

# FOOTBALL.

No sooner has any game attained to great popularity, than antiquaries are able to demonstrate incontestably that after all the modern is only an imitation, if not an emasculation of the ancient mode of play. It is noticeable, too, that the greater the favour with which the game is regarded, the more ancient is its origin proven to be. Ten years ago association football in Scotland had assumed the character of a national game, and I well remember the inevitable antiquary incontestably proving that the game had previously seen a development fuller than that to which the united efforts of thousands of players had raised it, in the days when cattle-lifting was by all odds the most popular game on the borders of the lands of the rose and thistle. It was with stoical resignation that association football players then accepted the position of disciples instead of masters, and the antiquary retired into obscurity with a self-satisfied chuckle at having demonstrated the inferiority of the players of the present to those hardy borderers who varied sheep stealing, with kicking inflated sheep's bladders. The antiquary having vanished—for a season, as it ultimately proved—players resumed the game, and made it preeminently the field amusement of the young men of Scotland. Everyone was satisfied that whatever may have been the excellence of the skill displayed by the border men of old and however high the merit they were entitled to as originators of the game, the young men of the day, though they but tumbled out of the hives of industry on to green fields for a few odd hours, had made such advances in the science of the game as to be entitled to rank as masters of the second era—when another old relic of humanity came forth and gave his fiat that the game was much more ancient than had previously been suspected. With bated breath the players learned that the Greeks practised football and after having slaughtered a few Romans, taught the game to the remnant of the legions. Thereafter the Roman troops engaged in war and the teaching of football and thus it came that the British learned the game. The antiquary does not give

particulars of its introduction and it is left to a humble player to complete the ruse, old fellow's work by explaining how it occurred. After his step-mother delivered Caractacus to Ostorius, the Briton was taken to Rome, and when there, he saw two or three games, while he was yet in captivity. After he was set free he took such a fancy to football that he found himself spending his money so freely that he had to hold a caucus with himself. On striking a balance, he found that after securing a first-class passage home he would just have sufficient means to enter into the king business and hire two teams for a week. To consider with Caractacus was to act and thus he returned to Britain. As he doubtless calculated beforehand, he only had to pay his teams for their first week's engagement. The fascination of the game made than keep the field long after any pecuniary inducement to appear had disappeared. This is, I believe, the true inwardness of the introduction of football into Britain. No antiquary has yet come forward to explain its introduction into Greece, or its origin. It may save much speculation to centre the first idea of football in Adam, for certainly his kicking away of the fatal apple—though this is not on the record, it is only natural to suppose that he did it—is a genesis as sensible for football as the genesis can be of any other form of 'humanity in action.' Now that we have got at the bottom facts in connection with football I may at once come to something practicable. In these hasty lines it is none of my purpose, however congenial the task would be, to trace the history and evolution of the game since it was, or was not, introduced into Britain by the returned king. Suffice it to say that up till the year 1863 the game was essentially local in all its rules. Thus there were the Harrow, the Eton, the Marlborough, the Shrewsbury, the Rugby, the Scotch, etc., rules, each set differing materially. The effect of these various peculiarities of play in a game where imperfection in any point may (however paradoxical it seem) mean the defeat of a team otherwise fully equal to its opponents, was to retard the progress of the game and to confine the contests to