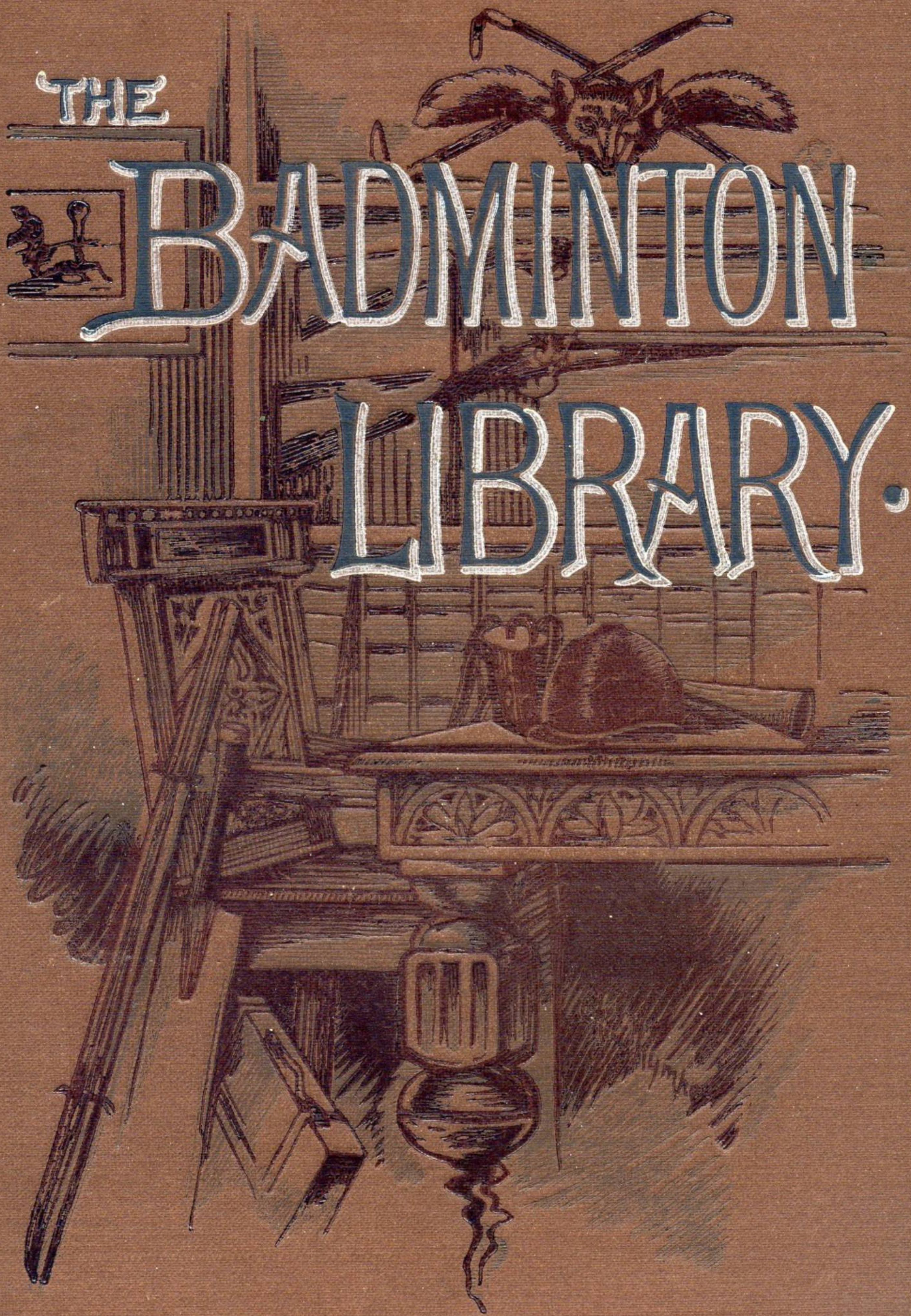


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*GOLF*



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# GOLF

BY

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WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY THOMAS HODGE  
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# GOLF

