

A VISIT TO GOFFTOON

BY A. C. MORRISON

IT was evening : on rushed the train with almost lightning rapidity. I reclined comfortably in a third-class compartment, and thought with pleasure of the various joys that were in store for me. By my side lay an umbrella and a sandwich ; but my pocket did not contain the proverbial return ticket ; for it was only at five o'clock on an August evening that I had left the office of Messrs. Smith, Brown, Jones, and Company, with permission to absent myself for a fortnight. In the first excitement attending the great occasion, I seized my traveling bag, that had been carefully packed in the morning, bolted to a station, and took the first train for anywhere. There was

only one other passenger in the compartment; but my conversational efforts were most distinctly discouraged. This gentleman was arrayed in tweeds of loud pattern, the design of which I was quite unable to comprehend. I quailed beneath his examining gaze, but at length he closed his eyes. Then, venturing to investigate, I discovered with astonishment that the design of the tweeds consisted of curiously wrought cleeks and irons, with golf-balls judiciously interspersed. On the seat there lay a small valise of so remarkable construction that it cannot be described, but it bore the significant label, "Gofftoon."

For three weary hours the engine puffed and whistled; but at length there was a slackening of speed which told that the terminus was at hand. My companion gathered up his belongings, among which was a set of golf-clubs,

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glanced ferociously at me, and turned to open the door. Undismayed I followed, and stepped on to a platform which was now almost completely dark. A porter moved towards me, but after examining me for a moment, he seemed to miss something, for he turned and walked quickly in the opposite direction.

Above the entrance to the station there was a lamp that shone upon these curious lines, which I was then at a loss to understand—

“An entrance into Gofftoon let no one dare to seek,

Unless he bear at very least a driver and a cleek.”

“Rather a poor joke,” I mentally remarked, but as the wind had begun to blow, and rain had begun to fall, I hurried off in the direction of the town. Presently some one addressed me. “The greens ’ll be stiff, an’ you’ll need

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an 'eclipse' the morn," was all he said as he passed once more into the darkness. I shouted after him a request to direct me to an hotel. For a moment I got no reply, but at last he announced that it would "tak' a meenit or twa, and he hadna time, but," continued the wayfarer, "ye micht try the first ane ye come to."

With this gratifying intelligence I proceeded, until I came to a brilliantly illuminated building which bore the sign, "Player's First-Class Hotel." I rang the bell. Presently a waiter appeared, who in answer to my request for accommodation immediately said—

"I'm afraid we can't put you up, sir; what's your round?"

Thinking to humor this golfing maniac, I told him I could do — in 102.

"Won't do, sir," said the waiter, and the door was immediately slammed in my face.

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Despite this reverse, I was still happy enough to sympathise with the landlord in having such an idiot in his service ; but my eyes had yet to be opened. Without delay I continued my search, and was soon standing in the entrance hall of another hotel. Again, to my complete bewilderment, the question of the monomaniac waiter was repeated ; and I repeated my answer. To my joy it was this time received with satisfaction. I was once more doomed to disappointment, for I had yet an important question to answer.

“Use an iron or wooden putter, sir ?” queried the indefatigable boots.

“Confound you !” I retorted angrily, “what does that matter to you ? I only want a bed ; I use the wooden putter mostly.”

“Very sorry we can’t put you up, sir, but this is the ‘Cleek,’ and Mr. Iron is very strict in his orders.”

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Wearied with my wanderings, I at length succeeded in satisfying the requirements of the "Bulger Inn." I reached these quarters in time to share in the remains of a banquet held annually under the auspices of the Gofftoon Branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Bulger. My appetite was not impaired by the fact that there was placed before me a soup-tureen in the form of an exaggerated golf-ball: my salt-cellar was the tureen in miniature: the spoon I used was a diminutive putter with the head scooped out. On a table in the corner of the sitting-room I occupied there might be seen writing-paper with crossed golf clubs as a heading, pens of the shape of cleeks, and therefore unsuited for writing, to say nothing of two gentleman golfers supporting inkwells in their unwearied arms.

On the way to my bedroom I passed

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the door of the room in which the banquet was proceeding. On it was placarded the following: "All interested in the bulgerising of the world are now invited to enter." I accepted the invitation, and presently I listened to a gentleman as he proposed the toast of the evening: "Prosperity to the Bulger." With these soul-stirring words he concluded an eloquent speech:—

"Gentlemen, the principles which it is our aim to advance require no poor words of mine to recommend them to the approval of all. Let us struggle ever onward, ever upward; let us lay aside all that might be prejudicial to the conquering career of the Bulger; let us refrain from violent language when the sacred weapon is in our hands: and so, in the time that is to come, our one grand principle, despite the laughter of the ignorant and the sneering of the sceptic, will have

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a universal application." (Loud applause.)

