

CONCERNING GRIPS

By R. STANLEY WEIR

Harry Vardon remarks in "How to Play Golf" that there are two primary and all-important points to remember. These are: to grip the club properly and to keep the head steady; by "steady," he means as still as possible until after the ball is despatched. The intelligent golfer soon discovers that keeping the head still depends largely upon a correct swing with the arms, including a timely turn of the wrists. The swing, again, owes much to the grip; while the test of a good grip is not altogether the position of thumbs and fingers during the silent and solemn moments when one addresses the ball, but their changing position and pressure as the swing progresses and finishes. As the grip, through the hand, is the connecting medium between club and brain it is clear that *how* we grip is, as Vardon says, of primary importance; but as a good grip is not maintained throughout the swing with stiff, unvarying degrees of pressure or tightness in either hand it is also clear that the question of grip, not merely at the start of a stroke but from start to finish, is well worth analysis and greater consideration than it has, perhaps, hitherto received from sedulous golfing scribes.

It seems to me that the most characteristic feature of a good grip (which is, true enough, part and parcel of the swing itself) is this ever-changing and varying pressure or easing of the hands throughout the swing. Many a good golfer does this unconsciously but misses the pleasure and satisfaction of a scientific analysis; that is, he does not really play scientifically. Most players, I do not hesitate to say, would enormously improve the steadiness of their play if, instead of concentrating attention upon what I might call the stationary grip, the grip at the address

or the waggle—they tried to note the action of fingers and palms midway, at the top, and at the finish of a full drive and of lesser shots. In fact, more than half the troubles of golf, hooking and slicing certainly, can be traced to defective gripping and it is rather singular that the grip *throughout the swing* has been discussed so little.

It is common to classify grips as of two kinds: the overlapping and the two-V. This classification is suggested by the appearance of the first grasp of the club as though that were everything. But there is really no merit in either kind of grip *per se*. They are merely a preparation for the gripping throughout the swing, and unless one understands the essential principles of good gripping as something which, as said, varies and changes with the swing from beginning to end, he misses a keen delight of the game and a means of avoiding otherwise inexplicable and exasperating break-downs. This two-fold classification, then, tells us nothing of the secrets of good gripping. It is claimed, indeed, that the overlapping grip unifies the power of the two hands. If so, it merely accentuates error as well as merit. The advantages of that grip, however, are not the unifying of the power of the hands but, as we shall see, in enabling the hands to accommodate themselves to each other. By taking thought one may unite the power of the hands, if that is desirable, with the two-V grip as well as with the other.

No. If I were to classify grips I should classify them as, (1) the grip chiefly with forefingers and thumbs and (2) the grip chiefly with the smaller fingers. And I would add that, given a good swing, equally good golf may be played in either style. Further



TRAVERS' GRIP FOR THE MASHIE—BACK VIEW



VARDON'S GRIP



TAYLOR'S GRIP

I would submit that the whole matter of good gripping which, I must repeat, is a continuous performance through the entire swing, is based upon an application of the good old maxim, left hand firm, right hand loose. For the word "loose" we should perhaps substitute "easy," and we should also recognize that, at the finish of the swing, the left hand, too, is frequently loose or easy. To put the matter in another way, the grip with forefingers and thumbs requires that the palms of the hands open accommodatingly and *gradually*, if one may use that word for so brief and swift a performance, and close correspondingly in the down swing. This is the application of the ancient maxim cited. The grip, then, is no rigid, stiff unyielding grasp. It is a nice adjustment of changing pressures. Similarly, the grip with the little fingers, which is the stronger of the two, also requires some accommodation from the hands; but it is done differently; it is done by allowing the shaft to fall into the web

between the right forefinger and thumb. This practice has been condemned by overlappers and others; and for those who grip with forefingers and thumbs it certainly would seem quite wrong, but, for the second kind of grip described it is almost a necessity; moreover, its complete justification is found in the play of such masters as James Sherlock and Aleck Herd whose words we shall presently cite.

There is also a composite grip which might be mentioned, that uses the little fingers of the left hand and the big fingers of the right. In this case of course the right-hand web is not a feature. It is almost, if not quite, as good a grip as the others, particularly in iron shots where firmness and ease are both essential.

We have now fully disclosed our theory of grip and it is only right that we attempt to justify it by citing competent authority. Not that we have anywhere found the precise differentiation just submitted in any of the books

of the masters, but we do find corroborative exposition as each discloses his own particular method.

Harry Vardon, for example, is strong for the grip with forefingers and thumbs. We should grip firmly with these members, he says, on both hands. But I found it exceedingly interesting to read his warning against what players are *naturally* prone to do, viz: to grip with the little fingers of the hand. He says (p. 84), "*It seems to be a law of nature that the little fingers are able to grip more securely. Try them, for instance, when seizing a stick. But, in golf, we want them to act chiefly as guides; their superior strength must be suppressed.*" Notwithstanding the great authority of Vardon many will be tempted to say, if the smaller fingers can grip stronger, they are the fingers for us; and it will not be surprising to find very eminent golfers acting upon this law of nature that Vardon warns us against. Aleck Herd, for instance, is a great player, and he has written these words (Fry's Magazine, Feb. 1913): "*I grip tightest with the second, third and little fingers; you can obtain such a firm hold with these members that there is not a lot of danger of the club slipping. It seems to me to be the easiest way of holding the club.*" James Sherlock, too, is a first-class player. In "The New Book of Golf" he tells us the same thing as Herd. "*I hold my club with both hands close together but not overlapping. The left hand grips firmly with the three fingers; the thumb and first finger lap round the club and find a place out of the way since they are not called upon to take an active part.*" Both Herd and Sherlock also allow the club to fall into the right-hand web. Sherlock would be called, to look at him, a two-V gripper; Herd would be called a palm or fist gripper; but the apparent difference is owing wholly to the disposition

of their thumbs. In fact it is safe to say that there are no fist-grippers pure and simple among class players. They all grip either with the big or the little fingers. Mr. John Ball, many times amateur champion, gives the impression, to look at him, that he is a fist-gripper; he is not; he is a little-finger man with transverse thumbs. So, despite of appearances, was that great and regretted player the late Lieut. Tate.* The use of the right-hand web in the one grip corresponds to the opening of the palms in the other. both are legitimate and they both illustrate the meaning of the maxim "Left hand firm, Right hand easy." Both permit that nice parallelism of the hands, that nice turning of them together beside or under the shaft according to the length of the stroke.

We think it should give the studious golfer much satisfaction to recognize these two (nay three) kinds of grips. If he elects to use forefingers and thumbs he will grip with these with equal firmness throughout, but he will, if he is wise, remember to open both palms freely as the club goes back; he will recognize, too, that perhaps the chief merit of that style is that the covered thumb *ensures* an opened right palm from the very start. I ought to enlarge on this, but refrain. If, on the other hand, he elects to grip with the little fingers he will not hesitate, in big swings at least, to use the right-hand web. He will find it delightfully easy to obtain proper circularity of swing. He will find it much easier to keep the hands low and prevent the left wrist from bulging; and he will find, in putting, for example, that he can secure a wonderfully firm and direct line of retraction. Or, finally, he may elect to adopt the composite grip with both comfort and confidence.

*Mr. Jerome D. Travers, as he tells us in his book, tries to eliminate the forefinger in his grip. He must therefore be a little-finger player, directly violating the Vardon doctrine and practice.