

ARMS AND SHOULDERS

By ROBERT STANLEY WEIR

THE most famous golfers have frequently told us (I could quote their words), that the game is inexhaustible as far as attempts to analyze its infinite variety are concerned. And, in a letter to me some time ago, J. H. Taylor expressed the opinion that it was excellent practice to revise mentally our practical theories as to stances, swings, grips and the like; with the variations that different circumstances sometimes demand. "To be conscious of how and why one does a thing" said he, "is a great gain."

I make no apology, therefore, for harking back to an article written by the editor of this magazine in the November number, 1915, entitled "Wrist Action in the Upright Swing." The editor took issue with Mr. Burnham Hare author of *The Golfing Swing*, a booklet, by the way, which, in my humble judgment, is one of the very best all-round analyses of the game in print, on the question of the initial movement of the club-head in the backward swing.

Correcting tradition and the erroneous phrase of popular exposition, Mr. Hare expressed the opinion that "the initial movement of the club-head in the backward swing is actuated and controlled by the forearm and not by the wrist." Which is to say that the wrist-joint, is not to be allowed to flex or have too free play. He went on to say that, in the backward swing, "there is gradual pronation* of the left hand and wrist, supplemented by the rotation forwards of the left shoulder. One further quotation may suffice to expound Mr. Hare's theory.

"A rapid pronation of the left hand makes a comparatively horizontal movement of the club-head, whereas a more gradual turn-over of the left hand favors an upright swing . . . Between these two extremes there is considerable scope for the gradation of the two factors which control the backward swing."

In his very interesting discussion of Mr. Hare's theories, the editor, while not denying their applicability to the flat swing, denied them as rightly expounding the upright swing. The editor, in a word, strongly plumped for the theory that the initial impulse should come from the left shoulder in the upright swing; for the reason that this movement keeps the club-head longer in the line of play than is possible in any other way. I strongly advise the reader to turn to his back files of GOLF ILLUSTRATED and re-read Mr. Behr's very lucid expositions.

My object in harking back to this subject is to suggest, with a view to helping the student of golf, that this initial movement by the left shoulder rather than by the left wrist, may be adopted not only in the upright swing but in each and every degree of

uprightness or horizontality. Why not? I think we must all admit that the movement of the shoulders, whether we are flat or upright swingers, is the same. There is, I mean, only one plane in which the shoulders can move. George Duncan, for example, was once a flat-swinger, as he tells us, but changed his style. Did he, then, change the angle of rotation of his shoulders? No; for the simple reason that such a thing is impossible. We, therefore, seem compelled to adopt the conclusion that there is some ground for Mr. Hare's contention that pronation of the left forearm in the back swing decides the character of the swing, i. e., whether it be flat or upright, seeing that the arms have some liberty while the shoulders have only one plane to swing in; they may rotate more or less but always in their own single, unvarying arc.

I am convinced, after experiment and much consideration, that the editor is right in his advocacy of initial movement by the left shoulder, or, at least, simultaneous movement with the arms. The advantages are that the arms move more freely, and that we get the longest arc of swing compatible with accuracy. Unless the shoulders thus accommodate the arms the swing is lacking in pith and power. The player, experiencing this lack, overflexes his wrists in an endeavor to get a bigger swing and robs his stroke of accuracy, or abridges his swing with consequent loss of power. But I am also of opinion that the editor's very valuable tip may be very profitably adopted by players of every plane or variety of swing; whether flat or upright, and I, therefore, go one step further than he has done.

When it comes to iron play, of course, with its hitting characteristics, extreme caution as to shoulder action will be exercised. But there are hundreds of players who by restricted shoulder action use their woods like irons; and it is for such I have ventured upon this homily.

Since writing the foregoing I observe that the editor has again touched upon this fascinating topic in his leading article for July: "A Peculiarity of Evans' Style." In the main, however, he has dealt with the question of the initial movement in the full swing and detects in the Evans' swing an advance or shove of the hands at the very start similar to that practised by Duncan, Vardon and Travis. George Duncan, so the editor informs us, was the first to point out and recommend this method of beginning the swing. That it is a characteristic of the players named I have no doubt; in Mr. Travis' case it is particularly noticeable.

Now I venture the theory that the advantage of this freer style (for free it is as compared with the

* The hand is said to be "prone" when the palm is downward; "supine" when the palm is upward.

orthodox turn of the left wrist or forearm) is not, perhaps, so much in keeping the club in the line of flight as it is in securing a swifter impact. George Duncan rather conveys this when recommending that we "sling" the club at the ball. Probably the swiftest kind of a blow is given by a slinging motion. A hit and even a sweep involves a certain amount of tautness in the forearms; not so with the sling; which also prevents the hands from getting ahead of the club.

Even the swing of George Duncan, upright as it is, is by no means perpendicular or coincident exactly with the line of flight. This being the case, I doubt whether there are any practical differences in point of merit between the play of say Duncan and Taylor, in so far as their different planes of swing are concerned. Their differences in style, I should be inclined to say, result from a somewhat different use of the arms. Duncan, as he advises others, is a slinger of the club; Taylor is more of a sweeper or a hitter. Vardon is inclined to be a slinger, Mr. Travis too. It is exceedingly difficult for the eye to judge what the mental attitude of any player is; but I am sure there are at least two effective ways of delivering the club—one by slinging, the other by hitting. The slingers, I would say, have, in the main, the advantage of preserving untautened forearms, so paying in the long run; but the choice is better left, perhaps, to individual predilection. I have a growing conviction, however, that in the method of swinging the club rather than in the degree of incline in a player's swing, resides the essential difference between great players who seem to offer us a choice of style.

I should like, in conclusion, to emphasize one point about shoulder action, as giving the real reason for its value. It is not so much that the shoulders directly contribute power (a common error in my judgment), as that they enable one to make the swing full and, also, that they indicate the correct

line for the arms. What I mean is that, as the shoulders can only rotate in one plane (they cannot by their nature wobble at all), they may safely be accepted by the arms as guides. If the arms take an orbit that does smoothly agree with that of the shoulders, the stroke is sure to be marred. This is not to say that the shoulders or body (for shoulder action means body action and body turn) do the swinging, but it does mean that they suggest or indicate the true path. Any player whose arm-swinging smoothly parallels his shoulders or body in the swing is making a true swing; and this is the truth, I think, that Mr. J. A. Scott has tried to convey in his occasional articles to this magazine.

In conclusion I must remind the young golfer that a good swing, perfect in circularity and form, may yet err in the moment of application of power. I am convinced that the power of the hands is often introduced too soon and wasted and that Mr. Travis' counsel to provide the maximum for a spread of three or four feet at the bottom of the swing has not been bettered.

Possibly it was bettered by Mr. Horace G. Hutchinson in a casual looking paragraph of the Badminton book. Casual as it looks it nevertheless contains what is probably the *sine qua non* of the golf stroke, something more important by far than any of the little points discussed above. I am strongly of opinion that Mr. Hutchinson long ago revealed the secret of the characteristic snap and power of the full stroke in golf, but that it has been completely lost sight of by more modern theorists. Vardon, in his book, ignores it; Braid, in his great work, is rhetorical but vague, frankly confessing that he does not quite understand the secret of the long ball. Mr. Horace G. Hutchinson understands it and told the world about it years ago, but in an altogether casual manner. With the editor's permission I shall quote chapter and verse next month.

