

chapter 2

The GOFF





The GOFF

Although first published anonymously in Edinburgh in 1743, Thomas Mathison is the credited author of the famous poem *The GOFF*. He lived from 1721 to 1760 and therefore wrote this “heroi-comical poem” at the young age of 22 years. He was the son of a wealthy merchant of Edinburgh. Merchants were some of the most prominent citizens of Edinburgh and had a large appeal to the game of golf.

Mathison started his career as a lawyer’s clerk and aspired to be a writer too. Licensed by the Presbyterian Church he was eventually ordained minister of Inverkailor and translated to the parish of Brechin in 1754.

Before the publication of *The GOFF*, the first published mention in Scotland of the game of golf is in Henry Adamson’s book *The Three Muses* in 1638 in a ‘pleasant poetical description’:

‘And yee, my clubs, you must no ore prepare
To make your balls flee whistling in the air.’

In England in a book, *Instructions to a son* published in 1661 and written by the Marquess of Argyll, he states:

‘Tennis is not in use amongst us, but only in our Capital city [Edinburgh], but in lieu of that you have the excellent recreation of Goff-ball than which truly I do not know a better.’

After its publication, *The GOFF* ‘stood alone in a century of silence’. There are two important golf collectors, who amassed impressive golf libraries with all the rare literature of the game of golf and who were both important golf literature scholars: C.B. Clapcott from England and O.M. Leland from the USA.

Remarkable is Clapcott’s long hidden paper with his commentary on Mathison’s poem *The Goff: A Heroi-Comical Poem in Three Cantos; A Commentary by C.B. Clapcott of 1946*. Rediscovered in Leland’s collection was a copy of this paper. Clapcott’s commentary has helped to unveil the secrets of the poem’s story long thought to have been an imaginary golf contest between two imaginary players and the identity of the heroes of the golf match.

Mathison wrote *The GOFF* in the heyday of the game of golf as played in Scotland in the eighteenth century, the origin of modern golf, as we know it today. The poem refers to the many so-called ‘Caledonian Chiefs’, prominent citizens, many of whom were wealthy merchants and members of the Town Council, who formed the centre-weight of the Golfing Society of Edinburgh. Later to be renamed The Honourable Company of Edinburgh Goffers.

The game of golf had earlier developed in Edinburgh into a popular pastime. Played mainly outside the city walls, ‘the Burghmuir’, on the designated common playgrounds of Bruntsfield Links near Wrights



William Inglis and the Procession of the Silver Club (1787), by David Allan (National Galleries of Scotland)

Houses, south of the castle and city of Edinburgh. The game later moved to the playgrounds of Leith north of Edinburgh in Leith, on the eastside of town named ‘Leith Links’ along the coastal strip on the shore of the Forth of Firth.

The word ‘links’ became synonymous for a common playground, where games or pastimes such as ‘golf, archery, rowbowlis, caitchpulis’ and so on were regularly played, except of course on the holy Sabbath day. Not all of Edinburgh inhabitants would confirm to this rule as we can infer from some city records. Following are extracts from the records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, 1589-1603, Scottish Burgh record Society of London, 1927:



View of Edinburgh (1700), by John Overton



Map of Midlothian (c1682), by John Adair (National Library of Scotland)

'...dyvers inhabitants of this burgh upoun the Saboth day to the town of Leith and in tyme of sermonis are sene vagand athort the streets, drinking in tavernis, or other ways at golf, aicherie, or other pastimes upoun the Lynks, thairby profaning the Sabboth day.'

The 'Lynks' referred to in the records is Bruntsfield Links in Edinburgh. It is an interesting thought to realise the word 'links' was first used in combination with Bruntsfield and the earliest golf played in and around Edinburgh, played on what is known as 'Bruntsfield Links'.

The move took place to grounds outside the port town of Leith only after the playground of Bruntsfield Links became less suitable for the ever more popular growing game of golf. Here there was suitable playground found for various common pastimes, such as golf and archery.

It is noteworthy too that Bruntsfield and the playground Bruntsfield Links was, and still is, found south of the city of Edinburgh outside the city walls.

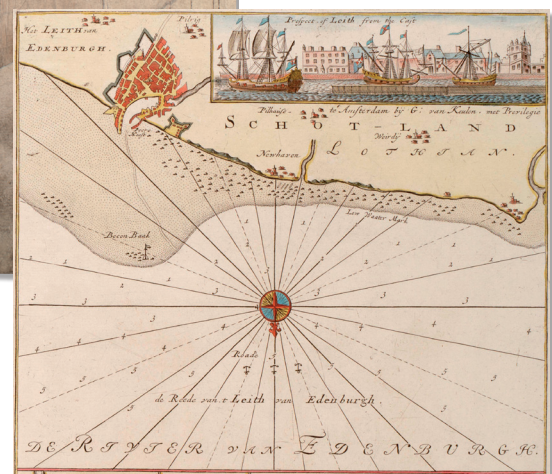
Leith on the other hand, is north of the city of Edinburgh on the coast of the Firth of Forth. Bruntsfield Links was not near the coast and was about 7 miles away from Leith.

Therefore all explanations relating the word 'links', being a coastal stretch of sandy land may prove to be wrong. Bruntsfield Links is a different sort of grounds and is far distance from the coast. Old Scottish dictionaries, such as Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary, Edinburgh 1803, state that 'links' were originally 'the windings of a river and meaning the rich grounds lying among the windings of a river. Later it also meant the sandy flat ground on the seashore'.

