

ALWAYS ONE HOLE DOWN

BY W. DALRYMPLE

OF the many yarns associated with Largs Bay and the Links of Leven, the following is perhaps the most pathetic ; and though it is, as a matter of fact, familiar to several, it is hoped that it may be new to some readers.

July is proverbially a joyous month, rich in merry sunshine and full of glad promise, and Saturday all over the Christian world the day of the week associated in all minds with happy reminiscences. Yet it was on the second Saturday of July last year that the following events occurred, the sadness of which is only less remarkable than the horror which they caused.

It is among the more primitive races that a short, stout man is of the great-

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est value—for obvious reasons. Still, on the golf links of civilization he may not be altogether despised. He is not only the cause of bright and rosy hope, and high and joyous enthusiasm in the hearts of his adversaries ; he is also productive in the breast of his own partner of that feeling of calm and pious resignation which we are so pleased to see in those of our fellows who inspire us with anything like affectionate interest.

A fat little man, with a red face and auburn hair, and a nose poised between eyes which reminded one not a little of those aggravating balls of glass so much affected by the later generation of soda-water men ; such is the hero of this mournful tale, or, if you will, tragedy in real life.

Where the creature came from, we are now glad to be ignorant. His name is a rare one in our district—Smith ;

but as will be gathered from the sequel, he preferred to be remembered by a name closely associated with his unhal-
lowed deeds.

As to his dress the less said the better. In the good old days in France, the corpse of a hanged man was frequently dressed in a clean shirt, should the King happen to pass that way. Had our friend lived in a golfing district in the France of those good old times, it would have been unwise to postpone the presentation of such an article to him until such time as his Majesty went by! But, to his honor let it be said, he did not insult the memory of Old Phil, by appearing in white spats.

It is not on record that any golfer of experience ever *chose* such a man as partner. He is the result of a toss—a spin with a half-crown, the gift of some dread Fate. And it was in some such way, or, perhaps, in punishment of some

unconscious crime, that the writer was saddled with our hero.

When our partnership was sealed, his look of settled gloom became more pronounced, and the tone in which he asked if we preferred red or black gutta was absolutely debilitating to one who had made the very hastiest of luncheons.

Yet things went brightly and prosperously for us at first. Forceps and his cousin Nicodemus were fozzling right and left. If Forceps topped his tee shot, Nicodemus carried on the sprightly sport by planting him in the nearest bunker. Did Nicodemus pull round into the railway, Forceps would infallibly send his into the nearest burn, and of these there are no fewer than four on Leven Links. One of us enjoyed the fun immensely, but it was not our hero: on the contrary, when we at length came to be five up and six to play, his dejection became worthy only of Dart-

moor or a Friendly Girls' Picnic to Auchterarder or Freuchie.

"Well, Sir," I said, with what I fondly imagined to be cheering courtesy, "you certainly have played a stunning game ; just fancy being five up and six to play against Forceps and his cousin Nicodemus !"

"Ah, that's all very well ; but," he added, with a weary sigh worthy of a spider in a fly-paper manufactory, "you don't know."

This rather pained me, because, though not much of a player myself, I know a great deal about it, and, in fact, have often given invaluable advice to people who fancy they know a great deal more than I do ; and to be thus told that I did not know was unkind, if not indeed actually offensive. Unwilling, however, to provoke any unpleasantness, I mildly remarked : "How, sir?"

"Ah ! you don't know all," he re-

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peated, with a groan which reminded me of dentists and cod-liver oil. "No, sir! you don't know all."

"Look here! If you've committed any crime of unusual atrocity, please don't mention it till this game is over," I said hastily. "By the way, what's your name?" for, as a matter of fact, by reason of its extreme rarity in our district, it had for the time escaped my memory.

"My name is one not unknown in poetry and prose, but principally the latter. I am usually, however, more widely known in the golfing world as the 'Man who is always one hole down.'"

"Get away!" I exclaimed, with a sickly effort at gaiety; for, though I had never actually met the creature before, I had often heard whispers of his existence, and he undoubtedly spoke in a tone of veracity.

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“Yes ; always one hole down ! Sometimes more—never less ! It is indeed a doleful doom.” Here he brushed away a tear with his sleeve, and dropped a pace behind.

“But what about your unlucky partners ? can’t you make a change just this once—for my sake ?” I exclaimed with some unworthy selfishness. “You know it’s pretty rough on me.”

“True ; but what of myself ? Often do I hear the sunny laugh and the merry voice prate and babble of its four—five—six—even of its eighteen holes up ; and I, *always, always* one down—and sometimes more !”

“Is there no hope of breaking this nefarious spell ?” I exclaimed with some dismay, for Nicodemus had just laid a long putt dead.

“None !” he replied with a resigned look ; and he added, with a shudder, “Ha ! she comes !”

“Who?” I cried with a jump; for he startled us, and there were dozens of Highland cattle pasturing on the Links. If he meant a cow, I determined to go home at once, or, at all events, escape to the other side of the railway.

“She is on the other side of that knoll just now. I hear her; you will probably see her in the course of five minutes.”

“Thunder! Is she charging?” I cried in perfectly excusable anxiety.

“Charging?” he echoed, with a long slow moan; “charging? Alas! she is already charged, primed, and ready for action.”

There now appeared over the knoll in front of us a pretty young creature of some four feet six or so, winsomely robed in gray, of a curious shade, with a red jacket and sunshade of the same color. She was accompanied by two Maltese terriers, whose knowledge of

Pears' must, from the delicious white silkiness of their hair, have been profound in the extreme; and on a chain trotted a pug, with black warty muzzle, and a tail curled in a knot that it would have been the joy of a Coleraine pig to bite.

"Ha! who comes here?" cried Forceps and Nicodemus, for they have both a nice taste in such matters.

"It is my wife," said our partner with an extremely depressing mixture of wail, whistle and whine. "She always takes a turn out with the dogs, and walks home with me."

"Is that the reason," I whispered sternly, "of you know what?"

"Always one hole down!" he murmured.

And, as a matter of fact, at the end of the game so we were!