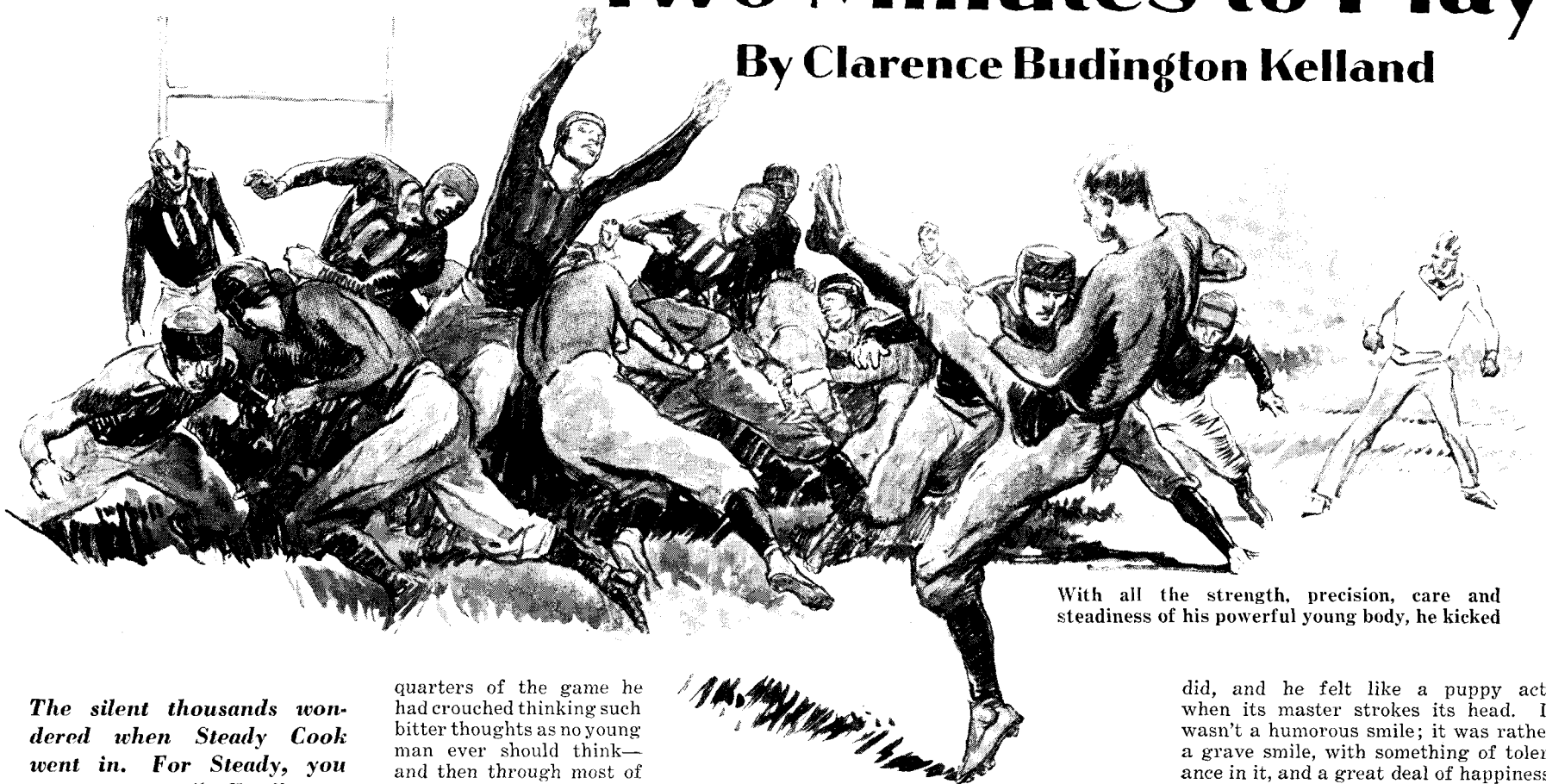


Two Minutes to Play

By Clarence Budington Kelland



With all the strength, precision, care and steadiness of his powerful young body, he kicked

The silent thousands wondered when Steady Cook went in. For Steady, you see, was "yellow"



STEADY COOK straightened up from the huddle and walked slowly back to his position in the kick formation. Automatically he stopped and turned at the correct distance behind the line and, with his eyes on the ground, kicked and scuffed with his right foot to get a grip on the turf. Then he raised his eyes and surveyed his team—his team!—Old Hickory, which had elected him captain at the close of last season.

