



2

THE MODERN GAME

THE GAME OF GOLF, AS IT IS PLAYED NOW-A-DAYS, IS, we suspect, a very different affair from the primitive pastime of some hundreds of years ago. *We suspect;* for, as has been deplored in our previous chapter, there are no Golfing annals to search for curious information—no quaint tome, blazoned with monkish delineations of the sport, to refer to; and how the game was played in detail, who were its patrons, who the lights of its science, are points of interest now entirely lost to us.

But centuries, it is almost needless to say, have not denied, in their lapse, to Golf, the improvements which have been vouchsafed to almost every other art and amusement in the world. No; centuries have passed over the rugged heath and reclaimed sand-bank, and have smoothed them to velvet carpets for the sport; centuries, by destroying with the knowledge they evoked, these old fallacies of amusement, the card, the dice-box, the loathsome hell, and the nightly debauch carried into the noon-day, which our forefathers delighted to honour; and by replacing their enervating excitements with the manly outdoor pastimes of the present day, have brought wealth, numbers, and the patronage of the great, to bear upon the advancement and improvement of Golf.

Within the last few years a remarkable difference has

8

THE MODERN GAME

been produced in the number of Golfers, by the discovery of Gutta Percha, and the branch discovery that it was excellently well fitted for the manufacture of Golf balls. Before that ever-memorable era in the history of the game, the Scottish Links did not present the same animated appearance they do now; nor were the votaries of the pastime composed so variously of all classes. There was a sufficient reason for this in the expense of requisites. The universal, because unavoidable, use of feather-balls is quite within the recollection of every one who has reached his third lustrum as a Golfer. These are awful days to look back on! Feather balls were constructed with great trouble to the maker, and at a corresponding expense to the player; their manufacture indeed constituted a distinct trade in Golfing communities. They were formed by stuffing boiled soft feathers, in quantities that would seem to many apocryphal, by means of a kind of awl, into a stout leather case, sewed into the similitude of a sphere; a little opening being left for the insertion of the feathers. This hole was then finally stitched up; the case hammered round and painted; and the ball was ready for use. But alas! its duration was brief indeed: one or two rounds of a moderate-sized Links, were quite sufficient to put it *hors-de-combat*; and its wheezing flight through the welkin was but too symptomatic that it was done for, to all the higher intents and purposes of Golfing. But it was destined to renew its youth, like an old courtier with his rouge and his patches. Again it was under the hands of the maker, who smoothed its ruffled surface and coated its gaping seams with paint;—then retailed it to embryo Golfers, at a cost in keeping with its 'sere and yellow leaf.'

This was the career of a Golf ball antecedent to the introduction of Gutta Percha; which caused a total

9

revolution in the history of ball-making. The first flight of 'Guttas' was hailed with a burst of joy financial by every-one except the old monopolists of the feather manufacture. They saw no reason to rejoice; their occupation was, like Othello's, gone, at least in all seeming; and day after day, the demand for feathers dwindled, and gutta percha was the order of the time. A few prejudiced oldsters, indeed, remained staunch liegemen of the old system; but only for a time, and at last the ball-makers themselves, who had firmly nailed their colours to the mast, surrendered before the increasing volleys of guttas. We are, moreover, happy to state that the ball-makers, so far from losing by the advent of gutta percha, have had eventually ample reason to rejoice thereat; for, the only drawback to the enjoyment of the delightful pastime, its expense, being removed, the increase of players and their ability to invest in a number of balls at the same rate that formerly was the value of a couple gives them ample and remunerative employment.

We may remark here that gutta percha balls, when properly made and hammered, or otherwise compressed so as to unite their particles firmly, fly quite as well as feathers through the air; and like the King they 'never die;' for a judicious softening and re-hammering, with a coat or two of white paint, are all the preparation required to make them bound away as merrily and as handsome as when first they left the original mould.

