

ON HUNTING GOLF BALLS

One may peruse the sport page of every newspaper, the most glamorous chronicles of Olympian games, but nowhere is listed that noble sport, the one most dear to me, the sport of hunting golf balls. To the multitude it is something unheard of, to the athlete a childish pastime, but to me it is the peak of excitement, the essence of sport, the sport of kings. Those unskilled in the practice of this game would no doubt deny the presence of breathless moments, thrilling plays, or any excitement whatever that would make an enthusiastic crowd of spectators gasp in awe and wonder. Skeptics are objects of my heart-felt sympathy. To say this game is the height of excitement is to put it mildly.

To walk along in the lush green sward where the irate golfers slice that maddening ball, to come upon that glistening white sphere resting peacefully on its grassy bed, to pick it up and turn it around, noting its pearl-white cover and flawless surface, that is indeed excitement. While you are admiring the ball, your companion, for there always is a companion, draws near to inspect it, and with envious eyes notes its beauty. Long does he gaze at it, reluctantly does he return it, and, uttering a deep sigh, goes back to his hunting. To make this game more exciting, often you have a race to see who will be the first to find a ball. The winner, as a prize, receives all the balls which the unlucky loser finds that day. You pick a likely hunting place and, at a given signal, glue your eyes to the ground and the game is on. Side by side you crash through the brush, tramp down bushes, or wade the muddy bottoms of the creeks, eager to win the prize. Luck comes your way; you see that ball under some hedge or feel it with your foot, and with shaking hand you snatch it up; your companion starts at your sudden move, hastens to see the ball, then accepts defeat with a woeful air.

In aiding the golfer to retrieve his lost golf-ball, the golf-ball hunter has an etiquette, or I might say a code of gentlemanly rules, entirely of his own making. While peering about the stump of some fallen tree, you hear a vague whistling, the thud of something striking a tree, and down the ball drops to lie hidden in the grass. You mark its position and wander aimlessly about at some distance. The golfer, midst a great rattling of clubs,

invades your hunting grounds and immediately casts upon your so-engrossed personage a suspicious glance.

"Did you see my ball around here, son?" he asks. With a surprised air you look up, and, with that utterly blank gaze, which only long practice may produce, you shake your head. As he taps around the hallowed spot with increasing impatience, you watch him furtively.

"Are you sure you did not see that ball, son?" he asks again, but with a much higher blood pressure. On your negative reply he stalks away. His back turned, at once you hasten to the spot, pick up the ball, and hurriedly deposit it in your pocket. Ah, the pity that such deception should enter into this great game. But then you calm your conscience by saying that, as the golfer is no doubt rich, surely he won't miss one little ball; and, thus justifying yourself, you feel at peace with the world once more.

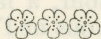
This sport, however, is not purely amateur, for certain mercenary motives give it the flavor of professionalism. You might imagine that one stores these golf-balls in some treasure-chest at home, or that they are given to the nearby farmer to encourage his chickens to lay more promptly and regularly. Unfortunately such is not the case. When one is in a state of financial embarrassment, golf-balls provide a pretty fair revenue. The ball having a split cover and cracked paint represents ten cents; the one whose surface is slightly marred and showing signs of hard usage, fifteen cents; while that having a shiny cover and a sound surface is worth twenty-five cents. Of course the amount depends a great deal upon your good salesmanship, but to acquire the finest proficiency in this art you must be fully versed in the intricacies of the game itself. Selling a ball to a feminine golfer would try the patience of Job himself. To state your mission the moment you are within the home of a prospective buyer is to show a woeful lack of tact and judgement. First, you must be very solicitous about her health, inquire if her husband is prospering, and then, with a hopeful look, ask if she has managed to decrease her score on the local course from a hundred to ninety-five. Pleased with your interested attitude, she will proudly divulge her latest score. At once you marvel at such low figures and then suggest very casually that she will no doubt win the Ladies' Open Championship of the following year. Prompted by this thrust, she needs must tell of her won-

derful golfing achievements, her long drives, her deadly approach shots, her uncanny knack of playing par golf consistently, until she has imagined herself to be making scores at least twenty strokes below the average. At this moment, you ask if she would mind looking at three or four golf-balls that you happened to find that day. In her excitement, she is blind to all their defects; she only sees their shining surfaces, and, assuring herself that she is getting the better of the bargain, will hand you a dollar.

Fortunately, when one is selling these balls, all customers are not so apt to sour one's disposition as are the so-called weaker sex. Selling golf balls to most men is indeed a pleasure unless you meet one who is, to quote the modern term, golf goofy. Men of this type must tell you of every shot they have made during that season, and you may be sure there are never any poor ones, until they grow so boring and tiresome that scarcely are you able to refrain from throttling them. After dealing with such men, the man who glances over them once, hands you your money and bids you good-day is, to say the least, a soothing balm to your sorely tried good-nature. He is indeed a heaven-sent person who makes this marketing of golf-balls a profitable pleasure and not a distasteful drudgery. And so this sport of kings is rendered commonplace by the economic law of supply and demand.

Ah, well, one must have stimulus for all great pursuits.

—B.L.H., '33



Books, to judicious compilers, are useful; to particular arts and professions, they are absolutely necessary; to men of real science, they are tools; but more are tools to them.—*Johnson*.

What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just;
And he but naked, though locked up in steel
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.

—*Shakespeare*