He could not see the faces of the linemen, but he could guess at their expressions. He could, however, see the faces of Green and Wilmot and Carney and Jones. They were dour, resentful, except Carney's, which was dark with disgust. They resented him, resented his coming into the game at this late hour, resented his being alive, he thought. From Big Loomis at center, to tall, lithe, fiery Jones at end, they were ashamed of him—these men who had been his close friends, even his admirers, for three long years, and for a part of the fourth. Only a part of the fourth.

Only subconsciously was he aware of the shriek of the referee's whistle. Two minutes to play! Two minutes—one hundred and twenty seconds. And that two minutes would contain all the time that he, the captain of his team, had played in regular competition throughout an entire season.

Two minutes! With the game at a scoreless tie; at the fourth down with ten to go.

Throughout three quarters he had sat on the bench, alone at one end, wrapped in his blanket, and watched his teammates play a grim, courageous, defensive game. He had watched them give all they had, and knew in his heart that if he could have added to that all what he could have given last year, it would have been enough to win. Through three

quarters of the game he had crouched thinking such bitter thoughts as no young man ever should think—and then through most of the minutes of the fourth quarter. He, the captain and the leader, knowing that his men did not want him in!

His heart had been out there as they held gallantly; as this team with the black jerseys, which had defeated Old Hickory for three years hand running, in the final big game tried all the football it knew, but could not cross the goal line. No score and two minutes to play. The fourth down and ten to go.

It was then he hurled his blanket from him and strode to the coach.

"Mac," he said in a hard, strained voice, "I'm going in."

"You're not," said Mac. "Sit down."

"I'm going in. I'm captain of this team. I say I'm going in, and in is where I'm going."

MACK'S shrewd eyes looked up at him sympathetically. Steady could read the compassion in them and it warmed him a little.

"You're a fool," said Mac.

But already Steady was over the side line, hurrying to report to the official. Winters went out and Steady took his place in the huddle.

"What's the big idea?" asked Wilmot ironically.

"I'm going to drop-kick," said Steady.

"Couldn't you stay out another two minutes and make it unanimous?" asked Jones.

"Kick formation," snapped Steady.

Now he glanced over the bent backs of the men and saw under its leathern helmet the sneering face of Reck Beggs, saw Reck make some remark in an undertone, and heard the answering snicker. Reck Beggs, who had beaten him out for quarterback on the home high school team in Cairo, and who was, it seemed, to beat him out for a more important position with Ann Wharton, who had been born just across the street from both of them!

Ann was in the stand—and at his invitation. It was an invitation given a year before when matters stood far differently and when her presence would have been a joy to him and an inspiration. She was there, on the Old Hickory side, and he wondered why. Why had she reminded him of his invitation, and

why had she come to be a witness to his humiliation?

The sight of Reck Beggs reminded him of so many things, but most of all it reminded him of Ann and of how she had seemed to prefer him, Steady Cook, to the boy who always had been able to beat him at everything else.

"I like you better than I do Reck," she had said a dozen years ago when they were children together, "because you aren't ever smarty."

Neither was Ann ever smarty, not even when she was of an age when sticking out the tongue was considered to be a stinging retort. Ann never stuck out her tongue. Now that she was grown to gracious young womanhood she never did those adult equivalents of sticking out the tongue.

She was gay, she was witty—but also she could be grave and sympathetic, and Steady knew her to be very, very stalwart. She was, he had often said to himself, the sort of girl on whose lap you could lay your life, neatly done up in a package, for her to do with as she desired. And never hesitate a second about it. He had grown into the habit of depending upon her to do that some day, for he did not regard himself very highly. He relied on Ann to make something of him.

She made him feel very humble—not that he ever was what you might call cocky.

