



A NEAR FINISH—ST. ANDREW'S, SCOTLAND.

MEDAL DAY AT ST. ANDREW'S, 1899.

BY T. M. PARROTT.

THE last week of September is the climax and culmination of the golfing season at that Mecca of the venerable game, St. Andrew's, Scotland, and Medal Day is the great day of the feast.

For a week before, there has been a gathering of representative golfers from all parts of the kingdom, along with their sisters and their cousins and their aunts, especially their cousins, for the far-reaching ramifications of Scotch cousinship have long been proverbial.

The meeting, the dinner, and the dance are all very well in their way. But to the true devotees of golf, "the play's the thing," and Medal Day, with all its hazards of new fortunes and eclipsing of former stars, is the great center of interest.

On Tuesday evening there are but two topics of conversation in the town—the weather and the winner.

As to the winner, there is the greatest difference of opinion, "Freddie" Tait, ex-amateur champion of Great Britain, is, perhaps, the favorite. But Tait is not in very good condition, and is somewhat "off his game," and, moreover, say the knowing ones, he'll be too eager to win to-morrow, for it's the last time he'll play at St. Andrew's for months. His regiment, the famous

Black Watch, is ordered abroad, and the young soldier may have a harder game than golf to play before long. Besides Tait, there are several men famous in the annals of golf: Leslie Balfour-Melville, the hyphenated representative of the old families of the "East Neuk of Fife"; slashing "Teddy" Blackwell, whose long residence on the Pacific slope has given a characteristic Californian expansion to his conceptions of driving; "Johnny" Laidlay, the pride of North Berwick and the unrivaled master of all iron clubs; young Henderson, one of the coming men at St. Andrew's; Bovill, the Englishman, who sports the St. George's medal, another Tait and another Blackwell. But there's no telling. The glorious uncertainties of golf are part of the fascination of the game.

Wednesday morning dawns cold and clear. The devotees hurry down their breakfast and rush to the links. The printed list of the players and the order of starting is eagerly scanned. There are seventy-two couples, an unusually large field.

The large number of competitors has dictated the early hour of nine for the start. Try as you will, you can't get more than fifteen couple off in an hour, and if the match is to be finished before nightfall, it must begin sharp on time.

It is cold down at the links; the flags are streaming out in the sharp breeze, and though the sun is bright and the waters of the lovely bay are as blue as the sky, the little knots of people in front of the club-house are stamping their feet and blowing on their fingers, and only a few, the most ardent followers of the game, are on hand to see the drive-off.

This, by the way, is a ceremony peculiar to Medal Day. The captain-elect of the club inaugurates his reign by solemnly driving off a ball from the teeing ground before the club-house. As he drives, a gun is fired to herald the opening of the match, and the Queen Adelaide medal becomes by this ceremony the property of the captain, to have and to hold for his year of office. It is an anxious moment. Captains have been known to miss the ball entirely, amid the silent, but quite visible, scorn of the bystanders. It must be remembered that the captain is chosen, by no means for his golfing prowess (in fact, when Prince Leopold had, as captain, to open the match, he simply pushed the ball off the tee), but for his rank and social prestige. It is one of his privileges to provide the champagne for the Golf Ball, and there are many golfers whose drives are longer than their pocket-books. Happily on this occasion the two qualities are combined, and the Honorable Thomas Cochrane, M. P., son-in-law of the Earl of Glasgow and captain-elect of the Royal and Ancient, is a player of no mean skill. Here he comes from the club-house, a tall and slender figure, with quick, keen eyes, a sportsman every inch of him. He shakes hands with the ex-captain; nods a kindly greeting to old Tom Morris, the patriarch of the game, who is in his place of pride to-day as green-keeper of the classic links; and steps forward to the tee. A preliminary flourish, and Cochrane strikes off. It's a perfect drive, long and low, with the swallow-like swoop and soar in it that mark the clean-hit ball. The gun fires, and a cloud of white gulls rises up from the wet sands at the burn's mouth and sweeps out seaward.

Play begins. Pair after pair is called up and started by old Tom, who acts as master of ceremonies. To the uninitiated it seems a perfect day for any manly sport—good football weather, we would call it at home; but the knowing ones shake their heads, "Something

is wrong with the weather," they say. "There'll be no records broken in this match. Kirkcaldy, the professional, did the round in 74 not long ago, but there'll not be two cards under 80 to-day." And it soon is plain that something *is* wrong. Perhaps the cold wind has stiffened the players; certainly it sends many a ball wheeling out to the sands, while those who make allowances for it seem to catch a lull, and pull their balls far away to the left.

