

FIFTY YEARS OF GOLF

The Fifth Installment of the Golfing Reminiscences of Great Britain's First Amateur Champion

By HORACE G. HUTCHINSON

GOLF had jogged along very comfortably up to this time with its one championship, open to amateurs as to professionals, but never as yet won by an amateur. Then in the winter of 1884-5 it occurred to some original genius of the club at Hoylake—"why not a championship to be restricted to the amateurs?" I do not know whose great brain first flashed out the idea, but they wrote and explained it to me, asked me to serve on a committee for the purpose, and gradually the scheme was licked into something more or less like shape. It was decided to hold, under the auspices of the Royal Liverpool Club, a tournament, under match play rules, open to all amateurs. The club gave a handsome prize, or, rather, two prizes. I went up to Hoylake a little while before the affair came off, and there found the committee in charge in something of a difficulty. Douglas Rolland had sent in his entry and they did not know how to deal with it. You see, at that date we had no definition of a professional, or of an amateur, and had to decide on the analogy of other sports. I was all for accepting Rolland's entry then, and I am of the same opinion now—that it ought to have been received.

His offence was that having come in second—it was second to Jack Simpson—in the previous year for the Open Championship, he had accepted the second prize money, thereby violating the law common to several sports and pastimes forbidding an amateur to receive a money prize when in competition with professionals. That would have been all plain sailing but for the unfortunate fact that it was discovered that Johnny Ball, some years before, and while still quite a boy, had played himself into the prize list at an Open Championship and had been offered, and, without a thought about the matter, had accepted, a sum that I think amounted to no less than ten shillings. It was, of course, unthinkable that Johnny should be deprived of his birthright as an amateur for such a boyish error as this. There has never been the faintest suspicion of professionalism about any act of Johnny Ball's extraordinary golfing life, but technically, at that date, his case and Rolland's were very much on all fours. I saw that the committee, or a majority of them, were resolved to reject Rolland's entry. I did not care to be a member of a committee which rejected, for a cause I could not quite approve, the entry of one who would certainly be a very formidable competitor for a tournament which I had a distant hope that I might possibly win. I therefore asked leave to resign from the committee, before the vote

was taken on the point, and did so, with perfectly amicable sentiments all round. I have been rather long-winded perhaps in this explanation, but I wanted to make it clear to those who are uninformed about it the reason why the present amateur definition is drafted just as it is, with a time limit, beyond which a man shall be held guiltless of having done any action to spoil his amateur status in accepting a money prize in competition with professionals.

So that was settled and Rolland's entry disallowed. It passed off with less trouble than I had expected, perhaps just because Rolland was such a thoroughly good fellow, whether he were professional or amateur and not at all of that small spirit which is apt to take offence where none is meant. We set to work to play our tournament. It was considered best not to entitle it a championship, seeing that it was the installation of a single club only, and had no official recognition. Funny things began to happen, from the start. It gave much delight to the men of Hoylake that I should have drawn, as my first foe, my old enemy at Westward Ho! Arthur Molesworth. Him I managed to beat with tolerable ease. I think he had even then begun to lose the sting of his game. After that I rather forgot my fortunes until the semi-final heat, when I came up against Johnny Ball. In a previous heat, by the way, he had committed the crime of parricide, knocking out his father, who put up a stout fight against him, nevertheless. Johnny and I had a great contest, and I thought he was going to beat me, for he was 2 up at the turn; but I began to play rather well from there inwards and beat him 2 up on the last green.

In that tournament we had not the arrangement which was made as soon as the Amateur Championship was put on an official footing—that is to say in the very next year—of all byes being played off in the first round. The effect of that was that Mr. Macfie had a bye in the morning. The final was decided in a single round to be played in the afternoon. I had been wound up to high concert pitch by that morning round with Johnny and could not play a bit in the afternoon. Macfie, on the other hand, putted like a demon and never made a mistake, so very likely the result would have been just the same if I too had been idle all the morning.

