

# Giant in The Land

THE CENTENARY OF DONALD DINNIE

By ALAN GRAEME

AS I watched the competitors come in from the last round of the Open Golf Championship at Carnoustie the other day, I wondered just how many of them would take their place as legendary figures in the history of their game, how many of them might even become a kind of solar myth. Hagen, perhaps? Perhaps not! For there are so many good 'uns nowadays that it is very difficult



for one individual to raise head and shoulders high enough above those of the other big fellows. Further, except perhaps in the case of Henry Cotton, professional golfers lay down the law nowadays as a body, and not as individuals. More, a gay jumper has not the lasting quality of a beard, which gives Tom Morris a few *bisques* in the game of being remembered.

And from beards my mind travels to W. G. Grace and cricket, and I find that in the cricket field also the chances of taking a place in the legend are very limited in the case of present-day players. With the fourth of August so near to us and its memories of War, I recall just how great a figure Grace was. In the autumn of 1915 I was in

London. Loos was a fresh memory, a Zeppelin had just let us know how near the capital was to Germany, and a leading newspaper came out with a morning bill—and all that was on it was:—

W. G. DEAD.

Grace, the greatest of all cricketers, had gone to his rest, and they put the green turf over him at Elmer's End. We



shut our eyes and could see the "grand old man" striding across to the wicket again with the cap that always seemed so ridiculously small and the beard that seemed so ridiculously big!

And about the same time another "G.O.M." of sport went to his rest—but I knew of no bill that read:—

## DONALD DINNIE DEAD.

Yet out in France in the line by Hebuterne we watched our sixty-pounder trench-mortar bombs whirling and swinging through the air, and we said: "There's another Donald Dinnie for them!"

And so back to Carnoustie, and the departing heroes of a day—and I paused to ask myself how many Scots remembered that one hundred years ago on the day after this 1937 Open Golf Championship ended, Donald Dinnie was born at Aboyne.

Grace and Dinnie had much in common. In their own estimation, and perhaps in truth, neither had a rival in his particular branch of sport. Each was absolutely confident of his own ability. "You come in third wicket," Grace would say. He never made it "you go in." "I'll hae tae let him see hoo tae throw," said Dinnie. But there was one great difference between these two great athletes—whereas Grace saw to it that his records remained as facts, there is no definite proof of what Dinnie could really do. One thing definite we can say of him—that for a quarter of a century he was the supreme Highland athlete.

But let us take all things in order. Legend even surrounds the story of the choice of Donald's name. Here is the tale as they have it on Deeside. A man from the Island of Skye applied for a job at the Carmyllie stone quarries, in Angus. He was taken on, and for a couple of months he worked away, and delighted the other quarrymen by his exhibitions of strength. But one day a whiff of tangle air must have blown across from the North Sea, and the craving for the Islands came into the man's heart. That night he packed up, drew the wages that were due to him, and set out on the road to the Isles.

He made his way by one of the mounth roads over the Grampians, and finally reached Deeside. The story goes that the Islander stopped to rest by an old inn there. Some Deeside men were seated on the bench at the door, and they invited the stranger to join them in their evening refreshment. The traveller accepted the invitation, and the conversation turned on feats of physical strength. Suddenly

one of the "locals" rose from his seat, stretched his big frame, and, going to the side of the inn wall, gripped a huge boulder that lay there, and with a tremendous effort raised it breast-high.

"I never met a man who could do that," he said as he returned to his seat.

Without a word the stranger arose, picked up the boulder, and with a sudden jerk raised it above his head, then slowly lowered it, and returned to his seat without speaking. For a little while the company sat in silent admiration, and at length the big Deeside man spoke.

"Friend," he said, "would you be obliging me by telling me your name?"

"Donald Macdonald, of Skye," answered the stranger.

"Well, friend," replied the native, "if I ever have a son I shall call him after you, for you are the strongest man I've ever met."

Several years later, in the parish of Aboyne, in Aberdeenshire, a son was born to the big Deeside, and, mindful of his promise, the proud father called the boy Donald after the giant from Skye. The big Aberdeenshire man was Robert Dinnie, and the son, who first saw the light on the 10th of July, 1837, was Donald Dinnie.