## CHAPTER I

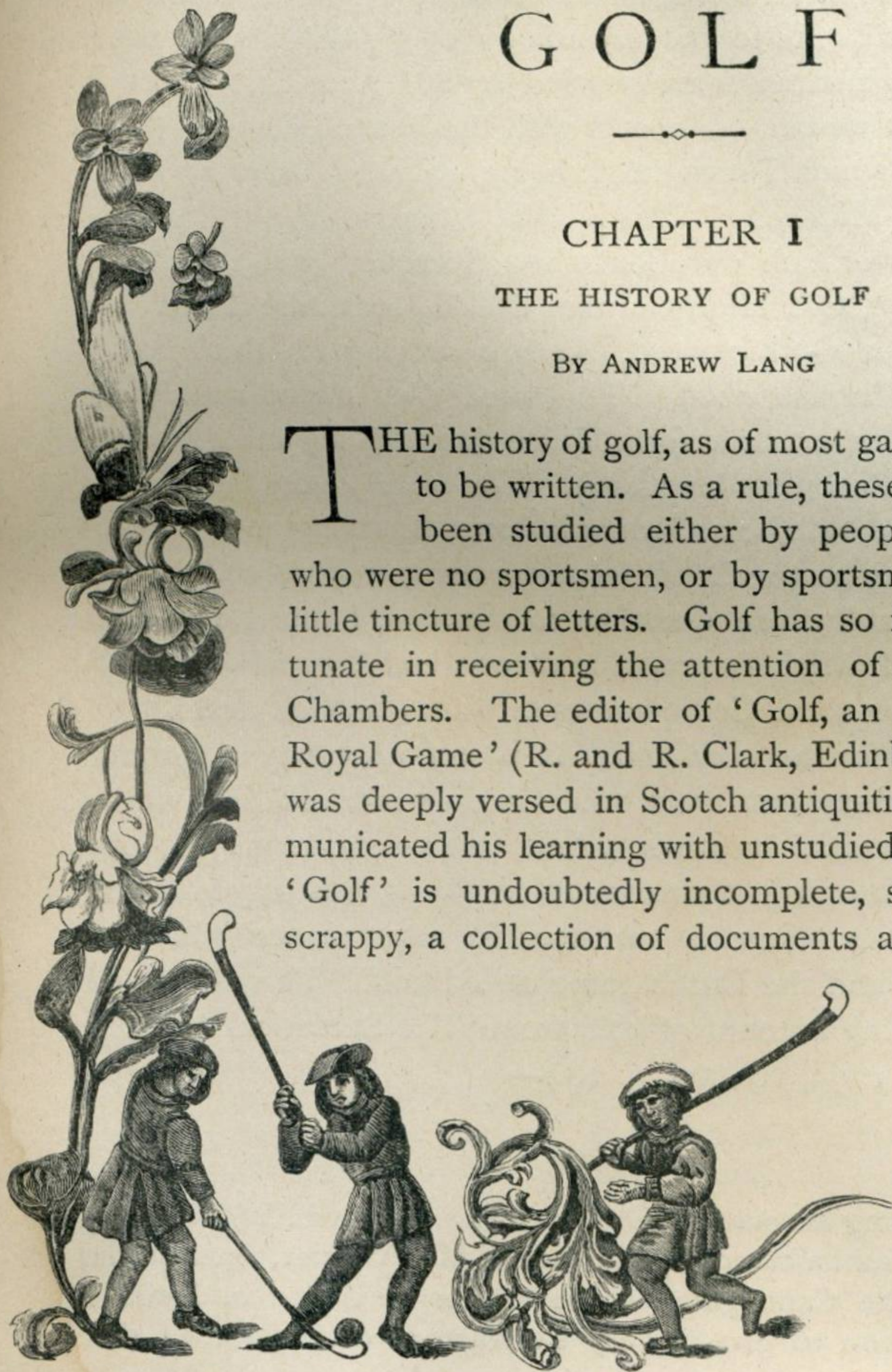
### THE HISTORY OF GOLF

BY ANDREW LANG

THE history of golf, as of most games, has still to be written. As a rule, these topics have been studied either by people of letters who were no sportsmen, or by sportsmen who had little tincture of letters. Golf has so far been fortunate in receiving the attention of Mr. Robert Chambers. The editor of 'Golf, an Ancient and Royal Game' (R. and R. Clark, Edinburgh, 1875) was deeply versed in Scotch antiquities, and communicated his learning with unstudied grace. But 'Golf' is undoubtedly incomplete, sketchy, and scrappy, a collection of documents and odds and

ends. It is nowhere, in a single chapter, that the history of golf can be exhaustively written. But we may try

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to show its relations with other ball games, its connection with foreign forms most nearly allied with itself, and we may lightly trace the antiquities of the sport.