But here comes a pair of stars—Leslie Balfour-Melville and Hutchings, of the Royal Liverpool Club. They get off nicely, and a large part of the crowd moves after them. Balfour-Melville is well in the lead, but his second shot, badly sliced, falls into the Swilcan burn, that ancient enemy of erring balls. His caddie stands sadly on the brink; the ball is plainly visible in the clear water, but lost beyond redemption. He drops another, losing a stroke, a bad beginning on such a day, and starts again. But he is plainly nervous. He floats his handkerchief flagwise to try the force and direction of the wind, implores the "gallery" to stand back, and inquires somewhat sharply after the ownership of the mongrel dog that persists in straying within the limits. That will never do. No nervous man can win the King William medal. A little later on, when the usual dog trotted over the green while Tait was sighting a long and difficult put, the ex-champion stooped and called the beast to him, patted him on the head and put him gently behind him into a lady's hands while he holed his ball. Meanwhile the Liverpool star is showing up in very bad form. He takes 7 for the first hole, 6 for the second, misses a short put at the fourth, and actually requires 8 for the Long Hole. We turn back to follow another pair. However well those two may do hereafter, their early short-comings have put them out of the game.

We have done well to turn back. Just as we reach the teeing ground the names of Edward Blackwell and Frederick Tait are called. Blackwell steps up, a big, hulking, long-armed fellow, red-faced, red-haired, with a pale blue eye and a dogged air. His opponent is nowhere to be seen. "What's the matter with Tait?" "Where's Freddie?" run the anxious whispers—nobody speaks aloud during a golf match. Tait, Sr.,

the Edinburgh professor, is stolidly smoking a pipe in the club porch, but his son is not with him. Can anything be wrong? No! Here he comes, lazily stepping down the bank, without a club, his hands in the pockets of his Norfolk jacket, as careless as if this were an ordinary match. A caddie with a great bag of clubs appears as though out of the ground. Tait pulls a driver and steps lightly to the tee; a fine clean-cut figure, with a certain air of soldierly smartness, smaller, lighter, but every way neater than his opponent. He hasn't much color, and there are some hard lines drawn about the small bright eyes; evidently he is not in the best of condition. But sick or well, Tait will give the best of them a fight for it to-day.

Off they go—two splendid drives. We notice at once the difference in form. Blackwell, the greatest exponent of the new St. Andrew's school that ranks length of driving first among the qualities of golf, drives a ball that flies as though shot from a catapult. "It's a *smite*, not a drive at all," says an admiring follower. Every inch of his long body, every pound of his weight, goes into the blow. The effort is apparent, but the result is commensurate. Tait, on the other hand, takes it far more easily. He drives a little off the right leg—not good form according to the theorists—and makes great play with his wrist. The ball doesn't seem to have the same rush and lift as Blackwell's, and the whistle of the sweeping club-head isn't heard so plainly. But when you come to look at the tees, Tait's ball is usually not far behind Blackwell's, and Blackwell's is, perhaps, the longest drive in the world.

They take the first hole, the Bum, together in 5. The next, Blackwell captures after two superb drives in 4. But Tait has come to grief. His second shot lies right on the edge of an ugly bunker, and on his third, just failing to clear the high bank on the other side, the ball rolls back into the loose sand. He extricates himself neatly, but not with force enough, and goes plump into a second bunker a few yards further on. By the time he has holed out, he has taken 7 strokes, and things look black for the favorite. But now he settles down to work. If his driving is not up to Blackwell's, who actually traverses the long stretch of the "Elysian Fields" with a drive and a cleek shot, his ap-

proaching and putting are far more accurate. He regains his lost strokes, and finishes the outward course, even with Blackwell, in 42. "Not medal golf," say the critics, and shake their heads. But at least he has beaten Balfour-Melville so far, for the heir of all the houses, as we now hear, has taken 46 to get out. If Tait can hold Blackwell down he may win yet.

