

THE ART OF GOLF

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ANNOTATED BY THE HON. MR. RECORDER WEIR.

PART II.

CHAPTER X.

OF MATCH AND MEDAL PLAY.

HAVING examined in detail the different kinds of shots which the golfer is called upon to make, a few remarks on combining them into a game may fittingly conclude this little treatise.

There is no such thing for the properly balanced mind as an uninteresting match at golf. Some greedy and ill-conditioned persons will not play in what they call "duffers" foursomes—matches in which the real flukes are the clean-hit shots, and the winning side that which has the luck to make the greatest number of these. On the other hand, there are dull fellows who will not stake their reputation on a serious match in which defeat means sorrow and victory joy, which classifies them as golfers, or decides the ownership of a five-pound note. The wise golfer who wishes his game to flourish will supply it with a judicious mixture of the two kinds—the friendly and the big match.

A friendly match is the earnest golfer's holiday, and his opportunity for practising as well. It gives him time to listen to the singing of birds, and to observe the natural non-golfing beauties of the links. It is also his time for trying new clubs, modifications of style, or fancy shots which have been clamoring for recognition, more pleasantly, than in an hour's solitary practice. It enables him to set

at rest questions about his thumb, the possibility of lengthening his driving, the advisability of taking to a cleek for putting, a mallet for approaching, etc., etc.; all this, of course, without his partner knowing that his half-crown is being trifled with. But to play too many friendly matches is a great mistake. It is the direct road to a bad style and careless putting. The tone of mind during most games one plays ought to be an earnest, oathful desire for victory, which alone will fix a man down to the great monotonous essential of hitting the ball true, and distract him from the will-o'-the-wisp of style.

Games at golf ought not to be played for nothing, more particularly where adversaries are in the habit of meeting often. Glory may be a sufficient spur when trying conclusions with a stranger; but between friends there must be something more. If there is not, the worst player will not take odds, and the better, from having nothing to do, will fall back to his level. This trades-union, communistic plan of offering no incentive to skill slowly undermines it. But with a stake, the worst player will demand his odds, the better give them grudgingly, and both strive to win. "What!" exclaim those who consider there is some mysterious wickedness in exchanging money for anything but perishables, such as food, drink, clothing, and shares in bubble companies,

"What! degrade golf to a gambling game!"¹ Gambling! what nonsense! Is dinner a gluttonous and drunken thing because at it there is eating and drinking? "I see," says the tolerant moralist, "small stakes. You would limit the betting to the 'statutory ball' or equally 'statutory half-crown.'" Why should I? Are there many cases of golfers crippling their resources by betting? Even if there were, who made us these people's grandmothers? Nevertheless the statutory half-crown has its merits. By adding up your collection of them at the end of the year, you can judge of your qualities as a match-maker. It is a fair criterion of your progress, or retrogression too. It has the advantage of being a uniform stake, which to wrest from your friend may be greedy, but is not cruel. From some people one might feel conscience-stricken when taking gold. It is unfeeling to crow when dormy three and the stake is large, but it is a fair game to jangle even half a dozen of a man's "statutories" below his nose, or to invite him into a shop to see you spend them. Before we can do this, however, the money must be won. Attention to several little matters will help players to win it.

It has already been remarked that excessive golfing dwarfs the intellect.

¹As to the soundness of Sir Walter's ethics, on the question of betting, on results there will be difference of opinion. We fancy, that the transfer of a money stake is no longer reputable, even in the old land; at all events it has never, fortunately, achieved the status of a custom here. "Playing for money" is undoubtedly reprehensible if the amount be large, and savours of pettiness and the mercenary if it be small. Disguised, jocularly, as a ball, a cigar or other refreshment it is, perhaps, a degree less objectionable. Certainly it is difficult to conceive of American or Canadian golfers passing cash on the result of a match.

Nor is this to be wondered at when we consider that the more fatuously vacant the mind is, the better for play. It has been observed that absolute idiots, ignorant whether they are playing two more or one off two, play steadiest. An uphill game does not make them press, nor victory within their grasp render them careless. Alas! we cannot all be idiots.² Next to the idiotic, the dull, unimaginative mind is the best for golf. In a professional competition I would prefer to back the sallow, dull-eyed fellow with a "quid" in his cheek, rather than any more eager-looking champion. The poetic temperament is the worst for golf. It dreams of brilliant drives, iron shots laid dead, and long putts held, whilst in real golf success waits for him who takes care of the foozles and leaves the fine shots to take care of themselves.

