we are sorry to say, can be adduced for the information of the reader. How or where the game was played after the stringent law of James II had determined, or had fallen into disuetude, down to the middle of the eighteenth century, are matters of sheer speculation.

A few scattered notices, indeed, are occasionally met with in the private annals of illustrious personages; more, however, in illustration of their predilections and pursuits than of the game itself. Thus, we are informed, that it was a favourite amusement of Charles I, who used to practise it keenly when visiting his northern dominions. He was, indeed, playing a match at Golf, according to a gossiping tradition, over the Links of Leith in the year 1641, when a courier with his horse all a-foam, came spurring over the Figgate Whins, bearing the tidings to the unfortunate King that Ireland was in revolt. Then, again, we are told that James II of Britain was an enthusiast in the sport.

There is an interesting pastime played in the rural districts of France, which has some affinity to the Scottish game; it is called *Jeu de Mail*, or Game of the Hammer; and, as it may be unknown to many of our readers, we shall extract the following account of it by an intelligent sketcher of French affairs:—

‘It is exactly our golf, but played under different circumstances, and many of the men here attain to great perfection in it; but whether they could beat our best players I shall not venture to say. I think they would have a better chance of beating us on our fields than we should them on their ground. Their club is made in the shape of a hammer, which gives rise to the name. The handle

is rather longer than that of a golf club, of the same size and thickness, and having a good deal of spring in it. The part with which the ball is struck, and into which the handle is firmly fastened in the middle, is about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, by about two inches thick, round, but shaped in such a way as to give the greatest facility for striking the ball with precision, the one end being nearly flat, like the flat end of a hammer, with which the ball is usually hit, while the other is more sloped so as to give a facility for striking the ball when it gets into a position of difficulty, and from which it requires some skill to extricate it, such as often happens also at golf. Both ends are strongly bound with iron, which is necessary to give weight to the club, as well as prevent the wood from breaking. The ball is solid and sound, made of the root of the box tree, about two inches in diameter, and consequently heavier than our balls. The game is played along the bye roads, in the neighbourhood of the town, sometimes with high banks on each side, sometimes ditches, at other places level, with the fields sometimes lined with hedges, but usually quite open; the surface of the ground is very variable; sometimes covered with deep ruts, at others sandy and smooth, generally tortuous, and offering always many obstacles to the course of the ball, which it is the object of the players to overcome in proceeding from one goal to the other. The goals are not very long, averaging perhaps half a mile; at the end of each is placed a touchstone, as it is here called, which the players have to strike before the match is won, and he who can do it in the least number of strokes wins. The players, must, however, keep on the road, as if the ball is struck off it, into a field for instance, the player loses three; so that he must make up that number, in counting his strokes, which gives his adversary

a great advantage. Good players, I am told, hardly ever make false strokes of this kind, but can usually send their balls in any direction, and almost to any spot they wish. There is one man here who, they say, and he says so himself, can break a plate once in three times, *at a distance of 200 or 300 yards*;<sup>\*</sup> but their great trial of skill is to put up a target raised eighteen feet high from the ground, and, at a distance of fifty yards, to strike the ball through a hole in the centre six inches in diameter. It is quite a chance, they say, if the ball passes through this hole, but it is not uncommon for their best players to hit the target frequently. The target is about the size used at archery meetings in England.—*Letter from Montpellier*

In the year 1750, the Royal and Ancient Golfing Club of St Andrews was established; and in 1761 the Bruntsfield Links Club, Edinburgh. Other associations of a like nature were quickly formed in various districts; and in these clubs records are duly kept of members, rules, and the results of the annual contests for medals. The dates we have just mentioned may therefore be regarded as indicating the epoch of the modern game.

<sup>\*</sup> We must be allowed to doubt this feat very much.—*Auth.*