

# THE CHELAH'S ROUND

A MODERN ROMANCE

BY ANDREW LANG

## CHAPTER I

THE odds against John M'Gummidge's winning the Golf Medal were, according to the Professor of Mathematics, "humanly speaking, incalculable." M'Gummidge was a Freshman: he was long, lathy, ungainly, and wore spectacles. Never had he been seen on the Links, not even taking solitary exercise with a short spoon. His only companion, a singular figure, was a student from Northern Hindustan. The Bobhachy Lal Rumun deserves a more particular description. The snows of an unknown number of winters flowed over the collar of his gown,

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while his silver beard (which in rainy weather he tucked into his boots) gave him an aspect particularly venerable, but in no way sporting. Rumor ascribed to the Bobhachy a longevity beyond the aspirations of romance, and it was believed that ever since the days of Akbar he had inhabited a cave in the Northern Himalayan slopes. A clear, airy, tinkling sound, as of a claret glass lightly touched, which was occasionally heard when the Bobhachy was present—especially in Lecture—had in no way endeared him to his teachers. But as he explained that the mystic note was entirely beyond his own control, and merely meant that a Mahatma (or initiated Sage) in Thibet or Afghanistan was anxious to converse with him in the spirit, of course censure was unjust and expostulation fruitless.

The Bobhachy could not be blamed, though it was remembered that the

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German Chelah in Mr. Anstey's *Fallen Idol* said—"They are not chentlemen in Thibet." Why the Bobhachy at his time of life (or trance rather) had sought a Northern University was variously explained. The most popular theory was that his parents had been too destitute to afford the usual fee for manners in Thibetan Colleges (two annas), and that he was now endeavoring, though late in life, to supply the deficiency of his early education.

The Bobhachy's mode of existence, like that of his only intimate (M'Gum-midge), was solitary and far from gay. A cave under the Castle Rock, and just above high water, was thought to be their inexpensive lodging, and it was reported that they tasted nothing which had ever breathed the breath of life. A handful of pulse, the rain-water from the rock, served to nourish the fire of existence, which, on such fuel, burns

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“with a hard gem-like flame,” Bobhachy said.

Though M'Gummidge was an assiduous attendant of philosophical lectures, there were some who whispered that under the teaching of Bobhachy he was really pursuing that mystic or Esoteric Vedanta which has been successfully concealed from European inquisitiveness. In short, he was, perhaps, a “Chelah,” or pupil of the venerable old Hindu. News of this course of study could not but agitate the parental mind when it was conveyed to the distant shores of St. Kilda, and to the lonely manse where Mr. M'Gummidge the elder tended his little flock. But still more surprise was felt, in golfing circles, when it was known that M'Gummidge had entered for the Medal. Layers never tired of offering odds fabulously long, which were snapped up by the Bobhachy. He was prepared, he

said, to pledge even his *Cummerbund* (almost his only article of dress) rather than not be "on" M'Gummidge to the extent of his available capital.

Whether the confidence of the patriarchal sage was justified is a question of which curiosity must be content to await the answer.

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## CHAPTER II

THE great day of the Medal arrived. The Bobhachy himself carried for M'Gummidge. It was observed that his clubs were by no means new. But few spectators watched the start, M'Gummidge's companion being but an ordinary player, one Jones. The Bobhachy compiled however a business-like tee, and it was noted that M'Gummidge, as he addressed himself to his ball, displayed none of the diffidence of the novice.

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He lay near the burn, and a sough of the performance reaching the town, the odds fell from 10,000 to 1 to 10 to 1 against the Chelah. His second lay dead, and he holed out in three.

Then occurred a circumstance which none who saw it will ever forget. As his partner holed out in five, the strange mysterious tinkling note sounded on the green, and all eyes were fixed on the Bobhachy. The caddie who carried for Jones (M'Gummidge's companion) put his hand in the hole to take out the balls, and, as I am a living and honorable man, he exclaimed—

“O Heaven! what is this?”

Though two men had holed out, *there was but one ball in the hole*. As several credible witnesses had seen M'Gummidge's ball enter the hole, though none but Jones's came out, the Chelah was rated at three. The Bobhachy being pressed for an explanation observed

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that the Mahatmas in Thibet disapproved of "Eclipses," and had probably disintegrated the mysterious matter of which "Eclipses" are composed. He then put down a gutta, and M'Gumidge having the honor, struck off. His ball, being slightly "toed," hit the old station-house, and cannoned back on to the green, where, after considerable search, it was found—in the hole!

"Great is Indra!" was the only remark of the Bobhachy. "His throne doubtless has been unpleasantly warm."

The devout Brahmin does indeed believe that the effect of prayer is to heat the throne of Indra, and to make him bestir himself in the cause of the Faithful. However this may be, the immediate effect was found in efforts to hedge among the layers of odds. Preying upon each other, in their terror-stricken cupidity, they brought the market round to 100 to 1 on the Chelah.

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When news came that he had gone out in thirty-seven (for he came to grief in the Eden, at the high hole, landing badly from the tee on the duck punt moored in the Estuary, where he could not lift his ball, and a "mashie" had to be used),—when news came to this effect, the Links were crowded. The University, the Artillery, the Town, the Fishing population, the Clergy of all denominations, deserted their usual haunts and pursuits: three political meetings hastily broke up, the Cabinet Ministers and distinguished Fenians who had been addressing them were "left speaking," and the whole agitated populace crowded round the Bobhachy, who by this time was talking in a remarkable Dundee accent.

Why pursue the narrative in detail? The Chelah's play may have been exaggerated by tradition, ever greedy for the marvellous. The stone bridge is

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reported to have broken down under the tread of the excited spectators, now swollen by the agricultural multitude. The records of the game, however, demonstrate that M'Gummidge did the round in 71, thereby breaking the record.

Next morning the town was full of newspaper reporters. But the Chelah and the Bobhachy were seen no more. Various theories as to the event have been promulgated. According to some, M'Gummidge was merely hypnotized by his dusky companion and caddie. If you can hypnotize an idle boy, so that he is head of his class while the influence lasts, as any one may read in the papers of the Psychological Society, why should you not do as much for a golfer? Others maintain that the whole affair was glamor. The Indian conjurer who does the mango trick, and makes a tree grow up before your very eyes from

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the seed in twenty minutes, must, it is argued, produce a "collective hallucination" in the mind of the observer. (See *Psychical Society's Proceedings*.)

Others there were who declared that money was uncommonly plentiful on the Links of Leven and Carnoustie after the events which tradition has handed down. They averred that a long white beard, from Nathan's, and a "Chestnut Bell," with a melodious tinkle, were found in a room of the Marine Hotel after the departure of two strangers who never paid their lawful debts to that establishment. And they insist that M'Gummidge was a novice from some obscure provincial "green," while the Bobhachy was a speculative Club-maker and veteran professional in disguise.

So prone is the unaided human intellect to fly after mere natural explanations of events manifestly extra-natural.