

FIFTY YEARS OF GOLF

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

By HORACE G. HUTCHINSON

THE first architect of the inland courses, when golfers began to learn that inland courses might, in some large measure, give them the game that they wanted, was Tom Dun. He went about the country laying the courses out, and as he was a very courteous Nature's gentleman, and always liked to say the pleasant thing, he gave praise to each course as he contrived it so liberally that some wag invented the conundrum "Mention any inland course of which Tom Dun has not said that it is the best of its kind ever seen."

His idea—and really he had but one—was to throw up a barrier, with a ditch, called for euphony's sake a bunker, on the near side of it, right across the course, to be carried from the tee, another of the same kind to be carried with the second shot, and similarly a third for the third shot if it was a three-shot hole. It was a simple plan, nor is Tom Dun to be censured because he could not evolve something like a more colorable imitation of the natural hazard. A man is not to be criticised because he is not in advance of his time.

Moreover these barriers had at least the merit that they were uncompromising. You had to be over them, or else you found perdition, and if you only hacked the ball out a little way beyond the first barrier with your first shot you could not carry the second barrier with your third. You were like a hurdle racer who has got out of his stride.

The course, constructed on these lines, on which I used to play most, from London, was Prince's at Mitcham—the most convenient of access of all, before the days of motors. I used to have great matches here with Jack White, before Sunningdale was made and he went there in charge.

Subsequently the mantle of Tom Dun as course-creator in chief fell on the shoulders of Willy Park, and his ideas were more varied. He was also a good deal more thorough, elaborate and expressive in his dealings with the inland courses. He was the first to advocate the wholesale ploughing up of the soil of the course and the re-sowing. He architected Broadstone, Sunningdale and a host more, and when he had finished with the Sunningdale he had certainly produced the best thing in the way of an inland course that up to that time had been created. He did his work well, but it was not entirely or even mainly due to him that Sunningdale was so good. The soil was more light and sandy, more like the real seaside links, than that of any other inland course.

They had done wonderful things at New Zealand, where Mr. Lock-King, with Mure Fergusson aiding and abetting, had fastened mighty engines to pine trees and dragged them up by the roots, fashioning a golf course out of a pine forest. That was pioneer's work in a double sense for it not only made this particular course where the trees had covered all the land, but it also showed to other people how possible it was to make a course out of forest in other places. It is not only possible, but it is also a good deal less laborious to grub up the forest trees than it is to get rid of a very dense growth of smaller undergrowth, such as there was to deal with at Le Touquet, in France, for instance. Then the soil in all this pine forest country such as we see about Woking and Byfleet is very light and sandy, as the inland soils go, so that it was fine natural material for golf when once the trees had gone. The latest construction of the kind is at St. George's Hill, near Weybridge, where the trees had been much better cared for for generations and in consequence were far larger and more difficult of uprooting than at New Zealand. There they had to blast the boles of the trees with dynamite before they could get them out of the ground. But of course the bigger timber was of greater value and helped to pay the labor bill.

These forest courses have done another thing for us, they have taught us the value of a tree as a golfing hazard. Our forefathers would have scoffed at the idea of a tree on a golf links, although there was for many a long year opportunity for the golfer to find trouble in the trees which come out threatening the course at a certain point at North Berwick. But then they do not have their actual roots in the soil of the links itself. They are outside it, over the boundary wall. But as for the opportunities which the tree hazard gives for those subtleties of slicing and pulling round, or of cutting the ball up with a very vertical rise, let those who have seen Harry Vardon on a course of this tree-beset kind bear witness. And the tree has at least this virtue; that it is permanent. It does not get trodden down and hacked out of existence by a niblick as the faint hearted whin does.

At Woking the natural trouble on the ground was heather rather than trees, and a fine course they have made of it. But of all, that of Sunningdale has always seemed to me just about the best of the inland ones—certainly the best of the earlier made ones. Then I was at Walton Heath, as a guest of Mr. Cosmo Bonsor's kindly hospitality, when that great inland

green was opened. Harry Colt had by that time gone to Sunningdale, and was making improvements on the original plan of Willy Park. But Walton Heath was a monument to the skill of another of our amateur course constructors, Herbert Fowler. He made a very good thing of it, as the wonderful success of that club has testified since. But it soon passed out of the hands of Mr. Bonsor, and for how much the energy of Sir George Riddell, who acquired the chief interest in it, counted in its popularity it would be very hard to say. Assuredly it counted for a great deal. Then they had James Braid, importing him from Romford, and his attractive personality and great fame helped the club. Another like him, our old friend Taylor, was by this time established at Mid-Surrey, and the club there was a power, by reason of the goodness of its green, its numbers and the strong players belonging to it.