Jamieson states: 'in time the name was transferred, but improperly, to ground not contiguous to the sea and the most probable reason for this designation was that it had been customary to play golf on the Links of Leith. When the ground near Bruntsfield came to be used in the same way, it was like in manner called [Bruntsfield] Links'. This is clearly a false conclusion.



Plan of the City of Edinburgh and Adjacent grounds (1703), by A. Bell



Map of Leith and surroundings (1690), by G. van Keulen

The name Bruntsfield Links was already in use as a playground for golf. This was long before the shore grounds of Leith became the preferred playground for golf and other popular pastime. The question therefore remains what the meaning of the word 'Links' may be in this context and why use this typical word for the grounds near Bruntsfield House, chosen as a playground for the citizens of Edinburgh.

An Act of 1827 has protected the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links from building to this day. Admittedly, the once sequestered park area has now become almost encircled by new lines of streets and terraces, intersected by new and modern drives for modern traffic. Mainly because of the great expansion of residential property development that were brought about by the industrial expansion of the Victorian period.

This caused the parks around the old Bruntsfield House to intersect the stately streets and lines of villas. Only a small section of the old Wrights Houses next to Bruntsfield Links remains. According to Maitland, Wrights Houses was at one time a small village outside the city of Edinburgh. In 1508, the Magistrates of Edinburgh were granted a charter from the King to feu (lease) the area of the Burgh Muir and gradually the only open space that remained was Bruntsfield Links and the bordering Meadows.

The village name derives from the mansion 'of great antiquity which for ages formed one of the most important features of the Boroughmuir being one of the oldest and by far most picturesque baronial dwelling in the neighbourhood of the city'. The mansion's name was 'Wryte's House' being a mansion from which the surrounding houses took their name. The word Wryte could well stem from the old-Germanic word 'writen', meaning giving rights or favours, 'reht', meaning right or law. Built in 1379, it stood where Gillespie's Hospital is now.

In the seventeenth century, there is a mention to an area as the lands of 'Brownisfield' (probably from the family name Brownsfield or Bruinsveld). Bruntsfield Links was not located on the property of Bruntsfield House but next to it as part of the Burghmuir. In that sense, an explanation for the word links could mean 'next to', as in 'next to Bruntsfield'.

Most probably, it was King David I (1124-1153), first of the Scottish kings, who granted the communities



Wrytes Houses adjacent to Bruntsfield Links, by A. Robertson

of the royal burghs large territories. Giving the Magistrates of Edinburgh the extensive area of land lying south of the city called the 'Borough-moor', a 'field spacious of and delightful by the shade of many stately oaks'. This area was the scene of many 'sanguinary battles' with the English foe and often involved the fate of the kingdom of Scotland. Here in 1513, King James



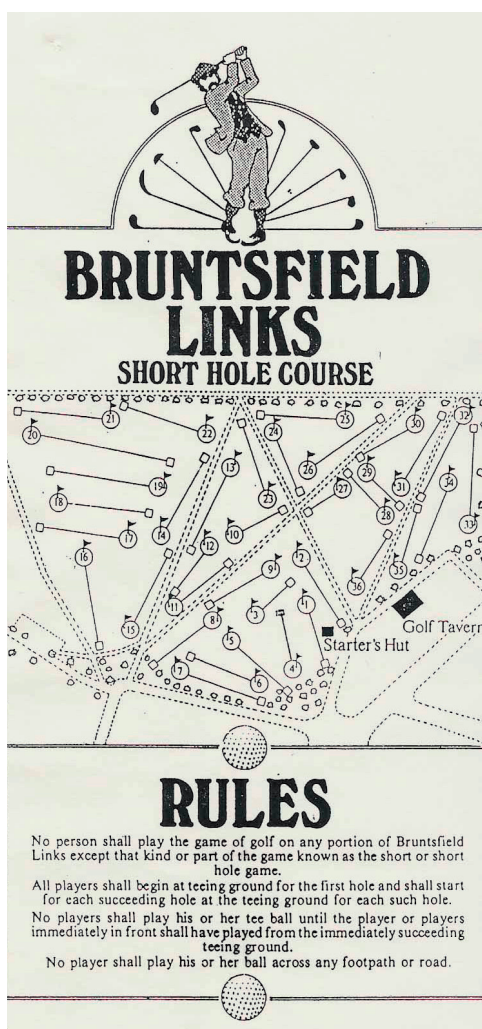
Bruntsfield House adjacent to Bruntsfield Links (1897), illustration from *The Grange of St. Giles*, by J. Stewart-Smith



View of Edinburgh Castle from Bruntsfield Links (1825)

IV mustered his military forces before marching to Flodden against the English, where the Scottish army suffered defeat and he was slain.

With the forests of the Burghmuir considered a public nuisance, the Magistrates used their charter rights 1508 to allow citizens to cut wood for their housing. Later the area was quarried for the urban development of the city and was not a safe area although '...inhabitants sometimes amused themselves at the [game of] golf' through the string of quarries. 'The upper part of these Links is quite covered with whins and full of quarry holes, insomuch that it was an unfit place for any person to walk in, or indeed for any use but the sheep who can scramble up and down the sides of the quarry holes'. Clearly, people considered the area of Bruntsfield as a dangerous place to be. This may be a hint to the use of the word 'links' in combination with this



Bruntsfield Links - Short Hole Course

then dangerous and unfit area. The word 'links' in Old High Germanic 'lenka' or Old-Dutch 'lyncks', has a meaning on the left side, bent (not right), cunning, dangerous (compare Latin Antiquity 'sinister'). There is an expression in Dutch: 'iets links laten liggen' literally meaning leaving something on the left, metaphorically staying away from danger. The use of old-Dutch words in Scottish was common in that period because of the historic relationship with Flanders and the resulting close social and commercial ties between the two nations for centuries. It is probably worth further study to find out whether the inhabitants, occupants or owners of 'Brownisfield' had any historic ties to Flanders in the Low Countries.

