Kolf on the ice at Amsterdam, with Montelbaan's Tower in the background. From a painting by Aert van der Neer (1603-1677).

J. A. BRONGERS (B.P.M., THE HAGUE), *who has made an intensive study of the history of the game, claims that golf had its origin in the Low Countries*

THE OLD DUTCH GAME of '*kolf*' differs in name from 'golf' by only one letter, but those who today know both games may say that apart from this the two games have nothing in common. Golf is played in the open air on a course covering 50–125 acres, whereas kolf is nowadays played in Holland indoors on a court about 22 yards long and 5½ yards wide, often adjoining the village inn, where the players mix the pleasures of the game with those of a glass of beer and a pipe of tobacco.

One can hardly imagine a greater contrast; yet I venture to assert that golf and kolf are connected, and that both games have the same origin, which is to be found in the Low Lands by the sea. Just as golf has been subject to evolution in the course of time, so the Dutch game of kolf, or *kolven*, has evolved to an even greater extent. For it is a fact that kolf was once played in Holland in much the same manner as the 'Royal and Ancient Game' is now played under the rules of St. Andrews.

From the 15th century onwards golf caught on, more or less in its present form, in Scotland, the country from which, in the 19th century, it started to conquer the world. The earliest written evidence which has come down to us of the popularity of the game in Scotland is a Scottish law dated March 6th, 1457, prohibiting golf altogether because archery, so much more important for national defence, was being neglected.

FIRST REFERENCES TO KOLF

By that time, however, the kolf game was being played, no less enthusiastically, in Holland; and, indeed, according to official Dutch records, it was popular at a date even earlier than the oldest written evidence of golf in Scotland. And this was not the game of kolf as it is played nowadays in a few parts of Holland, as a quaint survival of a once popular sport, but definitely quite a different game, as we learn from the old chronicles. At all events, this game was played outdoors on a large field, with a ball stiffened with feathers, and clubs different from their present-day form. Exactly *how* the game was played in Holland in those days is not known, but from what we do know we may conclude that it was a game very much like golf.

Albert, Duke of Bavaria, conferred in 1398 the citizens of Brielle (an ancient town ne Rotterdam) the right *de bal metten colven slaen buten der vesten* ("to play kolf outside t ramparts of the town"). This 'sporting Duk had already granted a similar right in 1390 the citizens of Haarlem when he made them present of a certain field, called *de Baan* (t Course), on which to play kolf and oth games "in perpetuity".

Going somewhat further south to Brusse we already find a by-law of the Town Coun dated 1360 saying that anyone playing k would be fined twenty *scellinge* (shillings), failing this would be removed of his upp clothing.

From the above grants by Duke Albert, will at once be apparent that the game of k needed much more space in those days. study of the history of Dutch games revea that the modern kolf courts with their limit space date only from the 17th century. Befo that time the space was unrestricted: the gan was played in churchyards, on the public hig way and, if possible, on the ice. Many by-la are known to us from various towns prohibi ing the game of kolf near churches and public roads on account of the annoyance caused, and banishing it to outside the ci

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walls. The citizens of Arnhem, for instance, were already compelled by an early 15th century by-law to play kolf "outside St. John's Gate on the road to St. Eman's Chapel". In 1421 a by-law at Utrecht prohibited the playing of kolf and *teneyten* (tennis) at a certain open field in the town. In 1454 Leyden decreed that no-one was permitted within the walls of the town—either on land or on the ice—to play kolf or to strike a ball.

We can best realise how old the game of kolf is in Holland and how closely it resembles modern golf if we look at the custom of *kolfslaan* (hitting the ball) which used to take place at the Castle of Croonenburg at Loenen-on-the-Vecht each Boxing Day for many centuries.