So that was the conclusion of it, and really unfortunate for Macfie that he had not official right to his name at the head of the list of Amateur Champions, for this was in all respects, except the title, equivalent to a championship. Leslie Balfour was

G O L F I L L U S T R A T E D



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THE ST. ANDREWS SWING

not there, but Johnny Laidlay was. It was the first time that I had made his acquaintance, though I did not have to play him. He was knocked out at an early period of the campaign. In fact I am pretty sure that he was not playing as fine a game then as he developed later. His putting, in particular, improved greatly, and so did the direction of his driving. His iron play was always, from the first, unsurpassed. I think that according to the arrangements of that tournament all ties must have gone on into the next round, for if I remember right Walter de Zoete tied with Macfie and was beaten by him on their second time of meeting, when Macfie, amongst other atrocities, did the short hole (the rush hole) in 1. De Zoete went very strongly in that tournament. One of his victims was Mr. Mure Ferguson whom he beat by 8 and 7. There must, of course, have been something wrong here: I am not sure that gout would not come into the diagnosis.

And somewhere or other, among the crowd of lookers-on at that tournament, with a heart very black with rage against me at my presumption in daring to beat the local hero, Johnny Ball, would have been a little boy of the name of Harold Hilton; a name to be heard of in later years.

That was the beginning, the preface, the preliminary canter, of the Amateur Championship, and it is to the initiative and enterprise of the men of Hoylake in getting up that tournament and conducting it to success that we owe all the fun and all the tears we have had out of that championship since. No doubt it, or something like it, would have come sooner or later, whether or no, but it was due to the Hoylake club that it came just as soon as it did. In the later course of that year it was taken properly in hand; the chief clubs in the kingdom gave it their sanction and contributed to buy a challenge cup for it: rules

were drawn up; the definition of an amateur was framed, and the first Amateur Championship meeting on those lines was determined to be held at St. Andrews the following year.

Now seeing that this veracious and highly egotistic record aims at being a serious contribution to the golfing history of modern times, as well as a sketch of my little personal share in it, it might be worth while just to note the names of the clubs which subscribed for that Amateur Championship cup. For the subscribers were all the principal clubs of Great Britain at

that time and anyone who has not looked over the list lately may very well feel something of the same surprise that the little boy experienced when he found himself in heavens-surprise both at some of those who were there and also at some of those who were not there. All the more notable of the great inland golf clubs, for instance, are conspicuous by their absence; and for the perfectly sound reason that they had not yet come into being, nor indeed had inland golf yet begun to be deemed at all worthy of consideration. There are, to be sure, the Royal Blackheath and the Royal Wimbledon. These are great in respect and veneration; but they no longer lead. St. George's at Sandwich was admitted to the sacred number of contributory clubs many years later, when it came into existence and its merits well warranted the inclusion of its course among the championship greens. And during all the first years of the Amateur Championship's existence it was my duty, acting on instructions from the Royal North Devon Club, to point out how very worthy was Westward Ho! to be the scene of that encounter, and also (but this was ever received with a bland smile in which, after a course of years, I began to join) how very central was its situation and how easy of approach from all directions. It has taken a lapse of many years and a more moving eloquence than mine to convince the management of the championship on these so obvious points; but now that they are convinced they accord the links of the West all their due recognition.

The original subscribing clubs then, who gave the weight of their authority to the new championship, were the following:—Royal and Ancient; Royal Liverpool; Royal Albert, Montrose; Royal North Devon; Royal Aberdeen; Royal Blackheath; Royal Wimbledon; Alnmouth; North Berwick, New Club;

Panmure, Dundee; Prestwick Club; Bruntsfield Links, Edinburgh; Dalhousie Club; Edinburgh Burgess; Formby; Gullane; Honorable Company of Edinburgh Golfers; Innerleven; King James VIth, Perth; Kilspindie; Tantallon; Troon; West Lancashire. Is it not the case, that there are surprises in this list, both in those who are in it and those who are out?

