



IN RE STYMIE.

By A. W. G.

I had the pleasure some time since of reading in the January number of the Golfer's Magazine an interesting and amusing article written by Mr. Harold Saunders in defense of the stymie.

While the article is written in a humorous vein, the statements made are, nevertheless, true, as will be at-

tested by every player who has laid a stymie or has had the "scurvy trick" played on him; and the admissions made alone furnish objections which should bring about the abolition of the stymie.

Mr. Saunders says that the player who has laid his opponent a stymie "invariably comforts himself like a

petty pilferer detected in a mean theft." "If he secures a victory with the aid of one or two judicious stymies, he slinks quietly home like one who carries the burden of a secret crime." "It stands to reason that you feel justly aggrieved when the man who places his ball in a direct line with yours and the hole practically acknowledges that he has played you a scurvy trick." Humorous—but how exasperatingly true!

Could there be a stronger arraignment of the viciousness of a rule than to acknowledge that its enforcement makes both players feel like a "scurvy trick" had been played?

The game of golf is defined as consisting in each side playing a ball from the tee into a hole by successive strokes.

When the players drive from the tee, they are on exact equality. Each side has the same obstructions to overcome, the same pits, and the same bunkers to avoid. When they play their second or any successive strokes *before reaching the putting green* neither player can obtain over his opponent any advantage by laying his ball near his opponent's ball so as to interfere with the latter's stroke. Rule 16 protects the player from interference.

But when the *balls reach the putting green*, this rule of fairness between the players is changed—then the iniquitous stymie rule is invoked. If the balls lie 12 inches off the putting green and 8 inches apart, then a player whose ball is nearer the hole can be required to lift it for his opponent to play, but if the balls happen to be 24 inches further toward the hole so as to be on the putting green, and 8 inches apart, then the

player is no longer protected from having his stroke interfered with. He must play over or around the ball. If casual water on the putting green intervenes between the ball and the hole, the player may lift his ball and place it by hand in a position "*which affords a putt to the hole without casual water intervening*," but if the opponent's ball interferes, no such privilege is allowed.

If any loose impediments, ice, snow, wormcasts, etc., on the putting green intervene between the ball and the hole, they may be removed, but an opponent's ball so offending cannot be touched, unless within 6 inches of the other ball. The smallest grain of sand or wormcast may be removed, but the sacred stymie must be played. How very absurd! Besides being unfair, the stymie rewards bad play. There can be no better shot played than to "hole out"; this is what the player is attempting; he fails, but his ball accidentally rolls in front of his opponent's ball and deprives him of the *same right* which has just been exercised by the player who has laid the stymie, i. e., *an unobstructed putt at the hole*. The first player has two chances; he has a clean putt at the hole; if he misses, he has still a further chance to lay a stymie (generally equivalent to holing out); his opponent whom he has stymied has no chance. He *had a good chance* and that has been taken from him by a bad shot of the inferior player. The bad player is rewarded; his opponent is penalized.

In stroke competitions, the interfering ball must be lifted, if the player so desires. Why not also in match play? Each player is playing against the other just as much in medal as in

match play; in the one case the strokes are reckoned by the hole—in the other by the 18 holes.

The stymie is not played in three or four ball match-play. Why not the same rule in singles?

There might be some justice in requiring a player who lays himself a stymie, to play it, but there is certainly no justice or fairness in enforcing the present rule. It would be just as reasonable to permit an opponent to place his foot between the player's ball and the hole and insisting on holding it there until the stroke is made.

We venture to say that, if no such thing as a stymie had ever been known, any golfer of to-day who should lay his opponent a stymie would instinctively lift or play his ball out of the way so as to accord his opponent the same right to an unobstructed putt which he himself has just exercised.

Why should the player be protected from interference with his stroke all the way to the putting green and then be robbed of his advantage? Why should the distance be six inches and not seven or any other number? Why is it that, while the player is permitted to remove every other thing on earth which would in any way interfere with the stroke, the opponent's ball should be made an exception? Why should the erratic stroke be rewarded and the unoffending player be penalized? Why should the result of a match be made to depend on luck and not on skill.

The stymie is wrong, is unfair, favors the bad play, penalizes the player who is without fault, is a creature of accident and lowers the ethical standards of the Royal and Ancient Game.

Let it be banished to the musty realms of antiquity to companion with its *confrere*, the feather-stuffed ball.