SIMILARITY OF KOLF AND GOLF

In this Castle of Croonenburg the Dutch Duke Floris V was kept prisoner in 1296 before being taken to Muiden, where he was murdered. Tradition has it that after his death Croonenburg was demolished by the people of Loenen and that the Lord of Velzen —one of Floris's murderers—was put in a spiked barrel and rolled from the Castle to Town Hall. In memory of that occurrence—again according to tradition—a game of kolf was played every year, usually between two teams of four players, starting at the Courthouse and continuing along the village street to the Castle of Croonenburg. The winner was the side that reached the kitchen door of the Castle in the least number of strokes. In the Castle the players were regaled with beer, and the spectators who used to follow the match in large numbers would scramble for apples thrown amongst them by the Lord of Croonenburg. According to an old custom, window-panes broken during this match—which much resembled a modern foursome—and any other damage was paid for by the Lord of Croonenburg. In course of time the match was extended to four games played to different 'goals' (or 'holes', as we should now say): a mill, the House of Velde, and the Courthouses of Loenen and Vreeland. This Boxing Day game of kolf was played annually up to about 1830, thus lasting nearly five centuries.

There are other indications as well that golf did not find its origin in the Scottish dunes, but that it may have been imported by Scots merchants who had become acquainted with the game of kolf in Holland, which country can boast of equally fine dunes on its west coast, where today some superb golf courses spread the fame of modern Dutch golf. Alternatively, Flemish tradesmen—weavers and the like—who had already settled in Scotland at an early date may have brought over their own favourite pastime. A Scottish poet describes Aberdeen as "my oon Flemish toon!"

How great was the general interest in kolf among ordinary people in the Low Countries is proved by the Flemish *Book of Hours*, which is in the British Museum and which, by virtue of a most remarkable vignette, has become known as the 'Golf Book'. It was written and illustrated in about 1510 under the direction of the famous Flemish painter Simon Bennink, and it shows for the month of September a miniature which depicts some people engaged in what we now call 'putting' on a green. And a fine green it is: many a modern Golf Club would be envious of its quality. (See foot of opposite page).

The artist, who devoted much time and care to illustrating this book with pictures of everyday life, must have been well acquainted with the game and have known how widespread it was throughout Holland and Flanders—a single political and cultural unit in those days—or he would not have devoted one of his miniatures to it. The game depicted in this miniature—the first known picture of kolf—was no different at all from our modern golf. The picture shows a three-ball on a green surrounded by low posts and rails (reminiscent of the 18th green of the Old Course at St. Andrews during a Championship), with two spectators (and a hen!). The player whose ball is farthest from the hole is about to putt; another player is kneeling and judging his 'line'. Truly, if this game is not golf, then what is it?

And what do you think of the following? For a long time during the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries the Scots did not make the balls for their national pastime themselves,

A Dutch kolf player of the 19th century. He holds his long Gouda pipe crosswise in his mouth to avoid breaking it.

but imported them from Holland. And these golf balls were bought in such large quantities that James VI of Scotland, in 1618, prohibited their importation altogether, because, in the words of his decree, "no small quantity of gold and silver is transported zierlie (yearly) out of His Hienes (Highness's) Kingdome of Scotland for bying of golf ballis". Moreover, he granted one James Melvill the monopoly of making and selling golf balls in Scotland for a period of 21 years. This Melvill had already started making golf balls, but he ceased this business because the Dutch balls were better. But now his chance had come, for James's decree went on to lay down that golf balls must be stamped and that any ball found in the Kingdom without such a stamp should be forfeit. In order, however, to protect his people against profiteering under this monopoly, James was sensible enough to stipulate that the price of the balls should not exceed four shillings.

Reading of James's protectionist policy,

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LORD OF MISRULE

Firste all the wilde heades of the parishe conventynge together, chuse them a grand Capitaine (of mischeef) whom they innoble with the title of my LORDE OF MISSERULE, and hym they crown with great solemnitie, and adopt for their kyng. This kyng anoynted, chuseth for the twentie, fourtie, three score, or a hundred lustie guttes like to hymself, to waite uppon his lordely majestie, and to guard his noble persone. Then every one of these his menne he investeth with his liveries of grene, yellowe or some other light wanton colour. And as though that were not baudie anough . . . they bedecke themselves with scarffes, ribons, and laces, hanged all over with golde rynges, precious stones, and other jewelles: this doen, they tye about either legge twentie of fourtie belles with rich handkerchiefs in their handes, and sometymes laied acrosse over their shoulders and neckes, borrowed for the moste parte of their pretie Mopsies and loovying Bessies, for bussyng them in the darcke. Thus thinges sette in order, they have their hobbie horses, dragons, and other antiques, together with their baudie pipers, and thunderyng drommers, to strike up the Deville's Daunce withall, then marche these heathen companie towardes the church.