The original golf course of Bruntsfield Links consisted of six holes. The course at Bruntsfield Links still exists today but has been converted to a 36-hole pitch-and-putt course open to the public. Obviously, the town council heard and listened to the following words expressed in 1863:

'Bruntsfield Links is far from being the best green for the pursuit of our national pastime, and far too limited in its

extent. It is to be hoped that the day will yet come when our Town Council, reversing their old policy, and recognising the necessity of providing the means of outdoor recreation for the people, will secure for us some other, and it is to be hoped more suitable place. Whereon to practice our favourite amusement, for should the ground in the vicinity, such as Bruntsfield Park, ever be feued, it is to be feared that those who now practice golf there will require to vacate and seek some other place'.

There is not a lot written about the history of Bruntsfield Links itself. James Grant mentioned Bruntsfield Links in the three volume *Old and New Edinburgh* book of 1860, stating that 'no part of Edinburgh has a more agreeable southern exposure than those large open spaces around the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links... the latter having long been famous as a playground for the ancient and national game of golf...'. He also mentions the old 'Golf Tavern (Hotel)', that overlooks the breezy and grassy scene...'

According to Grant, Bruntsfield Links offered playing facilities to no less than six golfing societies, of which he named only one, the Burgers (founded in 1735), later known as the Burgess Golfing Society. This date makes it the oldest known golfing society of Scotland and Britain. A uniform, adopted in 1790, was used to distinguish the golfers and 'to give warning to pedestrians in such a way as to avoid injury.'

On 2nd July 1800, Edinburgh Town Council granted to the Burgess Society a Seal of Cause. The name changed to the Edinburgh Burgess Golfing Society and they used the common golfing motto of the day "Far and Sure". Bruntsfield Links became, by the early nineteenth century, increasingly congested with people and traffic.

The Burgess members decided to move to Musselburgh in 1874 where they shared the 9-hole course with The Honourable Company (who had now moved away from Leith Links), Bruntsfield Links Golf Society and the (Royal) Musselburgh Golf Club. Later in 1894, the Burgess Golfing Society bought land from the Maitland family in Barnton, Edinburgh. The formal opening of the course took place on 3rd May 1895. By Royal Edict of His Royal Highness, King George V, dated 30 September 1929, the Burgess changed their name to The Royal Burgess Golfing Society of Edinburgh.

The Bruntsfield Links Golf Society formally began in 1761 and in 1790 adopted the motto 'Inde Salus'. Most of the membership, like that of the Burgess, consisted of Edinburgh merchants. From about 1788, the Bruntsfield Links Golf Society used the premises at 30-31 Wrights Houses, known today as The Golf Tavern, as their clubhouse.

The building itself probably dates from late eighteenth century and is the oldest clubhouse building still standing, used as a club meeting place until 1890, even after the Bruntsfield club left for Musselburgh.



Golf Hotel (or Tavern) at Bruntsfield Links, previous meeting place of the Burgess Golfing Society



Golf Tavern at Bruntsfield Links, previous meeting place of the Bruntsfield Links Golfing Society

The Society's oldest medal is the Golf Medal played for since 1819. In 1839, Bruntsfield moved to the course beside the racetrack at Musselburgh, which had eight holes at that time.

The Scots claimed the Bruntsfield and the Burgess had originally been one club, but had split over political differences of opinion in the aftermath of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, which had deeply divided Scottish society. The location in Musselburgh was also becoming too crowded and in 1897, negotiations ended with the Maitland family to feu (lease) land at



Bruntsfield Links (1830)

Barnton Gate close to the Burgess, now Davidson's Mains, in west Edinburgh.

From the late seventeenth century, we know from the records there were certain popular games for which organised contests were held. Town councils with the leading citizens of the burghs were usually involved in organising these contests providing sponsorship and trophies for the winner. Known are the earliest contests for the Silver Gun in 1587 (Kirkcudbright), presented by James VI to the incorporated trades, when he visited the royal burgh, and later the Silver Bell in Lanark for horse racing. Very popular were the archery competitions in various towns or cities. In 1709, the Town Council of the city of Edinburgh awarded the Silver Arrow to the Royal Company of Archers.

Following the formation in 1676 of His Majesty's Company of Archers, much in the way in Holland the companies of 'Schutters' or 'Schutterijeren' formed, as a formal society in Edinburgh it set rules and regulations for its members. As such, it may be recognised as the first modern day organised private sports club. The society later changed its name to Royal Company of Archers.

The competition took place on the Links of Leith and announced by the traditional 'tuck of drum' through the streets of town while carrying the Silver Arrow trophy in procession to the town's commoner playground. Many of the 'Caledonian Chiefs' as described in Mathison's poem *The GOFF* were also

well-known archers and winner's of the Silver Arrow. It is on Leith Links that in 1744, the first formal golf competition was organised in Scotland. It is recorded in an Act of the Council of the City of Edinburgh. 'Several Gentlemen of Honour, Skilful in the Ancient and Healthfull Exercise of the Golf had from time to time applied to the Several Members of the Council for a Silver Club to be annually played for on the Links of Leith'. The Council of the City of Edinburgh requested these gentlemen to draft 'Such Articles and Conditions, as to them seemed most expedient, as proper regulations'.

The costly Silver Club would remain the property of the Town Council of Edinburgh. The winner could keep the trophy for one year and would have their name and details inscribed on a silver piece attached to the Silver Club. The winner of the Silver Club contest would bear the name 'Captain of the Golf'.

