

MY FIRST FOURSOME.



FAST Days are not now so difficult to spend in Scotland as they used to be. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," but all work and a more than ordinary allowance of preaching is apt to make him kick his heels over the traces altogether. So the parson has of late lost his influence so far as holidays are concerned, and with much reason, for if a hard-worked artisan is to have a full holiday, let him spend it with his family, enjoying the fresh air in the country, and not in the musty, fusty, atmosphere of churches, which are, as a rule, damp and badly ventilated, listening, or rather, wearing the attitude of an attentive listener, to some most unpalatable discourse—for if there is a thing thinner than a Scotch Fast Day dinner, it is a Fast Day sermon. Not that we would advise a working-man to go down the Clyde in a steamer, *drink, dance* and *return delirious*, but that he should do so decorously, giving his wife and children a treat that would make them think more of the world and its blessings. Practical kindnesses go quicker home to the heart than ill-preached Scripture. He is but a half-souled individual, who would compare for a moment the smiling pictures of health and happiness with the canting faces of the hypocrites who cannot see reason for rejoicing in anything. The working-man has long ago settled the question in his own mind, and the parson has so far lost his power. As to the middle classes, it is long, indeed, since they determined to make it a holiday. At the time which the little reminiscence I am about to relate commences, the church bells were better responded to than now, and folks, more especially the middle-aged, remained at home, letting the young ones rush off to the coast, to Edinburgh, or Lochlomond, according to the bent of their fancy, or the facilities afforded by the railway companies or river steamboat owners. Anxious to avoid the crowds which I knew would be

everywhere but at Glasgow, I had resolved as I journeyed home to lay in a stock of good cigars, some choice books, draw down the blinds, and remain inside till the day was over. It was neither a very bad nor a very good resolution, but I could not be bothered studying where to go, the spirit of hesitancy hung over me, and, feeling utterly unable to make up my mind, it was wise policy to do nothing. A slight headache at the time would have been welcome. I would have consulted myself, resolved that I was indisposed, and not in a safe condition to go away from home, and so ended the matter. But it was determined otherwise.

As I walked up Renfield Street, mechanically buying my paper, and envying the happiness of the hot, rushing youth who, bag in hand, marched impetuously to the railway station, I had my arm caught by Dr. M'Savinclaus, the oldest and most experienced writer in Glasgow—one who had been made a doctor much against his own mind, for degrees, he would tell you, were now-a-days dangerously cheap.

"Weel, where are you for the morn?" said the Doctor in his Doric.

I explained that I meant to stay at home, at which he held up his hands in astonishment.

"At hame! Bless me, waste a guid spring day in the kirk! Hoots, hoots, come alang wi' me the morn and I'll put you richt."

"Did ye ever play gowff?" he continued.

"No," I answered; "though I have tried in a small way—I mean I have never played a real genuine game."

"The sooner you are launched the better," was his parting remark at the corner. "It's a good game. Meet me at the end of the Broomielaw Brig the morn's mornin' at eight o'clock. Good night."

"Good night," I said, "I'll meet you, certain."

Golf at that time had not the hold on the country it has at the present moment, and the only place where golf was known was in the suburbs of the ancient village of Powburn, where I was to play next day. Now it is a game played all over the country—from Aberdeen to Devonshire, from North Berwick to Machrohanish in Argyllshire. Ardeer has its links, and then—

Have you a pain in your back—
 Have you a pain ava?
 Set oot on the golfing track
 And the wind will drive them awa.
 Driver and putter and cleek,
 Cleek and putter and spoon,
 If you wish to spend a happy week
 Get on to the links at Troon.

Next morning—a nice clear spring morning—we met at the end of the Broomielaw Brig, the Doctor, with a tweed jacket and a tweed cap, looking as cheerful as a lintie. People were hurrying along, as steamboat whistles were whistling and steamboat bells were ringing. “This way for Rothesay,” was the call. “Here you are for Arrochar,” was the rejoinder. But we replied to all in vain—we were on for the gowff.

