

V A N I T Y F A I R

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The First Sports Clothes

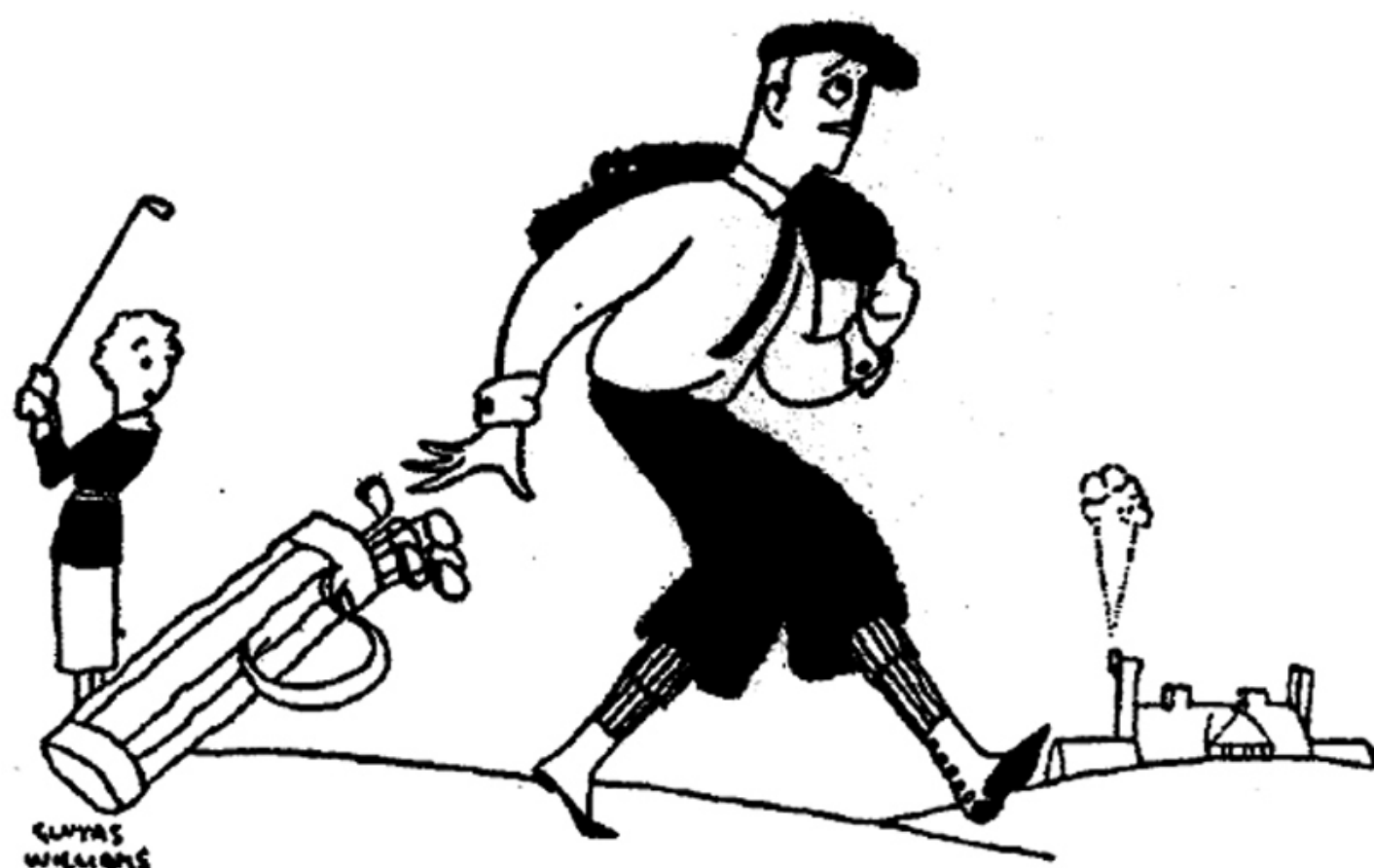
By CHARLES EVANS, Jr.

(an excerpt from a longer article by Mr. Evans titled, "The Royal and Ancient Game")

WE are told, how truthfully I cannot say, that the game of golf originated with simple shepherds playing along bleak Scottish coasts. Their clubs were crooked sticks picked up in a not over-forested region; their balls were rounded stones rather carefully selected from the large collections beside the sea, or from those so plentifully bestrewn over the soil that has made Scotland famous. They were not over-particular, I take it, about the size, and weight, and composition of those balls, their choice being a forced approximation.

