

ASTBURY 1922

"I can be Hagen, you can be Vardon"
He said with an impudent grin
For you look much older and I much younger
And I am going to win"
"Pass me my longnose driver you cad
I'll wipe the smile from your face
I'll win every hole" I said in reply
"And put you back in your place"

The sun seemed to strain to rise in the sky
And I mused a while in my mind
That if we had asked it to make up a three
I think it would have declined
"Alas" I had imagined it say
"I thank you for thinking of me
But I was up until sunset late last night
So I may just play nine after tea"

Saint Mary's church bells had started to call
The Astbury folk to its door
Behind me I pictured the glare of the vicar
For having missed matins once more
The rector's spectre had a distracting effect
So my swing was a little awry
The consequence thereby inevitably was
A slice of considerable size

"Do you think" said my friend "in a hundred years' time"
As we poked around in the gorse
"The son of your son's son's son - or daughter
Will be playing a match on this course?"
"Hum Hum" I replied, for sensing his gist
I knew what he was going to say
"Call me a sceptic, but I'm starting to think
Your ball will stay lost 'til that day"

Undeterred by his banter, the line of my thought
Was toward the question he asked
The nature of golf at our nascent club
When a century more has passed
"The game" I declared, "might be easier to play
Through invention of some new device
So the Astbury golfer who is not yet born
Might never suffer a slice"

Avoiding the cowpats and bristly thistles
We let two ladies through
A couple of misses and fellow church missers
And pretty good golfers too
"Most kind" one said and she smiled as she passed
I noted her elegant swing
The ball flew straight, I doubt she'll relate
To the challenge the rough can bring

A ball was located in two foot of weed
We judged it to be my lost drive
I addressed it with care and mumbled a prayer
Then thrashed it to an inch of its life
The trees in the wood stood like giants looking on
And their leaves exhaled the breeze
The sound thus made was a gasp of despair
For my limited expertise

Despite the derision I furthered my vision
For the 21st century game
With wheezes and schemes that make golfing easy
Yet leave us with plenty to blame
"In time" I said "we can expand the course
To bring to a standard eighteen
Some hedges perhaps and fencing as well
To keep the cows off the greens"

"We can build a pavilion where jokes and opinions
Can be shared on the morning's win
And a forecourt where Bentleys and Rollers stand empty
Whilst their owners are downing their gin
And then a veranda, from which they look down
At stragglers and strugglers alike
And snigger amusement, and offer inducement
For some impossibly difficult strike"

"And will you be handing your tweed jacket down?"
My friend asked unabashed
"So your son's son's son may inherit, in time
Your snappy sartorial dash"
"Gladly" I said "but I mourn the demise
Of golf's traditional style
I fancy he'll lean to contemporary wear
Like plus fours and a knitted Argyle"

A buzzard flew by as we approached the last green
Its wings serenely spread
My friend made some jibe about rabbits, I shunned it
And swore at my niblick instead
On sinking the last putt we were quick to agree
A great time was had, golf aside
So we formed the arrangements for next week's derangement
"After church service", we lied

The trees shook their heads in relief as we left
And waved their arms in the air
They seemed to lament the prospect ahead
Of a hundred more years of despair
But the sun was revived as we said our farewells
And I sensed its wisdom of thought
That a year is but a drop in the sea
And a century still is but naught
So though we may dress in a different way
Use clubs and balls unthought of today
Relax in splendour at the end our game
Little will really have changed

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ASTBURY 2022

What finer garden could there stand
On all of England's pleasant land
Or wistful waterway divide
From which its lazy lawns be spied?

What rolling pasture could surpass
By grander views or greener grass
These placid pools and gentle slopes
That bear our secret dreams and hopes?

Could mightier or prouder trees
Stand tall on guard but such as these
That line each route and avenue
To honour those seen walking through?

And what adventure might await
Where lady luck or twist of fate
Might sway the final fateful roll
And win the day or lose it all?

So as great and graceful have before
Would that I for ever more
Still young at heart though old and grey
Be wandering its wonderful and winding way