"You know, I just naturally wallow and worship you, Ann," he said that September before he left home to return to college, "but what you see in me is a puzzler. I never get anything pinned on me. I'm not very smart, and the Lord knows I'm not handsome. I can't do everything as Reck can, from turning handsprings to playing the banjo. Near as I can see I'm nothing but a hundred and eighty-five pounds of gristle."

He looked into her eyes then and she was smiling—that peculiar smile of hers which he never could fathom. It made shivers run up and down his spine, that smile

did, and he felt like a puppy acts when its master strokes its head. It wasn't a humorous smile; it was rather a grave smile, with something of tolerance in it, and a great deal of happiness.

"No, Steady," she said, "you aren't very smart, and you're not a bit pretty. You can't do parlor tricks. You can't even get acquainted with yourself. Now there's Reck. He can beat you at almost everything—but, Steady, why do you suppose they elected you captain of your team? Reck would give his soul to be captain of his team, but he isn't. You aren't smart enough to know the difference between a man other men want for captain—and the brilliant sort they don't want for captain, do you?"

"Oh, that!" said Steady. "They just made me captain because I was around and because things were kind of desperate and they knew I wouldn't make any fool breaks."

"I'd like to be the man who gets elected when things are desperate," she said.

"Do you mean," he asked presently, "that you've made up your mind to marry me?"

"We'll take that up," she replied, "in the proper order of business, which isn't for a year yet."

It was that very day the thing happened. He was crouched on his hunkers petting his dog and straightened up suddenly. The world went blur with flashes of fire through the blueness, and the flashes were such rending, tearing pain as he never had felt before. In his knee.

HE STOOD on his left leg, paralyzed, unable to move. Something had happened inside his knee, his right knee; it felt as if it had exploded. Presently the pain itself subsided somewhat, but he could not move, he could not step. He was rooted to that spot as if he had been tied—as if his right leg had been shot from under him. He tried to put his weight on it and almost fell upon his face. There was no support there—nothing but helplessness.

For five long minutes he stood bewildered and then he found he could hobble; fifteen minutes later he could limp across the road to the doctor, who listened to his story and fiddled around with the knee and took it across his chest



like some lever and pulled sidewise until Steady burst into a cold sweat and thought his friend was going to break it in two. There came a dull little click or snap and Steady felt very weak about it.

"There," said the doctor, "that's that."

"But what is it? How did I do it, whatever it is?"

The doctor explained, using long and queer names such as doctors learn, as they grow whiskers, to impress their patients. All Steady got out of it was that there was a thing called a cartilage in there and something had happened to it, like folding up, or tucking in its edge, and that it wasn't fatal but very painful.

"Will it happen again, Doc? I mean, I play football, and will a wallop put it on the blink?"

"You can't tell. It might stand a lot of banging in a game, and then go bad on you while you were walking up the front steps. Knees get bad habits. It may happen again in fifteen minutes, and it may never happen. But most likely it will. You could go to the orthopedic hospital and have an operation and probably get straightened out for good, but I wouldn't advise it yet."

"I'm captain of my team," said Steady. "Will it hold out through the season?"

"Maybe," said the doctor.

So Steady, being that sort of person, said nothing to anybody about it and went back to school, where everybody was surprisingly glad to see him and made a fuss over him. It was very warming to the heart and frightfully bewildering. He was always tickled to death when the fellows let him be around and just tolerated him; but that they should make a fuss over him was sort of upsetting and incomprehensible. Probably, he thought, it was because he was captain, and that was the correct etiquette toward captains.

He was glad to be alone with his

roommate, little Boss Wheeler, coxswain of the crew, a small volcano with no conception whatever of inferiority complexes.

"Mac's been yelping all over the place for you," said Boss. "He's like a cow that's lost her calf. Lousy lot of fresh this year."

"There's always a lousy lot of fresh," said Steady.

"That sounds," said Boss, "like a wise crack, but I'll bet it was just a dependable observation from a mind that never wavers from the truth. There's Mac bawling for you on the stairs."

The door burst open and the coach stood in the doorway with eyes that suddenly lighted. He sighed with relief.

"You're here," he said as if a tremendous load had been taken from his mind. "Whew!"

"Embrace! Embrace and give vent to your pent-up affection," said Boss.

