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Earliest Days till Now.

BY

J. C. FERGUSON, Southwick.

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ITS EARLY HISTORY.

Perhaps no game has leapt so generally into favour during the last decade or two as Golf has done. Yet for long years previous to its resuscitation it did not appeal to the sporting proclivities of the country at large, and the area originally affected by the introduction of the modern game was a strictly limited one, stretching, as it did, along the east coast of Scotland only. This may have been from its being introduced from the West of Europe as it is averred. It was restricted to this coast line for very many years.

As it is now practised, the game is not recognised as the impetuous outcome of an ingenious mind, but rather as the gradual development of a primitive pastime practised by a rude people, who hewed weapons from the forests, and cut them roughly into shape as the pupils of the present day prepare their shinty clubs. This, and the fact of its having its origin, when there was no written record made of anything except in the books of expenditure, buttery books, *et hoc genus omne*, of the royal and noble houses, will account for the lack of data concerning the earliest days of

the game and its devotees. Far back in this immemorial period, then, it may be averred it made but little advance in evolution, remaining long in its initial state for any thing that is known among peoples; and it was not till it was taken up as a pastime by the richer classes, and that better material to play with was demanded that the history of the game was recorded. From then, through time, and very leisurely, it became popular, and at last attained to such a degree of favour (but only yet in the locality already mentioned) that laws had to be made to discourage the practice of it; and, strange as it may seem, the laws that were meant to retard indulgence in it are the first intimation of the game's existence. The only previous suggestion of it is in some woodcuts, where the player is represented with a curved stick, addressing a sphere of some rude material.

But this much is known for certain that the game was a familiar pastime some years antecedent to the middle of the fifteenth century. This is the twentieth century, so that it can boast an antiquity respectable enough even if it went no farther back, which it does, however, for it has been spoken of in one of the few books of the game as 'popular' then, so that it must have been in vogue some time previous to that date, before it could have been so described.

Golf as known to the modern player is said to be originally Dutch, though the Scots lay claim to it as a thoroughly national game. The word "Kolb" is Dutch for "Club," and this and other evidences indicate that it belongs to the Low Countries. Scotland is, nevertheless, the accredited home of its adoption and development, and "any existence it has now in Holland is only as a consequence of recent introduction" from Scotland again. This country has kept its traditions well to the front, and has given

the game to the peoples of all lands where English is spoken.

Mr R. Clark, Edinburgh, in his valuable work on the subject, entitled "The Royal and Ancient Game," when writing of the favour with which the game was received, states that "it was popular then (in 1450, say) in such a sense as it can scarcely at this time (1875) claim to be." As the game was never more popular than now, the remark goes to show the enormity of the revival it has sustained, and the great and rapid strides it has made during the last thirty or more years.

But in the 15th century other things had to be thought of than pastime for its own sake. It was necessary that even recreation should savour of something more utilitarian than the diversion it afforded, viz., that of being practically applied in the defence of the country. For it must be remembered that previous to the discovery of gunpowder, archery was the repelling power with which to meet an invading foe, and the art of shooting the arrow, which held the position in warfare then that the rifle does now, was being sacrificed by a too close application to golf. To put a stop to this, an Act was passed in James II.'s reign to the following effect:—

"It is decreetit and ordainit that the weapingschawes be holden be the Lordes and Barronnes, Spiritual and Temporal, four times in the yeir and that futeball and golf be utterly cryit doune and nocht usit, and that the bowe merkis be made at ilk paroche kirk a pair of buttis, and schutting be used ilk Sunday." Laws with the same end in view were made in subsequent reigns, but the game was at this time too high in favour to be easily suppressed. Certain local authorities, such as Edinburgh, acted upon the suggestion of this decree, however, and harassed the devotees of the game by their enactments against it, and the magistrates were encour-

aged in this line of action by the clergy who found that the devotion paid to golf was having a delinquent effect upon church attendance. These decrees were ultimately so oppressive, that the sportsmen appealed to the King to be freed from the persistent vexatious interference with their favourite pastime. So James VI. on his first visit to Scotland after the Union—which visit was paid to pave the way for the introduction of Episcopacy—desirous of conciliating both clergymen and laymen, made his arrangements accordingly. He diplomatically decreed that those who attended service in the fore part of the day, and those only, should be allowed to indulge in golf or other diversion, in the latter part of the day. And thus the matter was settled for the time being.