The first minute book of the 'Company of Gentlemen Golfers' (later renamed The Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers) opens with the 'Act of Council' and records that on the 2nd April 1744: 'The Silver Club having been played for, Mr John Rattray, Surgeon in Edinburgh, after having compared the several clerks jottings, is declared to have won the same'.

Rattray, mentioned as one of the Caledonian Chiefs in *The GOFF*, won the trophy again the following year. He was a distinguished archer too having won the Silver Arrow on several occasions. The requested regulations in the Act, thirteen in total, appeared as 'Articles and Laws' in the back of the first minute book. These first regulations, although drawn up for the

Silver Club contest on the Links of Leith, were later copied and adopted by other golfing societies such as the Society of St Andrews Golfers.

Founded in 1754 and later renamed the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, it showed the great esteem for the Company of Gentleman Golfers from the city of Edinburgh. The 'Articles and Laws' for the Silver Club golf contest is considered to be the first written set of rules of the modern game of golf.

The published Heroi-Comical Poem *The GOFF* written by Thomas Mathison appears to be the first separately printed book devoted to this modern game of golf, as we know it today. Published three times in 1743, in 1763 and again in 1793, only a few copies are still in existence today. In 1981, the Library of United States Golf Association republished it in facsimile. In 2001 David Hamilton too devoted a new analysis to Mathison's poem in his book *The Thorn Tree Clique*.

Only in 1887, an earlier anthology of the poem written by Mathison appeared in *Golfiana Miscellanea*, edited by James Lindsay Stewart. This book is now also rare. Robert Clark printed *The GOFF* poem in his book *Golf: A Royal and Ancient Game* in 1893 (reprinted edition in 1975).

We now know the hero-i-comical poem by Thomas Mathison is not merely an account in verse of an imaginary contest between two imaginary players. Reading the poem carefully, we understand the contest was played 'over the plains of Leith' on the famous Links of the town of Leith. Although interestingly, the word 'Links' is not used once in the lengthy poem. It was on a late spring day as 'frisking lambs dance around'. The contest started around midday when the sun 'warmed the earth with noontide ray' and lasted until the sun was about to set when it 'lengthens out the shades'. The contest is between 'Castalio' and 'Pygmalion', metaphorically chosen names for two famed golfers and good friends, who we now know to be brothers-in-law. Castalio was in real-life Alexander Dunning, a well-known bookseller from Edinburgh. His opponent Pygmalion was Thomas Mathison himself, the author of the poem *The GOFF* and a young aspiring literary writer.

On the tee, Castalio boasts: 'Dares weak Pygmalion this stout arm defy?' and Pygmalion challenges: 'Thy empty boasts with justice I despise...' before the contest between the two heroes gets on its way. Castalio, the older more experienced player, had the honour, who 'his whole force collects and the orb a noble blow directs', hitting a wonderful tee-shot. Pygmalion, the younger player of the two, on the other hand nervous on the tee 'strikes the globe: [and] on the upper half descends the erring club', hitting a poor topped tee-shot.

Procession of the Silver Club by the traditional 'tuck of the drum' (1787), detail study by David Allan (National Gallery of Scotland)



NGoff. RA

Prize of the Silver Golf. at Edin. 1787.



View of golf players at St. Andrews (17th century), unknown artist English School, (British Golf Museum, St Andrews)

They played the contest over four stretches of five holes. The Links of Leith only had five holes in those early days of golf. The game was decided on the very last hole, the twentieth. When Castalio holed out from outside the green from about twenty yards for a miraculous three when 'high over the road the ball triumphing flies, lights on the green and scours into the hole'. 'Down with it sinks depressed Pygmalion's soul' as he, 'seized with surprise the hero stands' failed to halve the hole with a makeable putt from about fifteen feet 'and feebly tips the ball with trembling hands'. Spectators attending the contest cheered as 'surrounding crowds the victor's praise proclaim, the echoing shore resounds Castalio's name'.

The honours went to the winner but with it also a great deal of liquor: the loser yields a large bowl of punch. Pygmalion must prepare the bowl. 'The vanquished hero for the victor fills a mighty bowl containing thirty gills' (approximately 3.5 litres). Punch was a popular drink in those days among the golfing heroes, as after a fiery contest 'for Albion's peace and Albion's friends they prey and drown in punch the labours of the day'.

Mixing punch followed a strict formula. It was originally comprised of five ingredients: distilled spirits such as rum, brandy, or Batavia arrack, mixed with sugar, water, citrus, and spices like grated nutmeg but sometimes included green or black tea.

The intent of a heroi-comical poem is satiric and ironic at the same time. In the mock epic traditions of popular writers in those days, the poem follows the conventions of the eighteenth century. The start of the poem is classical following the traditions of Virgil and Ovid.

The poem then introduces *Golfinia*, the goddess of the holy playgrounds of golf. She overlooks the scene of the heroic combat between the two golfing heroes. *Golfinia*, assisted by two of her nymphs, *Verdurilla* and *Gambolia*, each assigned to one of the two heroes to aid them in their virtuous battle on the green and to guide their balls to the desired plain. *Irus* carried the clubs, placed the balls on sandy pyramids, and marked the landing places of the balls as a true caddie did. The poem also introduces the names of well-known Caledonian Chiefs from the Edinburgh community, who regularly frequented the hallow playgrounds of Leith for their health resort and manly sport. Such

names as Macdonald, Dalrymple, Forbes, Rattray, Corse, Stewart, Leslie, Brown, and Alston. These gentlemen well-known as honourable citizens of the Edinburgh society were lawyers, judges, council members, surgeons, etc.

