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IMPRESSIONS OF BRITISH GOLF

By Walter J. Travis

TO visit the principal links in England and Scotland is a liberal education in itself. There you have golf—Golf in its best and highest form. Added to this, I have had the pleasure of seeing some of the very finest players in the world play on their native heath. Naturally, the whole thing to me has been a source of the keenest kind of enjoyment, and, incidentally, to a certain extent, more or less of a revelation and surprise. In this country it is difficult,

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if not impossible, for the average American player to realize and properly appreciate the existent conditions of play on the other side as exemplified by their leading links, there being such a radical difference in their physical configuration in relation to our courses. I say courses advisedly, as few, if any, are true links in the proper sense of the word. It is highly doubtful whether any verbal or written description can adequately convey any accurate idea of the beauties of the simon-pure links which abound on the other side of the pond. We really have nothing like them. Imagine a vast expanse of sandy undulating plain, free



THE "HIMALAYAS" AT PRESTWICK.

from trees of any kind, dotted at frequent and irregular intervals with, generally, smoothly rounded hillocks—all pure sand—of varying sizes and shapes, some rising to a height of from twenty to a hundred feet, with occasional fairly level surfaces, the whole covered with the most beautiful turf, and protected on either side by whins or bent (coarse grass), and you have a very crude idea of the typical links in the rough, as it were. And bunkers, where we have one, they have four or five; but more of this anon. The greens are usually just as nature made them, more or less undulating, some in hollows, others on small plateaus or on gentle slopes, with now and then one fairly level—all covered with the loveliest velvety turf imaginable, a fine quality of thin silky grass indigenous to a sandy soil blessed with a mild and beneficent climate, and watered by frequent showers.

These links are not the growth of a few years; rather they are the product of centuries. Dornoch, for instance, according to Mr. Carnegie, was an old pasture-land four hundred years before America was discovered!

In the face of this we really have made amazing strides in bringing our principal courses to such a high state of comparative perfection during the last five or six years. But for every dollar spent on the British links we spend at least twenty. Money, however, cannot furnish us with the lovely contour of the foreign links, and in which reside their chief points of difference and charm.

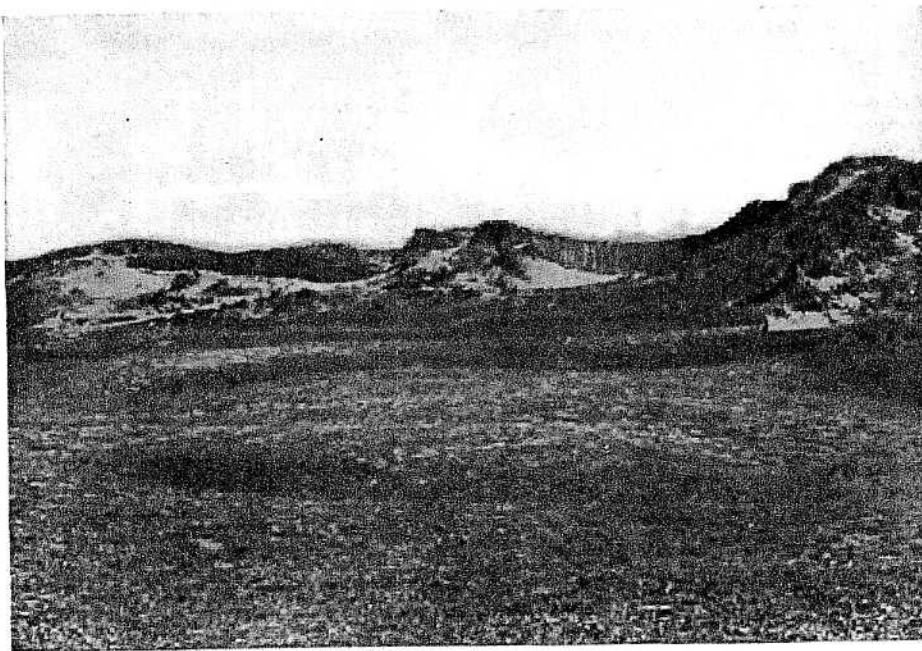
Where, for instance, have we any bunkers that suggest the faintest resemblance to the "Himalayas" or the "Redan" at Prestwick, or the "Maiden," "Sahara," or "Hades" at Sandwich? Where have we any holes comparable with the seventh, eleventh, and thirteenth at St. Andrews,

the seventh and tenth at Troon, the fifth and seventeenth at Prestwick, the seventh, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth at Formby, the second and fifteenth at Carnoustie, the third, seventh, and fourteenth at Prestwick St. Nicholas, the seventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth at North Berwick, the proposed new twelfth and thirteenth at Blundellsands, the fifth, eleventh, twelfth, and eighteenth at Muirfield, the eleventh, thirteenth, and fourteenth at Hoylake, the third, sixth, eighth, and seventeenth at Sandwich, the third and eighth at Mid-Surrey, the seventh and fourteenth at Deal, or the third, fourth, and tenth at Huntercombe? to say nothing of many others.

