

SOCRATES ON THE LINKS

BY ANDREW LANG

GOING down towards the shore lately I met Critias and the beautiful Charmides, for indeed they are seldom apart. Seeing that they carried in their hands clubs not only of wood, but of iron, and even of brass, I conceived that they were bound for the Palaestra.

“Hail to you, Critias,” I said; “is it permitted to accompany you?”

“Indeed, Socrates, you may, and you may even carry those clubs for me,” said Critias.

“But,” said I, “is the carrying of clubs an art, or a sport?”

“An art, if it be done for money,” he said; “but a sport, if to oblige a friend, for the things of friends are common.”

“Will you then lend me your putter

to knock yonder sophist on the head?" I asked ; but he denied it with an oath.

"Neither then," said I, "O best of men, will I carry your clubs, for it does not become one who has not learned an art to practice it."

Critias was now building a small altar of sea-sand, on which he placed a white ball, and addressed himself to it in a pious manner, and becomingly.

"It is a singularly fine morning," I remarked ; on hearing which he smote his ball, not rightly, nor according to law, but on the top, so that it ran into the road, and there lay in a rut.

"Tell me, Critias," I said, "do you think it becoming a philosopher, and one who studies the sacred writings even of the extreme Barbarians, to be incapable of self-command, and that in a trifling matter such as whether a ball is hit fairly, or not fairly?"

But he seized an iron club, and glared

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upon me so fiercely that I turned to Charmides, who was now about to hit his ball for the second time.

He observing that it was "a beautiful lie," I asked him : "Charmides, can we say that any lie is really beautiful or noble, or are not nobility and beauty rather the attributes of the True?"

He thereupon struck his ball, but not skilfully, so that it fell into the Ilissus, which did not seem to be his intention, but otherwise.

"Socrates," he said, "you have made me heel it."

"That," I answered, "is rather the function of the physician ; and yet no harm may be done, for shall we not say that healing is also an art, and beneficial?"

But by this time they had crossed the Ilissus, walking, one by a bridge of stone, and the other by a bridge of wood, whereas I deemed it more seem-

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ing to go round by the road. Hurrying after them, I found them declaring that "the hole was halved;" and as they again stood up before their balls, with genuflexions as is customary and pious, I said to Critias: "Then, Critias, if the half, as Hesiod tells us, be better than the hole, is he more truly fortunate, and favored of the Gods, who wins one half, or two holes, or ——"

But as I was speaking he struck his ball, not far off, but near; into a sand-pit which is in that place, and hard by it is a stone pillar, the altar, perhaps, of some God, or the sepulchre of a hero.

"What call you this place, Critias?" I said to him, as he smote the sand repeatedly with an iron instrument.

"We call it a bunker," he said.

"Is it, then, analogous to what you name a 'bunk,' or even more so, for have you not observed that when the

syllable 'er' is added to an adjective, then, as Cratylus says, addition of a sort is predicated?"

By this time he was in another sand-pit, digging eagerly with his iron weapon.

"Critias," I said, "of three things one. Either a wise man will not go into bunkers, or, being in, he will endure such things as befall him with patience, or, having called to his aid certain of the agricultural class, he will fill up those cavities, adding a prayer to the local Gods, and perhaps sacrificing a tom-cat."

But, I having said this, Critias and Charmides turned upon me with imprecations and niblicks, and, having first rolled me in the gorse bushes, and hurt me very much, they then beat me with the shafts of their clubs, and, next filling my mouth with sand, they bore me along and cast me into the Ilissus, whence I hardly escaped by swimming.

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“Now, Socrates,” they said, “is it more becoming a philosopher to speak to a man when he is addressing himself to his ball, or rather, having somewhere found a Professor, to prove to him—he being perhaps an old man or an amiable—that he does not understand his own business?”

But, by the Dog! I was in no case to answer this question; rather I have brought an action against Critias and Charmides before the Court of the Areopagus, estimating at several minæ the injuries which I received, as I have already told you.