In they come together, neck and neck. Blackwell's driving is like that of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, for he driveth furiously. Tait's short game grows sharper and more deadly. Two holes to play, and they are still even. Then, at the Road Hole, Blackwell overdrives with a fierce cleek shot, and lands on the stony road beyond the green. He makes a nice recovery, but most unfortunately the ball strikes a spectator and is kicked back on the road. The ball costs him 6, the same figure as Tait's, who has carefully steered his way through the bunkers guarding this most dangerous of greens. His piece of bad luck seems to take the heart out of Blackwell. He has been known to drive clear across the last green to the foot of the steps—incredible yet true—but now he leads off weakly, makes a complete mess of his second shot, and actually takes 6 for the Home Hole. Tait, on the contrary, is unruffled. The crowd is pressing closely around him. He can hear the eager whispers checking up his score, and computing his chances—small chances, say the connoisseurs—against Laidlay this afternoon. But "Freddie" plays best with a gallery behind him; his two drives are marvels of speed and accuracy, his approach lies dead, and he's out in 4, 83 in all, better by 2 than Blackwell and Balfour-Melville, and the best card in to-day.

The day wears on, and though some good cards are returned, there has been nothing, as yet, to equal Tait's. But here comes his most dangerous rival, J. E. Laidlay, the last on the long list. He has the very decided advantage of knowing just what has been done, before him, and his careful, even anxious, play shows that he means to throw away no chance. His companion, Captain Burn, is rather a clever runner-up than a dangerous competitor. He laughs and chats with the bystanders, curses the "filthy bunkers" that swallow up his ball, and takes life easily. But Mr.

Laidlay is very earnest. He goes up and down the little, wavy hillocks, and views the landscape before making an approach, and he studies the putting greens with the absorbed air of an expert in handwriting. His form in putting is a byword among golfers. He straddles over the ground, grasps his club nearly at the head, and generally looks as if he were going to put the ball anywhere but in the hole. But he would be a rash man who would bet against Laidlay's putting at any time, and today he seems particularly sure. He starts with a group of fives and gets a 4 for the Long Hole, where Tait took 6. He is playing the steady, even game, for while Tait's score varied from 7 at the "Corner o' the Dyke" to 3 at the Short Hole, Laidlay has only fours and fives.

But before he gets to the end of the course the weather has changed. The wind shifts round to the northwest; great banks of clouds are driving down from the Grampians, and, after a flying shower or two, the windows of heaven are opened and the rain descends in floods and torrents. It seems impossible to face the driving storm, but the game goes steadily on. Stolidly, under umbrellas, the players march from stroke to stroke, surrounded by a little knot of water-proof enthusiasts. Others, not so ardent, or not so seasoned, rush for shelter to the little tool-house on the bank of the Eden. The downpour lasts for half an hour or so, and then the storm passes off, and the half-drenched crowd emerges from its shelter to catch the golfers on the return course. In they come, playing quick and sure. Laidlay has gone out in one less than Tait, and

as he wins another at the "Heathery Hole," he seems to have the match well in hand. But the effects of the storm are beginning to show; club handles are slippery to the grip, putting greens are drenched and slow, and Laidlay's best-judged shots seem to hang and stop short of the hole. He loses a stroke at the Long Hole, another at the "Corner o' the Dyke." The fateful "Road Hole" finds him tied with Tait, and the ownership of the medal depends on his next few strokes. He drives off clean and far; the white ball hangs poised for a

moment against the mass of blue-black cloud that covers the old town, and then falls to earth. It runs swiftly over the undulating ground and disappears from view. One universal groan tells the story—*bunkered*. A clever stroke extricates it, but it's a stroke lost; and Laidlay's nerve seems lost, too, for he pulls his next shot far to the left and is trapped again, as badly as possible, in the nasty "pot bunker" that guards the green. He makes a frantic effort and the ball leaps at the bank, only to roll back into a worse lie.

Another blow; the ball and a cloud of

sand rise up together. He's out, but it costs him 7 to take the hole. Laidlay is too plucky a player to give up. A hard-hit drive takes him well on his way; a second carries him on to the green and right across the hole. But he has put a little too much muscle into the stroke. The put is just a bit too long and hard even for Laidlay's skilful eye and hand. It takes him 2 more to get out, and his card foots up to 84. The cannon fires and the flags flutter down. The match is over, and Lieutenant Frederick Tait is declared the winner.



TOME MORRIS, THE PATRIARCH OF THE GAME.