"You clear out, Shrimp," said Mac. "A couple of grown-ups have important things to talk about."

"And don't want any brains in the room when they do it," said Boss, making for the door.

"How's everything?" Mac asked when the door closed again.

"Slick," said Steady, who never used two words when one would do as well.

"BOY, if anything had happened and you hadn't shown up, I'd have bought a rope and gone looking for a tree. Now listen. Let's get right down to cases. We've got a team, and nothing has improved it since spring. It's a team that has the habit of getting licked. It fights, but it hasn't any kick. It works through the preliminary games and gets trimmed in the big one. It doesn't know the feeling of victory. That's what we've got to work with."

"Tough," said Steady.

"We've got to get their tails up and keep them up—and nobody can do it but you. That crowd depends on you like a baby does on its nurse. If you had left school or busted a leg they would lie down and let themselves get walked on. Not that they're quitters. Good kids, but all gummed up with the habit of defeat. Somehow they've got the idea you can pull them through."

"Never got picked for the All-American," said Steady.

"You aren't a hell of a football player, but you're good—good enough. The thing is you got them eating out of your hand. There's something about you. The reason you got named Steady, I guess. Anyhow, the whole show is on your shoulders—and the alumni are barking at my heels."

"Tell the alumni," said Steady, "to raise some football players. That's their job. The business of an alumnus is to get married and have kids that weigh a hundred and ninety and can play like Willie Heston."

Mac blinked. "You're getting verbose," he said.

"The alumni," said Steady, "give me a pain."

"Boy," said Mac, "they sure did rough you in that last game."

"Must 'a' looked silly in that intermission after the third quarter," said Steady. "They had me goofy."

"Goofy! You stayed there in the middle of the field alone and ran through half a dozen plays all by yourself before I caught on."

"Don't remember a thing. Don't remember any of the last half."

"Never saw a man take such a pounding," said Mac. "It was enough to make Jack Dempsey quit." Mac shook his head. "Son, I'm plenty glad I got you this year. What I need is the gamiest boy that ever played for Old Hickory, and, b'gad, I got him."

Steady had not been conscious of being especially game and now Mac's praise embarrassed him. He didn't like compliments—they made him feel absurd because, as he would have said, he knew they were just the bunk.

Now as he stood, steadying himself physically and mentally to signal for the ball, those words of Mac's seemed like the quintessence of bunk to him, who had been referred to in the newspapers as the "yellow captain."

Things had gone along as well as could be hoped for for a couple of weeks. A recruit from last year's freshman team was turning out to be something quite choice, and the temper of the team was good—even optimistic. It was queer how they seemed to rely on him; how they seemed to believe he could pull them through the season. And then it happened.

It was not in scrimmage, not the re-



sult of a wrench or a blow, but merely of turning quickly to watch a long punt. Again the world went blue with flashes of fire through it and cold sweat stood on his forehead. That knee! Somehow he was conscious of dismay rather than of pain.

He stood very still and erect and bent his will to the control of his face. The team mustn't know this. It would be bad for the team. So he clenched his fists and stood there hoping he would not fall down. He could not have moved, could not have taken a step to save his life. It seemed as if an hour passed and then a harsh whisper behind him asked, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Steady.

"What's the matter?" repeated Mac.

"Shut up. They'll hear. Knee! Be all right in a minute."

"Come over here to the bench."

"CAN'T move," said Steady through his teeth. "Stay here and talk so I won't have to."

"This 'ud happen," said Mac bitterly, mentioning certain pagan deities of his acquaintance. "Things were going too well." Despair was in his voice, for he had had experience with knees in his specialized life.

"I think I can walk now," said Steady.

"You stand there like your feet were dug in," said Mac, "until you can move without limping. If you limp a limp I'll tear your heart out."

That was that. In the evening a secret conclave was held over that knee by Mac and the trainer and a couple of specialists who seemed to derive pleasure from twisting and prodding and taking X-ray pictures. It was not encouraging, nor were the pictures of such a nature as to cause optimism when they were examined next day. The specialists pronounced their verdict.

"We'll have to go in there and straighten things out," they said.

"How long?" asked Mac.