THE FIRST AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP

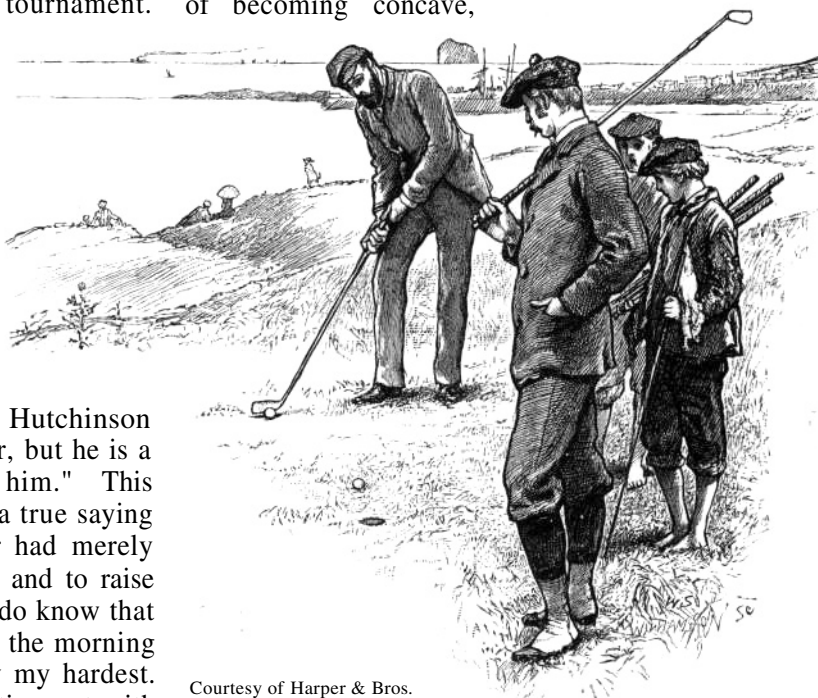
The first Amateur Championship, as by law established, was played at St. Andrews and started, for me, as I suppose did most things at that time of life, on the note of comedy. It must be understood that this institution meant a great gathering of the clans and of clansmen not very well known to each other. I daresay some of us had our own ideas that no one was likely to be unearthed from the dark places able to upset reputations more or less established; but everything was possible. I had carrying for me one of the numerous family at St. Andrews of Greig, I presume some connection of the fine golfer of that name and of his brother the lion-voiced starter. Of course the prospects of the championship were the great subject of discussion, and during my first match of the tournament—I think things must have been going fairly easily and that I had my opponent pretty well in hand—this Greig said to me, "There's a mon Fogie, frae Earlsferry, and they say he's gaein' tae win the chompsonship. He's a terrible fine player an' he daes na' mind the gallery a dom."

This was terrific news to me. By "the mon Fogie" I understood him to mean a Mr. Foggo of Earlsferry, whose name I had noticed on the list of the draw, and had noticed further that this Mr. Foggo would be my own fate in the second round of the tournament. That is, of course, always on the assumption that he survived; and of that, after Greig's remarks, I had no doubt. When I came in I heard to my surprise, as well, I may say, as to my relief, that this terror of Earlsferry had actually been defeated—knocked out on the last green by Dr. McCuaig.

Of Dr. McCuaig I did not know very much; and then, on the evening of that day it was reported to me that he had said "I shall beat Horace Hutchinson to-morrow. I believe he is a good player, but he is a young player. You'll see, I shall beat him." This was retailed to me, and whether it were a true saying of the doctor's or whether the retailer had merely "invented it to see how I should take it and to raise my ire, I do not know to this day: but I do know that it did raise my ire and that I went out in the morning with a very grim determination to play my hardest. I had no idea then of any amateur starting out with the expectation that he was going to beat me; unless,

indeed, it were Johnny Ball. I played steadily, the doctor was not at all at his best, and I won, I think it was the first seven holes. At all events it was such a number as made the match a very comfortable one. The doctor took his beating in the best of spirits, and bore no ill-feeling whatever.

Altogether that was a comfortable championship. After the first thrill of terror inspired by the reputation of "the mon Fogie" it went on oiled wheels. Mure Ferguson, I remember, was a hole up going to the eleventh, and I was a little anxious, but he let me win in the end, though only by a hole, and then it looked very much as if I should have to play Johnny Ball in the final—which was never to be regarded as a holiday. But the unexpected happened. In the semi-final he had to meet Henry Lamb. Henry Lamb was a beautiful golfer. It was he who invented the "bulger," that club with its convex face off which the ball flew with a straightness that was a revelation. You see, before the bulger was invented the face of our wooden clubs, by the perpetual contact and hammering on the hard "guttie" balls, always got worn away so that instead of being flat they were very decidedly concave. And you may understand what the effect of that gradient of face would be—to emphasize and aggravate every sin of heeling or toeing to which golfing flesh was heir. Therefore the good influence of the bulger was not really so much in introducing the first convexity, though that in itself helped the ball to go straight off it, but it also corrected that fatal concavity which the clubs soon assumed of which the faces were flat to start with. Instead of becoming concave,



Courtesy of Harper & Bros.