It was not without some little difficulty that we succeeded in procuring our tickets next morning at a well-known station now almost dismantled on the South Side. The crowd was all but impassable. Shouts came from Jock, and shrieks from Jenny, and women seized children by the hair of the head in true Scotch fashion, and dragged them upstairs to the platform, where porters shoved them about as rudely as they would sheep at a cattle tryst. The difficulty of securing seats was only greater than that experienced in securing tickets, and just as the whistle was blown the porter shoved a full family of five upon the top of us.

“Only the inconveniences of a Glasgow holiday,” said my good-natured friend, who seemed to enjoy the thing as he picked one of the little ones up and placed her on his knee, a proceeding which at once removed the timorous expression of the mother, who seemed afraid evidently that she had been intruding on the company of “big folk,” though it had not been her fault, good woman, that she had been thrust into a first-class compartment instead of a third. They were a douce, happy, deserving couple, on their way to see the old folks, the husband’s father being a country ploughman, who had not yet been blessed with a sight of his first grandson, a young thing in the mother’s arms. At the fourth wayside station they got out, after thanking us kindly, and showing us that there is plenty of good strong “grit,” respectability, and homely manner

in the Glasgow artisan, whatever may be said against him in the matter of strikes and other disputes with employers about hours and wages. "It's a good deal better to see the lad take his wife into the fresh air with his family," said the Doctor, "than sit mewling in a church pew preached at like a colley puppy that's been first tried on sheep. He'll go back wi' fresh hope to his wark in the mornin', and the auldest of the bairns will talk about the outing for days to come. In fact it will form one of their first pleasant memories to be recalled—ay, maist vividly in their auldest days—besides, it's a treat to the auld folks."

"It's a pity the church folks can't see it in that light, Doctor."

"Oh, man, it disna pay them tae see it in that licht, no that I rin doon the church. You'll aye find, however, that the kirk is not sae often filled with the crack preacher who is six days removed from his flock, as by the man who sets a good example, always takes a pairt in a' their enjoyments and sports, and shows himself to be as fond of honest legitimate worldly pleasures as other people. You'll see ane of this kind the day, fond of a gude, dry joke, a guid dinner, a timely dram, and fit to beat the deevil himself at the deevil's ain game, for he's the best whist-player in the neighbourhood. He dis'na fricht them wi' ower lang sermons. Twenty minutes' guid advice, fresh and hot, tells better on his congregation: he's great at a baptism, claims the first dance at the wedding, and always sees that the people do not drink too much at funerals. Theology he leaves to those who choose to dash their heads against it, like newly-catched larks in a cage—it has broke the hardest skulls before, and will no doot dae't again. But, heigho! am preachin' mysel'; here we are at the station."

We were heartily welcomed by the Vicar, as my friend always designed him, a hale, healthy old fellow, with a fresh roast-beef complexion, a merry eye, a bold chin nestling in a thin grey beard. A piece of white tie revealed itself behind a black waistcoat, over which was a shooting-jacket of grey shepherd tartan. He was of spare build, but no doubt of whipcord muscle.

"I wonder to see you, James, man, here on a Fast Day," was his first remark, accompanied by a short laugh or keckle.

"Ay, as if I was na' expecit. Ye tak very good care, John,

never to take up a freen's poopit in a Glasgow Fast, there's ower much fun here on that day."

The Vicar laughed, and led the way to the manse, in the comfortable interior of which we enjoyed a toothful of a whiskey not to be got every day—a present from the distiller himsel'.

"Ay, and hoo dae we play? Does your freen play?" was his remark as he turned to me.

"Not a stroke; never handled a club in his life," said the Doctor, "but the sooner he learns the better. But how will you make sides, eh? You and I can about hold our own, but——"

"Oh, you and ma freen here will play Donald and me, and we'll give you a couple of strokes to the hole."

"Donald I'm afraid's busy at work on the glebe, but——"

"Just cry over Donald, and nae nonsense. I'll no play my ball wi' ony ither man this day."

