

ALLAN ROBERTSON,*

The Champion Golfer.

ALLAN ROBERTSON, the greatest golf-player that ever lived, of whom alone in the annals of the pastime it can be said that he never was beaten, was born at St. Andrews on the 11th September, 1815. He came of a golfing race. His grandfather, Peter Robertson, who died in 1803, was a ball-maker and professional golfer. His father, too, David Robertson, who lived till 1836, followed the same trade, and was, moreover, a good player in his day—nay, few were better on the golfing green. As might be expected from such a generation of golfers, Allan took naturally to the Links. It is a fact that his very playthings as a child were golf clubs. As he grew up, this natural tendency, joined to a natural desire of his father that his son should continue the business of ball-maker, decided Allan's profession, and in due course of time he likewise took up the awl and the feathers to learn the manufacture of golf-balls.

At that period golfing was quite another thing from what it is now, or at least its accessories were. Gutta percha

was unknown, and golf-balls were composed of stout leather cases stuffed hard with boiled feathers. Their manufacture, indeed, was both a difficult and an arduous matter; and their expense when finished was such as to restrict the practice of the game, as a rule, to the more wealthy of the community. The Links of St. Andrews, in consequence, were less frequented than now; the course was rougher; the sport had an aristocratic and portly mien; and the matches of professionals were as pregnant with interest as any public event. It is not so now; the St. Andrews Links are crowded with careless multitudes luxuriating in the pastime cheapened to them by the discovery of gutta percha; and the game is popularised at the expense of its stately traditions.

Allan, however, commenced his golfing career in what, despite the dearness of leather and the paucity of players, we must still call the palmy days of golf. His entire nature was bent on being a golfer. It is yet told on the Links how Allan would rise betimes, and with shirt sleeves rolled up for better muscular play, start alone for practice across the deserted Links still wet with early dew. His success was abundant. Allan has improved in his day on the old theories of golf, and to him are owing many of the improved methods and styles of the present game. Some of these we will afterwards more particularly allude to.

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In the spring of 1848, Mr. Campbell, of Saddell (we believe), brought a few experimental gutta percha balls from London to St. Andrews. They were not very first-rate, to be sure; were not hammered, and flew heavily. Still the material was unquestionably good and adaptable, and consternation stood on every face, Allan's included. And no wonder. The leather ball trade was the only one St. Andrews could boast of, and it was considerable, extending to exports to the colonies as well as home consumption. In Allan's shop alone there were made, for example, in 1840, 1021 balls; in 1841, 1392; in 1844, 2456; and so on. The introduction of gutta percha, which anybody could mould into a sphere, was a dreadful prospect for Allan and his brethren, and dire was their alarm. It is even related that Allan would gladly buy up all the gutta percha balls found among the whins, etc., and actually attempted to destroy the obnoxious interlopers with fire!

However, the influx was too great for this system to be pursued any longer, and about 1850 Allan entered regularly into golf-ball making from gutta percha; and we are glad to know that his labour, whilst it was easier to himself, was not a whit less rewarded than in the old monopoly days of feathers.

The life of a professional golfer, like Allan's, is so composed of continuous matches and a certain recurring same-

ness of incident, that we have found it impossible to trace in anything like a consecutive story the incidents of Allan's life. All we can do is to recall a few memories here and there, and give a selection in chronological order of his more important matches and feats.

Who will ever forget Allan, having once seen him! What Sir Hugh Lyon Playfair has been to the city proper, has Allan been to the Links of St. Andrews. They have unwittingly been in close partnership. Sir Hugh renovated a rough, ruined street; Allan had an eye the while to the improvement of the Links. Sir Hugh attracted citizens, Allan golfers. Ah! it was a magnificent partnership, and has done wonders. The analogy holds good between the two in other respects also. Who could do the honours of the Links like Allan? He was as perfectly at home with a descendant of William the Conqueror as with one of the cadies. Without the least tinge of servility, Allan could accommodate himself to everybody, and arranged everything on the golfing links with the politeness of a Brummel and the policy of a Tallyrand.