If you have started with no other idea but to hit, in a short time it will appear that you are driving far. Take no notice of the fact. Regard the extra distance covered as anybody's business but yours. The greedy, grovelling spirit of the true golfer, anxious to win holes, is not to be beguiled from its purpose by the soul-satisfying, pocket-emptying glories of brilliant shots. During a match there is usually a great deal said about the state of the game, or the adversary's position in regard to the hole, and one is very apt to attempt to play accordingly. By doing so, many holes are lost

²Sir Walter's fooling is, of course, excellent, but even he admits that "It takes a man wi' a heid to play the goof." In this respect the idiot is somewhat at a disadvantage. Nay, the man who does not in his soul appreciate the positive beauty in the flight of a well smitten ball, the graceful delicacy of a good putt is not likely to achieve them. Who shall song that the excellent golfer is not at bottom artistic, appreciative, at least, of the poetry of motion?

which would not otherwise fall to the opponents. For instance, how often does it not happen that you are playing two more, and think it necessary to hole in less than the perfect number to secure a half? You make an effort, fail, lose a shot more; which shot, not the two more, it turns out, costs you the hole. Everybody knows that to press a drive will not add to its length, but it is not equally acknowledged that extra mental pressure for an approach or a putt is worse than useless. The supposed necessity for pressing is born of too much respect for the enemy. Because they have got the best of you for the moment, and played the hole perfectly up to a certain point, they are credited with being infallible, and you see no chance of their going into a bunker or taking four to hole off an iron. It is scarcely ever politic to count the enemy's chickens before they are hatched. Cases constantly occur of holes being lost because it seems absolutely necessary in order to save them to get home from a bad lie. Your forcing shot sends the ball from bad to worse, and what might have been won in five is lost in seven. A secret disbelief in the enemy's plan is very useful for match play.

This contempt must, however, be largely seasoned with respect. It does not do lightly to lose the first two holes, or any hole. When one is down it is natural to hunger for holes, but even with five up play greedily for more—play a yard putt as if the match depended on it. Likely enough it will turn out that it did. With five up express, as is polite, regret at laying a stimy, but rejoice in your heart.³

³The golfer must often have experienced the truth of La Rochefoucauld's cynicism that "We take a secret pleasure in the misfortunes of our friends."

It is a great thing in a match to be one or two up, and to keep the lead. An advantage maintained for seven or eight holes almost certainly breaks down the enemy and wins the match. Yet everyone is inclined to be carelessly confident when they are ahead, and when they have lost their lead and some more, partly by their own fault, to apply themselves with undue and fatal earnestness. If golfers would but humbly acknowledge to themselves (which is true) that they lose heart and have bad luck when they are down, they would be more careful to husband their advantages. How men "funk" is comically noticeable at the close finish of a big match. With all even and three to play, the side which can finish in fair figures is almost certain to win. But in these circumstances even first-class players generally give an exhibition of lamentable bungling all around.

Some particularly tender-hearted golfers play better in foursomes than in singles, because in the latter they are apt to have their bowels of compassion moved and their game made loose by the grumblings and lamentation of the adversary whom they have got well in hand. Playing a foursome will not lessen his dread of the other side when down, but it will prevent the merciful man from being moved by pity. The wailing, the discontent about the odds, the deprecation of stymes, the harping on the flukiness of long putts held, his good luck, their bad luck, will not melt his heart and soften his muscle. Between him and them is one nearer and dearer—his partner. It is not selfish to crush the enemy; it is duty—duty to the partner. What are the tears of two enemies to the joy of one friend?

The choice of, and conduct to-

wards, a partner are matters of considerable importance. If we get beaten, no matter who he is, or how he has played, or how we have played, it will, as a matter of course, be entirely his fault. During the match, however, it is politic to mask our disgust and contempt; for it is not the scolder, but the scolded, who is apt to go to pieces. No man who takes a partner ever questions for a moment that he himself is the amiable factor in the combination. This is all very well, but this belief in our own imperturbability often leads us to challenge along with some notorious grumbler, to play badly in consequence, and to lose. If we thus break down, we blame him, and unjustly. The fact is, our temper is proved to be such as to unfit us to play with a quick man. He has roared like a lion indeed, but played like one, whilst we have trembled at his roaring, been put out when he showed us our putts, sulked when he interfered with our shots or advised how to swing. It is we who have bad tempers, and should therefore choose perfect partners. He is qualified to play with either angels or devils, and win.

