

A Theory of Golf, or Wrist Action Again

By R. STANLEY WEIR



THE writer has been playing golf for nearly twenty years and thinks he has read practically every book that has been published during that time. He would be tempted to say that, in the printing and publication of many of these books, much good paper and ink have been wasted but for the fact that, however absurdly authors may write about the game in attempting to elucidate practical theory, the game itself is so fascinating as to make the reading of almost any book on golf well worth while, particularly in rainy weather or, say, in the winter of the golfer's discontent. During those twenty years, too, he has also met many professional teachers of golf and has exchanged silver and paper currency for advice and instruction given or "professed" by them in the art of propelling golf balls according to proper methods along green fields. The greater part of this paper currency and silver, he is also tempted to remark, might have been more profitably given, say, to charitable purposes but for the fact that professionals are by far, for the most part, the most entertaining fellows any golfer is likely to meet with.

If we come to the books of Braid and Vardon we meet, not with any definite theory of the game, but a series of rules and cautions and injunctions and prohibitions that leave the sedulous reader highly entertained no doubt, but mentally bewildered and absolutely without any single unifying principle which reduces golf as it ought to be reduced, to a simple matter of practice according to the many and varying exigencies of different situations and different clubs.

Braid bids us "hard at it from the top" which no experimenter but finds disastrous. "Pause in iron play at the top" which simply focuses attention at the wrong end of the swing and blinds the player to any intelligible theory of the game. That the wrists have something highly important to do in the stroke of golf Braid affects to believe, in this respect and, as will be seen, it is very vital, from his great compeer, Harry Vardon; but, instead of giving us a clear, straight-forward exposition, we are beguiled by mysterious rhetoric in which the "corkscrew" is the noble metaphor. The action of the wrists, we are told, is for all the world like the action of the hand in inserting a corkscrew into the cork of a bottle. Hundreds of Braid's readers have pondered over this cryptic saying and have finally given it up in despair, and on appealing to that great potentate, the local professional, for an elucidation have probably received such an answer as received from his pro on putting

a similar query. "Jimmie Braid said that? Not he. Well, if he did, he was fair talking nonsense."

But to confute Braid it is only necessary to cite Vardon who flatly denies the special function of the wrists and gives you seven or eight rules of the most obvious kind as containing all that is necessary to know for our salvation as golfers. In one of his books the great secret is, to co-ordinate a shoving out of your left hip as the club comes down; in a second book you are exhorted to attempt the impossible feat of hitting your ball while at the same time attempting to hit somebody who is imagined to stand behind you! Really, with every desire to write respectfully of eminent names one has to laugh, unless he would blaspheme, at the total absence in their publications of any clearly defined theory of a game whose theory, difficult as its practice (largely because of defective theory) may be, is really as simple as A, B, C.

The world of golf has been further bewildered by other writers who announce that the secret of golf consists in smiting the ball with the right hand and bearing with the weight of the body on the left leg rather than on the right leg, in the process of swinging. So dense is the leading exponent of this school that he cannot see how the weight can possibly bear chiefly on the right leg without swaying to the right! This clinches his argument for the left leg. He does not perceive that with the head kept still and the torso turning on the spine as a pivot there is not the slightest necessity for swaying. But, right or left, the discussion is beside the mark and miles away from the essential feature of true golf swaying.

What then is the essential feature of the golf swing? For we need not take time or space to do more than name other books such as the "Practical Golf" of Walter J. Travis, one of our most accurate and concise manuals, which just touches the great secret and then drops it like the proverbial hot potato; or Jerome Travers' books which convince the reader that the author either knows more than he cares to reveal or has failed to clinch more victories at critical times because of the lack of a conscious workable theory, or of Marshall Whinatch's "Golf," whose painful and fantastic strivings after golfing truth once bewildered many; or of J. H. Taylor's manly and straight-forward but still defective presentation. What then is the essential feature of the golf swing?

It is simply this, that the ball be struck as with the wrists, that is, with the sensation of wrist action, forearm action though it really be. Knee action and body action are subsidiary and contributory in the swing. Arm action is likewise contributory. All the well known torsions of the swing modified according to its bigness or

smallness of the swing are necessary, but the snap which gives life to the stroke comes from a free and conscious application of the power which is reported to the player by his wrists; even though some professor of anatomy or physiology asserts that what really happens is that the right forearm and hand pass rapidly over the left quasi-twisting fashion at the impact with the ball.

Be it so. For practical purposes the ball when well struck is struck with the wrists. Now, as this action is not to be defined in so many words, but rather to be described, I continue. The motion has something of the sensation of a *slinging* action with the hands, and the wrists experience a pleasant shock. It is unrestrained and rapid. It gives us the *emphasis* of the swing. The follow-through is irresistible and we need take no thought for it. All other body, leg or upper-arm movements culminate in this feeling of wrist action and are subordinate to it. This is the feature that all good golfers have in common no matter how their grips or stances differ. Nobody golfs truly who does not smite the ball as with the wrists, that is, with the feeling of so doing—the feeling of the boy as he slings a stone—the feeling of the lumberman with the swinging axe in his hands—only that the golfer's action is lateral where theirs is more vertical. Building up on this practical theory, then, the wrist grows strong, accuracy becomes automatic. We really begin our striking aim at the minimum and not the maximum distance from the ball. We thus avoid hitting the ball or putting in force too soon; the wrists or what seem to be the wrists, are the active agents and are felt to be so.

The absolutely correct sensation (for so rapid is the movement that our sensations are better guides than our eyes) is got when we use any club with the feeling (again the feeling) of a left-hand back swing. This is what Aleck Herd of Huddersfield, England, recommends. But do not keep the right hand out of the fun. Let the left hand teach the trick to its fellow. The result is a sort of twisting of the forearms, the right over the left, with the top of the right hand much in evidence as we bring off the impact. Remembering, then, that in proper golf action the wrists should exert themselves consciously as we come near the impact; that they are the real leaders; that the sensation is like a back-handed swing of the left hand; a slinging motion; a throwing out of the hands in a swift springing way; that body and upper arms are passive and not active in the business;—remembering these things and putting them into practice we become actual golfers and dispatch our balls along green fields with the joy of clean hitting and confidence. 'Tis a consummation much to be desired.