The name *Golf* is usually thought to be akin to the German *Kolbe*, 'club,' and may be a Celtic form of that word. M. Charles Michel, Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Gand, writes : 'As to the etymology of "golf," I fancy none but Scotch philologists are puzzled by it. At a first glance I do not think we can connect it with the French *Chole*.' (This was a guess which I submitted, being no *grand clerc en philologie*, to M. Michel.) 'This is what I find in the "Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache" (1889, p. 181), under *Kolben*, Old High German *Cholbo*, Icelandic *Kolfr*. It presupposes a Gothic word, *Kulban*=stick with thick knob (probably=English *club*). The word *Golf* might readily be Celtic, for the Germanic form *Kolbe* demands a *g* and a *f* in the other Indo-European languages. The word *chole* (Belgian for a club) might well be a Germanic term, surviving in Walloon, and *Golf* may be the Celtic form, surviving in English.'

While leaving the question to scholars, I am inclined to agree with M. Michel's probable theory, and I would note that *Golf* occurs in some Celtic names of places, as Golf-drum.

So much for the word golf. It is not necessary to dispute the absurd derivation from 'the Greek word *κόλαφος*,' which appears in several treatises. And, in passing, it may be observed that though golf, or something like it, was played in the Low Countries, there is no specific resemblance whatever between golf and the Dutch game called kolf. This is proved by the following account of kolf, from 'The Statistical Account of Scotland,' 1795, vol. xvi. p. 28 :—

#### KOLF

The following account of the Dutch game, called *Kolf*, was very obligingly communicated by the Rev. Mr. Walker, one of the ministers of the Canongate, whose former residence in Holland has enabled him to give a very satisfactory description of that



game. The Dutch game called kolf, from which the word golf is derived, as both are probably from the Greek word, *κόλαφος*, is played in an enclosed rectangular area of about 60 feet by 25. The floor, which is composed of sand, clay and pitch, is made as level as a billiard table, and the inclosing walls are for two feet above the floor faced either with polished stone or sheet lead, that they may cause the ball to rebound with accuracy. At about 8 to 10 feet from each end wall, a circular post of about five inches diameter is placed precisely in the middle of the area with regard to breadth, consequently opposite the one to the other, at the distance of 40 feet or thereby. The balls used in the game are about the size of cricket balls, made perfectly round and elastic, covered with soft leather and sewed with fine wire. The clubs are from three to four feet long, with stiff shafts. The heads are of brass, and the face, with which the ball is struck, is perfectly smooth, having no inclination, such as might have a tendency to raise the ball from the ground. The angle which the head makes with the shaft is nearly the same with that of the *putting* club used at golf. The game may be played by any number, either in parties against each other, or each person for himself; and the contest is, who shall hit the two posts in the fewest strokes and make his ball retreat from the last one with such an accurate length as that it shall lie nearest to the opposite wall of the area. The first stroke is made from within a few inches of what is called the *beginning post*, and the player directs his ball as precisely as he can on the opposite one, that he may hit it if possible, computing at the same time the force of his stroke, so that, should he miss it (which from the distance may be supposed to be most frequently the case), his ball may rebound from the end wall, and lie within a moderate distance of the post, and before it, *i.e.* between the two posts, rather than between the post and the end wall. The reason of preferring this situation of the ball will appear by reflecting how much easier it is in that case to send the ball, after striking the post, back again towards the other one. The skill of



FROM A TILE



the game consists in striking the post in such a way, whether full or otherwise, as may send the ball towards the place where you wish it to rest. It combines the address required both in golf and in billiards. Five points make the game; and such is the difference between a capital and an ordinary player, that the former will give four points of the game and frequently be the winner. This superiority of play I experienced myself at a *kolf baau* near the Hague, after I had considerable practice in the game, and was, in fact, no mean player. With the advantage of three points I was completely beaten, and even when I got four, I could hardly preserve any tolerable equality.

A great advantage of the game of *kolf* is, that it can be played at all seasons, and in all weather, as the place is as close as a house, while, at the same time by opening the windows, which are very large, you may have a sufficiency of air. There is generally a kind of apartment at one end of the *kolf baau*, two or three steps higher than the floor, where spectators may enjoy the sight of the game, so far as the clouds of tobacco smoke, with which they commonly fill it, will allow.

