

The Golfer's Rubáiyát

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I

WAKE! for the sun has driven in equal flight
The stars before him from the Tee of Night,
And holed them every one without a Miss,
Swinging at ease his gold-shod Shaft of Light

II

WAKE, Loiterer! for already Dawn is seen
With her red marker on the eastern Green,
And summons all her Little Ones to change
A joyous Three for every sad Thirteen.

III

AND as the Cock crew, those who stood before
The first Tee murmur'd: "Just this chance to score,
You know how little while we have to play,
And, once departed, may return no more."

IV

NOW the fresh Year, reviving old Desires,
The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,
Pores on this Club and That with anxious eye,
And dreams of Rounds beyond the Rounds of Liars.

V

CAMPBELL indeed is past with all his Fame,
And old Tom Morris now is but a name;
But many a Jamie by the Bunker blows,
And many a Willie rules us, just the same.

VI

A THOUSAND lips are lockt; but still in hoar
High-balling Andrew's Shrine, with "Fore, fore, fore!
Oh, fore!" the Golfer to the Duffer cries,
That reddened cheek of his to redden more.

VII

COME, choose your Ball, and in the fire of Spring
Your Red Coat, and your wooden Putter fling;
The Club of Time has but a little while
To waggle, and the Club is on the swing.

VII

WHETHER at Musselburgh or Shinnecock,
In motley Hose or humbler motley Sock,
The Cup of Life is ebbing Drop by Drop,
Whether the Cup be filled with Scotch or Bock.

IX

EACH Morn a thousand Matches brings, you say;
Yes, but who plays the Match of Yesterday?
And this first Summer month of opening Greens
Shall take this Championship and That away.

X

WELL, let it take them! What have we to do
With Championships, or, Champion, with you?
Let This or Other struggle as he will,
For him alone the Strife—for him to rue.

XI

WITH me along the strip of sandy Down
That just divides the Desert from the sown,
Where name of Shop and Study is forgot,—
And Peace to Croker on his golden Throne!

XII

A BAG of Clubs, a Silver-Town or two,
A Flask of Scotch, a Pipe of Shag—and Thou
Beside me caddying in the Wilderness—
Ah, Wilderness were Paradise enow.

XIII

SOME for the weekly Handicap; and some
Sigh for a greater Championship to come:
Ah, play the Match, and let the Medal go,
Nor heed old Bogey with his wretched Sum.

XIV

LOOK to the blowing Rows about us—“Lo,
“Strolling,” they say, “over the course we go,
“And here or there we lightly flick the Ball,
“Turn, and the Trick is done—in So-and-so.”

XV

BUT those who keep their Cards and turn them in,
And those who weekly Handicaps may win,
Alike to no such aureate Fame are brought,
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

XVI

THE shining Cup men set their hearts upon
Is lost to them—or won them; and anon,
Like a good Three set in a bald Three-score,
That Glory gleams a moment—and is gone.

XVII

THINK, in this worn, forlorn old Field of Play,
Whose Green-keepers in turn are Night and Day,
How Champion after Champion with his Pomp
Abode his destin'd Hour and went his way.

XVIII

THEY say the Female and the Duffer strut
On sacred Greens where Morris used to putt;
Himself a natural Hazard now, alas!
That nice Hand quiet now, that great Eye shut.

XIX

I SOMETIMES think that never springs so green
The Turf as where some Good Fellow has been,
And every emerald Stretch the Fair Green shows
His kindly Tread has known, his sure Play seen.

XX

AND this reviving Herb whose tender green
Muffles the fair white Sphere o'er which we lean,
Ah, curse it gently, for here Jamie once—
Great Jamie—lay, and fetch'd a bad Thirteen.

XXI

AH, my Belovéd, play the Round that offers
TO-DAY some joy, whate'er To-morrow suffers:
To-morrow!—why, to-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Duffers.

XXII

AND some we loved, the feeblest with a Club,
Ordain'd to scloff, to fozzle, and to flub,
Have turned in Cards a Round or two before,
And played that final Green without a Rub.

XXIII

AND we that now make merry on the Green
They left, and Summer dresses in new sheen,
Ourselves must we beneath the springing Turf
Add our Ell to the Bunker of Has-been.

XXIV

AH, make the most of what we yet may spend
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into dust, and under Dust to lie,
Sans Breath, sans Golf, sans Golfer, and—sans End!

XXV

ALIKE for those who for TO-DAY prepare,
And those who after some TO-MORROW stare,
A Keeper from the Links of Darkness cries
Fools, your Reward is neither Here nor There.

XXVI

WHY, all the Toms and Jamies who discuss'd
Of the True Art so wisely—they are thrust
Like foolish prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

XXVII

MYSELF when young did eagerly frequent
Jamie and His, and heard great argument
Of Grip and Stance and Swing; but evermore
Found at the Exit but a Dollar spent.