We have asked, Who that has once seen the champion golfer can ever forget him? Let us try to help the picture which every player will oft in fancy draw. Our scene is the St. Andrews Links on a genial summer's day. Allan's house crowns the summit of the slope; down towards the

sea—the blue, beautiful sea—lies the white Club-House, with its gravelled terrace. It is not yet eleven, that great hour of cause on the Links. Groups of cadies are prowling about; a clash and rattle of clubs are heard as you pass the club-makers' shops. One or two golfers are putting idly at the starting hole with their burnished cleeks, trying some impossible *putt*, which, if they had only done but yesterday, would have put a very different finish on to a certain match. Suddenly a golfer appears at the Club-House door; he looks about for somebody who is evidently lacking. "Where's Allan?"—the cry is repeated by telegraphic cadies right up to the champion's little garden. A minute elapses, and down comes the champion in hot haste to the Club-House. He is, you will recollect, oh! golfer, not of much stature, compact, rather robust indeed, with a short stoop, and short-necked. His face is pleasant to look at—rather Hibernian, indeed, with its habitual expression of drollery, which has almost given the stalwart golfer one or two dimples. He is dressed, as you must remember, in his favourite red jacket, and carries a cleek (a pet weapon) in his hand. But now the match is arranged. Allan has evidently got to nurse an elementary golfer. It is a foursome; Allan and his *protégé* against two rather good hands. Remark how pleasant the little man is; no miss of his partner causes a shade to habitual

good nature, and, ten to one, when the match comes in from their round, but the new player swears by Allan, and gives in his adhesion to golf for once and all.

But it was in a grand match that the figure of Allan should live in the memory of all. Who shall describe his elegant and beautifully correct style of play! The champion was remarkable for his *easy* style, depending on a long cool swing, and never on sheer strength. His clubs were of the *toy* description, as the slang of the Links hath it, possessing no weight or misproportion of wood. Indeed, in a word, Allan's game throughout was pure unadulterated science. No man, perhaps, so well united in his play all the bits of the game. Pretty driver as he was, we still stake our belief on Allan's short game, especially in quarter shots. And this was an important point in Allan's practice. He it was that introduced the deadly use of the cleek in playing up to the hole. Previous to about 1848 or 1849, short wooden clubs, the baffing, or short-spoons, were used for this important stroke—both difficult, and frequently inaccurate. But Allan employed the cleek to jerk up his ball; however badly it might lie, it was all the same; and this killing game, destructive to a certain extent to the green, is now all but universal.

To return to Allan's great matches. His coolness was unique, and almost miraculous. He was never known to

swat or indeed change his off-hand manner in the least. He was never beaten—proud epitaph. It is something to be the best in anything of all the world, and Allan stood confessed the model player. But it is not only as a golfer that Allan is to be deeply deplored. He was possessed of the best heart and kindest feelings in the world. In the intricate dealings of the Links, in the formation and playing of great matches, Allan was honourable, just, and gentlemanly, from first to last.

Allan did much for golfing both in and out of St. Andrews. He has laid out capital Links in various districts, and played thereon himself to the incitement of beginners.

A new era is about to dawn on the golfing links; the old stars are paling; when will others arise? Hugh Philp, who knew how to make a club, is gone; gone, too, fine Allan, who knew how to handle one.

Up to the spring of the present year, Allan was a hale, stout little man, with scarcely the memory of an hour's illness. Temperate, too, in an uncommon degree, regular in his habits, and enjoying daily exercise on the links; no one could reasonably foretell the rapid change that has taken him from us. In the spring, Allan had an attack of jaundice, proceeding, we believe, from an abnormal state of the liver. He never rallied; and after six

months' weakness, he gradually sunk, and died on the 1st of September. God rest him, noble golfer, excellent companion—we will not easily see his like again.

We have already noticed how impossible it is, especially with imperfect means of information, to give a consecutive or full account of the champion's feats, but we subjoin a few, in hopes that this meagre outline may testify, in some small way, to the merit, as a man and a golfer, of Allan Robertson.

1840. Allan played a grand match with Tom Alexander, ballmaker, Musselburgh, over the St. Andrews Links, in October, and beat him by 4 holes, during the round at 95.