When gunpowder displaced archery, the art of shooting with the bow was greatly neglected, and golf received a fresh impetus; and the attention of the public generally was directed to it from its being largely patronised by royalty and noblemen. James VI. was devoted to it and carried the pastime with him when he left Scotland to reside in London, and he it was who introduced the game into England by establishing the first golf club at Black Heath. His sons Henry and Charles were fond of the diversion. James II. was also a devotee. King William IV. was patron to the old club of St. Andrew and presented it with a medal to be played for annually. It was he, too, who sanctioned the name "The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrew," and, to mention no more now, King Edward, when Prince of Wales, if he is not now even, was patron of the same club.

Scotsmen, in their usual characteristic manner, carried golf with them to all lands whichsoever they adopted for the nonce as their homes, and thus began

the dissemination of golf abroad. But it was not perhaps till the middle of last century that the game took a serious hold on the English mind, when the Westward Ho Club was formed in Devonshire. Since then it has gone on in favour with the inhabitants of all quarters of the globe, and wherever it has been introduced, it has gone to stay.

EVOLUTION OF THE CLUB AND BALL.

As the object in the game of golf is, by a series of strokes—the fewer the better—to drop an inch-and-a-half ball into a four-and-a-quarter hole, anything from 100 to 500 yards distant from the tee or starting point, and without once touching the ball with the hand after it has left the tee, unless under circumstances which will be explained farther on, it is evident that the player must be possessed of a keen eye and a steady nerve. And as the links, as the Scots course is called, are studded with sand bunkers and hazards of many kinds, consisting of scrub, dikes, etc., he must have skill to avoid these in his long drives and his more measured strokes as he approaches the green, in the centre of which lies the hole which he wishes to drop the ball into. Considerable dexterity must be exercised in all his essays, and with every individual club, and as this dexterity can be acquired only by long and persistent practice, it is essential to the attainment of a high degree of it that the player begin in early life. Many cases may be known to votaries, where the player was initiated in the sport at middle age, and yet attained a tolerable proficiency—sufficient, at least, to make the game pleasurable to him, while reaping the healthful benefits the recreation affords; but cases of this kind are few where he has escaped bad style, that is a stiff or awkward manner of addressing the ball and swinging his clubs. It stands to reason that no player who first wooed the game well on in his manhood can ever hope to cope in grace of style with one who began in boyhood or early

youth. "Learn young, learn fair," is as applicable to golf as to every other sphere of action.

As the game is so extensively popular now, more so, it might be said, than any other British sport, there will in future years be fewer middle-aged tyros than heretofore, and greater general excellence will be the consequence. This will be a welcome result, too, for the game has much to recommend it both to old and young, whether it be taken up from the ambitious desire to excel in it, as a health-giving exercise, or as a cultivating power of some of the higher virtues. It provides one of the most healthful recreations extant. There is not only the muscular exercise in the swing of the "stick," which brings the whole body into play, but there is the leisured walk in following the ball; there is the excellent practice which tends to produce an exact eye, the judging of distances, the measurement of the stroke, the exercise of patience in looking for a lost ball; and last, though not by any means least—to use a much hackneyed phrase—the exercise of self-control which has to be carefully cultivated when a shot is "foozled," or the earth, air, or club cleaved. In any of such circumstances, and all of them are annoying, but not uncommon nevertheless, the best relief would seem to be a warm expletive; but the golfer who forbears to give violent expression to his chagrin in any of the trying positions mentioned has won a greater moral victory than if he had "two up and one to play." But moral victories are not generally played for on golf links, so few of them are won.