Though the Doctor had said I had never handled a club in my life he knew otherwise, for I had played several singles, and knocked my ball about promiscuously over the links of an east country town, and had considerable practice in putting, at which I was considered to be more than usually skilful for a novice. With two strokes to the hole, therefore, we were thought a fair match, unless, indeed, Donald should prove a demon at the game. The Doctor shook hands with the old Beadle most heartily, and the latter of course was helped in Scotch fashion to a dram. "Gled to see ye lukiug sae weel, Doctor, the green is in gran' order; there's no much win', and I don't think the links will be too thickly crowded." Walking down to the club-house the Vicar got out his sticks, the Beadle having brought his with him from his house when summoned. A set which was not in common use was procured for the writer, and we proceeded to the teeing ground, where were the caddies, always quiet and attentive when the Vicar, who formed one of the set, placed the balls. The Beadle drove off first, and in a style which excited my envy; for he took it clean and clever, and had the satisfaction of seeing it roll clear of all dangerous bunkers. I "swiped" off, determined to do as well, but to my own surprise missed it altogether. Much discomfited I stood back as the Vicar stepped into my place, telling me not to swipe so hard, *and be careful not to rise my heels from the ground.* His drive

was quite as successful as the Beadle's, rolling a little beyond it, and the Doctor played the like.

It was my turn next to play "one more," and with the short spoon I determined to be most cautious, and with caution I was successful.

"Well done!" said my clerical friend, kindly. "Don't be too anxious; we stand well for this hole yet."

He had, however, to play two more, but laid his ball well on to the putting green with a nice, clean shot.

Donald had now to play "one of two," and chose his putter, which he used most cleverly, laying his ball almost "dead."

It was now my turn to show my skill; but, alas! I was nervous. I meant to send the ball 15 yards, and only moved it 15 inches.

"I am afraid our chance is gone, now," said my partner, as I scratched my head over my clumsiness, "but I'll try." He cleared the ground a little, and then rapped his ball smartly and evenly. It rolled over the little hillock, round the little basin, and down within a few inches of the little hole.

The Doctor played carefully and well, and, holing his ball, won.

Beautifully the Vicar started off with a swinging swipe, the second time clearing the bold sand bunker, in which I saw myself, while he shook his club, hammering in vain.

The Doctor was not so successful, his ball catching the top of the bank and rolling back.

"We're out of it this time, Donald," said the Doctor.

"Weel I wat, sir," said the Beadle, cautiously; "but we'll do our best for a hauff." Playing cannily with his iron, he lifted the ball with a neat cuff over the summit in a style which called forth all our loudest encomiums. It was a daring shot, let alone a clever one, and Donald well deserved his praise.

Getting over, we found the Doctor had to play the odds, which he did most deftly with his cleek, for he was a clever hand at the short game. I played one off, and we found ourselves on the green in two, and everything in our favour. The Vicar, however, had to play the like, which he did so as to remain undoubtedly dead that the Doctor lifted his ball, for we could have beat him without the odds most easily.

The sun was now shining out with a strong noontide glare, which tempered slightly the bracing breeze. The muscles of our back sinews were beginning to crack, our breasts to distend,

and we felt the full glow of health warm our cheeks ; for golf is indeed one of the most health-giving of all pastimes, one of the safest, one of the least expensive, and one of the very best.

Our third hole was along the line of the sea, and with the wind I drove off this time clear and fair, and received the praise of my partner. The Beadle chose a different line, and though he did not drive so far, I found that he lay better, for he knew every sand-scape and whin-bush in the ground. The Vicar was called upon to use his sand-iron, which he did most deftly ; and we went on our way rejoicing, the Doctor playing the like with equal success. The hole was halved with the aid of the handicap allowance, and on we went again. So ran the course until the last hole, which, after splendid driving and some beautiful short play, was won by the writer and the Vicar, who, however, lost the next round, in which they were only allowed a stroke to each hole.

Need it be said that our Glasgow Fast-day was wound up most happily in the manse, where many a good old medal competition was re-golfed over the toddy, and the day altogether much better put in than in Glasgow with the blinds down !

