

THE ART OF GOLF

By Sir Walter Simpson, Bart.

ANNOTATED BY THE HON. MR. RECORDER WEIR.

PART II.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF APPROACHING.

(Continued.)

There is another fancy shot which differs utterly from the last except in respect of results. It may be played at all times instead of the other, whilst from a bad lie it is the only way I know of to loft a ball. In this shot the club is lifted more nearly straight up than in a normal one, crashing into the turf behind the ball. But there is more to attend to. Why many fail at this blow is that, when mother earth interferes with the completion of the segment of their circle, they submit. To succeed, the player must follow the ball, not in the same curve that he swept down on it, which is impossible, but as best he can. This best will be an ellipse. It is wonderful how beautifully the enemy will spout into the air. Among all these shots, which are loosely described as wrist-shots, this is the only one in which the wrists legitimately come into play. To get the club, as it were, round the corner, after the ground is reached, there must be a twist from them. The disadvantage of the shot is that, even from good lies, the distance is extremely difficult to regulate. It will fail altogether if anything but a strong blow be struck. Still many will remember the wonderful accuracy Jamie Anderson acquired in it some years ago, hitting a full blow at all dis-

tances, and regulating the length of his loft by the inches of turf he took behind the ball. In a bunker this shot is also useful (a niblick, or mashy, of course, being the weapon employed), better perhaps than the ordinary dig. By it a ball may, if necessary, be lofted higher, and, what is still more to the point, it will often be got out of a deep cup, in which the common thud would merely bury it.

When the ball is close to a straight face, a shot somewhat like this last may, in desperation, be attempted. The club is lifted nearly straight up, and brought down with a crash an inch or so behind it, as if the only intention were to split open the ground. There should be no attempt to follow. Sometimes (I say emphatically sometimes) the ball will spout up into the air in a marvellous manner. This shot cannot come off except out of loose sand.

A style of approach often employed is running the ball with the iron, either along the ground, or very little above it. When this is attempted, it is customary to turn in the club face. By so doing, the player gets the sentiment of his intention; but that is all. The turning of the iron alone will not run a ball. The essential thing is that the player be well over the ball, and his hands slightly in advance of it—in fact, just as far from the "*juste milieu*" at one side, as they are

at the other when he attempts to "lay back" the iron.¹ It is necessary to point out that the position of the hands, not the turning in of the club, is the essential thing in this shot, because, although doing the latter inclines one to the former, the one is quite possible without the other. (Let me observe parenthetically that merely turning the toe of a club, in or out, is of no effect in any shot, except to convert a properly made tool into a bad one. Placing the club out of its proper position is simple folly, unless it be part of the result of the mode of address, not an isolated contortion.) Our player, then, has taken his position for a skimming approach. His hands are well in front, the club face turned in—not to keep the ball low, but partly because it now naturally lies that way, partly because that way of resting it makes it a more upright club for the nonce—and uprightness, we have seen, is conducive to low trajectory. A common mistake is now to jerk—the thing, of all others, which ought not to be done. Jerking raises a ball. The club should rather be dragged, the wrists rigid, the grip excessively firm. From rough ground near the hole, or on a bad putting-green, this shot is very useful. Many prefer it to an ordinary loft at shortish distances, the latter being more difficult within, say, thirty yards than when the player has further to carry. There are some who employ it for all approaches, and with good effect, too. These you may recognize by their stance, which is often square or even in front.

There are four clubs used for ordinary approach work—the putter, the cleek, the iron, and the mashie.

The first, of course, can only be used on very flat ground. Long putts, and the putters thereof, are much despised. A putt of sixty yards laid dead causes anger or laughter, according to the temper of the adversary. But I am bound to say that those who are well practiced in "skelping" often call forth the exhibition of one or other of these forms of emotion. The worst of this mode of approaching is that, sooner or later, it undermines the constitution of the most delicate and valuable club in the set; whilst to carry two putters—one as a whipping-boy—is unwise. They cannot be made exactly alike, and, even if they are nearly so, hesitating between the two at intermediate distances is apt to put a player's putting powers out of gear.