ON THE PUTTING GREEN AT NORTH BERWICK IN THE EIGHTIES

GOLF ILLUSTRATED

after much battering, the face of the bulger became merely flat.

So it was a blessed invention; and as to its inventor, he was not only player of a very fine and graceful game of golf, but was also the most delightful fellow to play with that could be imagined. He had a temper which in its perfect serenity was a most valuable golfing asset to himself, and also most valuable in the charm of the companionship which it brought into a round of golf with him. His mode of addressing the ball was remarkable, for he stood as if he were going to drive it at an angle of at least forty-five degrees to the right of the hole. I remember at some inland course in the South, where his strange method was not known, a caddie calling out to him as he was on the point of driving from the first tee, "Stop, stop. You're playing to the wrong hole." Henry Lamb gave the boy one of his sweetest and most lamblike smiles, and proceeded to drive the ball two hundred yards straight down the middle of the course—to square leg. He used to swing round so far as he came down, that really it was to the cricketer's square leg that he drove; and yet his style was a singularly graceful one; which seems as if it could not be.

It was a singularly effective one, no less, and he was a medallist on most of the courses then known to the golfer. Still, he was not a Johnny Ball. On that day, however, he proved himself a greater than Johnny Ball, who was far from being at his best, and when I came in from my own semi-final effort I learned with a breath of even deeper relief than I had given to the shade of the defunct "mon Fogie" that Henry Lamb and not Johnny was my man for the final.

Neither of us started well, in that final round; it was only of eighteen holes in those days; but I began to get going after the fourth hole and Henry Lamb was, I think, a little done after his match with Johnny. At all events he left the holes slip away very quickly and I had an easy win, on which he was the first to offer his congratulations—a very courteous gentleman!

The intelligent student of golfing history up to this period might very well note, and with some surprise, that whenever reference is made to Johnny Ball, it always seems to be as of one disappointing expectation. And that, in truth, was very much the case. Men of Hoylake used to come to me almost with tears in their eyes, because they knew that they had my full sympathy and understanding. They knew that I knew what a terror Johnny Ball really was on

his own course and when playing his right game. But what afflicted them almost to hysterics was that he never seemed able to produce this wonderful best of his when he went away to play anywhere else than at home; and the consequence of that was that the other folk, the Scotsmen, laughed at them, saying "this local idol of yours has feet of very poor clay"—or gibes to that effect. They took it very badly. It is hardly to be believed now, when we know what a brilliant lot of victories in all fields Johnny has to his credit, that he had to wait a very weary while, and to suffer a number of disappointments, before he began to come to his due. When he did come, he was not to hold nor to bind.

Johnny Laidlay did nothing effective in this first championship. For the moment I forget who knocked him out but he too had to "bide a wee" before he did all that was expected of him; but I made his much better acquaintance about this time and acquired the greater respect for his game, especially for the accuracy and delicacy of his approaches with the mashie. It was a new club to me, and something of a revelation, in its possibilities. For it would, of itself, and without any efforts of the player, do all to the ball that might be done with our old irons only after a deal of cut had been carefully put on. I do not at all regret that labor: it was an excellent education; but there is no doubt that the mashie simplified the approaching problems. It made an easier game of it.

I have been looking up the details of this championship and find one of its "points" to have been the meeting of Johnny Ball and Johnny Laidlay, the first of very many encounters of its kind, resulting in the English Johnny's win by 3 and 2. So that was the fate of the Scot: he fell by no unworthy hand. There is always consolation in this reflection. Henry Lamb, as I read on the same record, had fought his way to the final over the corpses of some stout foes. The first round gave him a bye, but he then had to meet Mr. Charles Anderson, forgotten by golfers of to-day, but a stalwart in his time. Next Harry Everard fell to him, and then he had a bigger man than either, especially at St. Andrews, in Leslie Balfour. He beat Leslie at the last hole. Then in the semi-final he beat Johnny Ball by no less than 7 up and 6 to play, and it was by the same sufficient margin that I defeated him. What Johnny can have been doing I hardly know. That he must have been playing some game widely different from his real one is very certain.