As for their clubs, nothing much could have been said about them. Of course the location of knots, or crooks, may have been a disturbing feature and have occasioned as much spirited discussion as do the respective merits and demerits of smooth-faced, scored, or ribbed irons.

Neither does history tell us whether those primitive shepherds quarreled about the size of the hole into which the roundish stone was driven. It is also strangely silent as to whether anyone besides the player ever com-



plained about the shape of the crooked stick, or feared peevishly that another had been able to pick up a golf shot in a thicket of wood instead of working for it beside a sandy, wind-swept shore. All that we are told is that it was the shepherds playing on lonely places in Scotland who began the game that has spread overseas to the cultivated courses of America, where those of us who cannot play good golf can at least enjoy ourselves in quarreling violently over the rules.

ANOTHER important thing forgotten in the history of that period of golf is the costume. Nothing is said as to whether it was suited to the game, or to the comfort of the men and boys who watched the huddling sheep. In

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fancy we can see them, however, rather uncouth creatures in crude, unfashionable garments, enwrapped in grey mists and sheltering themselves with a plaidie against the bitter winds.

An American humorist has told us that history is always true, for, if it isn't true, it is not history. All that golf history has done for us at this time is to give us a hint, and we must fill out the picture according to our imaginations. The unfortunate truth, from which we are now suffering, is that Jock and Sandy did not write for the papers. The golf writer had not then been evolved.

After the Shepherd Period there is a long gap. Strange, is it not?—that every system of evolution has a missing link, and golf evolution has several large ones. We have that striking picture of lonely shepherds playing with crooked sticks, while silly sheep look on. Then there is nothing. It was as if the game enshrouded in Scottish mists had been swept off into the sea.



Unexpectedly, with a terrible suddenness, we are ushered into the Royal Period of golf. It has always seemed to me that

this was too abruptly done, there is too great a break in continuity, and too great a strain put upon one's faith in history. But kings began to play golf. Maybe the Scottish shepherds taught them for an ample consideration. We hear of a beautiful Scottish Queen who was supposed to have forgotten a sick husband while she played golf with an interesting Duke (let us hope that he played better than the Dukes I have known) on a pleasant landscape outside a castle.

That has a modern sound if one leaves out the titles. Many a good American husband has forgotten a sick wife while he played golf on an interesting suburban links; and many a good American wife has forgotten home and family while she fought her way to a championship on the same inviting spot. Mary's forgetfulness seems to have rendered golf unpopular in Scotland for awhile. That is another thing I have never quite understood, for, when Mary renounced golf to please her subjects, very shortly after her husband was blown up, house and all. It would seem that he was safer when she forgot him for the sake of a good and humanizing game.

The little trouble in the Royal household proved to be but a minor setback, and we soon hear of royalty playing again, Mary's descendants, being true Scotsmen, seeming particularly fond of the game. Son, grandson, and great grandson, they were all golfers.

Then at a much later date when the late King Edward was Prince of Wales he gave the game his princely sanction, and played it at St. Andrews, where it was flourishing, and golf rules were becoming an interesting sporting science.

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I have never been able to discover how well the King played the Royal game. A King's score at golf seems a matter of polite mystery, and even the frankest Scottish caddie never tells us how badly the Royal Golfer played, and that is stating an almost inconceivable thing.

Royalty did, however, dress up the game. It gave us the brilliant garments that golf captains wear in Britain. When I first went abroad I thought that I had never seen more splendid creatures. And the modern golf costume is a thing of mode and cut. The Shepherd's game had become fashionable, aristocratic—just right for America. About that time a certain number of us had a good deal of money, and we were trying to forget the fur-traders, the ferryboatmen, the butchers and blacksmiths and peddlers who had founded our family fortunes. We were hunting coats



of arms, building imitation feudal castles, and we were fairly aching for a game that common people could not play. Polo was all right, and properly expensive, but every man was not obsessed with an ambition to break a neck, or leg, or otherwise injure some necessary part of his body. Then, too, the words "Royal and Ancient" had never been attached to Polo, and when one thinks of it they *are* intriguing words. Ancient, I suppose, because of the shepherds who forgot their sheep for a little while, and Royal because of the Kings and Princes who laid aside the burdens of their station for a tiny space of time, and interested themselves solely with the strange vagaries of a diminutive feather-stuffed ball. Often since then, have kings and presidents forgotten the almost unbearable sorrows of the big globe, while following with a careful eye the many vicissitudes of the little one.