

A QUESTION OF COLOUR

THE course is over some hundreds of acres of pasture land. The land is undulating and 'in good heart', which means that having driven at the direction post on the sky-line and seen the ball deviate by a foot or two in its flight the player hands his driver to his caddy, takes out a niblick, and goes forward to search the luxurious vegetation which lines the fairways. A quarry or two add further perils to the player pursuing uncharted ways, a copse here and there, sombrely obtrusive, absorbs ball after ball with rattling echoes of derision, and impenetrable boundary hedges mean stroke, distance, and ball.

Time was in the early days when the founders and original members thought a day's golf on their own course very good fun. They brought packets of sandwiches for lunch, and Joe the green-keeper and staff, kept a stock of bottled beer in the shanty. The greens one could see because they were kept cut shorter than the fairways hewed through the rough. Besides, they had white calico flags on canes stuck in the holes.

But with an ever-growing membership the old order passed; new members brought new ideas; sub-committees to deal with this and that was formed; progress and improvements saw large tracts of 'ground under repair' in the fairways, temporary greens continually in use, and, in fact all the disgruntling features attendant upon a course being 'brought up to modern standards'. And the committees, as is the way of committees, served their allotted periods and were replaced by new committees with entirely divergent views from those of their predecessors, and though the work went on apace the progress of modernisation often marked time with its back to the goal.

But the real battlefields of scientific shock tactics were the greens. Old features disappeared, new bunkers opened up, agendas frothed and bubbled in the heat of controversies; but, nourished or starved, watered or top-dressed, the greens remained 'in good heart' — except where various fertilizers had left bare patches — flaunting their patchwork coverings of verdant hues: yarrow, clover, pearlwort, the occasional plantain appearing, it would seem, in a night; buttercups and daisies in season, and here and there some grass.

The course was on the outskirts of a university town and in due time there grew up two strong factions, the town and the university staff, and at a time when the war of the greens was in its bitterest phase there were elected to the committee two professors of science. And they listened in silence for a while as the floods of eloquence, flavoured with vituperation and fertilizers, swirled round the room. When for a moment the floods were stilled, one of them spoke:

"You've only got to render the soil acid", he said, and turning to his colleague he asked: "Don't you think so B?"

"I am not altogether in agreement with you", replied B.

And for the next hour or so the rest of the committee sat silent as the two new members fell upon each other with all the vehemence that had marked the discussions before their advent. They talked of acid intoxication of the greens by avoiding lime, nitrate of soda, and all the substances that tend to produce alkalinity.

In sonorous phrases jewelled with formulae they discovered *Plantago lanceolata* or *Sagina procumbens* in the velvet carpets promised by rival treat-

ments. Of pH or hydrogen ion concentration they argued, of sulphates of ammonia; of acid and amide-plants, which depend upon their mechanisms for assisting the toxicity of absorbed ammonia. They sprayed each other with quotations from Boussingault, Prianischnikow, and Butkewich; paragraphs from *Biochemische Zeitschrift* and *Soil Conditions and Plant Growth* flowed from them as water from the hoses on the greens they were discussing. When the chairman came up for the third time they were hard at it about the detoxication of absorbed ammonia.

"That reminds me", he said, and, banging his gavel, declared a ten-minute truce.

When the meeting reassembled it was decided by a bewildering majority that Professor A should treat the first nine greens and Professor B the last nine, according to the manner of their several beliefs.

For a while the greens, with their spring growths, appeared much as usual, then slowly, but surely, the first nine became tinged with yellow, which grew in radiance till June saw nine dazzling gamboge patches. But the last nine were a little behind with their metamorphosis, for, adopting blues as their spring mode, they finally saw the summer through in a striking cobalt.

"Looks like a railway poster", said the professional moodily going into his shop and shutting the door. And there were indeed, times when few would have been surprised to see heliotrope men playing with crimson clubs in the style of the more lurid hoarding decorations. Colonel Boreham-Steadfast quaveringly declares that he actually found himself in a bunker of bold check design, with two raving Chinamen on all fours. He'll tell you, if you like or if you don't, all about it everyday.

The astonished members became violently partisan. The whole club was split up into 'yellows', 'blues', or 'scrap the lots'. Harassed committee - men played furtive rounds in the early mor-

nings or gathering dusk to avoid the unanswerable cross-questionings to which they were subjected, and the secretary worked in secret in his bedroom, leaving a vague notice on his office door: 'Back in half an hour'.

Only the two scientists stuck unflinchingly to their witchcraft, outcasts, but happy in the confident knowledge that the other was wrong and ignoring the factions who urged them to turn the rough to heather and the elms to pines.

Then gradually the dazzling creations which had so gaily flowered died away, and by the time the gentle spring's ethereal mildness had set the new year clothing itself the greens were greens.

An article written by Peter Lawless which subsequently appeared in the *Morning Post* 30:11:33.

It seems that in his wisdom man only tampers with nature. Barring the misfortune of having two eminent scientists on the green committee has the role of the greenkeeper really altered so dramatically over the last forty odd years?

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