It would be a very dull and futile business to go into all the development of the inland golf which went on during these years. Enough has been said. But you could not draw anything like a full picture of the golf of the last fifty years without noticing this development. The inland clubs, and especially those about London, have become a force. As their members go forth to play from the one big city which is the common center they are the better able to make their opinion felt; and their word has become of importance in modern golf. It is possible that it is destined to have a larger importance yet. But I have no business with prophecy.

And also there are big inland clubs, which have already brought weight to bear on golfing counsels, in the Midlands. They have associated themselves into a union, as have several other clusters; and all these help in the forming and expression of opinions. But apart from all this the great reason why they attract members and why they are able to carry weight at all is that their courses are so good. The course-constructor has been learning and so has the greenkeeper. I once had a delightful letter from Peter Lees, the famous greenkeeper to the Mid-Surrey Club. He writes "when I find the worms too numerous, I reduce them." The worm used to be the great trouble and despair of the guardian of the inland putting green in the old days, but here we have Lees writing of dealing with them as it were by the very nod of Jove. When he finds them too numerous, he reduces them. The mode of reduction is so well known and so easy that he does not think it worth while to waste a word in explanation of it. We have the nice story of a certain greenkeeper being asked "What kind of grass is this?" the enquirer referring to a sample that he had just picked up from the course. "Oh," came the puzzled reply, "there's only one sort of grass—green grass." That is a reply that is almost typical of the "green-ness" of the greenkeeper in the earliest days of the management—if

that is the right word for it—of the inland greens, but the modern keeper has to "discourse in learned phrases" of such varieties as fescues and poas and hardly thinks himself entitled to full respect unless he can fire you off all the Latin names of the varieties of grasses that occur on our inland greens and courses. The keeping has really become quite a science.

And at their best, that is when the weather is treating them kindly, there is not that vast difference in quality between the best of our inland greens and the seaside greens which our forefathers have led us to suppose. The big merit of the seaside links, which the inland can never hope to match, is that it is such a good all-weather course. With its porous soil it does not become so water-logged in the wet years nor does it become so desiccated in the dry. It is a more perpetual joy. But the days are long past when men could say that the seaside links were the only ones worth playing on or that the seaside clubs alone were worthy of attention.

THE REVOLT OF THE AMAZONS

Lord Moncrief (then Wellwood) writing in the "Badminton Book on Golf," had said that ladies were relegated and restricted to a species of "Jew's quarter" where they were graciously permitted to play with a single club, the putter, those little strokes which we all of us are fond of saying are the most important in the game of golf, but which we all feel to be the least interesting.

It was either in 1892 or 1893 that Lord Eldon asked me to stay with him at his Gloucestershire place, Stowell Park, on the Cotswolds, and, there incidentally, I received quite a new impression as to the possibilities of feminine golf. I had already played on the long links at Prestwick in foursome matches with the Misses Whigham, Johnny Laidlay being the man on the other side, and taking one of the sisters as his partner, while I took the other, but they had not then come to their full golfing due. They were rather in the phase which would now be known as the "flapper stage." Still, they played remarkably well. But the most remarkable thing, as we thought then, was not that they should play the long game so well, but that they should play it at all. It was like Dr. Johnson's comment about the dancing dogs. They played, and we as their partners played, with all consciousness that we were guilty things, doing that which we ought not to do. It was an enormity for ladies to play on the long links at all.

At Stowell Lord Eldon had a course of nine very good and interesting holes in the park, and there I found the Scott brothers, Osmond and Denys playing with their sister Lady Margaret. I had never at that time seen any lady capable of playing at all the same kind of game that Lady Margaret could and did play. You must remember that those were the days of the solid guttapercha balls, which were far less easy

GOLF ILLUSTRATED



A PHOTOGRAPH OF ALEX SMITH, HARRY VARDON, EDWARD RAY AND GEORGE LOW
Taken at Baltusrol during the exhibition match played there two years ago

Photo by Nesbit

to pick up clean off the ground and raise, without putting a little slice on them, than the modern rubber-cores. The ladies have especially been helped by these more resilient balls which rise more readily. But Lady Margaret Scott had a perfect facility in picking the ball up with her brassy, off the ordinary lie of the course, and sending it flying straight to the mark without any slice on it. She had a very long, an exaggeratedly long, swing back, but then the weakness of the extra long swing back was not realised at that time as it is now, and certainly she never seemed to lose control of the club, although there must have been some waste labor about it.

