

---

Golf from a St. Andrews Point of View

Author(s): Andrew Lang

Source: *The North American Review*, Jul., 1899, Vol. 169, No. 512 (Jul., 1899), pp. 138-144

Published by: University of Northern Iowa

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25104854>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The North American Review*

JSTOR

# GOLF FROM A ST. ANDREWS POINT OF VIEW.

BY ANDREW LANG.

---

GOLF has reached America, whether to "stay" or not. It appears to have arisen in "fashionable circles," and to have spread as I wish cricket could spread—a much better game. With us, in Scotland, golf is a very old sport, which Parliament tried vainly to put down, in the fifteenth century. Golf took up time which should have been given to learning how to hit an Englishman with a bow and arrow. But *that* game our ancestors declined to learn, thinking mere "long bowls" unmanly. Our Scots archers each carried a "sperthe" or battle axe, and, throwing down their bows, they went for the English with the cold steel, being shot as they advanced. Archery did not please, in Scotland; to golf we remained loyal.

Now, I have, personally, little doubt that we got golf from Holland, where it is no longer played. From Holland, to be sure, about Froissart's time (say 1380), we got everything we wanted, ready-made, paying in wool, fish, leather and other exports. My friend, Mr. James Cunningham, lately invaded Holland, in search of the Origins of Golf. I hope he will give his results to the world. We know that the Netherlanders played, for pictures of men driving off, and putting at the hole, occur in a MS. of about 1500, in the British Museum. Mr. Cunningham found pictures in which clubs and balls like ours occur, also painted tiles, of about 1650, but we knew already that these things were so. His chief discovery was the Dutch origin of such technical terms of the game as "putt," "stymie," and "dormie." If his philology is correct, as I believe, the question is settled. Holland is the cradle of the game. Scotland dealt very largely with Holland, and had regular trading settlements there, all through the later

Middle Ages. The Scots merchants would take up the Dutch game, as we took tennis from France. In tennis, the technical terms are French (*dedans*, etc.); in golf, if Mr. Cunningham is right, they are Dutch. Our James IV., to encourage home industries, forbade the importation of Dutch golf balls, and, since then, golf has waned, and finally expired, in Holland, while it flourishes with us.

Golf is one of a group of accidentally differentiated sports. *Chole* (a word of Teutonic origin) is the Belgian golf, which has an element of hockey, the adversary being allowed one back stroke to the players' three strokes. There is no putting at the hole, the goal is a distant church door or steeple. M. Zola has described the game, in "*Germinal*," with his usual romantic exaggeration; and a match with the Devil occurs in the late M. Deulin's "*Contes*," from Flemish sources.

Again, the *Jeu de Mail*, at least as old as Queen Mary Stuart's time, when she was a player, is of the same group. A box-wood ball was driven with a club shaped like a light croquet mallet, and, in place of putting, the ball was "lofted" through a ring or into a narrow hoop. To this purpose a curious instrument, ending in a long piece of fluted steel (given in a portrait of about 1650), was employed. The "swing," the style, and the rules are in wonderful harmony with those of golf, as may be read in Lanthier's little work, now very scarce (1717-1720). My friend, Mr. H. S. C. Everard, the well known golfer and writer on golf, has a copy, which I first saw at a sale 20 years ago, but could not afford to buy; and no other copy have I ever seen. Mr. Everard might reprint it, with the excellent illustrations.

The historical glories of golf are well known. Mary Stuart played; her son, James VI. and I., brought golf to England, notably to Blackheath. His son, Henry, Prince of Wales, drove well, and not unsuccessfully tried to "cut over" his tutor. Charles I. insisted on playing out his game, at Leith, when news arrived of the Irish Rebellion. So writes Wodrow, the correspondent of Cotton Mather, and no friend of the Stuarts. The Great Rebellion ruined the Royal and Ancient Game in England, and, at the happy Restoration, the Duke of York (James VII. and II.), took up *jeu de mail*, astonishing Mr. Pepys by his drives in the Mall. Not being loved in England, where he was persecuted for his religious opinions, the Duke went to Scotland. There, even the

Covenant had not interfered with golf; the solitary uninjured institution. That savory Christian, Mr. Blair, of St. Andrews, an exemplary Covenanter, decorated his sermons (or his talk) with allusions to the favorite pastime. He compared the union of the Kirk and its sacred Head, to that of the shaft and head of a driving club. Faith was the whipping, Love the glue. So writes the later Presbyterian champion, Wodrow. In Scotland, the Duke of York played in a semi-professional foursome, at least his partner was a semi-professional. They won, and the tradesman, building or buying a house with the stakes, put up for his bearings two clubs, with the motto, "Sure and Far."

