

A ROUND OF THE LINKS AT GOLF.

“**W**HAT say you to a round of the links?”

The speaker was one of those individuals who are to be found in nearly every shire in the country—a country gentleman of narrow acres and limited income, one who had more time on his hands than he had money to spend it with, according to his sporting proclivities. The scene was a club reading-room in a well-known northern town, and the time noon. We had got through the previous day's *Times*, just in, read the London letters of the provincial papers, glanced hurriedly at the Parliamentary news and latest betting, looked over the pictures in the illustrated journals, fortified ourselves with some tit-bits of society gossip for after-dinner purposes, and then felt that we had a good six hours on our hands. In the average country town there are, as a rule, few ways of enjoying yourselves beyond a gossip at your gunmaker's, a look at some new fishing tackle, a stroll into the stables of the local posting master, to examine and report on some new purchase, or it may be a dull and dreary game at billiards, at which you knock the balls about in a style which puts you in mind of Gog and Magog in Cheapside. “A round of the links with all my heart,” was my reply. “Anything that will pass the time, brace us up a bit, and give us an appetite for dinner.”

“Well, then, let's stroll out to the Golf Club-house.” So saying he put his arm in mine, and we started for the links, which were situated a short distance from the town. Though golf has, during the past few years, come greatly into favour in the South, there is every reason to believe that it will never make strong headway so long as men can throw a ball or handle a bat, for Young England will always prefer cricket; but on the north side of the Tweed it must ever remain a popular pastime. The game of kings, princes, and lords in the days of the Stuarts, it is the game of princes, peers, and peasants in the North at the present time (Prince Leopold was an honoured and a playing member of the premier club, the Royal and Ancient

St. Andrew's), and it may be truly said that it is the grand recreation of the whole legal profession of Edinburgh, some of whose members have been known to express as much grief over the loss of a hole as over the loss of a case in which the panel's life was involved. Along with curling it is considered to be orthodox, and some of the Scotch clergy are said to be fully more clever on the green than they are in the pulpit—a fact which, however, is possibly not so very remarkable after all. The great charm of the game consists in the variety of the play (no two strokes scarcely being the same), the pedestrian exercise one is led to take, which otherwise he might not care for, the use of the muscles of the arms and body in the swinging of the club, the gentle working of the brain in choosing clubs, determining style of play, and the patience and necessary control of temper, which is essential throughout the game. In fact, golf is a grand, healthy exercise for mind and body, and one which commends itself to professional men of all classes.

After a walk of about two miles, or twenty minutes as we might say, seeing our travel is regulated by time and not by distance now-a-days, we reached the club-house, a little stone building situated by the seashore. The green-keeper, who was (as is the case in nearly all Northern golf clubs) the club-maker, was absent, "he having," said one of the "caddies" or club-carriers, who usually hang round such places, "gone out a short time before with the 'Cornel,'" the Cornel being one of those enthusiastic golfers who would have taken his golf-sticks to bed with him had his wife allowed him.

"Yonder they are," said the urchin, pointing with his finger, "just bending for hame," and, following with our eyes the direction indicated, we saw two men, one dressed in a red jacket, followed by two lads carrying clubs, rise against the horizon on the sea-edge, and sink into the hollow again.

"Well, I think we'll wait for them; they won't be long; and we'll have a foursome, and I daresay a little whiskey and water won't spoil the play of either of us."

Producing a private key, he revealed a well-stocked medicine-chest—for golfers, though as a rule exceedingly temperate, do not altogether believe in total abstinence, a "black strap," which is good St. Andrew's for a pint of porter, being frequently

recommended by professionals to amateurs who begin to get a bit out in their play.

Doffing our felt hats we donned our cloth caps, and shifted our shoes for the hob-nailed ones which we kept on the premises, and were just swinging our driving clubs, as if we were at work, when in burst the Colonel.

"Ha, how are you?—Glad to see you out; it is a rare day for golf, and I do not think I ever saw the putting (pronounced like butting) greens in such grand order."

"They hav'na been in sich grand order this year, Mr. Watson," said the green-keeper addressing my friend, who was not so much of a stranger; "the dry east winds have made the turf as springy and clean as what you ca' a billiard-board—though what a billiard-board is I dinna ken."

In a few minutes afterwards we had arranged all preliminaries for a foursome, in which I found that I was pitted along with the professional to face the other two, having the military gentleman as my immediate opponent.

The green-keeper drove off with as clean a "swipe" as ever was struck, and, favoured by the wind, cleared a bunch of whins growing on a distant slope, and ricocheted over the knoll out of view.

"Well, that is a long ball, and no mistake," said his opponent (my friend), "but are you sure you're not in sand?"

"Just clear of it," was the reply; "the sand bunker's tae the left."

"Thank ye, Sandy, for the caution; but I'll not risk your road, any way."

As he spoke he fairly opened his back to it, and, being noted as one of the best drivers in Scotland, he sent his ball even further than that of Sandy, who, however, with a quiet chuckle, let him understand that he was, "maybe, a yaird or twa ower faur."

