

A Gourlay Ball for "Golf House"

Once upon a time there lived in Scotland golfers who played with a ball made of goose feathers sewed into a leather cover, although scarcely a man now living remembers the day. The feather ball was the first ball with which golf was played but it lost its charm about 1850 after a Rev. Dr. Robert Adams Paterson had created a ball of gutta percha.

During the four or more centuries when the feather ball was in play, all balls were made painstakingly by hand in the shops of the various professionals at golf courses throughout Scotland and England. There was, of course, considerable rivalry among the makers, and those who became preeminent could never supply the demand for their particular products.

The family of professionals and ball-makers who acquired the greatest fame was named Gourlay and operated at the Bruntsfield Links, in Edinburgh, and later at the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club, in Musselburgh. The patriarch of the family was Douglas, but he passed along his art to his sons, William and John. The Gourlay name was known throughout the British Isles by the middle of the eighteenth century, and "a Gourlay" became an accepted synonym for the best in golf balls. It achieved enduring fame in poetry and song.

When exhibits of balls and clubs of the feather-ball era were established in "Golf House," the void created by the absence of "a Gourlay" became conspicuous and we set about to fill it.

On the off-chance that Miss Molly Gourlay, of Camberley, Surrey, a member of the 1932 and 1934 British Curtis Cup Teams, might be able to give us a clue, we asked her if she knew of any that might be available.

It turned out that, despite her name, Miss Gourlay had never heard of a Gour-

THE BAD GOLFER WHO WAS GOOD

"I'm a golfer, St. Peter!" the spirit proclaimed,
"And of much I have done I am truly ashamed,
I have flubbed and I've dubbed to my pitiful cost,
But I blamed not the caddie whenever I lost.

"I've sliced and I've hooked and I've been in the
rough,
Twenty years I've played golf, I've had trouble
enough!

I've cursed when in sand traps, of that there's
no doubt,
But I covered my foot prints before I went out.

"I'm a golfer, St. Peter! just one of the mutts!
My sins they are many, I've taken three putts
Count'less times when I shouldn't, my record is
black,
But always the divots I cut, I put back!

"I'm an old hundred shooter! I thought I was
great
Whenever I finished around ninety-eight;
I was slow at the game, I confess it to you,
But I never refused to let others go thru."

"Come in," said St. Peter, "come in and sit down!
"Come in and I'll give you a harp and a crown!
I've a welcome for you, with the saints you may
dwell,
For it takes moral courage to play bad golf well."

*"The Bad Golfer Who Was Good" is from the book
THE HARBOR LIGHTS OF HOME, by Edgar A.
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lay ball, but the question piqued her curiosity and she took steps to determine just what "a Gourlay" was. Her quest took her to the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club, which has six highly prized and carefully safeguarded specimens.

William Currie, Captain of the Club, not only enlightened Miss Gourlay on the status of the balls but volunteered to donate one to the USGA Museum and Library.

The one presented to the USGA bears the name "Douglas" on one side and "Gourlay" on the other side. It appears to be unused, and a paper sticker attached bears the numbers 371/12. The significance of these numbers is not known.

There is no exhibit in "Golf House" which we cherish more than this little ball, at least 100 years old, which is not only a museum piece in itself but also expresses the friendliness which characterizes our golfing relations with Great Britain.

Meanwhile, the "Golf House" Fund has risen almost to the \$100,000 mark. At press time, 5,447 individuals, clubs, associations and others had given \$99,784.50. Of these totals, 114 have contributed \$1,670.01 since the last issue of the USGA JOURNAL. Their names are:

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