They were also the first known members of the Company of Gentlemen Golfers, later known as The Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers. The first edition only published the first initials of the gentlemen players for reasons of secrecy and discretion instigated by the divisions caused by Jacobite Rebellion. The poem gives an insight into making clubs and feathery balls. The technique of manufacturing ball



Punch bowl, Royal Blackheath Golf Club



*Colf players on ice (c1620) - detail,
by Hendrick Averkamp*



*Feathery ball (c1840), by Allan Robertson
(British Golf Museum, St Andrews)*



*Long-nosed club (early 19th century),
by Philp (British Golf Museum, St Andrews)*



*Rut Iron (c1760), unknown maker
(British Golf Museum, St Andrews)*

of leather filled with hair or feathers goes back to the Romans and their hand ball game of 'paganica'. This type of ball was much in use for the early hand-ball game of 'caets' in the Low Countries. Known as 'caitchpul' in Scotland, it is still played in many parts of Europe under various names, such as 'kaatsen' in Friesland (Netherlands) and 'jeu de paume' in Basque countries (France and Spain).

From this handball game, a racket ball game evolved using small rackets first and later the larger rackets still known today in tennis. These leather balls used for 'caets' adjusted to the early game of colf, popular in the Low Countries. The stuffed leather balls used for the 'spel metten colve' were made harder by increasing the density. The compression increased further by sewing wet leather, stuffing boiled hair or feathers and drying the finished balls. Using lead-white as coating made the balls heavier and watertight.

Scotland imported huge quantities of these balls from the Low Countries. That is, until the Scots took protectionist measures to stem the outflow of capital and by issuing royalties to stimulate local production in Scotland. The poem *The GOFF* refers to a famous ball-maker named Bobson. He is identified as the renowned St Andrews ball-maker Robertson, who 'with matchless art shapes the firm hide, connecting every part and through the eyelet drives the downy tide, crowds urging crowds the forceful brogue impels the feather harden and the leather swells, he crams and sweats, yet crams and urges more till scarce the turgid globe contains its score.' This account clearly describes the difficulty and hard labour to make a proper feathery ball. The cost was proportionately high.

There is enough evidence that players held the golf clubs made by Scottish craftsmen in high regard, both inside and outside Scotland. These were jointed clubs made all of wood with added lead weight poured into the back of the club head and pieces of horn added as protection to the leading edge of the bottom of the club head.

In addition, iron headed clubs were made whereby heated iron was forged and fitted around the bottom



*Young noble (unknown) with racket and ball (c1570),
by S. Anguissola*

end of the shaft, a technique use for the iron heads of arrows made by blacksmiths. Players used the iron clubs as 'troubleshooters' to hit the ball out of sandy hills or muddy ruts.

Craftsmen in Scotland were highly trained in manufacturing bows and arrows for archery and much in use during the near endless warfare of the Scots with their neighbouring English foe. The poem refers to the well-known club maker Andrew Dickson of Leith: 'Of finest ash Castalio's shaft was made, ponderous with lead and fenced with horn the head, the work of Dickson, who in Letha dwells and in the art of clubmaking excels.'

The writer Mathison chooses Pygmalion as his char-

acter in his heroi-comical poem *The GOFF*. Pygmalion is a legendary figure of Cyprus, mostly known from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Pygmalion is a sculptor who falls in love with a statue he had made. The statue is a beautiful woman made of ivory, but it is so realistic that he falls in love with it. He offers the statue presents and eventually prays to Venus (Aphrodite). She takes pity on Pygmalion and brings the statue to life. Pygmalion happily marries his great love and together they have a son Paphos. Metaphorically, but also satirically, Mathison may have likened his poetry as a wonderful piece of art and surely his dreams of being a great golfer came to life in his poetry.

As the character for his golf opponent Alexander Dunning, the writer Mathison chose Castalio, a name related to the fountain Castalia on Parnassus, sacred to the Muses, to Apollo and to poetry. In this way, Mathison glorified his bookseller friend Dunning as an inspiration to poetry and literature in support of many aspiring young poets and writers. Writers and booksellers bonded closely in those days, as the publishing industry did not yet exist.

Before Golfinia's sister-goddess, Victoria, decides the fate of the contest there is a remarkably strange incident on the last and deciding hole. Castalio's strayed tee-shot hits a sheep and this enrages Pan. He helps



his wounded sheep with a divine urinal treatment and in anger kicks Castalio's ball in the sand. Now Castalio in retribution hurls his club towards Pan. Pan manages to dodge the club thrown at him and runs in fear for his life. The unguided missile, however, does unfortunately strike Tray the shepherd fatally on the head. But Castalio quickly directs his attention to matters of more importance (sic), as a fearless Caledonian golfer hits a spectacular recovery shot from the sand toward the hole, and thereby unexpectedly secures victory over unlucky Pygmalion. A reproduction of the poem, a magnificent illustration of the game of golf as played in Scotland in the eighteenth century, appears in its entirety below.



Meeting of the Company of Cloveniers of Haarlem (1633), by Frans Hals (Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem)



Winter landscape on the river IJssel near Kampen (1615) - detail, by Hendrick Avercamp

Banquet of the Company of Cloveniers of Haarlem (1627), by Frans Hals (Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem)

THE
GOFF

AN
Heroi – Comical Poem
IN
Three CANTOS
BY
THOMAS MATHISON

EDINBURGH
MDCC XLIII

THE GOFF

CANTO I.