The game of Golf has at the present day peculiar facilities for being properly played in Scotland, where, from the splendid tracts of sand which royal grants or the provident munificence of private bodies long ago set sacredly apart for its practice, the head-quarters of the sport are situated. Were nature at the back of man he could

scarcely lay out better links than those of St Andrews, Perth, Musselburgh, Monifieth, Montrose, Prestwick, and many other places. The *habitués* of these several golfing grounds, have formed themselves into associations as well for the better protecting of the ground as golfing links, as for the development of the game by playing for medals; holding stated *meets* for the latter purpose.* Of late years the influx of English families for a summer in Scotland has been steadily on the increase, and Golf in consequence numbers many keen votaries among the Southerners. Links, we believe, have been staked out in various parts of England; and these infant Golfing Clubs, aided and abetted by the Scotch residents, who, in their ubiquitous character, are sure to be found 'quite handy,' are doing as well as could be expected. In sultry India, too, the game is not unknown, where it is preferable to cricket as an out-door amusement for obvious reasons; and this fact is as good as a medical certificate of its virtues. This widespread estimation in which the sport is held, has occasioned employment to a distinct set of artisans in golfing communities—clubmakers, ballmakers, caddies, &c.—thus giving a substantial and business-like air to the game, which speaks much for its steady popularity.

Before entering in our succeeding chapters upon a technical consideration of our subject, we shall give a slight general sketch of its nature.

The Golfing course is arbitrary in form; sometimes circular, sometimes oblong, but more generally stretching irregularly in a winding direction. The best site for a Golfing ground is by the sea-shore, and we find nearly all of the Scottish Links so situated. A sandy soil does not

* *Vide* addenda 'clubs.'

encourage the thick and luxuriant growth of grass, an earthy one does; thus the turf is easily trodden down to velvety smoothness merely by the pressure of the player's feet. At intervals of time nomadic flocks of sheep aid in keeping the herbage down; so that the course is always fit for the niceties of the game without any special attention. Still the theatre of our scientific pastime is by no means a Bowling-green; the course-proper alone has this trim appearance. On each side bristle all kinds of fuzzy horrors, —whins, thick-tufted heather, and many other situations of distress for a wandering ball. The course on a good Links is not wider, on an average, than thirty to sixty yards; nor is golfing, even on this cleared space, altogether plain sailing. The surface is dotted over at frequent intervals with sandy holes, technically called bunkers, from two to six feet deep, of irregular forms and sizes; whilst here and there a whin is left in a likely place to intercept the unwary stroke. Then the inequalities of the ground—a hillock here, an abrupt rift there—vary the play, and call up all the skill of the performer to avoid Scylla, and yet not tumble into Charybdis.

Some Links again have more the appearance of parks; the whins (tough old bushes too) have ceased to mark with their yellow bloom the heathery margin of the course; the bunkers have degenerated from stiff golfing hazards into a resort for holiday children with wheel-barrows, spades, and agricultural propensities; and growing in consequence exaggerated, have lost their rugged outline, and are worn into gentle hollows on the plain. To complete the taming of such a Links, the reader has only to picture to himself the daily inroads of the kine appertaining unto some economic milkman—a score or two of nurserymaids—a few rinks of quoits—and, sprinkling the scene with

washer-women, he will easily see that in such a region the royal and ancient game of Golf is in imminent danger of dying a natural death, or at all events, of being deprived of its most delightful perils.

Over the course, at distances from each other varying from eighty to four hundred yards, are bored small circular holes, about four inches in diameter. These holes are placed on especially smooth tables of turf called putting greens, for there, as the reader will shortly learn, the nicer strokes of the game are played. When they have been played to some little time, these holes are shifted a few yards, as well to preserve the green from too much rubbing, as to vary the the play by changing the *lie* of the ground in the short game. When the course is circular in form, the players go round till they reach the starting point; if oblong or irregular, they play to the further end, then returning, play the same holes backwards till they reach the point they set out from. The object of the golfer is to propel a small hard ball by means of clubs (which it were needless to describe minutely here), from one hole to another, and at last to hole it in a fewer number of strokes than his antagonist, who plays a separate ball. Until the hole is 'lost and won,' the ball is never touched by the hand, except in certain situations set forth in the code of Golfing Laws annexed to this little work. When the course has been thus accomplished, whoever has gained the greater number of holes is victor; but a match may be ended before the entire ground has been traversed, if one party has, at any stage of the game, already gained more holes than remain to be played, when, of course, his adversary, although winning all the rest, could not retrieve the fortune of the match.

We would advise our uninitiated reader to peruse, as

THE GOLFER'S MANUAL

supplemental to, and explanatory of, this brief description of the sport, the excellent code of golfing laws we have referred to. There he will find every detail of the game given, which he will be thoroughly able to comprehend with the aid of our glossary of technicalities. It would be superfluous for us, with such a concise account, and full explanation of the various predicaments of the game given in these rules, to write even a *résumé* of the leading points here; and in our future chapters we shall consider the reader as being conversant with the general features of the pastime as therein described.

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