Clearly golf is no more *kolf* than cricket is poker.

The essence of golf is the striking by two parties, each of his own ball, to a series of given points—in golf ‘holes.’ This is clearly distinct from any game in which each party strives to strike the same ball to opposite points, as in hockey or shinty. But we shall see that, in the form of golf still played in Belgium, both parties play with the same ball. One endeavours to reach the given point in a certain number of strokes. The other is allowed one back stroke out of three. Here we touch the place where golf is differentiating itself from such games as hockey and polo. Let each party have as many strokes as he can get, and we have hockey. Let each play his own ball, and neither of them touch his opponent’s ball, and we have golf, or pell mell, *jeu de mail*.

Now forms of this intermediate stage, *chole*, still surviving in Belgium and Northern France, are of extreme antiquity on the Continent. They represent golf in the making. The game might develop into golf, or pell mell, or remain arrested at a stage between golf and hockey, as in Belgium now. If the



point played to was a hole in the ground, golf arose ; if you played to a stone, tree, or rock, or through an iron hoop elevated on a post, pell mell, *jeu de mail*, *Pila-Malleus* was the result. In the Low Latin dictionary of Du Cange, we find that *Choulla* (French *Choulle*, or *Chole*) was *globulus ligneus qui clava propellitur*, 'a wooden ball struck by a club.' This occurs in legal documents of 1353, 1357. Under *crossare*, to play at *crosse*, or at *chole*, we learn that the clubs used had iron heads, like niblicks and irons. An engraving from a missal of 1504 is printed on p. 1, showing peasants engaged at *chole*, *choulla*, or *crosse*. In the original coloured miniature the heads of the clubs are painted of a steely blue. It has been remarked that the game, as represented, is a kind of hockey rather than golf. It must be noted, however, that the artist may have introduced the iron-headed clubs of one game into the other. The confused descriptions given by a learned but muddle-headed writer in the old *Mercure de France*



FROM A TILE

show that he got all the possible games mixed in his mind. The oldest mentions of *chole* and *choulla* seem usually to have been made because a quarrel arose at the game, and one player hit another over the scone with his iron-headed club.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing to show, as far as I am aware, that these early Flemish golfers putted at holes. They do not do so now, but play to a given mark, a stone, a church gate, a pot-house door. M. Charles Michel thus describes the game as it exists in Belgium :

<sup>1</sup> The missal from which we borrow our engraving is in the possession of Sir T. D. Gibson Carmichael, at Castle Craig. Lady Carmichael has kindly copied the miniature.



The players divide into two parties, after fixing the point on which they are to play, sometimes two or three, or even four leagues distant from the tee.

It is as if you played on Dourie Castle door from the first hole at St. Andrews.

The game is to reach and touch with the ball, say the right-hand pillar of the door of a church in such or such a village. The captains of each side choose a player alternately, till all the company are divided into two parties, each under its captain. Then the number of strokes in which the distance is to be covered is, as it were, put up to auction ; the side which offers the lowest estimate wins, and strikes off.

Thus, if one side bets it will reach the goal in six strokes, while the other can only offer eight, the sportsmen who think they can do it in six strike first from the tee.

Then off they go, across field and meadow, hedge and ditch, the game being usually played in autumn, when the fields are bare. Each man of the striking-off party swipes at the ball alternately, but, when they have had three strokes a man of the other party *déchole* (hits back). Then the first side plays three more strokes, then comes another *décholade* by the opponents. Thus each of the original strikers has three strikes for one strike by the adversaries. The *décholeurs* try to hit the ball into every kind of hazard. If the ball is hit into an impossible hazard, say over a wall which cannot be climbed, the players settle among themselves where a new ball is to be put down. In short, impossible hazards are replaced in a possible position.

M. Michel's authority tells him that a strong player can drive about four hundred yards—a rare feat. The Belgian club which M. Michel kindly sent me is a very rude weapon, with an extremely concave iron head, hafted on a stiff handle. The Belgian golfer thinks that with our clubs we ought to be able to hit further. The Belgian ball is an egg-shaped one of beechwood. Experiment shows that English golfers cannot make a long drive with Belgian weapons.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I gave the Belgian driver to the Wimbledon Club.