GOFF, and the Man, I sing, who emulous, plies
The jointed club, whose balls invade the skies,
Who from Edina's towers, his peaceful home,
In quest of fame over Letha's plains did roam.
Long toiled the hero on the verdant field, 5
Strained his stout arm the weighty club to wield;
Such toils it cost, such labours to obtain
The bays of conquest, and the bowl to gain.
O thou, GOLFINIA, Goddess of these plains,
Great patroness of GOFF, indulge my strains; 10
Whether beneath the thorn tree shade you lie,
Or from Mercerian towers the game survey,
Or around the green the flying ball you chase,
Or make your bed in some hot sandy face:
Leave your much loved abode, inspire his lays 15
Who sings of GOFF, and sings thy favourite's praise.
North from Edina eight furlongs and more
Lies that famed field, on Fortha's sounding shore.
Here, Caledonian Chiefs for health resort,
Confirm their sinews by the manly sport. 20
Macdonald, and unmatched Dalrymple ply
Their ponderous weapons, and the green defy;
Rattray for skill, and Corse for strength renowned,
Stewart and Lesly beat the sandy ground,
And Brown and Alston, Chiefs well-known to fame, 25
And numbers more the Muse forbears to name.
Gigantic Biggar here full oft is seen,
Like huge Behemoth on an Indian green;
His bulk enormous scarce can escape the eyes,
Amazed spectators wonder how he plies. 30

Yea here great Forbes, patron of the just,
The dread of villains, and to good man's trust,
When spent with toils in serving human kind,
His body recreates, and unbends his mind.
Bright Phoebus, now, had measured half the day, 35
And warmed the earth with genial noontide ray:
Forth rushed Castalio and his daring foe,
Both armed with clubs, and eager for the blow.
Of finest ash Castalio's shaft was made,
Ponderous with lead, and fenced with horn the head, 40
(The work of Dickson, who in Letha dwells,
And in the art of making clubs excels),
Which late beneath great Claro's arm did bend,
But now is wielded by his greater friend.
Not with more fury Norris cleaved the main, 45
To pour his thundering arms on guilty Spain;
Nor with more haste brave Haddock bent his course,
To guard Minorca from Iberian force:
Than thou, intrepid hero, urged thy way,
Over roads and sands, impatient for the fray. 50
With equal warmth Pygmalion fast pursued,
(With courage oft are little weights endowed),
Till to GOLFINIA'S downs and heroes came,
The scene of combat, and the field of fame.
Upon a verdant bank, by FLORA graced, 55
Two sister fairies found the Goddess placed;
Propped by her snowy hand her head reclined,
Her curly locks hung waving in the wind.
She eyes intent the consecrated green,
Crowded with waving clubs, and votaries keen, 60



And hears the prayers of youths to her addressed,
 And from the hollow *face* relieves the ball distressed.
 On either side the sprightly Dryads sat,
 And entertained the Goddess with their chat.

First, VERDURILLA thus: "O rural Queen! 65
 What Chiefs are those that drive along the green?
 With brandished clubs the mighty heroes threat,
 Their eager looks foretell a keen debate."

To whom GOLFINIA: "Nymph your eyes behold 70
 Pygmalion stout, Castalio brave and bold.

From silver Ierna's banks Castalio came,
 But first on Andrean plains he courted fame.
 His sire, a Druid, taught (one day of seven)
 The paths of virtue, the sure road to heaven.

In Pictish capital the good man past 75
 His virtuous life, and there he breathed his last.

The son now dwells in fair Edina's town,
 And on our sandy plains pursues renown.
 See low Pygmalion, skilled in GOFFING art,
 Small is his size, but dauntless is his heart: 80

Fast by a desk in Edina's domes he fits,
 With saids and sicklikes lengthening out the writs.
 For no mean prize the rival Chiefs contend,
 But full rewards the victor's toils attend.

The vanquished hero for the victor fills 85
 A might bowl containing thirty gills;
 With noblest liquor is the bowl replete;
 Here sweets and acids, strength and weakness meet.

From Indian isles the strength and sweetness flow,
 And Tagus' banks their golden fruits bestow, 90
 Cold Caledonia's lucid streams control
 The fiery spirits, and fulfill the bowl.

For Albion's peace and Albion's friends they pray,
 And drown the punch the labours of the day."

The Goddess spoke, and thus GUMBOLIA prayed : 95
 "Permit to join in brave Pygmalion's aid,
 Over each deep road the hero to sustain,
 And guide his ball to the desired plain."

To this the Goddess of the manly sport: 100
 "Go, and be thou that daring Chief's support;
 Let VERDURILLA be Castalio's stay;
 I from this flowery seat will view the fray."

She said: "The nymphs trip nimbly over the green,
 And to the combatants approach unseen."

THE END OF THE FIRST CANTO

YE rural powers that on these plains reside,
 Ye nymphs that dance on the *Fortha's* flowery side,
 Assist the Muse that in your fields delights,
 And guide her course in these uncommon flights.

But chief, thee, O GOLFINIA! I implore; 5
 High as thy balls instruct my Muse to soar:
 So may thy green forever crowded be,
 And balls on balls invade the azure sky.

Now at that hole the Chiefs begin the game,
 Which from the neighbouring thorn tree takes its name; 10
 Ardent they grasp the ball-compelling clubs,
 And stretch their arms to attack the little globes.

Not as our warriors brandished dreadful arms,
 When fierce Bellona founded war's alarms,
 When conquering Cromwell stained fair Eska's flood 15
 And soaked her banks with Caledonian blood;

Or when our bold ancestors madly fought,
 And Clans engaged for trifles or for naught.
 That Fury now from our blessed fields is driven,
 To scourge unhappy nations doomed by heaven. 20

Let Kouli Kan destroy the fertile East,
 Victorious Vernon thunder in the West;
 Let horrid war involve perfidious Spain,
 And GEORGE assert his empire over the Main:

But on our plains Britannia's sons engage, 25
 And void of ire the sportive war they wage.