Cleek approaches do not lay your respectability open to doubts like long putts, which have the same odor of meanness as the "sneak" of boys' cricket. Although for the most part low, they are not absolutely crawling things. They have one distinct advantage over iron approaches. The cleek, lofting low, can be used at greater distances than the iron, thus bridging over that rather wild country which lies between a full cleek or spoon shot and the approach proper. But the cleek has little else to recommend it as against the iron, which, played with equal skill, is in most circumstances more effective. The least hillock will catch and kill a cleek approach, whilst, even in the absence of such obstructions, the run at the finish is necessarily so long, that the chances of stopping or turning bumps are greatly increased. Some people will object that there is as much chance of a lucky as of an unlucky fall. This is not so. Nature does not smile upon golf. Being inanimate, she is more apt to op-

¹This doctrine is confirmed by all experts and is absolutely sound.

pose obstruction than to further motion. The cleek approacher is consequently proverbial for grumbling at his luck. When the worm cast turns his ball, he is the worm that turns. Moreover, the trajectory of a cleek shot is so low, that the least shade of top will prevent the ball from rising at all, and then it will cling to the ground and go half-way. From an iron, a shot one degree too low is still in the element it was meant to traverse, not in grass, which has double as much resistance. "But my cleek is as much lofted as an iron," is what one often hears. No doubt it is. Most cleeks are. It is not the difference of lay, but of shape, which governs their respective lofting powers. A cleek, to loft as high as an iron of the same lay, would require to be thicker on the sole than they usually are, and as sharp as a knife on its upper edge. Even then its height of loft would be very uncertain. The change in thickness of metal from below upwards being so sudden, a microscopic variation in the height of impact would materially alter the amount of loft. In short, it is the depth of face, not the lay, which causes the difference in execution between a cleek and an iron. Certainly a more lofted cleek might be used. But such a weapon would in no respect be better than an iron, and would have the drawback of all laid-back clubs, a subject already noticed.

For approaching, the iron is on the whole the best club yet devised, and the one most in favor with players. It is supposed to be a very difficult thing to get a good iron. This is not the case, although it is very common to see men owners of, and proud of, very bad ones, which vastly increase their difficulties in approaching. This is because they set their affections on a wrong style of club. It is usual to

carry two irons—a heavy for driving, a light for approaching. This nomenclature sets men on the wrong scent from the beginning. The two ought to be called the driving and the approaching iron, without this (as I hold erroneous) dogmatic reference to their comparative weights. Whether a driving iron ought to be heavy or light, or whether it ought to be carried at all, is a matter for individual taste to decide. But there is no greater mistake than to have a light "light iron." To say what weight it should be is impossible, so much depends upon the player's style and build. Roughly, it may be stated, however, that an iron lighter than a driving cleek is simply a useless toy. Error in the direction of heaviness, whilst less common, would be less fatal.

The lay of an approaching iron, as well as the weight, is a matter of importance. If too straight in the face, it either will not carry over bunkers and hazards, or else its owner will be led into a habit of jerking, in order to make it do so. On the other hand, a much lofted iron is very difficult to use. Unless the ball be struck with absolute precision, it either digs into the ground, or hits with its edge. A medium amount of loft is best. By merely looking at the club, it is impossible to decide whether its lay is right or not. An upright club for the same work requires more pitch than a flat one, experience proving that (as already insisted on) the more upright a club is the lower its trajectory. Again, the thicker the sole is in proportion to the top, the higher it will send the ball. The proper way to decide whether an iron has the right lay or not is to try it. If a half-topped shot travels further than a lofted one

over ordinary turf, the club has too much pitch; if the opposite happens, it has too little. However pretty an instrument, to whatsoever great man it may have belonged, reject it, and pick a new one out of a shop.²

CHAPTER IX.

OF PUTTING.

TO the beginner putting seems the least interesting part of the game. It feels mean to go dribbling and creeping up to a little hole, whilst a teeing-ground, from which you may drive the ball unknown distances into space, is ready close by. The rabbits in the bents mock at it, rushing into holes of about the same size at headlong speed, and with perfect ease. Like other things, essentially foolish in themselves, such as preaching, pleading, feeling pulses, etc., putting becomes attractive in proportion to the skill acquired in it. The young player will tell you that he cannot putt a bit, as complacently as mankind in general compliment themselves on having bad memories. Not so the experienced golfer. His putting is a feather with which to tickle his lug.