The game is generally played between two or four, that is one a side or two a side, the more common and preferable being the former. Each player has his own clubs and ball, and plays quite independently of his partner, except that each plays in turn, the one whose ball is more remote from the

goal having the honour. He who takes the fewer strokes claims the hole; if both take the like number, the result is known as a half, and can be claimed by neither. The ball must not be touched by the hand from the time it is driven from the tee till it drops into the hole towards which it is being driven, except it lies on clothes, or in water, or in any of the holes made in the greens, or on ground under repair, or in other positions where it is quite unplayable. The fact of clothes bleaching on the green being mentioned in the rules as a casual obstacle points to the time when the links were common property and were used by the public for washing and bleaching purposes. The same utilitarian uses of the greens are suggested in the rule that if the ball lies behind a tub the tub may be removed. These are the only exceptions in ordinary circumstances, but the reader can quite imagine, and the player has knowledge of, many cases not mentioned here where the "lie" of the "gutty" renders it impossible to be reached by any of the tools. In such cases the player may lift his ball. turn his face toward the green he is playing for, and drop it behind him. The penalty attached to this is a stroke on to his score. He must then strike the ball where it rests. In other cases he must play the ball or give up the hole. A lost ball is a lost hole. Now, a few of the places a ball may drop are in a sand bunker with perhaps an overhanging brow of anything from ten to twenty feet high, a hazard of long grass, scrub, heath, or whin-bush, mole hill, road-way, or other bad ground, the base of a dyke, or the bottom of a ditch, a cup in the fair-way made by a previous player scooping out the turf by his stroke, a track or other sunken ground, etc.; and as it can be lifted by a club only, it will at once appear, even to the uninitiated, that a variety of "sticks" is indispensable, each of which is adaptable to one or other of

the "lies" of the ball. Each of these clubs possesses a special property which gives it an advantage over all the others for a distinct stroke; but they are all originally sprung from the bent stick of the first player, and though there is no data to go by, no written record of any kind, imagination can well travel backward to the rough, crooked stick of the earliest sportsman, and trace them each in succession a modification and a development for different uses, even as now, and on through the different stages they may be followed up to the manifold formations of the present day's variety and plenitude. In a print of the 14th century two figures are represented, each of whom has such a club as one might imagine to be much nearer the original than any of those in use now, but still an improvement upon the earliest ones; it is just a "bandy" or "shinty" stick, cut from the rough, and pared into shape. One of the figures is in the attitude of driving a ball from a slight elevation, corresponding to the modern artificial tee of sand. In other plates the Dutch are represented with iron clubs, possibly from their having to play frequently on ice when wood would splinter, not only from contact with the ice, but from being rendered more brittle by the frost. There is nothing in the former print to suggest the composition of the ball; but here again it might be allowed to give play to the imagination, and thereby trace it to the round knot off a tree root. The first reliable record there is, is that of a leather case packed hard with feathers, and sewn up. This ball was succeeded by one composed entirely of hard-pressed gutta percha, which kept the field for many years, and is still in use indeed, but only for economical reasons, as it has been almost entirely superseded by a substitute similar to it in outward appearance, but constructed on an entirely different principle internally.

This is the "rubber core," and is a great advance upon the gutta percha one, as it leaves the face of the club much more freely, and travels a longer distance. This is the ball of to-day, and it is manufactured by various firms under a variety of names, as the "Haskell," "Swallow," "Hawke," "Captain," "Colonel," and many others. The evolution of the ball in its later stages carries us back in authentic history to the days of the great exponent of this sport, Allan Robertson, the king of the links, and to the youth of his partner, the high priest of golf, the well known, popular Tom Morris, of St. Andrews, who died on Sunday (May 24, 1908) at the age of 87. Robertson and Morris were partners in the manufacture of feather-stuffed balls, and these commanded a very high price, a price so prohibitive as to deter the spread of the game. The advent of the "gutty," the invention of Mr Paterson, Musselburgh, in the middle of last century, caused a split of partnership between the two. Old Tom tells that the new gutta perchas made a great difference in the game. He had got one, he said, from a Mr Campbell to practice with, and Robertson, who was most conservative in all his notions pertaining to the royal game, took umbrage at his partner for patronising the new invention, as it was likely to spoil their trade. So they separated, and Morris started the making of the new production by himself. Robertson was so much annoyed with the opposition of the new ball that he endeavoured to debar its use by buying up the stock, but this proved a futile effort, as it deserved to be. Tom, on the other hand, deserted the old for the new, as he foresaw that the latter, from its superiority in quality, its adaptability and cheapness, had a likely future; and, as he rightly anticipated, it has had far-reaching effects upon the history of golf. With the introduction of this