The Chairman at this point observed a stranger in the company, and immediately called upon him to say a few words on the progress of their principles in other parts of the world. I was the stranger, and as there was no escape possible, I forthwith addressed the meeting :—

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, my sympathies are with you, as are the sympathies of the world. (Great applause.) I venture, however, somewhat to disagree with the gentleman who has just sat down. (Silence.) I cannot conscientiously say that I believe the principle of the bulger—(ominous murmurings)—is applicable to the Cleek." (Storms of hissing and booing, amid which there came these awful admonitions, "Sit upon him!" "Put him out!") I felt that something desperate

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must be done to retrieve my lost position. I turned towards the chair, and despite a scathing fire of selected missiles more or less hard, I roared at the pitch of my voice,—“But, gentlemen, when it is applied, the Cleek will be no longer necessary.” Amid the thunderous applause that followed I disappeared.

The furnishings of my bedroom were remarkable. The walls were covered with representations of championship matches, and such works of art as “—— playing the First Shot with a Bulger.” Various suitable admonitions were conveyed to the reader by means of cardboard and green worsted: “Tak’ tent to be weel up on the green.” “Tak’ plenty o’ sand.” “Never up, never in.” The bedcover had depicted on it golfers in all manner of attitudes—“At the tee,” “In the bunker,” “On the green.” On the dressing-table there lay a book of

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rules with the inscription, "Visitors are requested to read a small portion every evening before retiring." The following announcement might also be read upon the wall: "Two rounds must be played every day. It is recommended by the authorities that three be attempted. First round begins at 7 A. M.; second round at 1 P. M."

Notwithstanding these circumstances, I slept well, and was awakened by a voice and a knock at my bedroom door.

"You're late, sir; first round's beginning."

"I haven't got my clubs," I replied.

"Very sorry, sir," the waiter said from without, "but it's against the rules to supply lunch until the scoring-card of the first round has been handed in. I'll get you a driver and a cleek somewhere."

In half an hour I was on the Links, but I did not feel at my ease; for all

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around were arrayed in true Gofftoon checks, whereas I had to remain content with a black jacket, and nether garments of a very mild stripe. It was immediately recognized that I was an interloper, and I was treated accordingly. No caddie would play against me for less than ten shillings, but a desire for lunch forced me to come to terms.

My first day in Gofftoon passed slowly away. In the afternoon I repaired again to the starting-point. After waiting for two hours and a quarter, I felt that I had done my duty, and so wickedly I set myself to construct a score which might qualify me for a further share of the good things of the "Bulger Inn." I congratulated myself that the morrow was Sunday; for on that day I might have an opportunity of considering my embarrassing position. I pondered the cost of a correct Gofftoon outfit, and wondered whether my once

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having been ignorant and improper would for ever prevent my receiving a welcome.

To my astonishment I discovered that the people of Gofftoon were devout. The instruments of daily labor were laid aside when Sunday came, and couples perambulated the Links in the morning, engaged in constructing imaginary scores.

I repaired in the midst of the inhabitants to the church, and listened with humility to the preacher as he compared the life of the righteous man to the flight of an "eclipse" against the high wind, when it is struck clean from the tee. Each stroke was an effort of the good towards the end which all should strive to attain. In life, he eloquently remarked, there may be bad lies and difficult approaches; but with faith, perseverance, and courage, these would be overcome, and a rest would at

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length be found on the Elysian Plains. On the other hand, the life of the wicked might be suitably compared to the waverings of a sixpenny "gutta" which could not be fairly driven, but would be tossed about, so to speak, by every wind of doctrine, until at length it would be lost, or, like the wicked, find its destination at the bottom of some pit, from which no iron or niblick could avail to extricate it.

The congregation issued from the church much edified by the discourse. In the graveyard I stopped to examine the tombstones, on which were many interesting inscriptions. Each bore some suitable motto, and a list of the golfing virtues of the departed.

HERE LIES

WHO DIED ON THE 1ST APRIL 1890
HAVING ON THE PREVIOUS DAY
EXCEEDED THE HUNDRED.

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He was far and sure in his driving : accurate
in his approach : and deadly in his putting
His average round for the five years previous
to his demise was eighty-five.

At the bottom of another stone there
might be read—

“ He played the wrist iron shot to perfection.”

A third stone had imprinted at the
top

“ PERSEVERANCE ”

and bore a representation of a golfer
vigorously striving to extricate his ball
from a hazard. His remarks on that
particular occasion were left to the
imagination of the reader.

Presently, as I looked at the work of
art, my mind was overshadowed by a
cloud, and I found myself sitting on a
hard backed chair. The hands of the
clock indicated 1.45 A. M., and beside me
there lay on the floor my portmanteau
and golf clubs, both labelled “ St. An-
drews.”