

GOLF CAUSERIE.

"Royal Dornoch" in the Far Away North.

Not a few of the golf clubs that now print and circulate an annual report and statement of accounts select for the close of their year the 31st December. Amongst these is the Royal Dornoch Golf Club, whose report has just come to hand from the far away shores of the Dornoch Firth. When the casual observer looks at the figures disclosed in this report, and compares them with those of the wealthy clubs in and around London, he will probably regard them as insignificantly small. But to many people in the City, and to the good folk of the cosy capital of Sutherland, the document speaks volumes for the prosperity of the place and the club. Golf is the one and only industry of Dornoch, which, by the way, is a Royal burgh, created so by Charles I., in 1628, and still merits the distinction of being the smallest county town in Scotland. To atone, as it were, for its diminutive proportions in this respect, "Nature," says Mr. John L. Low, "has gifted it most generously with golfing ground hardly to be equalled," and that in respect both of extent and quality. Dealing with its natural characteristics, another writer says: "Passing from folk-lore and the relics of ancient times, we come to what after all, are the glories of the place—its grand links and unrivalled sands. Now-a-days one is prone to associate links exclusively with the all-absorbing game of golf. It may therefore be a fact worthy of mention that at Dornoch, where there are two 18-hole courses, and plenty of room for two more, only a portion of the links is monopolised by the golfer. Pedestrians have miles of links, and children leagues of sands at their disposal, quite beyond the reach of molestation."

THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

Few places can lay claim to such a golfing antiquity. There is evidence of Earl John, nephew of Sir Robert Gordon, historian of Sutherland, having attended school at Dornoch in 1619, and the accounts for the young Earl's golf clubs are still preserved in the archives of Dunrobin Castle, the beautiful Highland home of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, situated a few miles to the north-east of the burgh. In 1630, Sir Robert Gordon, writing of the little town with the big links, says:

"About this town (along the sea coast) there are the fairest and largest linkes (or green feilds) of any pairt of Scotland, fitt for Archery, Goffing, Ryding, and all other exercise; they doe surpasse the feilds of Montrose or St. Andrews."

DISTINGUISHED OFFICIALS.

In the early part of last century Mr. George Dempster, the then proprietor of Skibo, and his guests, used to play over the links. Mr. Dempster is a prominent figure in the old golf painting, "Finish of a Big Match at St. Andrews." Skibo Castle, which stands three miles inland from Dornoch, on the Firth of the same name, is now the property and Scottish residence of the world-renowned multi-millionaire, Andrew Carnegie, who worthily upholds the historical associations of Skibo with the Royal and ancient game by being himself a great golfing enthu-

siast. It is somewhat of a coincidence that the Duke of Sutherland and Mr. Carnegie should occupy the offices of president and vice-president of the Dornoch Club at the present day.

A LONG START.

The existing club was instituted exactly thirty years ago, and although it cannot be said that many of the five hundred composing the population of the place became enamoured of the game, still a few—some of whom are foremost among its best and truest supporters to-day—not only kept it alive, but followed its progress at headquarters with an intelligence and interest which went far to pave the way for the boom which set in a decade or so later. In this way Dornoch had a long

start of all the other golfing centres in the North of Scotland.

KING EDWARD'S LAST VISIT.

The report of the Committee of Management to the annual meeting of the Club contains some interesting items. Foremost amongst these is the announcement that his Majesty King Edward has been pleased to confer on the Club the title "Royal," and directing that hereafter it shall be known as the "Royal Dornoch Golf Club." The Royal golf clubs of Scotland thus number six, and are the Royal and Ancient St. Andrews, Royal Musselburgh, Royal Perth, Royal Montrose, Royal Aberdeen, and Royal Dornoch. Through the influence and friendship of the Duke of Sutherland, who has been President of the Club continuously since its inception in 1877, Dornoch has been frequently honoured with the presence of Royalty. The King's last visit was in the autumn of 1902, immediately after his Coronation. Prince Arthur of Connaught was present at the links with the Duchess of Sutherland at the prize-giving in August, 1905; whilst the Grand Duke Michael and other distinguished personages from Dunrobin Castle often play golf at Dornoch. Unlike most other golfing centres, there is no expensive club house to maintain at Dornoch. We hear that the question is shortly likely to arise, but until now the want of such a building has not been severely felt, largely, no doubt, because of the close proximity to the first tee of the two principal hotels, as well as a number of the houses available for summer letting.

CHEAP GOLF.