What is the ideal partner? He should be of a Laodicean disposition—neither too hot nor too cold, ready to utter one hearty groan over any gross mistake he happens to make, and then to say no more about it. At yours, he should show disappointment in so far as they affect the game, letting you believe at the same time that they were simply failures, not the results of vainglorious attempts—of selfish attempts—to do something brilliant. When you have bad luck he should sympathise, but fulsome falsehoods about the badness of the lie are loathsome to an upright-minded man.

Gross hypocrisy on his part is only politic when you miss a short putt. This he ought to try over again, and miss. There are grave circumstances in life which make lies moral. This is one of them. A short putt missed may bring on a holing-out paralysis unless it is promptly treated.

The perfect partner, without letting you know it, looks upon himself as the backbone of the game, on you as the flesh which may err. He plods on whilst you miss—plods on still when you are brilliant. If you are efficient, he lauds you; if variable, he says nothing; if hopeless, he smiles and says, "It can't be helped." To him you are the chances of the game.

The perfect partner is not awed if you are exacting, nor sorry for you if amiable to his mistakes. If he is playing ill, he does not think of what you will say afterwards. He tries to recover for the sake of the match. If he be leader, he does not try to pull you through by extra brilliancy of play. If you are in a class above him, still more careful is he to attempt nothing beyond himself. Glory for the leader, duty for the subaltern. And if, perchance, it is he who is fighting the best fight, he is careful to hide his consciousness of this from his superior.

The perfect partner never volunteers information as to why you are playing badly, never suggests that you are taking the wrong club, although certain you cannot get up with it. He knows that although you accept a correction civilly, or even with hypocritical gratitude, you would not be human if you were careful to prove yourself wrong by making a good shot.

There *are* partners to be found possessing these and other virtues, but it is useless to look for one who, in re-

counting a lost match afterwards, will either forget your mistakes or remember his own.

A perfect partner is what one desires. A perfect adversary, on the other hand, is to be avoided. To be regularly beaten is—Well! it is not golf, and it is politic to avoid or watch carefully those adversaries who have a knack of getting the best of it in every match they make. The two most dangerous types are the grumbler and the flatterer. The former begins by huckstering for more odds than he ultimately intends to accept, asserts that he is best in a foursome if a single is proposed, reminds you that you outdrive him, speaks about his liver, has a sore hand, or a sprained wrist—can't play in wind if it is blowing, in hot weather if it is fine, in bad weather if it rains. If you are wise, make a match irrespective of these things, or let him go home to bed. But the wariest are apt to be caught after winning the first match and lunching. They are apt to lose the next two by carelessness, believing what he says about being out of form. It is so difficult to judge of an adversary's play. Unless one is getting beaten off the green, there is a predisposition to believe that the grumbling enemy is not as good as ourselves, and that (if he is winning) he is winning by luck. If we are some up, and he harps on his bad shots, walks with his head bowed, only raising it to wail, there is a risk of his being treated as nought, and perhaps pulling off the match in consequence.

Flattery is still more dangerous than grumbling. Under its influence a level match for shillings may be followed by a round for pounds, giving odds. Out of the hundred shots more or less you have made in the round,

the flatterer easily finds five good ones with which to turn your head. With putts especially he will succeed. A very straight or a very long drive may be used against you, but a few good putts are still more dangerous in the mouth of a match-maker. The drives—unless utterly given over to vanity—you know to be exceptional. But putts! who doubts that on his day his putting is remarkable?

The adversary who outdrives us is not difficult to deal with. If he does so on the average, he naturally gives odds, a man's driving being the usual standard by which his game is measured. If it is only when he hits them that he drives far, he is still easier to deal with. Those who hit occasional screamers, over-estimate their own game even more than the rest of golfers.

Judged by his apparent merits, the most dangerous man is he who is exceptionally good within the hundred yard radius. To estimate the comparative efficiency of men's driving is easy, but near the hole casual observation is quite deceptive. The faculty for occasionally sending the ball high in air to land dead causes a man to be overestimated. He who, time after time, holes from a yard and a half is not necessarily a permanently dangerous adversary. It may be his own bad putting which so often renders these efforts necessary. If you are puzzled at So-and-so constantly winning, the key to the enigma will probably be found in the inconspicuous regularity with which he performs the apparently simple duty of holing in three off his iron. His approaches are not brilliant perhaps. It may even be that many of them are scuffled along the ground, but a close observation will show that they are in-

variably straight. Nobody is oftener past the hole than short, but the deadly player will have a good average of approaches finishing on the far side. In short, an adversary who does not seem to be playing his short game at all well, may be winning every hole because each approach is laid within fifteen yards and each long putt within fifteen inches—a very simple matter, which rouses no astonishment, but is perfect play nevertheless.