Golf, with us, is mostly of a kindergarten order. The holes are too easy, and there is too much of a family resemblance all through, generally speaking. There are undoubtedly some notable exceptions which will at once suggest themselves to those fa-

miliar with the leading courses on both sides. But, speaking by and large, our courses seem to be mainly laid out not with reference to first-class play, but rather to suit the game of the average player. And what is the result? On the ordinary courses a premium is placed on mediocrity. But let the average good player on such courses "stack up against" golf as it should be played—on links such as Prestwick, Sandwich, or Formby, or Garden City and Wheaton—and where is he? Really good links develop really good players, a few remarkably so, while the general standard of play is at the same time very sensibly improved. This fact is meeting with increasing recognition, as is evidenced by the growing improvement of our courses in the direction of making them more difficult.

As I have already remarked, where we have one hazard, in Great Britain they have four or five. And yet you



THE "CARDINAL" AT PRESTWICK.

never hear a word of protest from the duffer—and they have heaps of them, I can assure you. Here, let a new bunker be put in, and instantly a storm of indignation arises. The march of progress is consequently made slow in the face of such general universal opposition, and the Green Committee is bitterly accused, and the lives of its members made extremely unhappy. It is high time we awoke to a proper and appreciative realization of what real golf is—and constructed our courses accordingly. Use forward tees for ordinary play, if necessary, but let the distances of the holes and the hazards be arranged at the outset with regard to first-class play in all competitions.

All of the principal links on the other side have been laid out on these lines. Some are necessarily more difficult than others, in certain respects, but all furnish really sound golf when the medal tees are used. If I may be allowed, *en passant*, to express an opinion, I consider that Huntercombe is easily the best-laid-out links I have ever played over, anywhere.

There, in order to negotiate the round properly, you must be a master in the art of both scientific slicing and pulling, and be able to get the full measure of every conceivable stroke that occurs in the game, or else be subject to some penalty—in short, every shot has to be played for all it is worth. That is golf—GOLF, in large roman capital letters.

The particular feature which distinguishes the British courses from ours—apart from the quality of the turf—is the undulating character of the ground. We lack entirely the numberless dumpings, hillocks, and kopjes of sand dunes so characteristic of the true sea-side links. Then, again, the transition from our fair green to the putting-green is usually quite marked. On the foreign links there is no such line of demarcation; the turf and the general “going” are practically the same throughout, there being nothing in so far as the quality and condition of the grass are concerned to especially differentiate where the fair green ends and the putting-greens commences, as with us.



THE "MAIDEN" AT SANDWICH.



“HOLE O’ CROSS” AND “HEATHERY” HOLE, ST. ANDREWS.

The result is that the general character of the play is somewhat different in methods, not only in full tee shots, but also in approaching. On account of the undulations, it is desirable to get as long a carry as possible on the full shots—apart from any intervening bunkers—otherwise the ball may be “killed” by striking the face of a hillock or be deflected by striking the sides.

For the same reason, only inversely, approaches are usually played with a mid-iron, the ball having a low carry and a good deal of run, keeping the line accurately to the hole despite irregularities of surface. With us, owing to the marked difference between the fair green and the putting-green, nearly all our approaches are played with a view of pitching either on or as close as possible to the green proper, with more or less allowance for run, according to the character of the stroke. This is even done at comparatively short distances from the hole, say forty to fifty yards. Strokes of this kind are usually made on the other side with a wooden putter, as they can be made with a greater certainty of success, owing to the existent conditions.

Nature has been exceedingly kind to our cousins in every way, in not only providing the raw material in the shape of links, but also in furnishing a climate suitable to their proper maintenance, practically unaided. Occasionally, however, she forgets herself, and periods of drought ensue, against which no human provision is made—or practically none, except on a few greens. Then the putting-greens suffer. With such lovely material at hand it is positively criminal not to lend nature a helping hand at such crises by artificially watering the greens—as we do on all of our principal courses throughout the summer season. With much poorer material to work upon, our best greens compare favorably with the foreign ones simply on account of the greater care and attention paid to them.

One peculiarity of the British greens is that, generally speaking, no one seems to know, or manifest the least interest in, the respective distances of the holes. This is very trying at first to the American player, who is brought up, as it were, on certain fixed distances. His first question on playing over a strange course is in relation to the distances of the holes.