sphere dates the wide and rapid spread of the game, for the working classes were now for the first time able to engage in it, being no longer prevented by high-priced balls. The clubs never were a deterrent, for they required once buying only; balls were a continual expense. The present-day "white" might be said to be prohibitive, but the recreation has taken too deep a hold upon the public mind to suffer from this now, as it did 50 or 60 years ago, and devotees will sacrifice something else rather than forego their fascinating sport.

The original "guttas" were 1s and 6d, the latter priced ones being "made-up" specimens, and were used mostly by beginners. The cheapest of the rubber-cored specimens is 1s (and not good at that, comparatively); others vary from that to 2s. This price would not be grudged by any, for the ball is worth the money, from its powers of resistance (a necessary quality to beginners and mediocre votaries), its spring off the sticks, and its long carry. It is the loss of balls that is the expense. The new "white" was first made in America, and has sprung rapidly into favour.

SOME NOTED GOLFERS.

So ancient and popular a pastime as golf must claim many devotees of repute and notoriety in its past and present history. It is only within the last half century, however, that skilled or well-known players could be discovered in other than the higher ranks, for up to that period the game was so prohibitive, by reason of its expensive tools, principally from the exorbitant price of balls, that it was practically, as well as nominally, a royal and high-class game. The feather balls, with their leather cover, which were the predecessors of the gutta percha ones, cost, at least, half a crown each, and one of them seldom survived more than one round of the links. A half-crown game is not for a poor man, even did that coin cover all the cost of the round, and what golfer will say it ever did?

It is not argued here that the few golfers mentioned in this article, were famed for their dexterity, in the prosecution of the sport, but all were at least well known in their day on the green, and were notorious enough to have their names handed down in the annals of their favourite pastime. It was possible to find in early history, as it is now, both the enthusiast who was successful, and the devotee who was not in any sense a great player. Enthusiasm does not always, or ever, perhaps, make up for lack of skill; but it bespeaks at least a willing spirit and a desire to excel, which is deserving of success. Properly applied it is highly commendable, but a too devoted appli-

cation to sport to the neglect of one's public and private avocations, is to be regretted, and he would be a bold man who would recommend, or even condone it. It may seem paradoxical, but it is suggested that a slavish devotion to any pastime is a kind of indolence. It certainly leads to neglect of other matters at least. The quaint philosopher, Josh Billings, remarked "Patience is a virtue, but when I see a man asleep in a boat, waiting for a fish to bite, it seems to me that laziness is what is the matter with him." A man, then, who sacrifices business to golf has this complaint.

In the character first mentioned below is a type of the indolent enthusiast; he was nothing else except a trouble to his wife who resented his neglect of business as a result of the fascination or the infatuation the game had for him. He was known as the "Cock o' the Green." He had been a butler, and like many another of his fraternity, had been able to set up a public house from his savings. Fortunately for him, his wife was a capable woman and quite able to attend to the business, for no sooner was he released from the necessity to work than he ceased to do so, and practically spent the remainder of his retirement on the golf green. But after all, he was no more than an enthusiast. He was not a dexterous wielder of the clubs, for he suffered, as all must suffer who begin late in life to play the game. But as that point was discussed in a previous article, it need not be enlarged upon here. Let it suffice to state that no amount of practice can make up for the want of experience in early life. Despite his devoted attention to the game, then, to the neglect of all things else mundane, he, the "Cock o' the Green," could never be said to excel. His diligence and perseverance might have been praiseworthy, but for the slavish element attached to it. His sport became his

