

BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT

By R. STANLEY WEIR.

IN SPITE of what some scoffers say, intelligent analysis of the swing in golf is always worth while. True, the tradition still seems to hold that there is much mystery about the science of the game; but science always refuses to be stayed by any such word as "mystery"; so that now the art of swinging cannot only be reduced to a few maxims, but, better still, the method and manner can be discovered if properly observed, for, after all, science is but another word for accurate observation and narration.

The correct swing is simply the best way of swinging and implies not only that the club head must describe a certain orbit as a whole but that the club face which makes the impact must be related to that orbit in a particular way. But enough to abstractions; let us descend to the concrete.

One sometimes wonders how many golfers or how few have considered the way in which the club head, whether of wood or iron, travels in a well-executed stroke. One does not expect baseballers, tennis players or even cricketers to trouble themselves with the orbits of their respective implements, but the longer clubs of the golfer and their peculiar shapes make such enquiries possible and useful to him. A good deal of attention (not too much, and that not yet absolutely decisive and authoritative) has been given to the action of the hands, fingers, body and feet, but considerably less has been given to what is revealed by the divergences of the club face as it leaves the ball both before and after the impact. I propose to consider, meticulous though some may deem it, how the club face can best be made to meet the ball and to point out the distinguishing mark of a good swing and a good impact.

I suppose that all golfers conceive it their proper aim in any stroke to hit the ball "fairly and squarely"; only in that way, they argue, can the ball properly be dispatched; and they are right. Where, however, seven out of every ten golfers go wrong is in endeavoring to play not by faith, but by sight. For this the hoary maxim, "Keep your eye on the ball," is probably responsible. Useful as this maxim is as a head-steadier and sway-preventer, it is, however, a source of mischief if the docile student pushes the doctrine to such an extreme as to strive to see the actual impact of club upon ball. That way madness lies. The stroke is at once constricted and, good though the intention be, the results are frequent fozzles and sometimes, alas, profanity.

The expert golfer, whatever the books say, plays by faith and not by sight. He looks at the ball, to be sure, but relies upon the swing to do the rest. He does not attempt to see too much; for the very good reason that he knows he cannot see what is really happening; no more than a rifleman does as he fires his shot; the bullet is too fast for his eye. No golfer sees his own swing except in photographs, which he usually denounces as libelous caricatures, and so rapid are most of his strokes that he certainly does not see club and ball connect. The good golfer, accordingly, has too much sound instinct to cripple and stiffen his performance by attempting the impossible. He plays by faith and not by sight; hence his free and easy swinging.

Now the reason why the expert golfer does and does not do these things is that consciously or not he mistrusts or at least ignores his senses. He mistrusts his eyes as sure and perfect guides for he knows that he cannot see the actual stroke, and he knows from experience that if he looks too hard at the ball he will probably miss or mis-hit; he mistrusts his sense of feeling because he knows that he cannot be absolutely sure how his shots are going to turn out, otherwise the pictures of the big men caught in the act or immediately after it would not show them looking so anxiously for the result; he only knows that if his swing as a whole is good the result is pretty sure to be satisfactory. *He trusts his swing.* It is only when he begins to be too

careful, measuring out his sense-activities one by one instead of fully trusting them as a whole, that he goes wrong. For the big strokes of golf are so swift that the individual senses of sight or touch or feeling are of comparatively little use to him; in fact, are positive hindrances if he allows himself to be mastered by them. It is only the union of his senses, the mind or consciousness as a whole that is of any value. To use the eyes or hands or fingers separately with consciously different functionings is absolute folly and is responsible for the great mass of mediocre play that abounds. The correct notion of how the club should act must first be mastered and then the muscular sense as a whole must be trusted.

Now I may appear to contradict myself in advocating play by a union rather than by a disunion of our various faculties, while at the same time proposing to analyze the swing itself. But my object is merely to illustrate the thesis I have just advanced: to show how easily our senses deceive us and that it is only by disregarding them as separate functions that the golfer, first learning what course the club should take, can attain that free effective swinging and manipulation that spell success.

Take the frequent case of the player, referred to some lines back, who, with infinite pains, strives to hit a fair and square ball from the tee. He naturally bends his effort to bring about a fine rectangular contact between club and ball, but, if he trusts his sense of touch and his own honest eyes, he is pretty sure to succeed in perpetuating the customary slice or feeble elevation. His senses will deceive him. Although striving to hit the ball squarely, he will not send the club head straight forward but will swing it to the left. He will hold the club too rigidly. It will probably take him years to discover that the rectangular contact is instantaneous and not continuous, that all else in the swing is divergence and convergence, that the only way to get the maximum of trajectory in the correct line is by a turning of the right or left hand, preferably of the left, and that by so doing and only by so doing does the club head go forward in the proper line. The visualization of the natural man in this aspect is pretty sure to be wrong. And it is only when some intelligent professor puts an iron in his hand and shows him that the way to get the true line forward is not by trying to keep the face of the club rigidly at right angles or "square," but by turning it so that the nose or toe of the club follows that line and, of course, the club head as a whole. Here, indeed, is an epitome of the art of golf which illustrates at the same time what thousands of golfers refuse to learn, namely, that golf is a game of contraries. We hit downwards when we wish the ball to soar, leftwards when we wish to slice, rightwards if we would pull, and the correct line, as I have said, is not by keeping the hands stiff and straight and the club face rectangular, but by allowing them freely to turn. If he is a righthander it will take him some time to learn that the *left* hand is by far the safest and strongest leader; if a lefthander, the *right* should command.

Photography has done much to popularize the literature of golf, but gentle readers of golf books should bear in mind that photography has not yet been able to transfix the vital part of the swing. Photography is not yet swift enough to catch for us how the hands and club behave at the bottom of the swing. When photography succeeds in doing this, it will reveal to the eye what is now conveyed to the understanding of comparatively few. It will show that the vice of countless swings is the unconscious bending of the right wrist by right-hand players and an unconscious bending of the left wrist by left-hand players. It will show that the feeblest blow is what thousands visualize as a straightforward blow and is not in actuality a straightforward blow at all, while the strongest stroke is the turning stroke. It is hard to explain all this in words. We must await the higher-speed camera.