

CHAPTER X

MERE ANECDOTAGE

“Forty years old, growing older and older
Short as a wind but in memory long.”

YES, in memory long ! That is what you, reader, will come to be also, if permitted like me to reach the threescore years and ten of the Psalmist. It is no sort of use to grumble over growing old, but one may pick and choose amid the lengthening scroll of one's memory and dwell by preference on the most cheerful of its contents. The generations pass, but the everlasting comedy of youth and age is repeated, and to be the elderly treasurer of a golf club where your committee consists mostly of young men under twenty-one has certain compensations.

For instance, I remember how about the end of the last century there was a certain reverend and very highly distinguished professor, not himself a golfer, whose schoolboy sons used to play over the course in the holidays. The club fees were then, I think, 5/- a week for this privilege, which of course during the long holidays comes to a tidy sum ; and the professor's wife wrote to the treasurer to know if the club would not let her boys

have the use of their course on somewhat easier terms.

His reply was to the effect that if the professor even though he was not himself a golfer, cared to become a member of the club he, the treasurer, would gladly try to get the club's consent to allow his two boys to play free; and accordingly at the next meeting, after reading out the correspondence to a roomful of undergraduates forming the committee, he observed that he had drafted a rule which he thought would meet the case and begged to submit it accordingly.

This suggestion being met with favour, he proceeded to read out his proposed new rule, which began thus:

"Rule XXI. That the privilege of using the club links be extended during the vacations to the sons of members under eighteen years of age . . ."

The first sentence was never finished, being drowned in an electric burst of laughter from his young friends; and as the elderly treasurer looked up, beaming at them through his spectacles, it dawned on him that there was something about the wording of his draft that was quite too much for the gravity of irresponsible undergraduates. They passed his new rule, however, all right, but it was passed in a somewhat hastily amended form.

The relations between father and son must always have a peculiar interest for an audience made up of young men, who, far from earning their own living, are dependent on a paternal allowance. Just then the club was parting with its professional

he was a celebrated ex-champion of the great world of golf, and the club had promoted to the vacant place a very promising golfer, a young man who had been the assistant professional; he was a local youth whose old father happened to be employed in the professional's shop as a club-repairer. Now the committee had made a practice of allowing the departing ex-champion, in addition to his wages, the half-time services of a boy who was paid entirely by the club but worked in the afternoons in the shop for the benefit of the professional. This privilege had not hitherto been extended to the newly promoted assistant, who appealed to the treasurer about it. "Very well," said the latter, "I am quite willing you should have it, but I think your best plan will be to write me a letter saying exactly what you wish us to do, and I will bring the matter before the next meeting of the committee."

The letter was duly written, and the treasurer, after telling the committee about it in his own words, said: "Of course there is a certain complication in the matter, so perhaps I had better read you in full exactly what our young professional has to say about it himself."

Accordingly he read out the letter, which, after recounting the extra help in the shop which had previously been allowed to the departed ex-champion, went on to say: "You see, sir, that I am left with only my father to work under me in the shop, and as I cannot very well discharge him

That sentence likewise was drowned in inextinguishable laughter. The delicate point about the difficulty of firing cut the pater' tickled irresistibly the committee of juveniles so that they fairly exploded. However, they assented most sympathetically to the newly-made pro.'s application, and he was duly allowed "half a boy's time."

Golf has so completely conquered the country now that the younger generation mostly get hold of the elements of the game in childhood; but twenty years ago it was quite otherwise and tall, powerful athletes, coming up from school to the 'Varsity, knew almost nothing of golf. I remember once, when I was striking off to the eleventh hole on the Cowley course, which is the nearer of the two University courses at Oxford, a couple of raw undergraduates were just playing to the fourth, which is exactly parallel to the eleventh hole but is played in the opposite direction, so that a badly pulled shot at either hole will leave the ball in the fairway of the other. I was walking to my ball after the drive, when I saw one of the men who were playing to the fourth turn considerably to his own left, march to where I expected mine to lie, and whack a ball from there into a yawning bunker. When I hurried to where my ball should most certainly have been lying, no ball whatever was to be seen, and I called after him with some severity, "I'm afraid you've played my ball, sir."