Robert Dinnie was a mason and contractor in Aboyne, and was a man of some literary ability. He published a very good little "History of Birse," a copy of which lies beside me as I write, and he also wrote some not undistinguished verses. He is remembered for the strange names he chose for his other sons. A Deeside veteran, who knew him well, told me that, when each of his sons made his entry into this world, Robert Dinnie would never let anyone—not even his wife—know what he had chosen as a name for the boy. He would solemnly dress himself up in his best clothes, and, without a word to anyone, would pay a visit to the minister in order to make all arrangements. As I have told you, he chose the name Donald for his eldest son, but after that he allowed his imagination to work a bit. He named one boy Digby; another—who grew to the immense height of six feet five inches—Lubin; a third, Montague. When his last son arrived, his wife and others begged him to "gi'e the lad a Christian name." Robert promised, and the boy was christened Walter.

Donald was apprenticed to his father's trade, and he proved himself a good workman. He actually issued a challenge that he would dress and build granite against any mason in the world. At the age of sixteen he gained fame in the field of Highland athletics, went on improving



steadily, and reached his best form at about the age of thirty-five. As a matter of fact, he forsook the building trade at the age of thirty and went into the hotel business. He was not so financially successful in his new venture, but it certainly gave him opportunities for more consistent training.

He acted as mine host in Kincardine O'Neil, Stonehaven, and Auchinblae. As Charles Donaldson wrote: "At Stonehaven Dinnie had done remarkably good business in carriage-hiring and funeral undertaking, the latter in particular having proved most lucrative. As a consequence, Dinnie put much faith in his new venture at Auchinblae, as there was not a hearse in the district for miles round. Here he set up a pretty large establishment, prepared to bury the entire population at short notice, and on the most reasonable terms. But the business hung fire, as it were. The people were in no hurry to die, and when they were finally compelled to leave the vale of tears, they preferred to be carried as their forebears had been, and Donal's hearse and horses stood idle."

In later years Dinnie ventured into the hotel business in Australia and New Zealand, and finally ran a chip and fish shop in Glasgow.

And now to Donald as the athlete. At his best his measurements were:—Height, 6 feet; weight, 15 stone 9 pounds; chest, 46½ inches; thigh, 26½ inches; calf, 17½ inches. It is greatly to be regretted that change in the handles of hammers, unrecorded conditions of grounds, doubts as to actual weights, make it difficult to compare Dinnie's feats with those of modern athletes, but experts who knew Dinnie are of opinion that his records would stand at something like the following: 16 lb. hammer, 116 feet; 16 lb. ball, 45 feet; 22 lb. ball, 37 feet. He is given credit for many better performances than those, of course. For example, at Coupar Angus in 1871, he threw a reputed 16 lb. hammer 138 feet 8 inches, and he is said to have putted a genuine 16 lb. ball 49½ feet. He was in a class by himself with the caber, and also as a wrestler, and in the Scotland of his time he had no equal as a weight-lifter.

When he toured abroad he was unbeaten at the usual Highland Games feats, and he also took a worthy place in wrestling. He won the mixed-styles championship of America, and the great Muldoon, while superior to him in the Graeco-Roman style, had to give way to him under the Cumberland code. In New Zealand and Australia he beat all the champion wrestlers.

For many years Dinnie attended all the leading meetings

in Scotland, and walked away with all the prizes. In fact he made it his business to see that all his exhibitions were made worth while. A curious incident in this connection happened one year when the Braemar Games were held at Mar Lodge. All the heavy events were over, and the show was closing down, when news came that King Edward VII. (then Prince of Wales) was arriving. The Prince had been expected all day, but finally any hope of his turning up had been abandoned, and then in bowled his carriage, when the games were practically over. It was up to the Committee to provide something, so they decided to ask Donald Dinnie to give one or two exhibition throws. At this time the great Donald was in his heyday, and the Committee thought that, if they could get him to putt the weight and toss the caber, a satisfactory show would be staged for the Prince of Wales. But Dinnie was not so easily managed. When asked if he would do as the Committee desired: "Oh ay," said Donal, "but I'll want twa pound."

The Committee tried to convince Dinnie that the honour of throwing before the Prince of Wales should be a fitting recompense for all his trouble, but that was not Donal's view. "Na, na," said he. "I pey my taxes, and I'll no' tak' less."

Donal' would not be persuaded, and so the other athletes took the field without him. Things went not so badly with the stone and the hammer, but when they came to the caber none of the competitors could turn it over. Dinnie, in exasperation, rushed out of the stripping tent, got hold of the caber, and threw it as easily as if it had been a walking-stick.

Dinnie strenuously denied that he asked two pounds for himself, stating that he wanted it put up as a special prize for which everybody might compete; but, since Dinnie was bound to win, it is somewhat difficult to see the difference.