In a match play, as a rule, it is the finish, in medal play the start, which is most exciting. In the latter, one feels how dismal it would be to drag round the links with an incubus of ten or twelve strokes too many for the first three holes. After one has warmed to the work, it is not so crushing, slowly, surely, imperceptibly to tail off. Successful medal play, however, calls for more nerve and patience than match play. So long as our card remains good, each shot is as important as the first, and as we near home with a good record the excitement becomes intense. Even from the last tee a carefully compiled and creditable card may be driven to the winds.

Some men give a very good account of themselves on medal days by playing a bold, gambling game, which either comes off, or requires three figures to record it. From him who is always there or thereabout, the medal round is too trying to be pleasant. Each shot is a solemn and difficult interview, on which depend momentous issues. After each there is a moment for thanksgiving, a moment of relaxation, a short walk, and to business again—to the business in hand. There should be no thought of anything else. The good medal-player is no Lot's wife, ever adding up his card to see

what is behind him. When he has to drive, he drives. Approaching, he does not see himself in the bottom of the hole in three; he only sees the ball which has to be struck. Visions of the calamities of missing do not flicker along the line of his putt. His round is dismal business, without reflection or anticipation.

Some golfers advise great caution in medal play.⁴ They advise to drive gently, to play round bunkers, to play putts for dead. It is not likely that the cautious medal-player will have to tear up his card, or that there will be any double figures on it, but he may easily have a worse total than if there were one or two, whilst anything better than a moderate score is improbable. An easy shot is as uncertain as a pressed one. A flabby muscle is as little under control as an overstrained one. To play round a bunker is to give yourself leave to top—a permission likely to be taken advantage of, for the golfer's body hates to hit and loves to fizzle; whilst his game is easily insulted by being made to go round, or play short of, a bunker, it ought to be allowed to try to carry. Besides, a bunker is not necessarily a very terrible place when you are in it. The player in one is as likely to win the hole as his adversary thirty yards further back on grass. Especially when the bunker is within forty yards of the hole is caution folly. A cupped ball on the grass is as likely a

⁴There is a happy mean between too great caution and too great preceptancy. On the whole it is bad by too great caution to ignore the mental telegraphy that goes on from the brain to the hand. After a fair mastery of the game is acquired it is well for a player to trust himself say as to his swing and the amount of force required for any stroke. Painful deliberations and shiftings, long continued waggings and shufflings are for the most part, deservedly fatal.

contingency as a very bad one in the bunker. The bunkered ball will likely be got out, whilst the same pusillanimous spirit which played the other shot may likely put it in. Besides, why should the bold player get in? To hit clean with a driver is not more difficult than to do so with an iron. In short, the bold game saves a shot if successful, and does not necessarily lose one if too daring. That timid play is a mistake will be made apparent on a moment's reflection to any one who has ever entered for a scoring competition. He will remember having thought, "If I go in there I am done for,"—how he has gone in, got out, and only at most lost a shot. Of course, this argument only applies to ordinary bankers. On every green there are some terrible ones—unfair ones, in which the punishment does not fit the crime. These must be avoided.

It is in putting, more than in any other part of the game, that the would-be medal winners, and those who enter to see what they will do, are apt to fail on medal days. Bad driving, with a turn of luck, may lose you little or nothing, but bad putting runs up a score that you will only reveal to in-

quiring friends after one or two askings and some explanation as to what bad luck you had. Every one starts for a medal a little shaky, needing something to picket his mind to, so that it may not wander away into realms of dread. In driving, one can prevent stray thoughts by employing the mind in keeping the eye on the ball; in approaching, one can deafen himself with "Be up;" in putting, all formulæ but makes us more erratic. Any kind of reflection or moral resolve seems to put the delicate machinery out of gear. Resolve to be up, and you are too far past; to be dead, and you are short; to be in, and you are out of holing. Good putting grows like the lillies. In match play it is vigorous when the sun is shining, and fades a little as the prospect grows dark. But the atmosphere of medal play is either too hot for it or too cold. One wants it to save shots for the future at one time, at another to retrieve the faults of previous play. To putt well on a medal day, one must be careless—advice easily given, but difficult to follow until our card is hopelessly beyond the reach of human aid.

*'We may outrun
By violent swiftness that which we run at,
And lose by over running.'*

HENRY VIII. I. I.—(*Shakespeare on Golf.*)

THE END.