occupation. He lived only to play golf, for he was not only at it from early morning to late night, he was even to be seen at the short holes with a lantern to direct him when darkness set in. Frost nor snow deterred him, provided the latter were hard enough to resist penetration by the ball. He was of course laughed at for his pains, and his neighbours gave him credit for being a little bit "gone," and christened him by the name mentioned above. But the hilarity of his neighbours and his neglect of business were not pleasant to his wife, who would willingly have cooled his ardour for the one aim of his life, and turned his energies to some more profitable purpose. Indeed when frequent scoldings on the subject proved of no avail she once tried to shame him off the green, on account of the unenviable notoriety he had gained, by bringing out his dinner to him, but her efforts were unavailing by reason of the absorbing nature of his sport. He simply told her she might wait if she liked till he had finished his game, but he had no time for dinner just then. What could avail after that? He played on the Bruntsfield Links, and died in 1813, and is now commemorated in Kay's portraits.

We have mentioned this votary first, as he was an altogether exceptional character of his time; but it were not a superhuman effort to discover among the thousand players of the present day many who are equally as enthusiastic, and—where time and expense have not to be considered—equally persevering and persistent, with perhaps more dexterity to show for their diligence.

But to refer to a much earlier period of history, let us turn to some of the royal names mentioned in the records of the game. In spite of the edict of James II. that "Golf be utterly cryit doune and nocht usit," we find that James IV. did not regard himself bound by his ancestor's decrees. The following accounts of the Lord High Treasurer

show that the Royal sport had some interest for him:—

1503-4—Feby. 3—Item to the King to play golf with the Erle of Bothvile—xlij s. Item to Golf Clubbis and Ballis to the King that he played with—ix s.

1505-6—Feby. 22—Item for xij golf balls to the King—iiij s.

1506—Jy. 18—Item the xviij day of July for ij golf clubs to the King—ij s.

This merely shows that he played golf, and only occasionally at that. It does not disclose any particular devotion to it; neither is there any evidence as to the degree of excellence the gallant monarch attained. Of James V. there is no mention in the records of golf. Likely enough the touch of melancholy from which he suffered, caused by the troublous times in which he lived, and for which he was largely responsible, would little dispose him to invigorating pastime, though perhaps such an one as that under discussion would have proved an excellent antidote to morbid tendencies. His daughter, however, Mary, Queen of Scots, was a player, but to what extent is not recorded; but her enemies, who were careful to take note of all her weaknesses and wrong-doings, and to discount her many accomplishments and favourable traits of character, assert that so little concerned was she about the death of her consort, Darnley, that she was engaged in a game of golf a few days after his murder. Surely such indulgence on the part of the Queen was but a mild way after all of showing her pleasure at being relieved from such an incubus. Her son again, James VI., was a keen player, if not a dexterous one; but to make up for want of excellence it might be suggested that there would not be wanting his characteristic self-satisfaction with his efforts; nor would any of his attempts lose anything from the remarks of his

courtiers, who knew well the weakness the King had for a flattering notice being taken of his achievements. He was often seen on the links of Leith, and England owes to him the introduction of the game to their country, for when he removed to London at the Union of the Crowns he inaugurated the sport at Black Heath, which therefore boasts the oldest club in the country. His two sons—Princes Henry and Charles (afterwards Charles I.) — were also votaries, the former only an occasional player, as is told in a manuscript in the Harleian Library. It is told of him that when engaged on the links on one occasion he was addressing the ball, when he was warned to take care that he did not hit his tutor, who was standing in the way of the club. "If I did," he smilingly remarked, "I had but paid my debts." His brother again, the martyred King—euphemism, is it? —was an earnest devotee, so much so that "during his confinement at Newcastle he and his train played at goff in the Shield Field, without the walls." Thus the records of Northumberland. And it was while practising on the links of Leith that he was made aware of the Irish rising in 1642, and he left the game at once, greatly affected by the news, and drove off to Holyrood.

