

# Golf and Government

By LAWRENCE F. ABBOTT

THE spectacular development in the United States of golf as a major sport displays two distinct social and economic movements going on side by side. On the one hand there are the private clubs that have reached an almost incredible stage of perfection and luxury. These constitute the aristocracy of golf. Some of them are almost as difficult to get into as the Peerage of England, and only those with a peer's income can afford to obtain and maintain a membership in them. Clubs of this class are delightful and commendable. They have done much not only to expand the game but to contract the waistlines of their members. They are, in fact, hygienic settlements for the neglected rich. And thus they perform a valuable social function in the community.

On the other hand, there are the public or municipal courses. Like all governmental experiments in a democracy these municipal courses were at first somewhat contemptible. They were inferior in design, inferior in upkeep and inferior in the etiquette and manners of the novices who played on them. But this inferiority was only incidental. It is not an inherent and ineradicable characteristic of public golf.

We sometimes forget that golf was originally as public a sport as skating on a village mill-pond. The earliest records of The Honorable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, for instance, show that this historic golf club, which now has a private championship course at Muirfield with a most delightful if not luxurious club house, played its first tournament over public links at Leith for a silver club offered by the municipality of Edinburgh. This notable event occurred on Monday, April 2nd, 1744, and was under the official supervision of "the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Council, with the Deacons of Crafts, Ordinary and Extraordinary, of the City of Edinburgh." With canny Scotch foresight the Lord Provost and Magistrates made the following stipulation in donating the silver club:

Lastly, it is declared that upon no pretence whatsoever, the City of Edinburgh shall be put to any sort of expense upon account of playing for the said Club annually except to indicate by Tuck of Drum (old Scotch for reveille or other official drum beats) through the city the day upon which it shall be annually played for, and to send the Silver Club to Leith upon the morning appointed for the match.

It is commonly believed by Scotch golf historians that King James I. of England (whom with their national pertinacity they call James VI. because he was preceded by five Scottish kings of the same name) played golf with his cronies in 1808 over Blackheath Common, near London, while his scholars were translating the Bible into the King James Version. The Blackheath Golf Club and the King James Bible were the two great bequests of James to his people. To this day, moreover, the course at St. Andrews, which "Bobby" Jones rightfully calls the greatest golf course in the world, is public ground and anybody can play over it on the payment of a very modest fee. One of the great pleasures of a golfer's visit to St. Andrews is to sit in a bay window of the Marine Hotel after dinner and watch the clerks and artisans playing up the 18th fairway in the twilight of a long Scottish summer evening. Here is to be seen golf in its finest flower—a field violet, not a hot-house orchid.

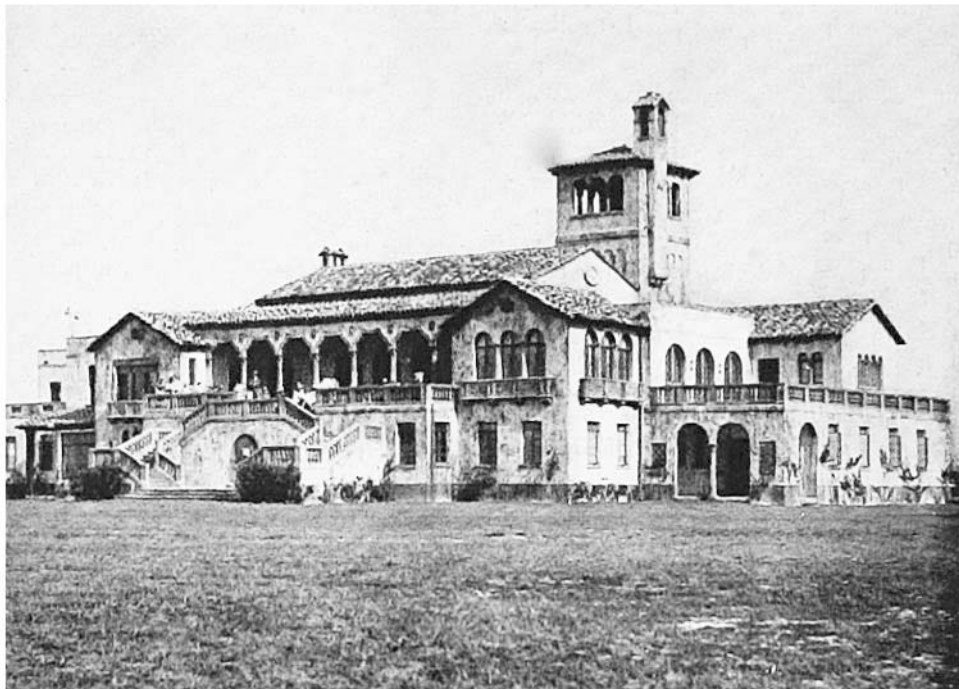
The records might be still further drawn upon to show that golf