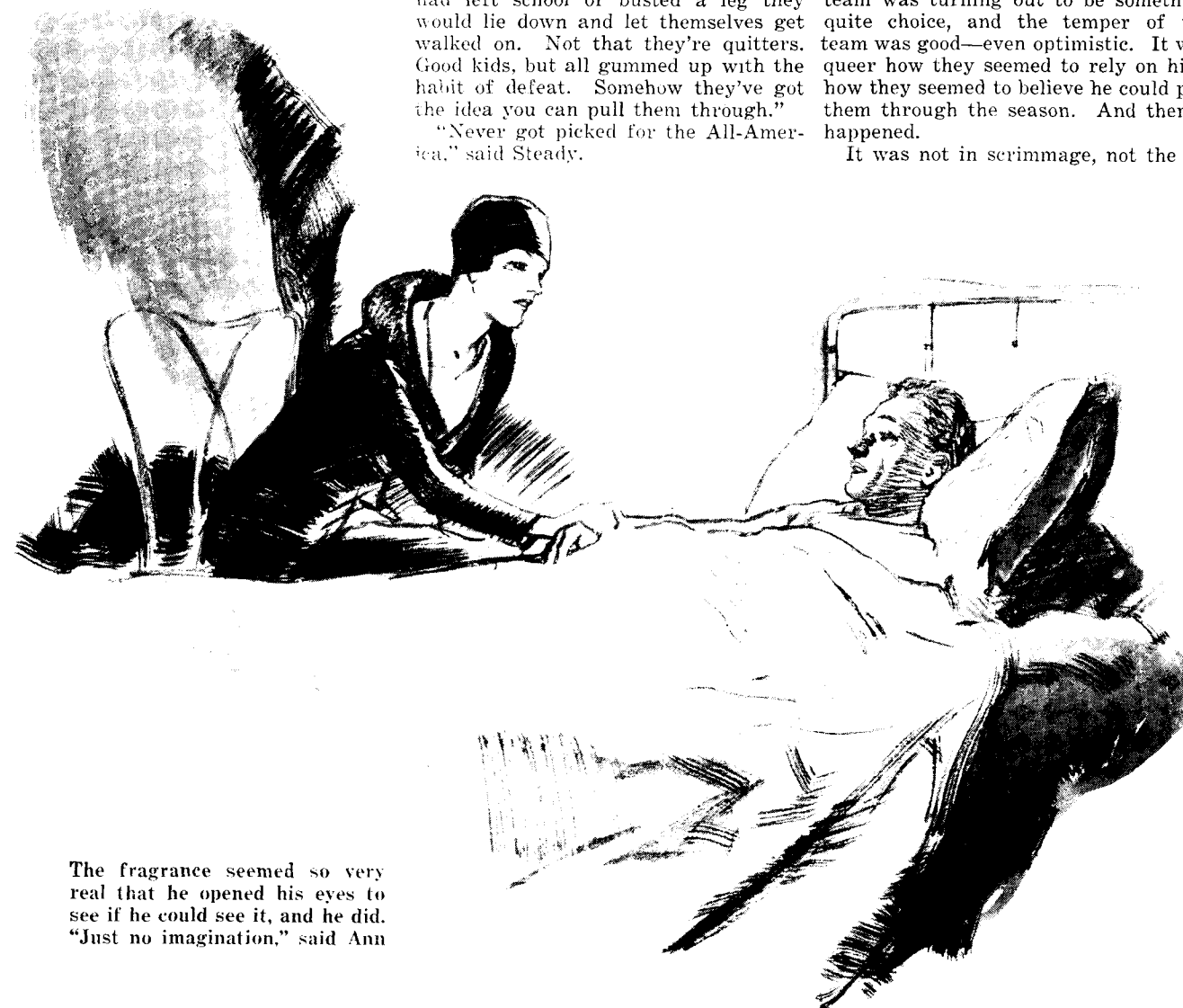
"He couldn't play this season—ought never to play again," and they pointed out what things might happen to cause Steady to go through life with a stiff leg or worse. Mac sat with bowed head and Steady, feeling terribly guilty, went to him and laid a hand on his shoulder. "I'm gosh-awful sorry, Mac," he apologized. "I wouldn't have thrown you down like this, not for gold and precious stones. . . . Listen, Mac, we'll take a chance, eh? Maybe the darn thing'll hold out."