As a consequence members' subscriptions have never exceeded the nominal one of 10s. for gentlemen, and 5s. for ladies, while the green fees exigible from non-member visitors are on a similarly modest scale. In view of these facts, the income of the Club for the past year, amounting to £692, is, relatively speaking, a considerable and highly satisfactory one, and is rather more than £100 in excess of last year's drawings. Of this total, £585 was spent during the financial year, leaving a credit balance of £107 to be carried forward. A paragraph explains, however, that, following its usual policy, the Committee is to use up its entire surplus on the green, and that, but for the severity of the weather, a considerable portion would have been spent before the close of the year in completing the improvements recommended by the ex-open champion, J. H. Taylor. It is stated that the whole of the balance will be absorbed by the end of March, but the report is silent as to the nature of the improvements.

135 LONDON MEMBERS.

One hundred and thirty-five registered members, it is a significant fact that 135 are London people, including the captain, Mr. Arthur J. Ryle, The Studios, 5, Thurloe-square. In common with many other sea-

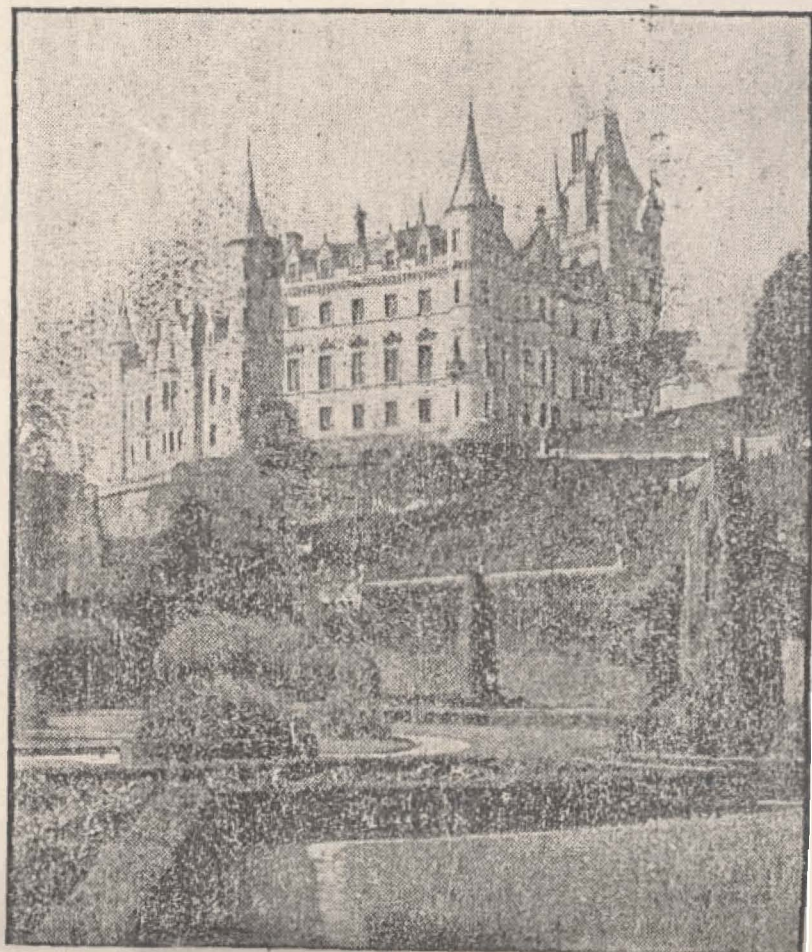
side links, the daisy has been making inroads on the Dornoch greens of recent years, as the following allusion in the report would indicate: "The successful results of the secretary's experiments in connection with the extermination of the daisies on some of the putting greens have encouraged the Committee to embark on an extensive scheme for ridding the greens of the pest." We recently published an article on this subject, and have reason to believe that the experiments at Dornoch have been made with the preparation known as "Daisy Crystal."

"BEST COURSE IN SCOTLAND."

The three greatest players visited this northern green last season, Braid, Taylor, and Vardon, and it must have given the Committee supreme satisfaction to be able to incorporate in their report the following expression of opinion from an unsolicited letter written to the secretary by Harry Vardon some weeks after his visit:

"You have indeed got a fine course up there at Dornoch: I should think it is the best in Scotland." For the third year running Taylor spent his fortnight's holiday at Dornoch. His partiality for the table greens there is now well known, and it is clear that he takes a fatherly interest in "Northward Ho! of Scotland," for the Committee take the opportunity of gratefully acknowledging his valuable advice, gratuitously given, in the matter of perfecting the club's courses.

J. S.



DUNROBIN CASTLE.

The beautiful home of the President of the Royal Dornoch Golf Club.

31 Jan 1907