Off we set, like men starting on a long journey, and quite as serious-looking as if we meant to cross Africa or discover the source of the Nile ere we returned, the Colonel, I could quite see, being as earnest as if he were leading his men up the heights of Alma. The east wind was nicely tempered by the sun, which shone out brilliantly, and, instead of being cold, was in that nice state of temperature which braces a man up and makes

him feel that he has lungs inside his breast. Indeed, we could feel the topmost buttons of our waistcoats bursting with their distension, while, below, our stomach was beginning to rake up reminiscences of breakfast, and make us hope that there was something good on for dinner.

"Here ye are, sir, ye've a nice bonnie-lying ba', as I said; take your driver, for this is a lang hole, wind at oor back or no' at oor back."

Taking my driver, as requested, I looked out my line, kept my eye on my ball, and, with a good full swing, had the satisfaction of feeling that clear click, which is something like the pull of a trigger when you have got the foresight of a rifle right on to the bull's eye, and saw my ball go clean and well away and then, caught with a swirl of wind, dragged off to the side.

"Verra weel played, sir, verra weel played, indeed," were remarks which put me into ecstasies with myself for the space of thirty seconds, after which I was quietly let down with the cautiously expressed opinion that "I was richt among the whins." Turning round to the left I saw the Colonel selecting his cleek, having found himself where Sandy fully expected he would, amongst sand. With an exceedingly neat shot he lifted his ball clear, but, striking a second face, it rolled only a few feet forward on the sward.

"You've got to play the odds," was the cautious remark of the old green-keeper as his opponent chose his driver again, returning it, however, to his caddie immediately afterwards, and asking for his "long spoon," as the ball was lying low in rather longish grass, which would not allow of a fair lick at it with a bold-faced club; and to the uninitiated we may explain that the spoon is so named because it is bevelled in the face so as to lift the ball slightly up, as well as drive it forward. Stooping a little with his right shoulder, he drove his ball well away, and had the satisfaction of seeing it in the distance roll on to clear ground.

As Sandy had informed me, my ball, though well driven forward, had been caught by the wind when in the hover and lifted in amongst whins, where we had a few minutes' searching for it. At last we got it nestling like a wild duck egg amongst rushes on a river's bank, and the old green-keeper had to make



use of his heavy iron to play "the like." This he did with all the cunning of an old hand, and I had the pleasure of seeing a clean shot left for me next time. The Colonel chose his cleek to play the odds, and was soon well on the green. With the same club I laid my ball within ten feet of the hole with the like again, to the eminent satisfaction of Sandy, who was feeling for his "putter."

His opponent played the odds again, but, whether from miscalculations, nervousness, or over-anxiety, was rather strong, the ball stopping seven feet on the opposite side of the circle from the player. Sandy took a careful look at the green, removed some little bits of wood, waifs from the seashore, smoothed down the grass here and there, and carefully noted the declivities, seemingly being determined in ending the hole in our favour with a single putt. But it was not to be that time all at once, for though the distance was well judged, as was the level of the land, the ball rolled within an inch of the mouth of the hole, and lay dead about five inches past. As it was, a certain finish for me next time, the green-keeper picked it up.

"This for a half," said the Colonel, meaning thereby that if he succeeded in holing his ball, he would cause a dead-heat, both sides having the same number of strokes. Choosing his cleek, which is of iron, as many good players do in preference to the putter, he made a good, fair, square try for it, but just as one would have thought it was going to drop in, it took that last turn which a roulette ball often does and remained out.

"Your hole," was his quiet remark, as the caddie lifted the ball out along with some sand on which he teed it again, about the place from which it was customary to drive off and within a few feet of my own, it being our turn at driving. The hole was a short one; and it was considered the proper thing to be on the putting green in two—a drive and a shot from the cleek.

"Topped it, sir," was old Sandy's remark, as I saw my ball, instead of rising in the air, roll clean along the ground, a fair enough style of play at cricket, as avoiding all chance of a catch, but anything but clever at golf. I had struck my ball above the centre, a stroke which is even worse than striking too low, so long as you hit the ball at all, as the turf will skin to some little

depth. The Colonel was not a long driver, his swing being shorter than either of ours, but he rarely missed his ball, was always in good line, and possibly over a day's play his driving was as successfully rewarded as a strong "swiper's." This time he placed his ball beautifully for his companion, and, Sandy being bunkered, I had to play the odds. With "the like" they had their ball dead; and, as Sandy failed in his long "putt," and the Colonel holed his ball with his cleek in really charming style, they had the hole, which made us so far even. The third we lost through getting amongst sand, out of which we found it almost impossible to hammer our ball. The fourth we gained and the fifth we halved.

Starting for home all even, we warmed down to our work in earnest, feeling actually warm, though the drops at the noses of the caddies showed the east wind to be piercing cold. The remaining holes were all keenly contested; and it was not till Sandy, with a long, well-judged "putt," holed our ball at the final that we won the round by one hole. Fortified by a "black strap," we started for another, which they won. Then came "the rub," which we pulled off, having enjoyed our afternoon in as healthy a manner as it is possible to do, and thoroughly convinced that the game is one of the healthiest for mind and body one can play, with the great charm of being most inexpensive.