When his ideas of general toleration in religion (ably supported, as they were, by William Penn) caused King James to be driven from his throne, in 1688, golf vanished from England. Though a Hollander, the Dutch Usurper was not fond of his native pastime. James himself had lost his nerve (perhaps in consequence of his shipwreck, quite a fresh idea), and, notoriously, was no longer capable of playing a losing game. The House of Hanover have never excelled in any ball game; besides, cricket, in the eighteenth century, had made her supremacy secure. It was a cricket ball, I believe, not a golf ball, that killed Frederick, eldest son of George II., who, in his heart, was a Jacobite, like all his descendants, in sympathy.

While golf, in England, fled with the Stuarts, it survived with vigor in Scotland. "I believe there were only two honest men in Scotland, Forbes of Culloden and Lochel," remarked to me the descendant of one of the pair. Forbes of Culloden, who practically put down the Rising of 1745, was one of the first golfers of his day. In Scotland, Prince Charlie had little time for golf, but, before 1745, he had introduced the game into Italy, and played in the Borghese Gardens. This showed that his heart was in the right place. He was a great innovator. Golf he brought to Italy; Free Masonry to Arras, where Robespierre's father was a member of the lodge; and Glove Fights to Avignon. Golf is now established in and near Rome, and the learned archæologist, Signor Lanciani, is a golfer. With the purpose of improving his style, he means to take lessons, at St. Andrews, from old Tom, or Auchterlonie, in winter (I cannot wish him better or more courteous and agreeable instructors), and, incidentally, he will deliver the St. Andrews Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion. If he could

introduce a lecture on the old Roman game of *Cambuca*, and its relations to golf, I dare say Tom Morris would attend the lectures. As a rule, Tom is content with revealed religion, and gives the lectures a wide berth. I do not condemn this conduct in a man who has played golf for some seventy years, and yet, whose natural bent (as displayed in his attitude towards the Abolition of Stymie) is favorable to new or even revolutionary ideas.

About 1750-1760, golf was played near London by Dr. Carlyle, to instruct Garrick. I regret that Dr. Johnson was not present. Moreover, the Knuckle-Bone Club, at Blackheath, kept the game alive, in its earliest and Royal English seat. Meanwhile, in Scotland, from Orkney to Skye and from Skye to Musselburgh, golf flourished; chiefly, I believe, on sea-side links. About 1790, the Medal was won at St. Andrews with a score of 95. Recently, the round has been done in 72 (and, I think, in 71) by Mr. Freddy Tait, Auchterlonie, and, I believe, Andrew Kirkaldy. But, in 1790, the links were a very narrow course, beset by whins; there was only one set of holes, in and out, feather balls were in use, and there were no bulgers, no patent lofters, while the putting greens were not bowling greens. You cannot think how much wider and easier the links are, even since I was a boy. Thus a score of 95 in 1790, or thereabouts, is quite equal to one of 72 nowadays.

The great golfers of the early and middle century, Alan Robertson, Tom Morris (still on the spot), the Parks, with the contemporary amateurs, were the straightest of drivers, and *their* putting was indeed "an inspiration." They did not "approach" with irons or iron lofters, but with the elegant and harmless wooden "baffey spoon."\* They did not cut up the links like modern men, making a point of "cutting their divot," or scrap of turf. I make no doubt that (considering the relative proportion of numbers) the ancestral golfers were as good as Varney, Taylor or Mr. Tait.

The middle century saw the superseding of feather balls at half a crown (Old Tom has made thousands in his day), by gutta percha shilling balls, hammered into tiny knobs, like the box-wood balls in the *jeu de mail*. The original smooth-bore gutta percha balls did not fly straight; hence the manner of *jeu de mail* balls was, quite unconsciously, imitated. About the same time, much lighter iron clubs were introduced (our ancestors tooled with

\* "Baffed" means laid back, and I have heard a lady's bonnet criticised as "too much baffed."

things like tomahawks of unusual weight); "brasseys" came in; finally Mr. Lamb invented the bulger. Short-headed, deep, and thick, this club is the reverse of the long-headed, slim, narrow club-head of Phelp or Alan Robertson. I doubt if it matters which sort you employ, whether you play as well as Mr. Leslie-Balfour-Melville, or as badly as the present outcast.

In the sixties, golf began to appear at Wimbledon Common, Westward Hoe, Hoylake, and at Pau in the Pyrenean country. Then arose Mr. Horace Hutchinson, from Westward Hoe school, as I am told. The wit and wisdom of Mr. Horace Hutchinson, in his "*Hints on Golf*," led to the Conversion of England. There had been earlier preachers,— the Stuart kings, Dr. Carlyle, the Knuckle-Bone Club, while the Scots, at Calcutta and Bombay, did not cast their grain on soil entirely stony. But these missionaries answer to Paulinus and Augustine: thorns sprang up and choked the doctrine. Mr. Hutchinson, on the other hand, came like Aidan (though not from Iona), and definitely converted England to golf.