1842. Allan and Sandy Herd, played in a double, against Tom Morris and Jamie Herd, beating them by 2 holes. Strokes 91 and 94.

1842. Allan played a match in December with Tom Morris, beating him by 2 holes, and holing the Links at 93.

1843. Allan played during the month of June, over the St. Andrews Links, a great match of twenty rounds, two each day, against William Dunn of Musselburgh. Allan gained on the tenth or last day, by two rounds and one to play.

1843. Allan played a great match of 36 holes with William Dunn of Musselburgh, beating him by 8 holes, and holing the second round at 88 strokes.

1844. Allan played a match with William Dunn, over three links; 1st, on Musselburgh Links, where Dunn gained; 2nd, at North Berwick Links, where Allan was victorious; and 3rd, at St. Andrews, where he also won, thus gaining the match also.

1846. In April, Allan played another of his matches with W. Dunn: 1st, at Musselburgh, where Dunn beat Allan by 7 a-head and 5 to play; 2nd, at St. Andrews, where Allan won by 5 and 3; and 3rd, at Leven, where he also was victor by 6 and 4 to play, thus winning the match.

1846. Allan played with a single driving club against Captain Broughton, and holed the round of the St. Andrews Links at 95.

1848. Allan played a threesome with William Dunn and Tom Morris over Dubbieside Links. Allan holed 18 holes (two rounds), at 80; Thomas Morris at 89; and Dunn, at 91 strokes.

1849. A great match for £400 was played in the summer between Allan and Tom Morris against the two Dunns of Musselburgh, on three links, Musselburgh, St. Andrews, and North Berwick. At Musselburgh the

Dunns won at a canter, winning by 13 holes and 12 to play. At St. Andrews, however, Allan and Tom won their rounds, and retrieved some two or three holes. North Berwick was the deciding place, and at the commencement of the *last round of all*, the Dunns had four holes a head, and only eight to play. However, Allan and Tom, 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.

1850. In October Allan and Tom Morris played over the St. Andrews Links a foursome against the two Dunns for £50 a-side. Allan and his partner finished at the burn hole by two and one to play, holing at 88.

1852. In October, over the St. Andrews Links, Allan and Tom Morris played a great match of 36 holes with Robert Hay, Esq., and William Dunn, Blackheath, for £100 a-side. Allan and his partner won by six holes a-head and five to play.

1853. In October, over the St. Andrews Links, Allan played a round with Captain John Campbell Stewart, 72nd Highlanders, winner at that meeting of the Royal Medal.

This round was halved, though Allan was three a-head and 4 to play, and dormy at the Burn.

At this time, also, Sir Thomas Moncrieffe and Allan played Tom Morris and Captain Fairlie. The first round was won by Allan and his partner, at 3 and 1 to play; and the second by their adversaries, at 4 and three to play. This foursome was played repeatedly, and on the whole play it may be said to have formed one of the closest matches on record.

1857. Allan and Andrew Strath, in May, over the St. Andrews Links, played a round against Tom Morris and Park junior, winning by six holes. Strokes, 84 and 90.

1858. On the 15th September, Allan, in a round with Mr. Bethune of Blebo, accomplished the round of the St. Andrews Links at 79 strokes, a number altogether unparalleled, and likely to remain so. The following are the particulars of this superb score:—Going out—1 in 4; 2 in 4; 3 in 4; 4 in 5; 5 in 5; 6 in 6; 7 in 4; 8 in 4; 9 in 4. Total, going out, 40. Coming in—10 in 4; 11 in 3; 12 in 5; 13 in 6; 14 in 4; 15 in 5; 16 in 5; 17 in 4; 18 in 3. Total, coming in, 39.

At various times Allan has holed the St. Andrews Links at the following numbers, selecting his best holes:—Going out—1 in 3 strokes; 2 in 3; 3 in 3; 4 in 3; 5 in 4; 6 in 4; 7 in 3; 8 in 1; 9 in 3. Total, 27. Coming in—10

in 3; 11 in 2; 12 in 3; 13 in 4; 14 in 4; 15 in 3; 16 in 3; 17 in 4; 18 in 3. Total, 29. Number of strokes to this selected round, 56.