



Kolf on the ice at Amsterdam, with Montelbaan's Tower in the background. From a painting by Aert van der Neer (1603-1677).

J. A. BRONGERS (B.P.M., THE HAGUE), who has made an intensive study of the history of the game, claims that golf had its origin in the Low Countries

THE OLD DUTCH GAME of 'kolf' differs in name from 'golf' by only one letter, but those who today know both games may say that apart from this the two games have nothing in common. Golf is played in the open air on a course covering 50-125 acres, whereas kolf is nowadays played in Holland indoors on a court about 22 yards long and 5½ yards wide, often adjoining the village inn, where the players mix the pleasures of the game with those of a glass of beer and a pipe of tobacco.

One can hardly imagine a greater contrast; yet I venture to assert that golf and kolf are connected, and that both games have the same origin, which is to be found in the Low Lands by the sea. Just as golf has been subject to evolution in the course of time, so the Dutch game of kolf, or *kolven*, has evolved to an even greater extent. For it is a fact that kolf was once played in Holland in much the same manner as the 'Royal and Ancient Game' is now played under the rules of St. Andrews.

From the 15th century onwards golf caught on, more or less in its present form, in Scotland, the country from which, in the 19th century, it started to conquer the world. The earliest written evidence which has come down to us of the popularity of the game in Scotland is a Scottish law dated March 6th, 1457, pro-

hibiting golf altogether because archery, so much more important for national defence, was being neglected.

#### FIRST REFERENCES TO KOLF

By that time, however, the kolf game was being played, no less enthusiastically, in Holland; and, indeed, according to official Dutch records, it was popular at a date even earlier than the oldest written evidence of golf in Scotland. And this was not the game of kolf as it is played nowadays in a few parts of Holland, as a quaint survival of a once popular sport, but definitely quite a different game, as we learn from the old chronicles. At all events, this game was played outdoors on a large field, with a ball stiffened with feathers, and clubs different from their present-day form. Exactly *how* the game was played in Holland in those days is not known, but from what we do know we may conclude that it was a game very much like golf.



Albert, Duke of Bavaria, conferred in 1398 on the citizens of Brielle (an ancient town near Rotterdam) the right *de bal metten colven slaen buten der vesten* ("to play kolf outside the ramparts of the town"). This 'sporting Duke' had already granted a similar right in 1390 to the citizens of Haarlem when he made them present of a certain field, called *de Baan* (the Course), on which to play kolf and other games "in perpetuity".

Going somewhat further south to Brussels we already find a by-law of the Town Council dated 1360 saying that anyone playing kolf would be fined twenty *scellinge* (shillings), failing this would be removed of his upper clothing.

From the above grants by Duke Albert, it will at once be apparent that the game of kolf needed much more space in those days. A study of the history of Dutch games reveals that the modern kolf courts with their limited space date only from the 17th century. Before that time the space was unrestricted: the game was played in churchyards, on the public highway and, if possible, on the ice. Many by-laws are known to us from various towns prohibiting the game of kolf near churches and on public roads on account of the annoyance caused, and banishing it to outside the ci-