Heresies, of course, began to abound. *The English count their strokes!* Every incompetent foozler has his pencil and paper and delays golfers by pausing to register his tens or thirteens. Also, he wrangles over invisible points in the rules. The Scot plays in the ancestral spirit of the game. On the links he drops metaphysics (which, indeed, are now scorned in Scotland at large). But the English revel in subtleties of interpretation, just as Cambridge men (to their defeat and confusion) bowl widens on purpose, because "there is nothing against it in the rules." Also the neo-golfers of England started "pot-hunting," endless competition for prizes, with monstrous handicaps. They brought in women. Here I am not wholly guiltless. The day before I and a reading party left St. Andrews, about 1873, we played the first foursome with ladies recorded since Queen Mary and Lord Lindsay played Mary Seaton and Maitland of Lethington; against which Knox (probably) thundered from the pulpit. Next morning early, I fled into the wilds of Atholl, with a price on my head; while my male opponent (English) put Tweed between himself and mischief. We only retreated just in time; our partners were left to the female tongues of St. Andrews. I was much the oldest of this nefarious foursome, and ought to have known better; anyway, my side lost, and I had to pay the stakes.

The female form and drapery, in driving, are not lovely objects, and ladies now beset the links. However, 'tis funny to see them *run* after their balls, with feminine impetuosity, and I will say that they choose hours when men are not playing, and, generally, efface themselves as much as possible; while I have seen a lady make quite a decent shot from the tee. These compliments refer exclusively to St. Andrews, and to St. Andrews in winter. I do not, for my part, regard women as nearly so objectionable as small school boys. My friend, Mr. —, offered half a sovereign for the head of a small golfing school-boy. The reward (like the thirty thousand pounds for Prince Charlie) was unclaimed, but the proclamation had some effect.

It was the English, chiefly, who brought in fair (I mean female, for as to "fair"! ) golfers, and they also set to work at the making of inland links. An Englishman would play across a turnip field. On one suburban course, the chief hazards are advertisement boards recommending pills and soaps! It is near a lunatic asylum, and, of course, the players *may* be patients. You read, in the press, "Brown's tee shot was caught in Cockle's Pills, but Smith was not more fortunate, coming to grief in Pears' Soap." This is not golf; I doubt if any inland imitation of the game is golf. I admit the existence of an artificial bunker at Wimbledon; it is a "melancholy pleasure" to get into it (as Mr. Hutchinson says with a touch of poetry), but one bunker, and that obtrusively artificial, does not make a course. By the way, if America wants sand for bunkers, let it apply to St. Andrews, where the very air is sandy, and sand gets into our very books. The exports of this emporium are solely potatoes; but if you need artificial bunkers, our supply of the article is unlimited in quantity, and unequalled in quality. Probably, however, the tariff on sand is prohibitive. "Tak' mair sand," says the sage, even Thomas, the Tomoris. If you want it, you now know where to get it; our houses, without exception, are founded on the sand. No extra charge will be made for skeletons, mediæval or prehistoric, with which our soil abounds. You may be filling up a bunker with the dust of King Constantine (about 940, A. D.), or of Cardinal Beaton.

Thus freely (like Montaigne concerning cats), I have spoken of the heresies of British converts to golf. But honesty compels me to add that the English professionals, as Taylor and Varney, are more or less our masters, while Mr. Ball's career is only

matched by our Mr. Tait's; who, in turn, can commonly defeat Mr. Hilton, of late. But, among amateurs, nobody is steadier, or better to back, than Mr. Leslie-Balfour-Melville, who is also not a man to try with loose bowling at cricket. He is *not* Mr. A. J. Balfour, M. P., to whom he could give no short odds. You may be a statesman, and a philosopher, like Mr. A. J. Balfour, "but gowf needs a heid."

Of American players I cannot speak, for I have seen none of them. May we soon find them on pilgrimage to St. Andrews, Sandwich, Prestwick and Hoylake. And, if there are to be international matches, may our excitable populace behave better than they have occasionally done, when local patriotism was fiercely aroused. Possibly, you also have an excitable populace? Why the rabble are so apt to forget the rules of fair play is a question which Swift should have argued in his "Modest Apology for the Rabble in all Ages." I have seen a Surrey crowd behave very ill when the Australians played at Lord's (to be sure they were irritated by bad accommodation), but, as a rule, an Australian victory in England, or an English victory in Australia, is cheered with the utmost chivalry. International matches, of all kinds, ought to be conducted in this honorable spirit by the spectators. As for the players, from them we need not expect anything but the most immaculate honor. There is no pleasure in a game played on other terms. If the learned, in their controversies, would only be sportsmanlike, the Republic of Letters would enjoy repose. Recommending to American golfers the old Scottish saw,

"Never in,  
Never win,"

I rest from this brief but earnest survey of the Royal (and now Republican) Game.

ANDREW LANG.