XXVIII

WITH them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand sought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—
“You hold it This Way, and you swing it So.”

XXIX

PATIENT I fared to many a sacred Spot,
Ev'n at the Shrine of Andrew cast my lot,
And many a Knot unravel'd by the Road;
But not, alas! of Golf the Master-knot.

XXX

THERE was a Green for which I found no Tee,
And a blind Bunker which I might not see:
Out of the distant Dark a Voice cries "Fore!"
And then—and then no more of Thee and Me.

XXXI

AS then the Sparrow for his morning Crumb,
Do thou each Morrow to the First Tee come,
And play thy quiet Round, till crusty Age
Condemn thee to a hopeless Dufferdom.

XXXII

PERPLEXT no more with Where or How or Why,
Thy easy fingers to the Shaft apply,
Content to send away a fair straight Ball,
Though follow'd earthward by the naked Eye.

XXXIII

AND if the Ball you drive, the Shaft you press,
End in what all begins and ends in—Yes;
Thank Heav'n you play TO-DAY as YESTERDAY
You play'd—TO-MORROW you shall not do less.

XXXIV

GLAD if the Master of the Handicap
At last shall find you come without Mishap,
Though without Glory, to turn in the Card
He has expected of your sort of Chap.

XXXV

WHAT though a Fluke should fling your Class aside,
And Best Gross be your momentary pride:
Are you a Golfer more than when last week
You did YOUR best, and barely saved your Hide?

XXXVI

'TIS like a private Bar where for a Day
Innumerable Rickies come your way,
Happy—but on the morrow happier far
Had there been less to drink and more to pay.

XXXVII

AND fear not lest the Fair Green after your
Ill-luck and mine should yield Bad Lies no more;
One or two Others may fare ill as you:
Nay, even three, or maybe—maybe four.

XXXVIII

WHEN you and I our final Match have play'd,
Think not the ever-springing Green shall fade;
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds
As Caddies heed the Bag,—their Quarter paid.

XXXIX

A MOMENT'S Flight—a momentary Flick
Of Being from the Providential Stick,
And Lo!—the phantom human Sphere has reacht
The Nothing it set out from—Ah, be quick!

XL

WOULD you that Phillip of Existence spend
About THE SECRET—quick about it, Friend!
A Hair perhaps divides the False and True,
And upon what, prithee, does this Golf depend?

XLI

A HAIR perhaps divides the False and True,
Yes, and a single Jamie were the Clue—
Could you but find him—to the Championship,
And peradventure to the Champion too.

XLII

AND yet what matter who a Moment reigns?
'Tis not for such a Toy you take your pains;
To play the steady, simple, honest Game;
That is the Joy and Credit that remains.

XLIII

BEHIND the uprisen Turf fair in the Ditch,
To risk the Overhang, or play back—which
To do? Ah, Brother, let the Gallery go:
Than tear the Web, better to drop a Stitch!

XLIV

TWO—Three—aye, better Golf we all have seen—
But—bravo! Four—a sweet Approach and Clean;
Steady, you still may well go down in Five:
There are no Hazards on the Putting-Green.

XLV

WASTE not your Hour, nor try in vain to fix
The How and Why—some wondrous Brew to mix;
Better be jocund with a calm Two-score
Than sadden for a bitter Thirty-six.

XLVI

STRANGE, is it not?—that of the myriads who
Into the Out-of-Bounds have late play'd through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Stroke
To guarantee the shortest Hole in Two.

XLVII

THE Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes,
And ye who play behold the Ball fly clean,
Or roll a Rod; but why? Who knows? Who knows?

XLVIII

THE swinging Brassie strikes; and, having struck,
Moves on: nor all your Wit or future Luck
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Stroke,
Nor from the Card a single Seven pluck.

XLIX

NO hope by Club or Ball to win the Prize:
The batter'd, blacken'd Re-made sweetly flies,
Swept cleanly from the Tee; this is the truth:
Nine-tenths is Skill, and all the rest is Lies.

L

AND that inverted Ball they call the High—
By which the Duffer thinks to live or die,
Lift not your hands to It for help, for it
As impotently froths as you or I.

LI

OF Earth's first Clay was the last Golfer framed,
And that last Golfer's latest Score was named
When the first Morning of Creation sang
The Dirge of every Duffer Golf has claimed.

LII

YESTERDAY this Day's Foozling did prepare;
TO-MORROW'S Slicing will not yield to Prayer:
Play! for you know not whence you came, nor why:
Play! for you know not why you go, nor where.

LIII

I TELL you this—When, after youth was past,
A kindly Heav'n gave me to Golf at last;
No Freedom but I gladly barter'd for
The satisfying Bond that holds me fast.