"Lemme think," said Mac, but he had smiled at Steady—the sort of a smile a man remembers. Then, turning to the others he said savagely: "Clamp your jaws on this. If a word of it gets out it'll be from one of you and I'll drop in of an evening for a little brutality. Come along, Steady. To my rooms."

In the coach's quarters they sat down glumly. "Here's the situation," Mac said, "and see if you can solve it: You can't play, and you can't quit. What's the answer?"

Steady shook his head.

"We've got the team on its toes. It swears by you. (Continued on page 26)"



The fragrance seemed so very real that he opened his eyes to see if he could see it, and he did. "Just no imagination," said Ann

Mid-irons and Palaces

There isn't a day laborer who works as hard as some unhappy millionaire who has sworn to break a hundred. Not for him the calm joy of sweet restful evenin's surrounded by wife an' children—he's busy playin' spoon shots out of the fern jars in the conservatory

Uncle Henry

THERE doesn't seem to be any particular excitement over the approachin' session of Congress," remarked Mr. Stubbs.

"Why should there be?" Uncle Henry answered morosely. "Far more important matters claim popular interest an' consideration. From all over the country come reports that the slice is worse than ever this year, an' that golf clubs in every section are bein' ravaged by the deadly hookworm. There's a regular epidemic of heel blisters, an' Red Cross nurses are worked to death carin' for cases of sand itch contracted in traps.

"I don't want to be an alarmist, 'Lonzo, but America is in a mighty bad way. Accordin' to statistics recently compiled by the League for the Study of Insanity, only two people in a hundred are able to keep the head down, an' nine hundred out of every thousand make a practice of droppin' the right shoulder.

"Eight in ten come back too quick, forty-seven out of fifty bend the left wrist, an' practically 99 per cent are in the habit of pressin'.

"For the futile year endin' June 30, 1928, a total of 15,000,000 golf balls were lost, an' 17,134 sets of golf sticks were thrown into lakes, ravines or ash cans. Some 18,000 divorces were granted because husbands insisted upon practicin' chip shots in the parlor or puttin' peas at table, an' 400 wives were killed for expressin' surprise that their mates played no better in view of the time they spent on the game.

"Nothin' can be expected from President Coolidge, of course, for he's not a golfer. However, it's his misfortune rather than his fault, for he's physically unfit. The bottom of a sand trap, filled with heel prints, is no place for any man with an ingrown speech. Consider his plight when he looked up on an easy pitch shot to the green? What if he happened to be playin' one under fives right up to the eighth hole an' then took a snappy twelve?

"As a matter of fact, there's not a leader in either political party shows any understandin' or sympathy. You don't see McNary an' Haugen introducin' a golf relief bill, do you? Yet as opposed to the 3,000,000 farmers in the United States there are more than 25,000,000 people who make a business of golf. Almost as many work at the game as watch buildin's bein' torn down or stand gazin' at a construction gang diggin' holes in the ground.

"An' if you ask me, 'Lonzo, what relief does a farmer need? When he fares forth of a mornin' to tear up the virgin



18,000 divorces because husbands practiced chip shots in the parlor

sod, at least he has a *spade*, an' isn't forced to rely entirely upon a mashie or a mid-iron. What does it matter if he looks up from his plow or fails to follow through with the hoe? It's easy for him to make a drive of ten or fifteen miles, an' he runs no risk of losin' a horse or a mule in a water hole.

"What does tax reduction mean to a man who's spent the best years of his life tryin' to break a hundred? Low taxes are good enough in their way, but Americans are more interested in the low nineties. Secretary Kellogg's proposed treaties for world peace are simply a waste of time. How on earth can he expect to take hate an' bitterness out of the heart of humanity as long as there is a stretch of rough in front of every tee?

Fill Up the Sand Traps

"A golf relief bill! That's what the country needs. MORE AN' WIDER FAIRWAYS! It's a slogan that would thrill every man an' woman, an' I'm surprised that the politicians haven't had the wit to see it.