Fond of pleasure as Charles II. is said to have been, and which earned for him the name of the "Merry Monarch"—euphemism again!—there is no account of his having formed any attachment to the game of golf. His tastes seem to have craved far less healthy pastimes; but his brother, the short-reigned James II., was a devotee of more or less zeal and success. A story is related of him to the effect that — "Two English noblemen having acquired during their attendance at the Scottish Court some knowledge of the game, challenged the King, who was then Duke of York, and any Scotsman he could find, to play a match for a large stake. The Duke accepted the

challenge, and selected as his partner one John Patersone, a shoemaker. Winning easily, his Highness dismissed the shoemaker with half the stakes, and with the money Patersone built for himself a house in the Canongate." Not a bad day's work for the disciple of St. Crispin! We read further of the Duke's devotion to the Royal sport, mingled with another indulgence, which would seem to have been congenial to his unenviable characteristic of tyranny, for in Robertson's "Historical Notices of Leith" it is written — "After the Restoration the Duke of York was sent to Edinburgh, and his favourite pastimes appear to have been torturing the adherents to the Covenant and playing golf on the links of Leith."

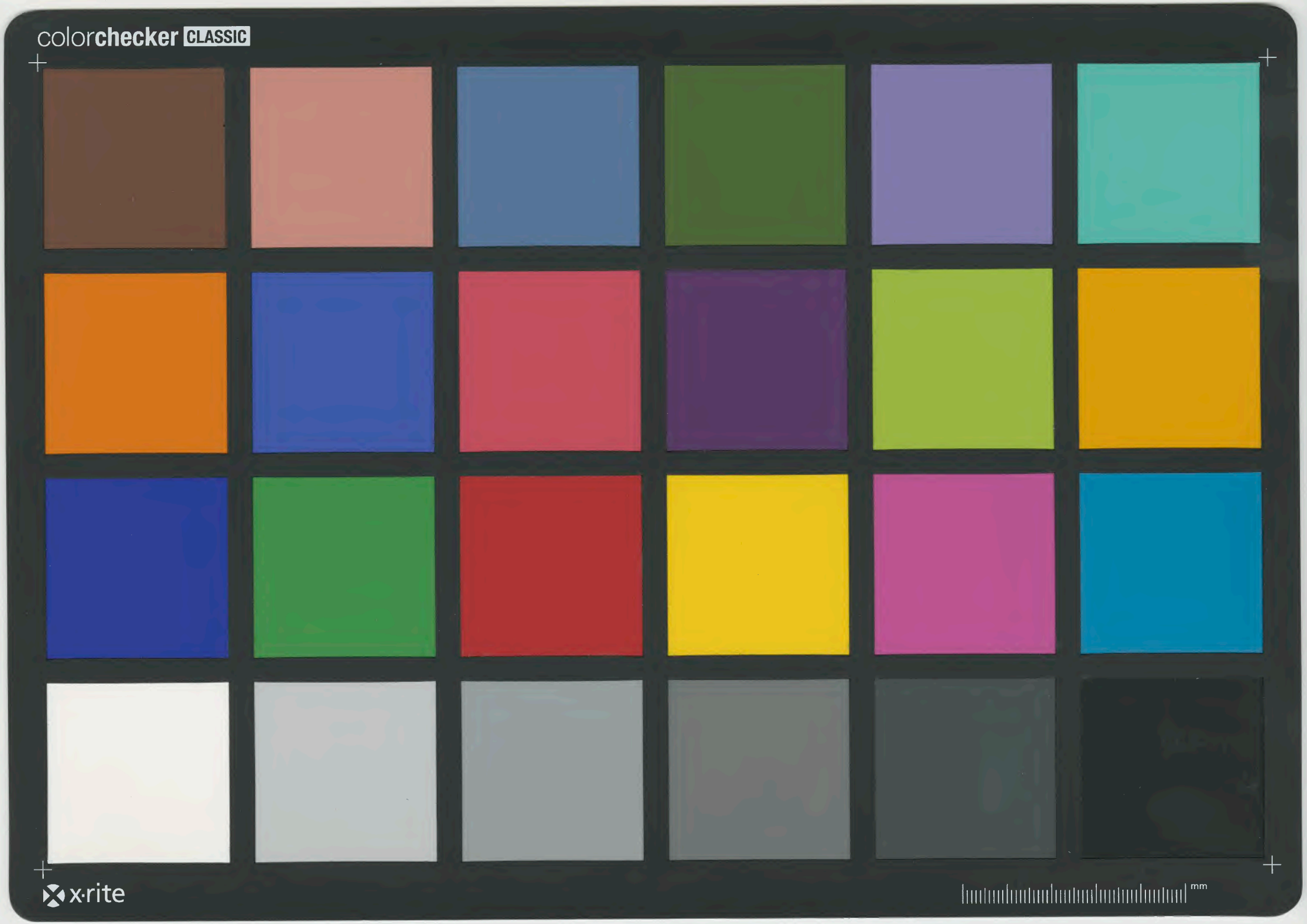
The exigencies of space must be our excuse for taking a long leap through time and bringing this sketch to treat of more modern players. There were two noted players who figured in the middle of the last century, one of whom has long since gone to his rest, and the other "left us but yesterday." We refer to Allan Robertson and Tom Morris. These two are mentioned in an article which appeared in M'Millan's Magazine in the words — "One mighty golfer is gathered to his fathers. Allan, the hero of our boyhood, is dead. Tom is a famous player, and he merits his fame; but Allan had no peer, and he has no successor." The writer of these words had not foreseen the possibilities of golf, perhaps, when he continued— "Shall we, or our children, look upon his like again?" The encomium was well deserved in its day, and even to-day, were it possible, Allan would make some of our champions, amateur and professional, look to their laurels.