is a democratic and not exclusively an aristocratic pastime. But to foster and preserve its democratic side it must have in the United States, as it had at Edinburgh in 1744 and has today at St. Andrews and North Berwick, municipal support. Luckily for the game this support is growing stronger and more efficient. As governors, legislators, mayors, aldermen and park commissioners gradually become adepts at the game the municipal courses improve in quality.

The foregoing consideration of the relation of government to golf was put into my mind by a game which I recently enjoyed on a municipal golf course during a brief visit to Florida. I have seen some of the private golf clubs of Florida and they are very fine indeed. But no course that I have visited recently, north or south, has quite the sociological interest that attaches to the West Side Municipal Golf Club at Fort Lauderdale. I am quite aware that when a man is playing golf he does not want to think of sociology or economics. Nor will any amount of optimism about progressive democracy offset the black despair engendered by rough putting-greens, ill-kept sand bunkers and unplayable lies throughout the fairway. Not that any of these devilish snares for the profane and ungodly are to be found on the Municipal Course at Fort Lauderdale. On the contrary, it is

excellently planned, its putting-greens are of well-watered, tender grass, and its bunkers deal out to the bad player only just punishments. As it is still young the fairway is in the immature stage of adolescence. But time and nursing will remedy that. The most petulant and exacting golfer can hardly expect to find, even in so favored a clime as Florida, the turf which it has taken two centuries to grow at St. Andrews.

The following bare statement of facts may serve to indicate why it seems to me that the Municipal Course of Fort Lauderdale deserves a place in the gallery of



**THE WEST SIDE MUNICIPAL GOLF CLUB AT FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**  
The public golf course is in keeping with the beauty of the club house. It is excellently planned, putting greens are well watered, and the bunkers deal out to the bad player only just punishment

GOLF ILLUSTRATED. It is municipally owned and operated on a tract of 185 acres. Including the club house, the Municipality has spent nearly half a million dollars on its golf venture. The course is under the supervision of the city Park Commissioner and a committee appointed by the city authorities from the Chamber of Commerce. The course is of championship length, 6410 yards. The daily, seasonal and annual dues are very moderate for family or individual memberships, and any deficit for upkeep is paid out of the city treasury. A well appointed club house has been built by the city at a cost of \$100,000. A cateress provides meals under the oversight of a "Citizens' Club House Committee" composed of ladies.

Let me hasten to add that I am not engaged in giving Fort Lauderdale any free real estate advertising. It is not a "boom" town nor a mere mushroom winter resort. It is a city of twelve or thirteen thousand inhabitants, the county seat of Broward County, with a permanent agricultural and commercial background and believes that some day it is going to become an important seaport. I have set down its achievement in golf because it is. I think, an interesting and progressive experiment in the democratization of sport.

One more word about this interesting municipality which is administered by the Commission form of government with a City Manager. As I drove through the very pleasant (Continued from page 64)

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residential section with my host a small covey of quail ran across the paved street, hopped up on the concrete curbing and disappeared in the grass and shrubbery of a pleasant bungalow. To my exclamation of surprise my host replied that by a city ordinance the entire area comprised within the city limits had been made a bird sanctuary. The result was that during my foursome on the Municipal Golf Course—which is about four miles from the City Hall, but, with Florida's generous provision for the future, is within the city limits—I saw and heard more birds than I ordinarily do in summer on a New England golf course—among them robins, highholders, meadow-larks and, best of all—plover. The sweet but plaintive whistle of a plover, as I stood on one tee, recalled the song of the English sky lark, unseen and undiscernible, that made me gladly lift my head from a putt many years ago on one of the superb greens of Walton Heath, the course of that fine veteran James Braid. There is no record that Shelley was a golfer; but if he had been playing that afternoon at Walton Heath he might have repeated his immortal lines to a skylark:

Hail to thee, blithe spirit!  
 Bird thou never wert,  
 That from Heaven, or near it,  
 Pourest thy full heart  
 In profuse strains of unpremeditated  
 art.

There is, after all, something in golf beside the technique of the shot and the record of the score-card.

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