



Tailpiece from an illuminated "Book of Hours" in the British Museum, executed at Bruges, 1500-1520

THE GOLF BOOK OF HOURS

By THE EDITOR

WAS golf originally a Scottish game or was it an importation from the continent?

Here is a question that has held every writer who has delved in the history of the game, and among the most prominent historians, so far as I am aware, only the Rev. John Kerr and the late Garden Smith deny any other origin than a Scottish one. And their whole argument rests upon the surmise, that of club-and-ball games, the essential feature of golf, the putting of a ball into a hole, was peculiar to Scotland alone. The Rev. John Kerr in *The Golf Book of East Lothian* says: "We believe that the putting-out process, which is the essential feature of golf, and differentiates it from so many other club-and-ball games, was no borrowed idea, but an original one, and that Scotland, which has the credit of developing golf till the world has come to look upon it as worthy of universal adoption, has also the credit of giving to it the pristine features which it has never wholly lost."

To anyone who has been curious to learn something

of the history of games it is a well known fact that in the XVI and XVII centuries the continent of Europe,

and France especially, was overrun with every manner of game in which the ball plays a part. During these centuries France was the great sporting nation of the world and it is to her, more than any other nation, that the world is in debt for the games that give it enjoyment to-day. And of these ancient continental ball games the *jeu de mail* of France and the *het kolven* of Holland stand out as the ones most closely akin to our own game of golf. *Jeu de Mail!* That name is perhaps unknown to the most of you and yet it has left its mark upon the present day by naming one of the most famous streets in the world, Pall Mall, let alone the stately Mall, whose broad way is bounded on all sides by the splendors of London. And *het kolven!* Who of you have not noticed something familiar in those old Holland winter scenes, such a favorite bit of life

which the Dutch landscape artists of the XVII century were never tired of depicting. Among the myriad of figures desporting themselves upon the ice, there are



Page from a Book of Hours written and illuminated by a Flemish artist about 1510. It represents, outside of the above illustration, the only other picture of early continental golf and has an important bearing upon the history of the game
By Courtesy of E. P. Dutton & Company

GOLF ILLUSTRATED



The only picture of Dutch golf showing a ball being driven from a tee. From a copper engraving by Luiken, Amsterdam, 1719

always a few playing a game with clubs similar to our own and in attitudes that leave no doubt that the game has some kinship to our own game of golf.

Both these games possess nearly all the features of golf excepting the essential one, a hole, and it is upon this one peculiar feature that the Scottish origin of golf is hung. Not even the discovery of the illustration which heads this article had any power to sway this conviction, for, the first mention of golf in Scotland dates back to 1457, whereas, this illustration from a Book of Hours is given a date of 1500-1520. The Rev. John Kerr practically ignores its significance by stating that "we notice a tendency on the part of many to 'read into' the pictures more of modern golf than they can bear." And the late Garden Smith, lightly sets this evidence aside, rather too lightly we think, by writing in the *Royal and Ancient Game of Golf* that "The Picture is undoubtedly interesting as the sole scrap of evidence, other than Scottish, that exists of any club-and-ball game in which the mark is a hole in the ground: but its importance and significance have been absurdly overstated. . . . But the very fact that no other hint or suggestion of holing out with a club is to be found in any other Continental picture or record, at least suggests the possibility that this picture is not a representation of a Flemish game but of the Scottish golf. The Flemish artist-monk might easily have seen golf at Leith and Musselburgh. But even if the picture can be accepted as a proof that the hole was also a continental mark, or even if it were the fact that it was quite a usual and well-recognized feature in foreign club-and-ball games, that would not prove that the Scots golfers borrowed the idea."

But another "scrap of evidence" has come to light. Another Book of Hours has been discovered which throws more conclusive light upon the similarity of a continental game of the XVI century to our own game of golf. I refer you to the illustration upon the first page. What is interesting in regard to these two pictures is that both artists show the golfer as kneeling when putting and that the mark in both instances is a hole; but, most interesting of all, this new discovery shows a golfer actually at the finish of a full shot. There can be no doubt that we have here before us the earliest illustration known of an actual game of golf in progress.