Donald Dinnie had only one poor season in Scotland—in 1867. That year James Fleming reigned supreme. Fleming was born at Ballinluig in 1840, and became brewer and butler in the castle of Blair Atholl. He stood just an inch under the six feet, and scaled 14½ stone. He was a very popular man, and perhaps the reason why Dinnie was not popular in Perthshire was that he persuaded Jimmy Fleming to give up his position in the Duke's castle and to tour abroad as a professional athlete.

In 1873 and 1874 Fleming and Dinnie toured Scotland together and won everything. Then another star appeared on the horizon. Bit by bit George Davidson took Fleming's place, and James dropped out. Then Dinnie and Davidson



went off to the games together, and Jimmy hung about Donald's stables at Stonehaven.

In the year 1883 Dinnie went off to Australia, and Fleming soon followed him ; and there, in Melbourne, Fleming died.

Davidson had the ground now, and when Dinnie returned he found his day over.

The rest of Dinnie's life was an unhappy one. He disliked to hear the younger men praised. Poverty pursued him. But he still kept his head high. In some ways one feels inclined to think he lived too long, for his fame dwindled with his days. Had he gone out in his glory, carping criticism would never have been heard. But his own bitterness created critics, and the power of his youth to sweep them aside had gone.

Many good stories are told of Dinnie's tours in foreign parts, but one of the best was that related to me by a Scottish journalist.

The journalist at the time was busy writing up the amazing career of a gentleman who had made Scotland famous—or infamous, as the case may be—in the annals of crime. At one time this Scots criminal had temporarily "left his country for his country's good." He was moving about America, and having a pretty thin time. Dinnie was wrestling at a sports ground in New York. After the show was over Donald had received his share of the gate-money, and had put it in his coat in the tent. The other Scot, whom we shall call Jimmy, was in great need of a temporary loan, and took the cash as well as Dinnie's watch, medals, &c. Many years afterwards the member of the criminal classes was in my friend's office when Donald called. The journalist introduced the two of them.

"I think I've seen you somewhere before," said the criminal.

"I dinna remember you," replied Donald.

"I saw you after you'd wrestled So-and-so in New York."

"Oh," said Donald. "Somebody cleared me out that day, and if I ever meet him——" Here Donald gave a graphic description, both in word and action, of what he would do to the gentleman in question.

"Quite right, Mr Dinnie," said the other. "I quite agree with you. The fellow deserves all you'll give him. Good-morning"—and he beat a hurried retreat. Donald never knew how near he had been to the man he wanted to man-handle.

The journalist was glad he didn't. You see, the office wasn't insured.

## French and Scottish Fare

### A CONTRAST IN CUISINES

By CHRISTINA JUST

I HOPE I shall not be immediately placed in the octogenarian class if I say that I know a family of four, excluding parents, who still go for family holidays, and hold long family discussions as to the locus and type of the holiday. I was an auditor at one of these, which raged intermittently for a whole day, reaching "gale force" at meal times. Was it to be Tobermory with its "magic casements" and mists shot with silver, or that white-walled vine-farm on the borders of Touraine? So, all day long, the noise of battle rolled. As evening fell, the father, lighting his pipe of peace, took a hand in the discussion. "You are no nearer finality than when you began," he said in his best committee manner. "Reduce the thing to figures in a business-like way." And taking out his notebook, he wrote :

TOBERMORY			TOURAINÉ		
Scenery	-	75	Scenery	-	25
Weather (generously estimated)	5		Weather	-	75
Bathing	-	10	Sight-seeing (Châteaux, &c.)	-	20
Golf	-	30			

"Arithmetic never proved anything," derided the youngest member of the family, scanning these totals. "Didn't Andrew Lang say that most people use figures as a drunk man uses a lamp-post—for support rather than for illumination?" "Literature never settled anything either," said the mother, who had buried all her literary ambitions years ago. "Give me the pencil"—in phrase and manner recalling one of the more genial presentments of Lady Macbeth. In firm characters she wrote in the Touraine column the single word: "Food—100." There was a shout of acclamation. "O, those *petits pois*!" said one voice dreamily. "O, those *soufflés de fromage*!" said another. Sheer greed, as the youngest member phrased it, had tipped the scale. Touraine had won.

There is a moral in this simple family chronicle. The scenery of Touraine cannot compare with the ever-changing loveliness of the West Highland landscape. Even the Loire, though it resembles the Tay, is inferior to it in the beauty and variety of its course. But what boots it though you gaze