PHILIP STUBBS, *The Anatomy of Abuses, 1585*

Kolf players of the late 16th century, watched by a hunter. From a painting by an unknown Dutch artist.

possibly the first of its kind, may cause a smile but the very fact that Dutch golf balls were exported to Scotland may reasonably lead to the conclusion that in the country of origin of these balls, Holland, a game similar to golf was played, and must have been enjoyed at an even earlier date than in Scotland. For in the primitive and almost completely autarkic society that the Low Countries were in those days, there could not have existed an industry manufacturing solely for export.

In golf the ball is placed on a tee for the first stroke from the starting point. Nowadays peg-tees are mostly used, but the tee may also consist of a little heap of sand. In kolf the ball was placed on a *tuitje* (tee), which was also a small heap of sand, as may be seen from the engraving in the well-known Dutch book (1719) by Jan Luyken, *Des Menschen Begin, Midden en Einde* ("The Beginning, Middle and End of Human Life").

The Scots call one of their clubs a 'cleek', and the old Hollanders had their *klik*, which was sometimes weighted with lead, just as at present the heads of some wooden golf clubs are metal-tipped. So in Holland the same kind of clubs were used as in Scotland. In the engraving (1625), after a picture by the famous painter Avercamp, showing sporting amusements on the ice on the Lake of Haarlem, it can be seen that in those days the kolf player on the ice liked to drive the ball long distances, and that he made a full swing which would be the envy of many a modern golfer.

Philologists have come to the conclusion that the word 'golf' is derived from *kolf*, which may also suggest that the game was first played in the Low Countries.

KOLF ON THE ICE

Going somewhat further into the evolution of the game of kolf, one comes across facts which again remind us of the modern game of golf. It appears that the mentality of the old Dutchmen did not, in the long run, find full satisfaction in one of the greatest attractions of present-day golf, *viz.* in the uncertainty whether, after a beautiful long drive, the ba will be found in a pretty or an awkward lie It appears too that the old Hollanders objecte to the long, and sometimes tiring, walks. A the oldest by-laws concerning the game, fro the 14th and 15th centuries, speak only of th game of kolf outdoors in the open fields outside the ramparts, in pastures or on malls On these malls the game of pall-mall, a elder sister of the game of kolf, was als played.

Gradually the players looked for a smoothe and smaller course, where less depended o luck and more on the ability of the player Thus the kolf courts of tamped clay appeared and together with this change of playing field the rules of the game were fundamentall modified. Only on the ice was the old form o kolf maintained, with the long, sweeping swing required for the greater distances in th open air.

Interesting references to kolf on the ice i the 17th and 18th centuries, when the gam enjoyed its greatest vogue, are to be found i the poem by Six van Chandelier, *Winter i Amsterdam* (1657). In this poem we read tha the kolf player stood firmly on both legs and after drawing lots for an opponent, prepared to swing his aspen club, weighted with lead, or his boxwood *Schotse klik* (Scottish cleek), which was three fingers broad and one finger thick, at the feathery ball which flew considerable distances. The game would be played to a post, which limits the playing ground, but another form would be for the players to drive their ball the farthest, taking it in turns, which must resemble modern golf.

In another poem, this time from a book called *Zinnebeelden voor kinderen* ('Symbols for Children'), published in 1626, the poet speaks of balls falling from the air and balls flying high and far. He goes on to say that the ball first "creeping into the hole" delights its master and "exempts him from paying". This "creeping of the ball into the hole" is particularly significant for those who see in the game of kolf the archetype and forerunner of golf, for in golf too the ball must land in a hole, and the successful player is assured of a free drink at the 'nineteenth'!

KOLF AS AN INDOOR GAME

The evolution of kolf continued. Even playing outdoors in a limited space could not really satisfy the over-indulgent 18th-century Dutchmen living on the abundance of the Golden Age. They sought more luxury and more refinement in their pastimes.

