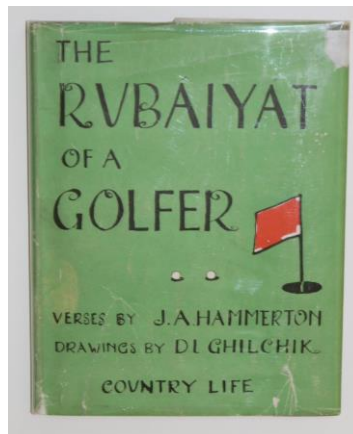


Valuable Book Group, LLC
Specialists in Rare and Antiquarian Golf Books
Newsletter and Book Review for the Serious Collector

The Rubáiyát of a Golfer

Herbert Warren Wind once noted how expansive the universe of golf books is, including “golf translations” of Shakespeare, Horace and Omar Khayyam. Today we focus on the last of the trilogy, the *Rubáiyát of a Golfer*, or, a humorous poetic work (containing only quatrains) with accompanying comic illustrations. The book’s author, Sir John Alexander Hammerton, is described by the *Dictionary of National Biography* as “the most successful creator of large-scale works of reference that Britain has known.” Among other roles he held was editor of *Punch’s Library of Humor*, a multi-volume set of books based on the weekly magazine, which also includes a title on golf. And apparently, Sir John was a frustrated golfer as well; stymied by not being able to play for the six years of the Second World War, he used the editing of these poems as his outlet.



The compact book is 72 pages (published by Country Life Limited in 1946; Donovan & Jerris H4810) and is one of only a handful of golf books published during the war. The book’s accompanying illustrations were done by David Ghilchik, who was an illustrator for *Punch Magazine*, and his contribution to the effort is in some ways the star of the show, lifting the sentiments of the poems off the page and providing the appropriate golfing atmosphere with English golfers scampering around in full tweeds.

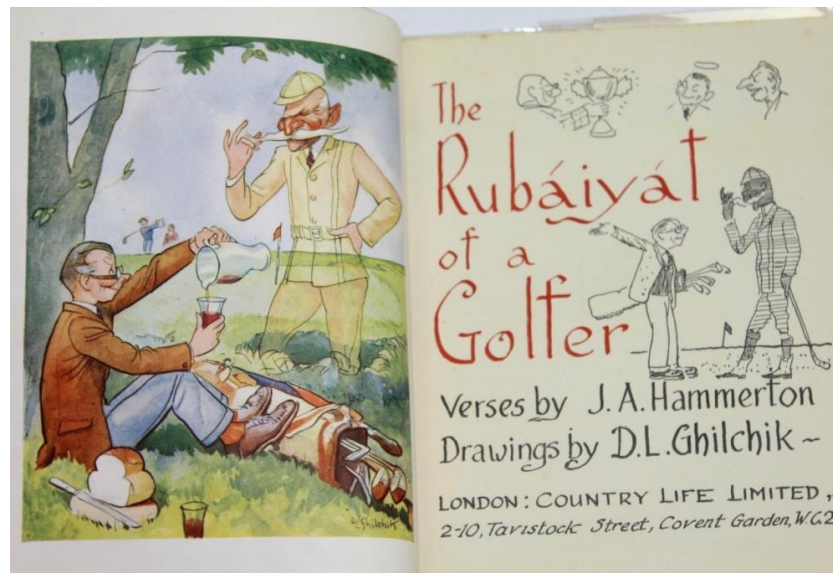
If you know as much about poetry as I do—which is to say you don’t—a quatrain is a poem having four lines. A Rubáiyát is a traditional Persian verse form consisting of a collection of quatrains, typically rhyming aaba (meaning the 1st, 2nd, and 4th lines end with rhyming words). The origins of the Rubáiyát go back to ancient Persia and the mathematical-philosopher-poet Omar Khayyam (1048–1131). The actual term Rubáiyát was coined by Edward Fitzgerald during his 1859 translation from Persian to English of a selection of quatrains attributed to Khayyam.

The book contains 34 golf quatrains and 38 illustrations, all of which still ring true today. Some samples follow:

*The "happy medium" is our spirit's quest ~
Neither to pull nor slice, the one sure test ~
As one fault's cured another shows . . . ah, yes,
No Golf is, but always to be blest.*

And,

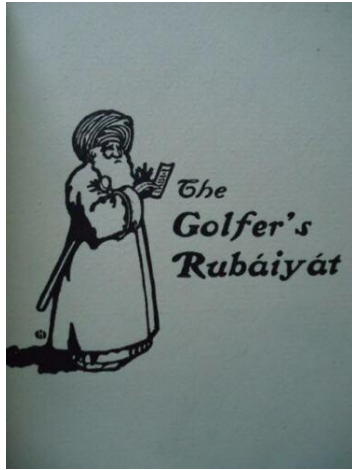
*New Dawn revives the old Hole that we may
Put up a better score than Yesterday.
Allah knows twere ill should we do worse, but
Dawns can be false and Hope too oft betray.*



The stunning frontispiece from Hammerton's Rubáiyát

As one of the few golf books produced during the War it contains a notation, "book Production War Economy Standard," with their approving seal on the book's end paper. Although a modest book in its own rite, *The Rubáiyát of a Golfer* has one of the most beautiful frontispieces in the golf library. It is a well done little book that captures the essence of golf's struggle.

Hammerton's effort wasn't golf's first foray into Rubaiyating. The Americans led the charge in 1901 with a book published by Herbert S. Stone & Co. in Chicago. *The Golfer's Rubáiyát* (D & J B21580) was written by H. W. Boynton and contains 78 quatrains. Whereas the *Country Life* book has a definitive English feel to it, Boynton's book steps right out of the Middle East with hand-drawn illustrations evoking Persian themes featuring baggy pants, wide belts, and turbans throughout. The poetry is also good:



*Glad if the Master of the Handicap
At last shall find you come without mishap,
Though without Glory, to turn in the card
He has expected of your sort of chap.*

The Rubáiyát of a Golfer is becoming increasingly difficult to find with a good dust jacket, although, *The Golfer's Rubáiyát* is the rarer of the two books.

As usual, Wind was right, there is such a deep breadth of literature on the game that it can keep us entertained for a lifetime.

-- John Sabino