Lo, tattered Irus, who their armour bears,
 Upon the green two little pyramids rears;
 On these they place two balls with careful eye,
 That with Clarinda's breasts for colour vye, 30

The work of Bobson; who with matchless art.
 Shapes the firm hide, connecting every part,
 Then in a socket sets the well-stitched void,
 And through the eyelet drives the downy tide;

Crowds urging Crowds the forceful brogue impels, 35
 The feathers harden and the Leather swells;
 He crams and sweats, yet crams and urges more,
 Till scarce the turgid globe contains its store:

The dreaded falcon's pride here blended lies
 With pigeons glossy down of various dyes; 40
 The lark's small pinions join the common stock,
 And yellow glory of the martial cock.

Soon as Hyperion gilds old Andrea's spires,
 From bed the artist to his cell retires;
 With bended back, there plies his steely awls, 45
 And shapes, and stuffs, and finishes the balls.

But when the glorious God of day has driven
 His flaming chariot down the steep of heaven,
 He ends his labour, and with rural strains.
 Enchants the lovely maids and weary swains: 50

As through the streets the blithesome piper plays,
 In antique dance they answer to his lays;
 At every pause the ravished crowd acclaim,
 And rend the skies with tuneful Bobson's name.
 Not more rewarded was Amphion's song; 55
 That reared a town, and this drags one along.

Such is famed Bobson, who in *Andrea* thrives,
 And such the balls each vigorous hero drives.
 First, bold *Castalio*, ere he struck the blow,
 Leaned on his club, and thus addressed his foe: 60
 “Dares weak *Pygmalion* this stout arm defy,
 Which brave *Matthias* doth with terror try?
 Strong as he is, *Moravio* owns my might,
 Distrusts his vigour, and declines the fight.
 Renowned *Clephanio* I constrain to yield, 65
 And drove the haughty veteran from the field.
 Weak is thy arm, rash youth, thy courage vain;
 Vanquished, with shame you will curse the fatal plain.
 The half-struck balls your weak endeavours mock,
 Slowly proceed, and soon forget the stroke. 70
 Not so the orb eludes my thundering force:
 Through fields fair it holds its rapid course,
 Swift as the balls from martial engines driven,
 Streams like a comet through the arch of heaven.”
 “Vaunter, go on,” (*Pygmalion* thus replies); 75
 “Thy empty boast with justice I despise.
 Hast thou the strength *Goliath*’s spear to wield,
 Like its great master thunder on the field,
 And with that strength *Caledonian*’s matchless art,
 Not one unmanly thought should daunt my heart.” 80
 He said, and signed to *Irus*; who, before,
 With frequent warnings filled the sounding shore.
 Then great *Castalio* his whole force collects,
 And on the orb a noble blow directs.
 Swift as a thought the ball obedient flies, 85
 Sings high in the air and seems to cleave the skies;
 Then on the level plain its fury spends;
 And *Irus* to the Chief the welcome tidings sends.
 Next in his turn *Pygmalion* strikes the globe:
 On the upper half descends the erring club; 90
 Along the green the ball confounded scours;
 No lofty flight the ill-spiced stroke empowers.
 Thus, when the trembling hare descries the hounds,
 She from her whinny mansion swiftly bounds;
 Over hills and fields she scours, outstrips the wind; 95
 The hounds and huntsmen follow far behind.
GAMBOLIA now afforded timely aid;
 She over the sand the fainting ball conveyed,
 Renewed its force, and urged it on its way,
 Till on the summit of the hill it lay. 100
 Now all on fire the Chiefs their orbs pursue,
 With the next stroke the orbs their flight renew:
 Thrice round the green they urge the whizzing ball,
 And thrice three holes to great *Castalio* fall;
 The other fix *Pygmalion* bore away, 105
 And saved for a while the honours of the day.
 Had some brave champion of the sandy field
 The Chiefs attended, and the game beheld;
 With every stroke his wonder had increased,
 And emulous fires had kindled in his breast.

THE END OF THE SECOND CANTO

CANTO III.