That putters, like poets, are born not made, is a common fallacy which

prevents many from becoming masters of the art. It is also a general opinion that to putt you only require to putt, and that there is nothing easier than to do so with the middle of the club. If you heel, toe, top, or draw a putt, you are accused of gross, wilful carelessness. The miserable man whose driving has gone wrong sets to work to amend his style. The putter at fault blames himself for not using his eyes more carefully, or else he gives up for the day, on the ground that his liver is out of order. There is here a fallacy. I do not say that one ought not to consider a semi-miss with a putter wicked, but it is not worse than the same crime with a play-club—nay more than failing to thread a needle is clumsier than missing a nail with a hammer. Nay, in my opinion, it is not so bad. Of the two, to hit clean with a driver is the easier operation. With the latter the main thing is to lay on. There are fifty styles in which this can be done, whilst, with the former, there are at most two or three.

Besides, for putting, a well-balanced club is absolutely essential. I am inclined to go further, and add that it must be made of wood. It is true that some hole out wonderfully with cleeks, others even with irons. But, by the shade of many a lost match, they are

²As to approaching with the iron it is possible to lay down a few rules somewhat more definite than Sir Walter attempts. The chief thing to determine is whether you wish your ball to have pitch and run or pitch only. The beginner is greatly aggravated by the way his ball persists in travelling after it gets past the hole. Even when he tried to calculate for the pitch he often finds the run of the ball tremendous, while to pitch his ball dead seems the most difficult of arts. The following suggestions may help him. For pitch and run the hands should be somewhat in advance of the ball; in other words the shaft should form an acute angle with the line of flight, *i.e.*, on the left side of the shaft. For

pitch with a minimum of run the hands should be behind the ball, the shaft forming an obtuse angle with the line of flight. For pitch and run the ball lies nearer the right foot, for pitch alone it lies nearer the left foot. For pitch and run the weight is transferred from right leg to left leg in the ordinary way; for pitch alone it remains almost wholly on the right. Finally for pitch and run the right wrist turns leftwards over the left wrist in the follow through in the usual manner, less pronounced of course, as the distance required is smaller; but in the pitch the right wrist remains under and does not turn over leftwards and the face of the club at the finish is looking skywards.

bad when they go off! Many men always putt with wood; few, never. The user of iron admits the inferiority of his weapon by carrying a putter to fall back upon when his fancy club fails him.

I have just said there are, at most, two or three attitudes in which good putting is possible. I am inclined to be more dogmatic, and to assert that there is but one. The player must stand open, half facing the hole, the weight on the right leg, the right arm close to the side, the ball nearly opposite the right foot. To putt standing square, the arms reached out, is as difficult as to write without laying a finger on the desk.

The idea that a putt is merely a shorter approach shot is one which must be got rid of. Approaches are played with a swing, longer or shorter, according to distance. A putter is not swung, but passed over the ground. It is a common thing for a professional caddy, under special circumstances, to put an iron into your hand near the hole, and to say, "Play as if you were playing with a putter." Those who apprehend the shot know that they are to give the ball a sort of push. Many players, however, putt with a swing. It is necessarily a very short one, and they are popularly described as "nipping their putts." From start to finish of a properly played putt there must be no free play of muscle. The putter must be guided all the time it is in motion, as much as the artist's pencil in drawing a straight line. In time, and by practice, driving may become partly mechanical, and balls be clean hit almost unconsciously. You may become a driving

but not a putting machine. Matter can be fashioned into a clock, but not into a portrait painter. It is because holing-out is a human act that none ever become infallible for even the shortest distances.

Within narrow limits there is a choice of styles of good putting. It may be done entirely from the wrist, from the shoulder, or by a combined use of all the arm-joints. It matters little which of these manners be adopted, so long as it is adhered to and persevered with in prosperity and adversity. But, however old a player you are, however good in other respects, if you are putting with a jerk or swing, a fresh start would be worth while.

A great secret of steady putting is to make a point of always "scuffling" along the ground. The best putters do this, although it is not evident to an onlooker, the noise of the scrape being inaudible. To be sure of the exact spot on the putter face which is invariably to come in contact with the ball, is, of course, essential to the acquirement of accuracy. If you play to hit clean, your putter must pass above the ground at varying heights, as it is impossible to note how much air there is between it and the turf. In the other way you feel your road. But the greatest gain from treating putting as a scuffling process is the less delicate manipulation required when short putts are in question. At a foot and a half from the hole the clean putter often fails, from incapacity to graduate inches of weakness, whilst the scuffer succeeds because he is dealing with coarser weight sensitiveness.

(To be continued.)