

FIFTY YEARS OF GOLF

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

By HORACE G. HUTCHINSON

WILLY PARK, always a man of some practical ingenuity as well as a magnificent golfer, had lately invented and patented a peculiar type of putter. He had also invented, by way of an advertisement of this crooked-necked club of his, the dictum that "the man who can putt is a match for anybody."

Now Park besides his other fine qualities was a very gallant golfer. It had been his way for some years, as soon as some man, be it Douglas Rolland, or any other, had come to the top of the golfing tree, so that everybody was talking about him and saying what a fine fellow he was, to challenge this fine top bird of the roost, and back his challenge with a £50 or £100 stake. There may have been a tinge of advertisement about it, for Park was a good man of business and the first of the professionals to realize what money there was in establishing golf shops, but chiefly, I think, he played these matches for the pure sport of the thing.

So now, Harry Vardon being, beyond dispute, at the tree top, Park must issue a challenge to play him, for a money stake, a home and home match, two rounds at North Berwick and two at Ganton. Now you have to realize that in these days Harry Vardon was so great a man, there was so much keenness to see him play, that when he went out the gallery followed him, they watched his every stroke, and they paid no more attention than if he had no existence at all to the poor wretch who chanced to be partnered with him. They would trample on this unfortunate creature's ball without the slightest remorse: he was rather lucky if he were not thrown clown and trampled to death himself by the throng.

Willy Park was a shrewd Scot. He was not going

to have any of this nonsense when he "the man who could putt" set out to prove, for money, that he was a match for anyone, even for Harry Vardon at his best. That match opened therefore, at its very second shot, on the note of comedy. Park had gone a little further off the tee than Harry Vardon, towards the bunker guarding Point Garry hill. That meant that Harry Vardon had to play first, and after his play of the second shot the gallery made a start to dash in, in their accustomed manner, quite regardless of the other partner to the match. Park proceeded to teach them their lesson at the outset. He did not hurry, like a guilty thing, to play his shot, as most of the others who played with Vardon used to do: instead, he left his ball altogether, with Fiery, his faithful caddie, standing guard over it. The people crowded forward as far as Fiery, but they were not at all likely to go beyond him, most faithful henchman and rather truculent watch dog, with round Scotch bonnet and streamers floating behind, the clubs loose held, out of the bag, beneath his arm—I rather think he would have called it his "oxter"—because he had for years carried clubs before bags came into use and the fine smoothness and polish of the club handles was apt to be spoilt by dragging them in and out of the bag. I never heard, nor cared, what other name he had than Fiery of which the propriety was written in flaming colors on his face. So he stood, facing and keeping back the crowd from the ball, a subject not unworthy of a historical picture and by no means to be disregarded as a point in the golfing story of the last fifty years, because he was a type, and nearly the last, of the old Scottish caddies and because this match was among the last of those of the old style. Park's school was really a generation

GOLF ILLUSTRATED

back of that to which belonged the modern triumvirate.

So Park walked on, having left his ball; he walked on to the foot of Point Garry hill; then he ascended it, with great leisure, quite regardless that the people raged together, and he looked at the flag, which he did not in the least desire to see. All he did desire was to teach the gallery their lesson, that he, Park, meant to count for something in this match, that Harry Vardon was not the only player; and when he had thus taught the lesson, which it were better that the people should learn first than last, he came back leisurely to his ball again and played it.

They took their lesson well—a Scottish crowd is not slow at the up-take and has its sense of humor. Moreover Park was their man, being a Scot. They liked to see him taking himself seriously, and they did not crowd on him inconveniently again.

And it was a most amusing match to watch, though just a little pathetic too. Willy Park was most emphatically "the man who could putt." He told me that he had been practicing putting for that match to the tune of from six to eight hours a day. It sounds terribly dull work; but certainly Park was rewarded for it, for I never saw such putting, day in and day out, as he was doing about the time of that match. And in the match he putted extraordinarily. I speak only of the first portion; at North Berwick. I did not see the latter end of it at Ganton; but I think the result, if there ever could be, from the start, a moment's doubt about it, was virtually all settled in the first thirty-six holes. Park putted extraordinarily, but he still had to prove his dictum that the man who could putt was a match for anybody. Vardon as surely could not putt; but then he played all the rest of the game to a beautiful perfection, whereas poor Park could not drive. He developed, at its worst, that tendency to hook his drives which has always been a danger to him. He arrived on the greens one stroke, or even two, behind Vardon. But then he put the putt in; whereas Vardon often neglected the simple precaution of laying it dead. So it went on, Park saving himself again and again by this marvellous putting, and at last, after he had holed one of fifteen yards right across the green, a crusty old Scot in the gallery was heard grumbling to himself in his beard:—"The on'y reasonable putt I've seen the day." What he had come out expecting, an all-knowing Providence alone can say.

But the strain of these repeated saves of holes apparently lost was too severe to last. Vardon put a useful balance of holes to his credit even at North Berwick. The final half of the match was to be played on his own course of Ganton. There was only one possible conclusion to it. At the end of the North Berwick match I suggested to Park that he would have to re-edit his dictum so that it should run "the man who can putt is a match for anybody—

except Harry Vardon"; and he confessed with a melancholy grin, that he believed he would have to accept that emendation.

With the disappearance of the old Scottish caddie, of whom Fiery might very well stand for the prototype, there passed much of the old order of golf, making way for the new. These old caddies themselves counted for very much more in the play of the game than our modern club-carriers, who are usually beasts of burden (and little beasts at that, just passed out of their Board School standards) and nothing more. They know the names of the clubs so as to give you what you ask for, and that is about as much as is expected of them. Sometimes they take a keen interest and identify themselves with their master's interests; but such fidelity and keenness are rather exceptional. The ancient caddie was a grown man: he was not, perhaps, an ensample of all the virtues, and if he turned up on a Monday morning without a certain redness of the nose and possibly a blackness of the eye indicating a rather stormy Saturday night of which the intervening day of rest had not wholly removed the damages, you might admire and be thankful. But his zeal for your matches was unflinching. He made it a point of honor to do all that the law allowed him, and all that it did not allow him so long as he was not found out, to aid and abet your inefficiency. He expected that you should consult him about the club that you should take, about the line on which you should play and about the gradients of a putt. He was a profound student of human nature, discovered the weaknesses of your opponent and urged you by counsel and example to take advantage of him. In my early days at St. Andrews, when I was playing a match with David Lamb, I was surprised, and more than a little shocked, by the counsel that one of those sapient caddies gave me: "Let us walk oot pretty smartly after the ba' Sir. Mr. Lamb canna' bear to be hurried." That was the proposal—that, Mr. Lamb, having a dislike to playing in a hurry, we should hasten on after the ball so as to induce him, by the power of suggestion, to hurry also, and so put him off his game. Needless to say, as soon as my innocence had succeeded in comprehending the inward meaning of the counsel I repudiated it with scorn and rebuked the caddie bitterly for suggesting it; and equally needless to say he thought me both a thankless person and a very particular species of Sassenach fool for so rejecting it. I have often thought that had Bret Harte known the old Scottish caddie he would not have needed to go to the Orient and the yellow race for the type of mind that he has sketched in his "Heathen Chinee." Nevertheless there was very much that was attractive and likeable in these henchmen of a fervid loyalty and few moral attributes besides, and their extermination, with that of other strange *ferae Naturae*, is to be regretted.