Harmonious *Nine*, that from *Parnassus* view
 The subject world, and all that is done below;
 Who from oblivion snatch the patriots name,
 And so the stars extol the hero’s fame,
 Bring each your lyre, and to my song repair, 5
 Nor think *GOLFINIA*’S train below the Muses care.
 Declining *Sol* with milder beams invades
 The *Scotia* fields, and lengthens out the shades;
 Hastens to survey the conquered golden plains,
 Where captive Indians mourn in Spanish chains; 10
 To guild the waves where hapless *Hosier* died,
 Where *Vernon* late proud *Bourbon*’s force defied,
 Triumphant rode along the watery plain,
Britannia’s glory and the scourge of *Spain*.
 Still from her seat the Power of *GOFF* beheld 15
 The unwearied heroes toiling on the field;
 The light-foot Fairies in their labours share,
 Each nymph het hero seconds in the war;
Pygmalion and *GAMBOLIA* there appear,
 And *VERDURILLA* with *Castalio* here. 20
 The Goddess saw, and opened the book of Fate,
 To search the issue of the grand debate.
 Bright silver plates the sacred leaves enfold,
 Bound with twelve shining clasps of solid gold.
 The wondrous book contains the fate of all 25
 That lift the club, and strike the missive ball;
 Mysterious rhymes that through the pages flow,
 The past, the present, and the future show.
GOLFINIA reads the Fate-foretelling lines,
 And soon the sequel of the war defines; 30
 Sees conquest doomed *Castalio* toils to crown,
Pygmalion doomed superior might to own.
 Then at her side *VICTORIA* straight appears,
 Her sister-Goddess, arbitress of wars.
 Upon her head a wreath of bays she wore, 35
 And in her hand a laurel sceptre bore;
 Anxious to know the will of fate she stands,
 And waits obsequious on the Queen’s commands.
 To whom *GOLFINIA*: “Fate-fulfilling maid,
 Hear the Fates will, and be their will obeyed: 40
 Straight to the field of fight thyself convey,
 Where brave *Castalio* en *Pygmalion* stray;
 There bid the long protracted combat cease,
 And with thy bays *Castalio*’s temples grace.”
 She said; and swift, as *Hermes* from above 45
 Shoots to perform the high behests of *JOVE*,
VICTORIA from her sister’s preference flies,
 Pleased to bestow the long disputed prize.
 Mean while the Chiefs for the last hole contend,
 The last great hole, which should their labours end; 50
 For the Chiefs exert their skill and might,
 To drive the balls, and to direct their flight.
 Thus two fleet coursers for the Royal plate,
 (The others distanced,) run the final heat;
 With all his might each generous racer flies, 55
 And all his art each panting rider tries,

While showers of gold and praises warm his breast,
 And generous emulation fires the best,
 His trusty club *Pygmalion* dauntless plies;
 The ball ambitious climbs the lofty skies; 60
 But soon, ah! soon descends upon the field;
 The adverse winds the labouring orb repelled.
 Thus when a fowl, whom wandering sportsmen scare,
 Leaves the sown land, and mounts the fields of air,
 Short is his flight; the fiery *Furies* wound, 65
 And bring him tumbling headlong to the ground.
 Not for *Castalio* lifts the unerring club,
 But with superior art attacks the globe;
 The well struck ball the stormy wind beguiled,
 And like a swallow skimmed along the field. 70
 An harmless sheep by Fate decreed to fall,
 Feels the dire fury of the rapid ball;
 Full on her front the raging bullet flew,
 And sudden anguish seized the silent ewe;
 Staggering she falls upon the verdant plain, 75
 Convulsive pangs distract her wounded brain.
 Great *PAN* beheld her stretched upon the grass,
 Nor un-revenged permits the crime to pass:
 The *Arcadian* God, with grief and fury stung,
 Snatched his stout crook, and fierce to vengeance sprung, 80
 His faithful dogs their master's steps pursue,
 The fleecy flocks before their father bow,
 With bleating hoarse salute him as he strode,
 And frisking lambkins dance around the God,
 The Sire of sheep then lifted from the ground 85
 The panting dam, and pissed upon the wound:
 The stream divine soon eased the mother's pain;
 The wise immortals never piss in vain;
 Then to the ball his horny foot applies;
 Before his foot the kicked offender flies; 90
 The hapless orb a gaping face detained,
 Deep sunk in sand the hapless orb remained,
 As *VERDURILLA* marked the ball's arrest,
 She with resentment fired *Castalio's* breast:
 The nymph assumed *Patrico's* shape and mien, 95
 Like great *Patrico* stalked along the green;
 So well his manner and his accent feigned,
Castalio deemed *Patrico's* self complained.
 Ah sad disgrace! see rustic herds invade
GOLFINIAN plains, the angry Fairy said. 100
 Your ball abused, your hopes and projects crossed,
 The game endangered, and the hole nigh lost:
 Thus brutal *PAN* resents his wounded ewe,
 Though Chance, not you, did guide the fatal blow.
 Incensed *Castalio* makes her no replies; 105
 To attack the God, the furious mortal flies;
 His iron headed around he swings,
 And fierce at *PAN* the ponderous weapon flings.
 Affrighted *PAN* the dreadful missive shunned;
 But blameless *Tray* received a deadly wound: 110
 Ill-fated *Tray* no more the flocks shall tend,
 In anguish doomed his shortened life to end.

Nor could great *PAN* afford a timely aid;
 Great *PAN* himself before the hero fled:
 Even he a God a mortal's fury dreads, 115
 And far and fast from bold *Castalio* speeds.
 To free the ball the Chief now turns his mind,
 Flies to the bank where lay the orb confined;
 The ponderous club upon the ball descends,
 Involved in dust the exulting orb ascends; 120
 Their loud applause the leased spectators raise,
 The hollow bank resounds *Castalio's* praise.
 A mighty blow *Pygmalion* then lets fall;
 Straight from the impulsive engine starts the ball,
 Answering its master's just design, it hastes, 125
 And from the hole scarce twice two club lengths rests.
 Ah! what avails thy skill, since fate decreed
 Thy conquering foe to bear away the prize?
 Full fifteen clubs length from the hole he lay,
 A wide cart-road before him crossed his way; 130
 The deep-cut tracks the intrepid Chief defies,
 High over the road the ball triumphing flies,
 Lights on the green, and scours into the hole;
 Down with it sinks depressed *Pygmalion's* soul.
 Seized with surprise the affrighted hero stands, 135
 And feebly tips the ball with trembling hands;
 The creeping ball its want of force complains,
 A grassy tuft the loitering orb detains:
 Surrounding crowds the victor's praise proclaim,
 The echoing shore resounds *Castalio's* name. 140
 For him *Pygmalion* must the bowl prepare,
 To him must yield the honours of the war,
 On Fame's triumphant wings his name shall soar,
 Till time shall end, or *GOFFING* be no more.

F I N I S