LIV

AND this I know: there is a Charm about
The quiet State of Golf, tho' fools may flout,
That with its magic has unlock'd the Door
Of Happiness they only howl without.

* * * *

LV

AS under cover of departing Day
Slinks the defeated Duffer on his way,
Once more within the Maker's house alone
I stood, surrounded by the Tools of Play.

LVI

CLUBS of all Sorts and Sizes, great and small,
That stood along the floor and by the wall;
And some old batter'd Veterans were; and some
Had swung perhaps, but never driv'n at all.

LVII

SAID one among them—"Surely not for naught
Tom Morris fashion'd me with anxious thought,
Has not my Form won many a Match and Cup?
And yet—and yet—I am no longer bought."

LVIII

THEN said a Second—"Hear the Codger croak!
Sure he would make of Golf an ancient Joke;
But Me—just think! a modern Willie Park,
My fickle Owner cannot sell nor soak!"

LIX

AFTER a momentary silence spake
A Brassie of a more ungainly make—
“They sneer at me for leaning all awry:
Well, then, I ask who won the last Sweepstake?”

LX

WHEREAT some one of the loquacious Lot,
I think a putting Niblick, or if not,
A driving Putter, or a goose-neck'd Cleek—
“Pray, what is Golf then,—and the Golfer what?”

LXI

“WHY,” said another, “Some there are who say
That Golf is but a Game that Golfers play,
And some that Life is but a mighty Green,
And Golf the Art to use it day by day.”

LXII

“WELL,” murmur'd one, “let whoso make or buy,
All in one Pickle we—like as we lie:
For let the right Good-Fellow come along,
We all may lay the Ball dead by and by.”

LXIII

SO one and one and one I heard them speak:
“Ah, Friends,” said I, “'tis not a Make we seek,
A Duffer arm'd with all the Clubs there be—
What is he to a Player with a Cleek?”

* * * *

LXIV

LATELY, agape beside the door of Fame,
Sudden a Touch upon my shoulder came,
And thro' the Dusk an Angel Shape held out
The greater Guerdon; and it was—the Game!

LXV

THE Game that can with Logic absolute
The Dronings of the Soberheads confute,
Silence the scoffing ones, and in a trice
Life's leaden metal into Gold transmute.

LXVI

INDEED, the brave Game I have loved so well
Has little taught me how to buy or sell;
Has pawn'd my Greatness for an Hour of Ease,
And barter'd cold Cash for—a Miracle.

LXVII

INDEED, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore—but it was Winter when I swore,
And then and then came Spring, and Club-in-hand
I hasten'd forth for one Round—one Round more.

LXVIII

BUT much as Golf has play'd the Infidel,
And robb'd me of my worldly Profit—Well,
I often wonder what the Grubbers earn
One half so precious as the Joy they sell.

LXIX

WHAT! for a senseless Bank-Account to wreak
Their manly Strength on Ledgers, till too weak
To swing a club?—So Caddies calmly tread
In Mire the Ball Heav'n sent them here to seek.

LXX

WHAT! as a poor dull Drudge to waste the Force
That might have made a Golfer, till the Source
Of Golf be dried—and Life grow all too brief
To top a Ball around the Ladies' Course!

LXXI

YET, ah, that Golf should vanish with the green!
What noble matches Winter might have seen;
And in Old Age what glorious Hazards foil'd,
What Zest of painful Pleasures might have been!

LXXII

WOULD but the dim Face of old Winter yield
One glimpse of green, like Youth to Age reveal'd,
Thro' which once more the failing Limbs might spring
As springs the trampled Herbage of the Field.

LXXIII

AH! with the Green my fading life provide,
Some ancient golfing Crony by my side:
Content to play one Round, or, meeker still,
To mix a gentle Foursome satisfied.

LXXIV

THAT even the wavering Remnant of the Swing
May bear some witness to my virtuous Spring,
And leave no True-believer passing-by
Unedified by its Admonishing.

LXXV

WOULD but the god of Golfers ere too late
Arrest the sure-advancing step of Fate,
What matter if we play the Odd or Like?
Or—if we play—hole out in Four or Eight?

LXXVI

AH, let the Honor go to Fate, and let
All difficulties by that Crack be met;
The Duffer still may win a Half or two,
Content while Fate is only Dormie yet.

LXXVII

OR if ev'n this be taken, you and I
May still fare onward calmly, honestly,
Nor care how many Down the Record stand:
The Match is over—Let us play the Bye!

LXXVIII

YON rising Moon that leads us Home again,
How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
How oft hereafter rising wait for us
At this same Turning—and for *One* in vain.

LXXIX

AND when, like her, my Golfer, I have been
And am no more above the pleasant Green,
And you in your mild Journey pass the Hole
I made in One—ah! pay my Forfeit then!

TAMÁM