

## DR. JOHNSON ON THE LINKS

(FROM AN AUCHINLECK MS.)

BY ANDREW LANG

ON the morning after our arrival in St. Andrews Dr. Johnson expressed a desire to see the ruins of ecclesiastical antiquity for which this place is famous, or, I should say, infamous. Yielding to a roguish temptation of which I am ashamed, and which even now astonishes me, I determined to practice on the credulity of my venerated friend. I therefore, under pretence of leading Dr. Johnson to the ruins, carried him to that part of the vicinity which is called the Links. It is an undulating stretch of grassy land, varied by certain small elevations, which I assured Dr. Johnson covered all the ecclesiastical ruins that time and the licence of the rabble had spared.

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He was much moved, and refused to be covered, as on consecrated ground, while he walked along the Links, a course of some two miles. Often he would pause, and I heard him mutter *perierunt etiam ruinæ*. I ventured to ask him his opinion of John Knox, when he replied, in a sensible agitation, "Sir, he was worthy to be the opprobrious leader of your opprobrious people." I was hardly recovered from this blow at my nation, when Dr. Johnson's wig was suddenly and violently removed from his head, and carried to a certain distance. We were unable to account for this circumstance, and Dr. Johnson was just about stooping to regain his property, when a rough fellow, armed with a few clubs, of which some had threatening heads of iron, came up hastily," saying, "Hoot awa'! ye mauna stir the hazard." It appears that his golf-ball, struck by him from a distance,

had displaced Dr. Johnson's wig, and was still reposing in his folds. Before I could interfere the fellow had dealt a violent stroke at the perruque, whence the ball, soaring in an airy curve, alighted at a considerable distance. I have seldom seen my venerable friend more moved than by this unexpected assault upon his dignity. "Sir," said he to the fellow, "you have taken an unwarranted liberty with one who neither provokes nor pardons insult." At the same moment he hastily disembarrassed himself of his coat, and appeared in shirt-sleeves, which reminded me of his avowed lack of partiality for clean linen. Assuming an attitude of self-defence, he planted one blow on his adversary's nose, and another in his abdomen, with such impetuosity and science that the rascal fell, and bellowed for mercy. This Dr. Johnson was pleased to grant, after breaking all his

weapons. He then resumed his coat, and, with an air of good-humored triumph, he remarked, "It is long, sir, since I knocked a man down, and I feel myself the better for the exercise."

At this moment we came within view of the Cathedral towers, and I instantly felt considerable apprehension lest, on discovering my trick, he might bestow on me the same correction as he had just administered to the golfer. I therefore hastily took the opportunity to call his attention to the towers, remarking that they were the remains of certain small chapels, which had suffered less from the frenzy of the rabble than the Cathedral, on whose site, as I told him, we were now walking. Thus I endeavored to give him a higher, and possibly an exaggerated, idea of the ancient resources and ecclesiastical magnificence of my country.

"Sir," he said, "we will examine later

the contemptible relics which the idiotic fury of your ancestors has spared ; meantime I must have a Roll. It is a long time, sir, since I had a Roll." He then, to my alarm, ascended the highest of certain knolls or hummocks, laid himself down at full length, and permitted himself to revolve slowly over and over till he reached the level ground. He was now determined to exercise himself at the game of Golf, which I explained to him as the Scotch form of cricket. Having purchased a ball and club, he threw himself into the correct attitude, as near as he could imitate it, and delivered a blow with prodigious force. Chancing to strike at the same time both the ball and the ground, the head of his club flew off to an immense distance. He was pleased with this instance of his prowess, but declined, on the score of expense, to attempt another experiment. "Sir," he

said, "if Goldsmith were here, he would try to persuade us that he could urge a sphere to a greater distance and elevation than yonder gentleman who has just hit over that remote sand-pit. Knowing his desire for information, I told him that, in Scotch, a sand-pit is called a Bunker. "Sir," said he, "I wonder out of what *colluvies* of barbarism your people selected the jargon wh'ch you are pleased to call a language. Sir, you have battened on the broken meats of human speech, and have carried away the bones. A sand-pit, sir, is a sand-pit."

I was somewhat deadened by this unlooked-for reception of an innocent remark. Meanwhile he had fallen into an abstracted fit, from which I attempted to rouse him, by asking him what he would do if landed on a desert island, with no company but a Cannibal.

"Sir," he said, "I should consider

myself more fortunately situated than when landed on an island, equally uncultivated, with no companion but an inquisitive Scotchman. From a Cannibal, sir, I could learn much. From you I can neither learn anything, nor have I any confidence in my power to communicate to you the elements of civilized behavior."

He burst on this into a hearty fit of laughter, which was concluded by a golf-ball, which suddenly flew, from an incredible distance, into his mouth, and produced an alarming fit of coughing. When he had recovered from this paroxysm he appeared somewhat disinclined for further conversation, and, on arriving at our inn, he said, "Sir, do not let us meet again till dinner. Sir, you have brought me to a strange place of singular manners. I did not believe, sir, that in his Majesty's dominions there was any district so barbarous, and so perilous to travelers."

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Finding him in this mood, and observing that he grasped his staff in a menacing manner, I withdrew to a neighboring tavern.