The little manuscript from which this illustration is taken is described in a catalogue of an English bookseller as follows:

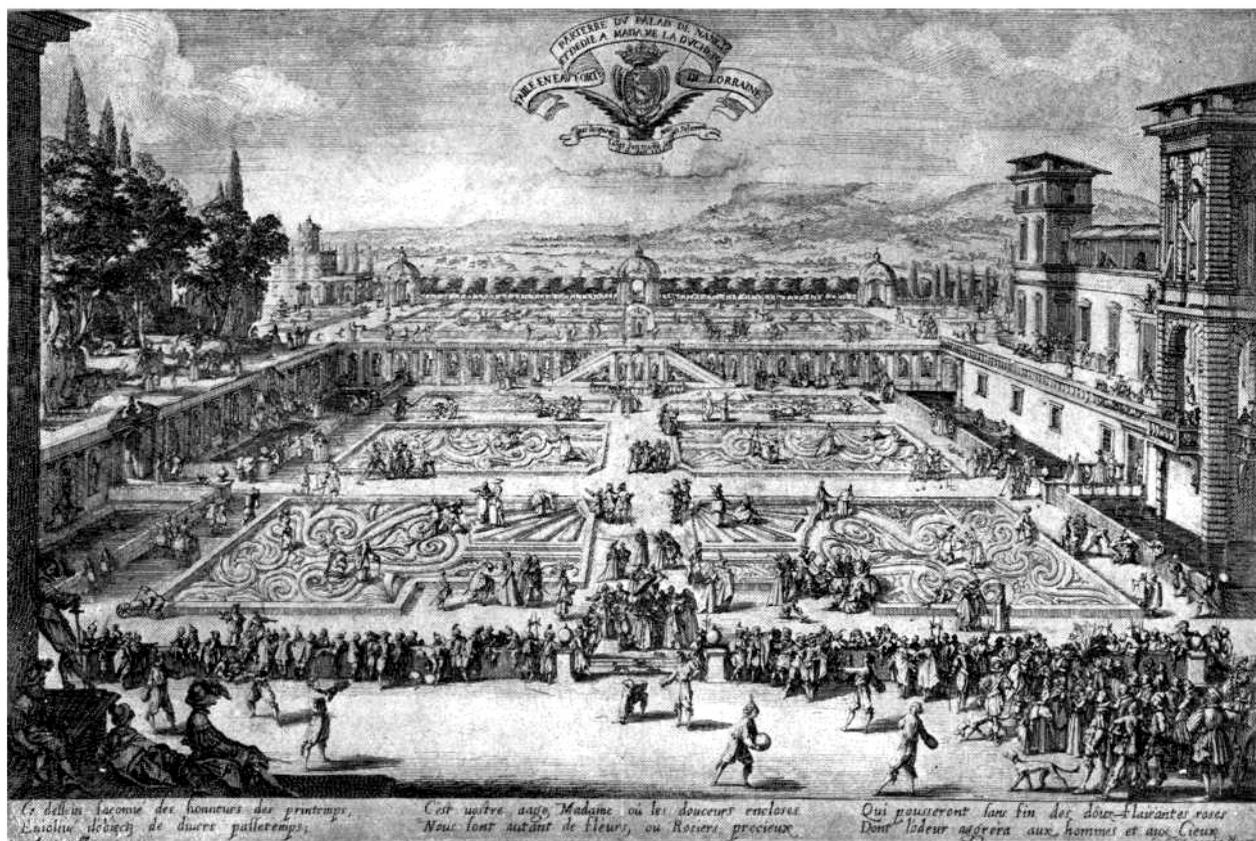
THE GOLF BOOK OF HOURS
HORAE B.V.M. AD USUM ROMANUM, cum Calendario.