A long article apeared in the "Dundee Advertiser" in 1859, its subject being "Allan Robertson, the champion golfer." This appreciation, after telling of his birth in 1815, states that

"he came of a golfing race," for his father and grandfather were both ball-makers and professional golfers. No wonder need be expressed that Allan took naturally to the game, and followed in his ancestors' footsteps also as a manufacturer of golf balls, when he had in partnership his friend, Tom Morris. It was during their joint partnership that the gutta percha ball was first introduced, and revolutionised the game. But Allan resented the advent of this new ball, while Tom, seeing the possibilities of the gutta globe, took kindly to it. This led to a split of partnership, but the two devotees remained fast friends for all that. Allan was perhaps the greatest golf exponent of his day, and his success led him to be regarded as invincible. He and Tom played many matches together with almost unvaried success; but they played none more exciting than that against the brothers Dunn of Musselburgh, in 1849, for a stake of £400. The competition was played on the links of Musselburgh, St. Andrews, and North Berwick. On the first two of these the brothers led, more especially at Musselburgh, where they were 13 holes up and 12 to play, and even on the second links, though the other two retrieved their position somewhat· when the third game was started the Dunns stood 4 holes up and only 8 to play. However, "Allan and Tom," as stated in a graphic description of the game, "by a magnificent game, gained the first hole, then the second; halved the third, gained the fourth, halved the fifth, and gained the sixth: thus making the poll all even—and two to play. These two holes Allan and Tom also won, thus obtaining the match, one of the most brilliant and extraordinary in the whole annals of golfing."

Other sensational matches were gained by Robertson and his young contemporary, but to refer to even a tithe of their victories, or of Allan's with other partners, while it would

record a series of triumphs, would be outwith our abilities with the space at our command. He died in the full acme of his fame and strength in 1859, passing away very rapidly, for one so young and who had lived so temperate a life as he had, for in six months from the date of his seizure he was carried away, to the great regret of all who knew him, and leaving an irreparable blank in golfing circles. He was succeeded as adviser and keeper to the St. Andrews Club by his friend, the late Tom Morris, "than whom there was no more popular golfer in the world," and whose interest in his life-long occupation continued unabated to the end. A writer in Leng's Golfing Manual states that—"Tom Morris was known and loved of all men—indeed, wherever the English language is spoken. He was esteemed and respected. A son of the auld grey city, he spent the greater part of his lifetime in St. Andrews, and witnessed those revolutions in clubs and balls which have created upheavals in the trade, and raised his favourite sport to the highest pitch of popularity ever attained by any pastime in ancient or modern times."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