

When Vardon Wore Suspenders

By O. B. KEELER

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The other day I got one of the infrequent and always fascinating and treasured letters from Anthony Spalding, 11 Wolsey Road, Ashford, Middlesex, England, this time with a lot of clippings—cuttings, in English, you know.

"You've spoken of (possibly) writing an historical story of golf," said Tony "and you may find something in these cuttings, written 30 and 40 years ago, and more. Some by Horace Hutchinson, Bernard Darwin (then just starting), A. J. Robertson in *FIELD*; some I wrote in *THE MAIL*, 1902-1906. Back in the days when A. J. Balfour said in a speech that 'the Scottification of England was taking place.' . . ."

A world of great stuff, in those "cuttings." Tony Spalding was a newspaper reporter and a golf writer a long time ago; he's the surviving reporter who covered the first political address ever made by a young sprout named Winston Churchill. He was doing golf when I first met him over there in 1926. We've sort of corresponded ever since.

And with the current switch in the golfing costume from pants back to plus-fours in this country, and all the wise-cracks on how Gene Sarazen had always stuck to the knickers, I'll just quote a few lines from Mr. Robertson in *FIELD*, written some 45 years ago, when Harry Vardon was in his prime, and the Haskell rubber-cored ball had just succeeded the gutty:

"With the red coat disappearing, except among the oldest race of players, another modification is that the knickerbocker is not so popular as it once was on the golf links, for a good many players appear to have come to the conclusion that the trouser is a far more comfortable garment. The decision, too, which has led to the discarding of the knickerbocker is not the prevalent notion, that the former wearer of the knickerbocker was glad to discard it for the trouser because there was a marked defect in the contour of his leg."

No, indeed! And the original prefer-

ence of the knickerbocker over the "trouser," for golf, was taken care of as follows:

"Hitherto, the fashion has been to cut the trouser leg too narrow and make it too tight. What the golfer seems particularly to need, especially in fine and hot weather, is plenty of width about the haunches and the thighs."

Vardon's Braces

And this naturally brought up the question of wearing "braces," or suspenders, and here the great Vardon commits himself emphatically.

"It is a curious fact that nearly all the best professionals today wear braces, no matter how important the match may be. Vardon's hint is that braces hold the shoulders together just as they ought to be for steady and successful play; an opinion in which John Henry Taylor also concurs, and one of the soundest pieces of advice given by the professionals who have studied every detail of the game. . . . An error made by the average amateur is that he has his golf clothing cut more for showing off the elegance of his form than in fitting his clothing to the free and unrestricted movements of his body."

Ah, well—and the "high collar" was disappearing at that time, among the dressy amateurs, some of whom had appeared on the links "in a stiffly starched collar almost as high as that for which Mr. Gladstone had earned notoriety in political caricature."

And the red coat? You don't remember when the aristocratic amateurs in the U. S. A. sported red coats? Ah, well, again—it went out of fashion over in Britain, too, yet—

"The wearing of the red coat was indeed a custom based on sound principles of common-sense, because it served to protect both players and spectators. . . ."

We still wear red caps, when deer-shooting. Or we ought to. Styles do change!