

THE HOME OF GOLF

BY R. BARCLAY

IN a book about Golf no apology is required for introducing some remarks upon St. Andrews. Golf without St. Andrews would be almost as intolerable as St. Andrews without Golf. For here are the head-quarters of the "royal, ancient, irritating sport." Here Tom Morris holds his court, his courtiers, the clubmen and the caddies; his throne, the evergreen links; and his sceptre, a venerable putter. Here the children make their entrance into the world, not with silver spoons in their mouths, but with diminutive golf-clubs in their hands. Here the Champion is as much a hero as the greatest general who ever returned in triumph from the wars. Here, in short, is an asylum for golfing

THE HOME OF GOLF

maniacs and the happy hunting-ground of the duffer, who, armed with a rusty cleek, sallies forth to mutilate the harmless turf.

When a man becomes infected with the golfing disease, his first desire of course is to strike the ball with occasional success. Continually and consistently to miss the globe may be enervating, but it cannot be called an encouraging pastime. Then follow loftier aims and aspirations. He perseveres until in a thrice-happy hour he "gets below the hundred." But if he be a Foreigner—in the golfing sense—his cup of joy is not yet full. His mind turns towards St. Andrews, and thither he bends his willing steps, or, in more prosaic form, sets out by train.

He will be struck at once by the unique appearance of the city. It stands in an atmosphere of antiquity. When and by whom it was actually

THE HOME OF GOLF

formed cannot with certainty be stated, The popular custom was to lay the blame upon St. Regulus—as the poet has testified :—

“ 'Tis thought when St. Regulus landed
The bones of St. Andrew he bare
To a cave in a cliff that commanded
A prospect with capital air :
' The seaweed is capital fare
For a healthy ascetic,' cried he :
And he settled contentedly where
The College now stands by the sea.” *

All this is very apocryphal, but we have every reason to date its origin from the year 736 A.D. Since then no place in Scotland has seen fiercer conflicts and more sudden catastrophes, and with no exaggeration it has been said that the history of St. Andrews is the history of Scotland.

In its modern aspect St. Andrews is

* Mr. Andrew Lang—“*Ballade of St. Andrews University.*”

THE HOME OF GOLF

peculiarly placed. Close upon seven thousand persons claim to be inhabitants. If we except the fishermen—of whom there is a large colony—the tradespeople, and the University, almost every other body is by profession or practice to be designated a golfer. Of course the other classes aforementioned are largely represented on the links when leisure permits them, for it is in truth a “City of Golf.” There are no public works, hence there is little or no smoke : and except when a misguided Town Council cements the streets with coal dust the pavement is as white as Scottish pavement may be.

The summer visitor finds it difficult to believe that St. Andrews is a University city. The college buildings are there, it is true, but no signs of life are visible. In winter, however, it is far otherwise. From October to April the streets are enlivened by the red gowns of the un-

dergraduates, and arrangements are now being made for the institution of a summer session. The educational record of the city is a noble one, and the University is still doing successful, and often brilliant, work.

But this is not Golf. Let us return to the links—with which none can compare. Here, there, and everywhere Golf is spreading : almost every day we hear of Tom Morris opening a new green and declaring it (with a faithless regularity) to be “the finest green in the country”—though he will occasionally modify the statement to this extent, that it is “second only to St. Andrews.” Whether these remarks are ever made by the cautious old custodian is doubtful : local enthusiasm is prone to exaggerate. There are links which are sporting, and links which are long : links which have good putting greens, and links which have none at all : links

THE HOME OF GOLF

which have no hazards, and links which are all hazard : but place any of them beside St. Andrews, and O the difference ! Very inferior golf may secure a good score at Carnoustie, or Leven, or Musselburgh, or Gullane, or Machrihanish, to mention no more, but anything below ninety on St. Andrews means that fooling has been conspicuous by its absence. The driving must be straight, the iron play decided and exact, and mistakes on the putting green cannot be ascribed to the turf, which, in summer at least, is truer than most billiard tables.

The bunkers are for the most part traps only for missed shots, and, considering the tremendous amount of traffic, bad lies are proverbially absent,

In short, St. Andrews is the home and nursery of Golf. Here it is that we find the game as it should be played, here alone, if we except North Berwick: for the palmy days of Musselburgh are

past, and Prestwick is too select to be considered. For there is Golf as it should *not* be played—as it cannot be played. Farther down the Fife coast, to seek no more distant ground, there is a links more than usually affected in the summer months by visitors and vagabonds, where, by the natives at least, style is unknown and turf seldom replaced. There are perhaps some half-dozen players of more than average skill who are duly worshipped by the lesser lights of the links : and there are probably not more than a dozen, or, at most, a score, who have seen a professional match or amateur play of the first class. Their style, if it may be called so, is universally and utterly abject : their clubs are generally more or less curious varieties of the “Bulger” arrangement : the half-swing reigns supreme : and there is no resident professional. The green-keeper, an excellent

THE HOME OF GOLF

man and a pretty wit, was enlisted (O foolish economy!) from the service of the plough. He makes a new putting green with infinite labor, and leaves the storms and heat of the heavens to convert it into a particularly uninviting bunker. He places the teeing-grounds among whins, and gloats over those who find it most profitable to drive therefrom with their irons. The native golfers, having no one of eminence to imitate, do what seems right in their own eyes, and what, in the eyes of every other body, is patently wrong, their chief amusement on many occasions being to drive blindly and fiercely into some unoffending foursome, crying "Fore" with unnecessary vehemence as the hindmost of the players is being conveyed to the nearest surgeon's. All of which is golfing according to —, but the name of the town must not be mentioned. The

THE HOME OF GOLF

inhabitants are many of them strong men.

In St. Andrews are the hopes of the golfer fixed. The very air seems to be impregnated with the spirit of the game. At the tee with the brave old towers behind, the rolling waters of the Bay to the right, and in front the mounds, and hillocks, and levels of the links, one feels that he has reached the end of his pilgrimage to the Shrine of Golf. A new glamor is thrown about the game: the Golfer's "spirit leaps within him to be gone before him then:" the Swilcan may receive his second or third shot in its liquid shallows: he may fizzle on the green under the critical eye of a by-standing professional, but "his heart's his own, his will is free." And standing at the end hole with his round half accomplished, he can survey the towers of the ruined Cathedral, and the ragged masonry of

THE HOME OF GOLF

the Castle, and the grey old city itself with the feelings of one who has found life worth living and Golf a game for men.