

ACADEMIC GOLF

BY R. BARCLAY

FOISTED upon St. Andrews by my well-meaning but misguided parents, I soon discovered that life at a Scottish University was not very hard to endure. True, I had been so kept in subjection in the early years of my existence, that the reaction caused by an independent residence in the lodgings may have derived much of its pleasure by comparison with the former state of matters; but, be that as it may, I had not been long in the place when I made up my mind to pass my undergraduate years as easily as possible. Previously my athletic record had not been strikingly brilliant: my Football experiences were unpleasant to think of, as I was generally to be found inside the scrimmage usurping the position of the ball, and

receiving the attention designed for its propulsion toward the opponents' goal. In the way of Cricket, too, I had invariably gone in second wicket down, and as invariably I myself was third wicket down—my modesty and unassuming efforts preventing me from “troubling the scorers,” as the papers euphemistically remark. It was natural, therefore, that when I made my *début* in a new center of civilization I should eschew athletics and turn to more indolent forms of amusement.

For a considerable period I managed to find relaxation in a country walk once a day. When the weather was not propitious, I confined myself to the playing of whist or chess—in both of which games I speedily became proficient,—with an occasional game of billiards with a man from London, who stayed in the rooms next to mine.

I had heard that St. Andrews boasted

Links ; but although I had seen them, they appeared to me only as a vast stretch of turf with infinite pastoral capacities. In an evil hour I was introduced to a fourth year's student, by name Saunders M'Bunker, who, with true Celtic cunning, allured me into a shop which I afterwards discovered was Forgan's. There he expressed his admiration for my physique, which he said was that of a man made for Golf. "In fact," he said, "you have a future before you, and you shall buy three of my old clubs." I smiled sadly, and with a mild attempt to look wise, I took the weapons in my hand. He said that this action of his would entail a great sacrifice on his part. Unwilling to be the cause of any loss, I paid him ten shillings, and walked off with the clubs. I made for the teeing-ground, where I was speedily joined by my new friend, who began to mention all

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the feats which he had performed with the driver—a club with a broken face and a plentiful supply of splicing. He had driven a ball across the burn from the tee on five different occasions—at least so he said to me then, although later, in the presence of a clergyman, he modified the assertion to a considerable degree. He told me how in his first year at College he had killed an unpopular Professor by striking him with a black gutta at a distance of a quarter of a mile, thereby earning the everlasting gratitude of his fellow-students. I wondered myself how he had escaped hanging, and came to the conclusion that the gallows yet awaited the murderous youth. Other tales equally marvellous he poured into my sympathetic ear, while I employed myself in constructing, under the direction of a bystander, a tee of enormous height. An officious Caddie offered to carry my

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clubs. I declined, in as haughty a manner as a person who was about to lower all existing records should do. I addressed the ball first with my club, next with my tongue : the first was unsuccessful, the second was profane, for I had dislodged a quantity of earth and left the ball untouched. The Caddie aforementioned was so unfeeling as to laugh. I struggled on, and by dint of hard hitting and turf cutting I carved my way to the first hole, which I secured in nineteen. The rest of my round was of a like nature ; the encouragements of other beginners, and the sarcasm of experts, having little or no effect on my play.

In four months' time I could go round in 120, chiefly owing to the fact that M'Bunker's clubs had collapsed in two days' time after I had acquired them ; and I felt that I was now on the highway to fame. But I got a rebuff which

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I had not expected. By some untoward freak of fortune I started on a round immediately behind what is commonly called a Professorial Foursome—that is to say, a foursome in which the players are Professors in the University. Duffer as I still was, I could not fail to observe that I was immensely superior to these gentlemen. On and on they went, hole by hole, bunker by bunker, while the air was rent with the sound of breaking clubs and the rattle of violent ejaculations. My insight into life was becoming larger and clearer. Theologians hold that religion is the perception of the Infinite—then I was a religious man—I was engaged in perception of the infinite. Reader! Professorial Golf is the infinite: it refuses to be confined within the narrow limits of rules and the unbending laws of nature. At the fifth hole I was blinded by the loose sand and earth which came flying back

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towards me, as turf after turf was hurled from the erring cleek. At the eighth hole the course of my ball was interrupted by a large mass of broken shafts, which was piled up in serried confusion. At the turn one of the players walked home, having lost his clubs and his temper. The three remaining Dons in solemn silence struck off—at least they struck; I cannot speak with certainty about the “off.” My partner and I plodded peacefully behind for some time, until, in a fit of forgetfulness, I drove from the tee at the long hole before the learned men had played their fifth shots. The words which they uttered I do not care to repeat here. However, I shelled them from a distance until they reached the home hole, when, having landed all square, they departed.

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I do not know why I was sent down by the Senatus. Rudeness and incivil-

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ity towards certain Professors were the chief counts in the indictment. But I suspect that the true reason was this, that these dauntless three, enraged at being discovered in their infamous and ineffective essays at Golf, had so contrived to secure silence on my part and salvation of their reputations.

But I shall not be so easily put down. I scorn to make mention of their names ; but any one caring to investigate the matter may discern the gentlemen on the Links of St. Andrew ; nay, he may even trace them by the long rows of loose turf which mark their victorious career.

I have left the city for good. M'Bunker tells me in his last letter that a Professorial Handicap had been arranged. The scratch man won easily in 139 ; a learned Principal who had been turned adrift on the Links with unlimited odds has not since been heard of.