MANUSCRIPT ON THE FINEST VELLUM, 16mo.
(4 ins. X 3 ins.), ff. 183, *beautifully written in a transitional gothic script with numerous small initials, 10 very fine miniatures, and 49 borders, 43 of which are historiated with drawings of sports and pastimes INCLUDING GOLF, various allegorical and historical subjects etc., each of the 24 pages of the Calendar being surrounded by a border containing a medallion with the sign of the Zodiac and a representation of the varied rural occupations of the month by a most accomplished FLEMISH artist; in a modern binding of white morocco covered with geometrical tooling inlaid in various colours in imitation of a Charles V. binding, with his device "Plus ultra" and the imperial Eagle on the sides, silver clasps, gilt gauffered edges* About A.D. 1510

An exquisite little volume which former owners have stated, and with much *vraisemblance*, to have been executed by command of the Emperor Maximilian I. for presentation to his grandson, afterwards Charles V. The reasons given for this assumption are, Firstly, the Emperor's advice to his grandson forming the first page of the volume, viz.: "*Deum time, Paupes sustie, Memento Finis,*" and secondly, the presence on p. 64 of an escutcheon bearing the device of Charles V. "*Plus ultra.*" Apart, however, from its imperial associations, the volume contains perhaps the most interesting collection of drawings of children's games and sports in existence.

It will be noted that both these manuscripts were written and illuminated by a Flemish artist. They were not done in Holland; but because of this it does not follow that they do not represent one type of *het kolven* the Dutch golf. It must be remembered that communication and travel was a very difficult undertaking on the continent in the XVI century. Such a thing as a standard of anything could not be maintained throughout the length and breadth of any country. Local customs and dialects predominated which showed themselves as much in the pastimes of the people as in anything else. Only in such pastimes as were followed by the nobility could standards be maintained for they had the wherewithal to travel and

GOLF ILLUSTRATED



THE PARTERRE AT NANCY

This etching by Jacques Callot done in 1621, shows in the foreground a game of jeu de paume in progress and along the center walk of the parterre a game of Pall Mall

took their games with them. This Dutch game of *het kolven* was evidently so popular that its devotees played it the year round and under every imaginable condition. Owing to a lack of links land, with its short grass, it was necessarily a winter game on ice in Holland. In the summer it was played along the streets and by ways of the country side, and, for more convenience, it was brought into the confines of a court which were attached to inns and took on some characteristics of its own. But this game of *het kolven* where it could be played under proper conditions in the summer time, as in Flanders, was the game of golf. Whether its origin was continental or Scottish is not for me to say.

The same remarks can be made of *jeu de mail*. There was a country form of this game which was called *chicane* played along road ways with some post, church door, etc. as an objective to reach in fewer strokes than the opponent. This game when brought to the cities was enclosed with palings in a space some 500 yards long by 50 wide and was known as the game of Pall Mall which Pepys mentions in his diary. It became further degraded when it was brought from the Pall Mall court into the house and placed upon a table becoming known in time as the game of billiards. Pall Mall proper survives to-day in the game of croquet.

The opportunity of a game surviving in its original form seems wholly dependant upon a continuance of those conditions which render its play possible, and further, whether the game as originally played was developed to such a state as to possess in the manner of its playing a holding interest. Dutch golf on the ice, because it lacked the hole of golf, has disappeared and only survives in a court game with little resemblance to its original form. *Chicane*, the country form of *jeu de mail*, was only known to be played in one place, Montpellier, France, a few years ago, and even its followers there were compelled to leave their accustomed playing grounds the roads, because of traffic, and build for themselves a number of artificial by-ways in a large field.

But our form of club-and-ball game, because it had developed to its, highest state when a hole was the objective and not a stake, rock or other land mark, gave mankind a game possessing a root idea of compelling interest. No degraded form could satisfy one who had once played it. It is therefore, first to its perfection as a game and second to the links lands of Scotland which furnished the permanent conditions to render its play possible through the hundreds of years that form its historical period that we must attribute its survival to-day. Back of that we know nothing.