First they made an awning over the court, and later the whole court was moved indoors. The innkeepers saw that the game attracted customers and ensured that suitable accommodation was available for it. Kolf became a pleasant pastime over a tot of gin, a glass of beer, and a pipe of tobacco; whilst in the fashionable inns they drank the tastiest wines with little cubes of Leyden or Gouda cheese served on porcelain saucers.

In whatever form it was played, *kolven* remained very popular with the Dutch. It was the national Dutch sport *par excellence*, a game innate in every Hollander, an inheritance which was in his blood.

It cannot otherwise be explained how this

game could hold a whole people in its spell for so many centuries. How great its popularity was will become clear when we consider that not a single one of the present-day modern sports, such as football, lawn tennis or hockey, enjoys such universal popularity as once did the kolf-game. This 20th century is sometimes, and not without justification, called the century of sport; but the Dutch 17th-century population was also keenly interested in sports and pastimes. For kolf was played by the whole nation, young and old, rich and poor alike. The Dutch capital, Amsterdam, could as late as 1792 (according to an official count of that year) boast of 128 inns and clubs exploiting in all 217 open-air and indoor kolf courts. At the same period, The Hague had about thirty and Rotterdam and Haarlem each more than twenty.

And today? Not a single one is to be found in these cities. Only in one region of the country is kolf still alive. That is in the province of North Holland, along the river Zaan and in 'de Streek', near Hoorn. There they still play kolf; but the game is dying. The young people are interested only in football and billiards, and are no longer keen on the game of *kolven*; in any case, they do not know understand anything of the antiquity of the game and they do not feel they owe respect to this heritage from the past.

'Kolven' or 'kolf' has had its influence on Dutch social life. Few know, for instance, that North Holland even has a village which derives its name from 'kolf': Kolverdijk, south of Harenkarspel and north-east of Warmenhuizen. This village of Kolverdijk lies in the heart of the kolf country, a shade west of 'de Streek', where each village still has its kolf-court. But Kolverdijk itself no longer has one.

In the coat-of-arms of the town of Wamel, in the province of Gelderland, there appear three upright kolf-clubs indicating that the game was once honoured in that town. This coat-of-arms is derived from that of the now extinct Van Balveren family who lived for centuries in the castle of Drakenburg at Wamel.

Engraving from Jan Luyken's 'The Beginning, Middle and End of Human Life' (1719).

INFLUENCE ON DUTCH LANGUAGE

Attention should finally be drawn to the influence the game of kolf has had on the Dutch language. It is obvious that a game so widespread and once forming such an important part of daily life would have a great influence on the language. Many once common proverbs and phrases have been lost since kolf ceased to be popular in the last century, but just as many phrases have been preserved up to the present day, and are used without people realising their sporting background.

There is a saying: "*Dat is een kolfje naar mijn hand*" (lit. "That lies to my hand like a golf club"), meaning "That's just the thing for me", and it conjures up visions of a golfer buying a driver and feeling its weight to see whether it lies nicely in the hands. "*Zo glad als een kolfbaan*" ("As smooth as a kolf court") is still a common expression and speaks for itself if one knows that the Dutch kolf court of the later period had to be absolutely level and as smooth as the modern golfer would wish his greens to be. Then the word *lukraak* (a stroke of luck) comes to mind, also derived from *kolven* and a contraction of the saying "*'t zal een geluk zijn als je 'm raakt*" ("It will be a piece of luck if you hit it"), meaning hitting the post. "*Binnen de perken blijven* "("To keep within bounds") is also derived from the kolf-court, where the ball had to be kept within the lines or bounds, just as necessary in today's golf. "*Paal en perk stellen*" ("To set bounds to") means, literally, to mark out a kolf-court, but it is now used only in a metaphorical sense. The expression "*Hij slaat de plank mis*" ("He hits wide of the mark") is also a kolf term.

Many more such expressions could be mentioned. But we will leave it at that, assuming that we have sufficiently shown the important part played by the game of kolf in the life of the Dutch people in former times, as well as Holland's contribution, through this game of kolf, to the development of golf, now a world-wide game and the greatest of them all.

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A young Dutch girl playing kolf in the dunes. From the painting by Albert Cuyp (1620-1691) in the collection of Mr. E. James.