I never had seen a lady able to play golf at all as Lady Margaret played the game. She had all the crisp and well-cut approach strokes at her command. It was some years after this that the ladies' championship was started. Meanwhile ladies, greatly daring, had begun to play on the long links. As a rule they would have been both better and happier on their own short putting greens; but there were exceptions who were quite able, by their skill, to appreciate the longer courses and to play them as well as the men. As soon as ever the ladies championship was instituted, Lady Margaret Scott (now Hamilton Russell) justified all the opinion I had formed of her game by winning that championship three times, in annual succession. And I think that the only reason why she did not go on winning it was that she did not go on playing for it. Surely she had done enough for glory.

It is very unprofitable work trying to estimate the

relative golfing merits of different generations, but I am disposed to think that our best ladies of to-day (whom shall we name? I think Miss Ravenscroft and Miss Cecil Leitch) are not greatly better, if at all, than Lady Margaret at her best. We have to take the difference in balls into consideration for one thing. It is certain that the change to the livelier ball has helped the best of the ladies more than the best of the men. But I get a certain line of comparison in this way: some of the finest of the lady golfers, when ladies first began to invade the long links, were the Misses Orr. They used to play at North Berwick. But they did not, in the daring fashion of the ladies to-day, claim to play at reasonable hours. They started very early and were finishing their round when lazy men were finishing breakfast. I think that they only once took part in a championship and that, on that single occasion, one sister beat another in the final and that a third sister had been beaten in the semi-final by one of the finalists. I played one of them at Nairn, giving, as far as I remember, a half, and that seemed to bring us very nearly together. In these latter days, since the ladies have claimed, and as I think, quite rightly claimed, practically an equal right to our long links, we have seen several matches at odds of a half, and again they have worked out very level. There was that much talked of match between Miss Cecil Leitch and Hilton. The lady won it. I do not think that either played up to his or her true game, unless it was perhaps Miss Leitch in the final round. But the match was a close one, showing that the odds were adequate for bringing

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the sexes to something like a golfing equality. Then again, giving the same odds of a half, we played a team of men against a team of ladies at Stoke Pogis. The one side was just about as representative as the other. Our masculine side won. To this day I do not know how we won: I do not understand how it is that the best of the men (speaking of amateurs) is able to give the best of the ladies anything like a half, but it does appear that these are very approximately the right odds, and it also appears that these have been just about the odds ever since the ladies began to play the long game. The inference is that the quality of the game of the best of them has not greatly altered. I know that when I played Miss Violet Hezlet in that Stoke Pogis match, I found myself hardly at all in front of her off the tee when we both hit good shots going against the wind. Down the wind it was another story: I could out-drive her usefully with the wind behind. And here I think it possible to give ladies a hint by which they might profit: if they would but tee their ball high going down the wind they would find it far more easy to give it that hoist into the air which is essential for its getting advantage of the favor of the breeze. They seem to have some high-minded idea that there is something not quite right about putting the ball on a high tee—that it is rather on a par with spotting the white at billiards. It is splendid of them to have such pure and high ideals, but it would be to their practical advantage to forget them now and then.

And I am quite sure that the ladies, as a rule, do not take the pains they should about their putting and the short game generally. There is but one of them, Miss Grant Suttie, so far as I have seen, who really studies her putts as a good man player studies them, and that is because she has played so much with men at North Berwick and has adopted their methods. She has her advantage therein, for she is the most certain on the green of all the ladies. It is a wonder, seeing that it is a part of the game which demands delicacy of touch and no strength of muscle,

that ladies do not putt far better than men. As a general rule they putt far worse.

Naturally, when this incursion of the ladies arrived on the links of the men it intensified the trouble of those problems of the congestion of the green which were already beginning to be acute. Naturally, too, men dealt with the incursion according to their powers and according to their gallantry. No doubt it was felt that it was a hard and discourteous thing to deny the ladies equal rights, even over the private courses. Obviously on the public courses they had the equal right, and they were not shy of claiming it. On the private courses we used to hear at first "It's absurd these ladies not sticking to their own course: they can't drive far enough to be able to appreciate the long course," and so on. But then it very soon became evident that they could drive further and play better than a large number of the male members of the club; which rather knocked the bottom out of that argument. As a rule some compromise was effected, the ladies being restricted to certain hours—after all, the men were generally workers, so that they had the more claim to have the course at their disposal in their hours of leisure. A very good form of compromise is that which is in vogue at Biarritz, and it may be commended to the notice of other clubs. There is one afternoon in the week set apart for all and sundry ladies, but besides this there is a permission for ladies whose handicap is four or under to play at any time and on equal terms with the men. This seems to meet the case admirably, for it keeps off the links the inefficient lady players who would be apt to block the green and whose right place is on their own short course, while it freely admits those who are capable of appreciating the blessings of the long course and are quite as good golfers as the average of the men whom they will meet there. As time goes on it appears as if we shall be fortunate if the ladies do not take exclusive possession of the links, and only allow us men upon them at the hours which are the least convenient.

