



# The Skip in the Roaring Game



"Fitting the Tee."

Curling. Curling. Curling.

When bold King Frost comes back again,

His snow-white flag unfurling  
And over the cheerless wintry plain  
The lyart leaves are tirling;  
O, wad creep and crulge aroun  
The fire lug, groaning, gurling?  
When we can heeze oor hearts aboun  
Wi' curling,—curling,—curling.

The sky is bricht, the air is keen,  
Oor limbs wi' could are dirling;  
Then to the loch—lik trusty frien—  
And set the stanes a-birling;  
And shout hurrah for oor auld game,  
Health-giving, frien'ships thirling;  
New fangled sports are no to name  
Wi' curling,—curling,—curling.

But let us have a mindfu' care—

While we are happy curling;  
O' dreary hames, and girdles' bare,  
'Mid frost and snow-drifts whirling;  
We'll play for flammen, coals and meal,  
And keep the stream a-pirling  
O' kindly thochts for puir folk's weal—  
When curling,—curling,—curling.  
(\*Meal-bins.)

"I tell ye, man, that a chiel that is na clean sportsman is fit company for naither man nor baiste!"

That is a perfectly orthodox sentiment, whether you measure it by the negations of a son of Belial or the uncompromising dogma of a true Presbyterian. The supreme test of a sportsman is his attitude on the principle of fair play. The Pagan philosophers preached the essential doctrines of clean sport, and the Great Founder of the Christian faith was also the immaculate sportsman, inasmuch as he incarnated the living principle of fair play—righteous-



"A Thun'erin' Cast."

ness (i.e.) playing the straight game.

The greatest sport men have ever indulged in is the "Roarin' game"—the game that is altogether prehistoric, and yet the most down-to-date diversion common to the age we live in.

If the "Roarin' game" is the greatest of them all, the greatest man in the "Roarin' game" is the skip. What an almighty fellow the skip is to be sure! Is there a game or a contest in peace or war, in which any man so justly (or so unwarrantably) thrusts himself forward as a candidate for the hero worshipping suffrage of his fellows as the curling skip?

In other games or field sports you may watch the proceedings for hours before you are able to distinguish any ostensible leader or captain, but you cannot be ten minutes on the lip of the rink till an overmastering instinct draws your whole powers of observation on the opposing skips.

See that massive son of Anak, with a face like a Nor-West-



"A Hair o' Pith."

moon, a voice like a "strong bull of Bashan," and a capacity for snuff and something else when off duty that has never yet been fathomed? He is Sandy Cormack, skip of the historic "Glentacket" rink, and his opponent is the Reverend Isaac Peabody, of the no less renowned "Thistle." Greater contrast in human flesh surely never existed than what is represented by these two heroes. If Sandy is a fit embodiment of Caledonian brawn, the Reverend Isaac has him beaten in brain but in solid avoirdupoise the "Wee Free" minister, with the perpetual "drap-at-the-nose" is to his adversary as a mosquito to an elephant.

And yet these two stalwarts are greater by far in the esteem of that "cloud of witnesses" by the rink side than anything that history records. Caesar or Alexander, Bruce of Bannockburn, Cromwell, Bonnie Prince Charlie, or even the greatest of the Argyles, never cut such a figure in the public eye as do these vociferating chieftains in the regard of their respective rinks.

Their place is paramount. They take the centre of the stage, plan and carry out every move in the campaign, issue their decrees, and in large measure accept the responsibility for victory or defeat. Their sway is—or should be—absolute. There is no room among the other players for initiative; it is their sole endeavor to obey to the best of their ability, and it is for this reason that personal counts for so much in curling.

It is the great purpose of the skip to get out of his men the best that is in them. He must not only know their play, and be well acquainted with the running of their stones. He must know their temperament, and be well acquainted with their behaviour in the stress of action. He must be ready with the honeyed word of encouragement that will keep his lead from losing heart, or the word of rebuke that will keep his back-hand from growing careless. He must be able to maintain a calm demeanour when all is well, and a cheerful outlook when things are falling to pieces; and he must be able to withal in a tight place to inspire his player with that little touch of extra confidence that will lift him above his normal form.

From his commanding post at the tee-head the skip surveys the battle-field: his two sweepers on either side, and his player on the crampit awaiting instructions before he delivers his stone. As his directions must carry, through the din of a vigorous bonspiel, a distance of forty yards, he must shout lustily (which in itself gives him an air of imperious command), and as there is often much to explain in the situation, the occasion lends itself to eloquence. Thus has come about that extraordinarily rich vocabulary of curling words and phrases which imparts to the game much of its distinctive flavour. It is wonderfully rich in simile and metaphor, full of imagination, embellished by the play both of humor and of pathos. The spectator of a big bonspiel, in fact, without any knowledge whatever of the points of the game, will generally find quite enough to interest and amuse him in the deportment of the players.

It is almost a tradition that the skip be both eloquent and cheerful—though there are notable exceptions to the rule. It is almost a tradition that he should abstain from any word of blame, that he should maintain an attitude of belief that all is for the best. There is nothing more striking about the game—in its native land, at any rate—than this generous attitude

of appreciation with which your skip regards your efforts. So far does it go that he will often look upon your successful shot as a special favour conferred upon himself personally.

"Thank you for that one," he will say, and in moments of fine achievement he is not content with mere approbation. He will



"A Canny Swing."

specially call upon you to come up "and have a look at it"; he will shake you cordially by the hand; he will even (in a crisis) fall upon your neck. It is a fine thing to see him desert his post in the house—when you have shipped your opponent's winner with the last stone of the head—and stride down the ice with outstretched hand to meet you. "You for a curler!" he will say, or "Man, I kennt a' the time that you could dae it!"

But it is a still finer thing to see his magnanimity in the hour of failure. You have been told to lay a guard, and have come roaring up the rink, carrying out his winner and leaving the other side two shots, and you approach in fear and trembling to hear his verdict. He stands scratching a rueful head as he surveys the wreck.

"Eh man, that was a peety," he will say. "The ice is getting awfu' keen. But never mind. It was no your blame." Or you have been asked to draw to an open tee at the close of a head, and



"A' the Curl."