"Drain the water holes or else roof 'em over with concrete so that the ball can get a bounce. Fill up the sand traps, or, if that isn't practical, fit 'em up with easy chairs an' escalators. As it is now, a man has to play with a miner's lamp on his cap, an' take pemican, a rope ladder an' a portable radio when he goes down into those

yawnin' abysses that disfigure fair landscapes.

"Encourage the tourist population to jump over fences an' pick wild flowers. Urge 'em to tear the darned things up by the roots! Also trees an' shrubs! All this talk about the deep tangled wildwood sounds well in books, but after a man has sliced into one for the fifth time, he's ready to let out a cry for more an' better vandals. When you find your ball coyly imbedded in a violet cluster, or shyly hidin' beneath a clump of flowerin' vines, the less said about nature the better.

"For another thing, there ought to be a law prescribin' severe penalties for newspapers that print these pieces by famous golfers. Or else make 'em agree on somethin'. Every blamed one tells you a different way to hold your hands, plant your feet, keep your head an' pivot the body. After you've spent an hour tryin' to follow instructions, your only hope is that some friend will lead you away to a home for the feeble-minded an' see that you get a room with southern exposure.

"You know how I've always praised Bobby Jones? Why, there was a time when I wanted the local Sunday school to teach from his book on iron shots. But did you see his statement the other day? Gave it as his opinion that the game had gotten too easy, an' he wants it stiffened up! Well, let's hope I never meet him now. Never yet have I been up

for homicide, but if young Jones an' I came face to face, I don't think I could restrain myself.

"Too easy indeed! Let him stand at the gate of a golf course, when darkness brings an end to the sweat an' toil of the day, an' watch the stream of wretched, broken men that pour out of thicket, stream, trap an' ravine. Let him study those haggard faces, bent backs an' anguished eyes—the stigmata of drudgery—an' then let's see if he has the hardihood to repeat his infamous suggestion that the game of golf ought to be made harder.

"Another thing that infuriates me is all this sneerin', jeerin' talk about the Idle Rich. Idle! Why, 'Lonzo, there isn't a day laborer in the whole wide world who works half as hard as some unhappy millionaire who has sworn to break a hundred. In the burnin' heat of summer, while humble toilers rest an' enjoy the comfort of cool sewers or gossip in the shade, or when winter's cold tears at the vitals, the money master is out in the weather moanin' an' cursin', perhaps, but unrestin'.

The Daily Soul Struggle

"Even on days when he's compelled to stay in his office there is no respite, for between conferences he tries mashie shots into the ink well, an' practices niblicks out of the wastebasket. An' not for him the calm joy of sweet, restful evenin's, surrounded by wife an' children. Either he's busy takin' a course in psychoanalysis, tryin' to get rid of mental hazards, or he's playin' spoon shots out of fern jars in the conservatory.

"Don't ever get the idea that golf is jes' a game, 'Lonzo. It's a life work, callin' for courage, devotion an' sacrifice, with death the only release. Patience an' persistence are the paths that one must tread.

"Every inch of the golfer's way is thick with agony of spirit as well as body. Think of the inner conflict that tears a man when he plunges into a jungle an' discovers his ball tucked away under a boulder. One little kick of the foot will save him three or four strokes, an' *not a soul is near to see*. Yet every day, in every part of the country, soul struggles like that are takin' place an' bein' won.

"Golf, however, has its national values, 'Lonzo. Before we got it from the Scotch there was grave fear that democracy might perish from the face of the earth. Great captains of industry were stealin' power from the people an' slowly subvertin' free institutions. Golf has changed all that, for today political power means nothin' to the average millionaire. His chief aim—his *one* aim, in fact—is to keep his ball on the course.

"The old class hatred has been done away with entirely, an' the poor are no longer eaten up by their mean envies of the rich. As the humble artisans sit in the shade, comfortably gossipin' until the noonday whistle blows, an' watch money masters toilin' over hill an' dale, choppin', swingin' an' gouglin', it's no longer envy that the poor man feels. No indeed, 'Lonzo. It's *pity*."

"If it's a Scotch game," said Mr. Stubbs, "why is it that Scotchmen don't win more championships?"

"They don't play it enough," answered Uncle Henry. "On most Scotch links you're allowed a year to find a lost ball."