Back came the indignant denial "No, indeed, sir. I've done nothing of the sort"

Then came 'whack' at the poor thing reposing helpless in the bunker below him, and 'whack' again, and then a third blow which fetched the victim of wrath out on to the green. Meantime, not finding mine, I hurried after the culprit, stopped him as he was preparing for yet another blow, pointed to the woefully scarred ball, and said, "If you'll look at that thing I think you'll find my initials on it." He stopped and picked it up.

"Oh, so it is! I say, sir, I'm awfully sorry! I hadn't the least idea! And I've knocked it about frightfully! Look here, sir, here another

"and the ingenuous youth, diving into a side pocket, produced a brand-new ball which he tried hard to get me to accept. I believe he was really contrite, and dismissed him with my blessing.

The Oxford atmosphere is sometimes accused of fostering rather alarming socialistic tendencies among its youth, and it is true that the doctrine of community of goods finds a certain acceptance with junior members of the University. I remember once walking up to the club-house on the old Hinksey links, the first day of term, just to see how things were. Not many of the young men had come up to the course so soon, but one of those that had done so was an undergraduate whose native heath was Hoylake, the second-best course in England, and who occasionally condescended to give me a liberal allowance of strokes and a beating.

"Would you care for a game, sir?" he asked, seeing me there without a partner

"Very much," I replied, "but I've been away for the vacation and I haven't brought my clubs with me to-day."

"Oh" said he, "if you didn't mind playing with strange clubs I think I could fit you out"; and I watched him pop into one undergraduate locker after another, extracting a driver here, a brassy rhere, and a variety of irons elsewhere, till he had got together a goodly set. "Perhaps these might suit you sir," he smiled, "and when we could have a round."

We had it, and I only hope that if ever the lawlful owners got these clubs back they found them not very much the worse for wear. Nor is it undergraduates alone who play a part in our eternal comedy of youth and age. Caddy boys also come on to the stage; though at Oxford we do not have many of them, as the younger men mostly prefer to carry their own clubs. I knew once a professor who went out for a game with a friend, both of them being Irish and (occasionally) given to picturesque exaggeration. They struck off; and their performances were anything but brilliant, it must be confessed, at the first couple of holes; and then as they walked to the third tee the professor gaily remarked, "I shan't be able to give you anything of a match to-day, old chap, I was beastly drunk last night."

"You don't come that over me," retorted his friend. "Last night I was at a College Gaudy and I had a good skinful of champagne." And then it suddenly dawned on him that to-day as it

chanced he had taken out a caddy, a very rare thing with him. And remembering also Horace's famous line, "Maxima debetur puero reverentia." He turned sharp round to the smug-faced urchin at his heels with, "We don't really mean it, you know."

"Oh, NO, sir," came the prompt answer of the wily infant; but the unbelieving grin with which he uttered those three words revealed the real opinion of his class as to the true moral character of senior members of the University Golf Club.

A MILLION TO ONE

Hurrah for the tee's flat stand,
Your ball on its pinch of sand,
The slow back swing,
The loose wrist fling,
And the drive which is simply grand!

Hurrah for that second clean
From a lie just fit for a Queen
With the best club you've got,
When a lightning shot
Lays the ball right there on the green

Hurrah for the long putt free,
The putt that's meant to be
Down all the way,
Let come what may;
And that four hole done in three!

Ah would it were ever thus,
When you never need make a fuss
Bunkered heavy in sand,
Other bunkers a hand,
And nothing to do but cuss.

You count up your hopeless score :
 Already you've played two more :
 Your opponent grins
 While you think of your' sins,
 But remember you've been there before !

And miracles happen in golf
 Sometimes even when you are off
 It's a million to one,
 Ye' the thing has been done,
 Flying out with a nib'ick loft.

Then here's to the glorious game
 That never is twice the same ;
 May we all of us play
 Till our final day
 And then not fail of our aim.