

THE ART OF GOLF

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ANNOTATED BY THE HON. MR. RECORDER WEIR.

PART II.

CHAPTER II.

OF STYLE IN DRIVING.

(*Continued.*)

Hitherto I have spoken chiefly of errors in swinging developed in the region between the shoulders and the point of the club. Those that can be made with the rest of the body are of a simpler nature, because, in regard to them, swings for the most part are what they seem. It is without dispute that the shoulder joints are to be used with perfect freedom and flexibility. If a man is reaching too far with them he does not need to be told. He feels his neck sink into his body. He knows that the more freely his trunk oscillates on its supports, the better. He knows that, his position once taken, his body ought not to sway to the right nor to the left, forward nor backward. Not that he can count upon its never doing so. We often get into tricks of falling backwards, swaying away to the right, etc., but we are conscious of them. Every one knows that whether he play with straight or bent knees, they must remain straight or bent throughout the shot. The necessity for standing firm on the feet, however, although admitted, is not universally appreciated. There is a prevalent disposition so to plant them as to make sure that the left heel will come away from the ground, as if this were of

as much importance as a firm foundation. Indeed, I am inclined to think that it is of none at all. That the heel of good players does come away from the ground, there is no doubt; but, in the case of many of the very best, how reluctantly!—and merely as if torn from it by the force of the swing. As I have said before, most fine players (I might say all who began young) have no theory, and can give but scant advice. One of the very best, when pressed for an answer as to a certain peculiarity in his stance, said, “Do I stand so? I didn’t know (said as if it meant, ‘I don’t care’). The only thing to think about is planting your feet in the ground—it doesn’t matter where, so long as they are glued down.” I said, “But your heel leaves the ground when you swing.” “Does it? Are you sure? I don’t think so.”

A chapter on *Swing* would be incomplete without some reference to the maxim “Slow back.” Every one acknowledges and feels that it is a sound one; but many fail to put it in practice, particularly those who have a slow, ponderous style. This seems to be a contradiction in terms, but it is true nevertheless. The fact is, “slow back” is not an accurate term for what is meant. Those learning the game get puzzled. The professional does not appear to practice

what he preaches. He seems to swing, and does swing, swiftly. What is really demanded by "slow back" is not absolute but relative slowness. If we compare the true swing to an india-rubber band, "slow back" means that is to be stretched more slowly than it will recoil. By practice, men learn to set the spring quickly, and the rate is of no importance provided there be nothing approaching to a jerk or wrench back. You must not be able to hear the club swish through the air as on the return journey. "Stiff back," "taut back," or "sway back," would be a more explicit phrase. Whatever it be called, the thing itself is a *sine qua non* of fine driving. When a player is merely pushing his hands round his neck instead of swinging, however slowly, and twitching them forward again, his caddy will be tempted to tell him he is too quick back, as much as if he is jerking it up round his shoulder. A good player who has temporarily fallen into any form of (to invent an ugly word) unpendulumness, on being warned that he is too quick back, will understand that he is not tightening all the muscles properly used in swinging equally—that he is merely flopping at the ball with his arms. A bad player, who has never learned what a true swing is, may only be made worse with "slow back." It may induce him to lift the club up softly and gingerly, with the kind of slowness necessary to grab a fly on his right ear,

but which has nothing to do with driving a ball. A true swing is not flashing a sword through the air, but as if forcing it through a strongly resisting medium.¹

Whilst the minds of golfers are, for the most part, unduly exercised about their swing before impact, tricks, jerks, and false curves in the other segment of their circle are scarcely thought about or observed. We wonder that A., with a short, spasmodic twiddle, should drive further and more steadily than B., who gets credit for quite a professional style. But if we look (not a natural thing to do, because the eyes instinctively wink when club and ball click together), B will be seen "to follow," whilst A. pulls up short. Of the two evils, crampedness after striking is perhaps more fatal than before it, or rather it would be more accurate to say that no one is contented to swing short back as many habitually do forward.

It is unnecessary to enlarge upon this part of the swing. What has been already said applies equally to both halves of it. The second part ought to be, as far as possible, a reflection of the first.² In the case of good players who stand square to the ball, it is so in every respect, being a little shorter or longer proportionately according as a man stands "in front" or "open." Falling in, falling back, etc., are as apt to occur in one half as in the other. Swaying the whole body forward after the ball is as likely to cripple driving as swaying away from it

¹ I regard this as a very illuminating observation, although some may find it cryptic. The sensation of a good swing is, as Sir Walter describes it, that of forcing say, a sword, through a strongly resisting medium. The wrists seem to take the lead and they should pull the arms and body round after them. It is thus that Vardon describes it. The wrists he says, should drag the arms after them. The hands, too, are kept resolutely in their proper alignment, so as not to pass the ball before the club's head. If the body or upper arms overpower the wrists the result is a "dunch" and not a swing at all. The difficulty with many drivers is really a faulty mental conception of the stroke. Feeling stronger in the biceps or

shoulders than in the wrists or forearm they place the emphasis in the former rather than on the latter, forgetting that what is wanted is, as Sir Walter Simpson says, a swift blow rather than a heavy one. Let us repeat that the wrists lead and dominate throughout.

² Mr. Hilton is responsible for the dictum that the pace at which the club head reaches the ball will be greatly diminished unless the segment of the circle described after the moment of impact be at least as long as the segment described before it. His practical deduction from this is that there should be no bending of the arms after the ball has been struck until the circle is completed. (*Concerning Golf*: Lon p. 65.)

when taking the club back.³ It is not so common to let the right heel leave the ground too much at the end of a stroke, as it is to rise too much on the left toe. Nor do men need to keep a tight hold of themselves lest the club wander away by itself in search of a long swing. Loose-jointedness here rather betrays itself by a check a foot past the tee and a finishing twitch with the wrists.

CHAPTER III.⁴

ADVICE TO BEGINNERS.

THE beginner who has read the foregoing chapters will be apt to re-read the first sentence, and to agree with those who complain that accuracy is almost impossible with so many things to remember; or, if he sees that it is not intended he should think of them all, he will still be puzzled to understand which are the elementary, which the more advanced, instructions. Accordingly I propose in this chapter (even at the risk of some repetition) to write a little sermon for the young player.

Let the beginner shake himself down naturally before the ball, and hit. Till he has done this for a good many days, no advice has either use or meaning. During this first stage it is probable that he will be quite delighted with his driv-

ing, and with good reason. His attention being entirely directed to hitting—his curiosity about how to hit not being so far aroused—he makes good shots. In many respects a man naturally attacks the ball in the proper way. He stands up, stands firm, does not force; and although his swing is of course stiff, it is not artificial. From the very first some players, however, make the mistake of treating the ball as a heavy object, whilst in reality it has, for practical purposes, no weight, and ought to be swept away, not jerked. In a bunker or in a hard hole it becomes heavy, and nothing will do but a jerk; but from the turf the problem is to shave it cleanly off. Again, early cricket, and many other games with balls, start most beginners on their golfing career with a wrong grip. The handle of the club is opposite the third waist-coat button instead of being as low as the length of the arms naturally let it go. They wish to drive as much in cricket form as the shape of the club will allow. Not that any one thinks of literally golfing with a straight bat. They are freed from that restraint, and enjoy swiping across the wicket. But this cannot be allowed. A bad cricketing style is not a good golfing one. The beginner must learn that golf is the very opposite of cricket, that he must get his hands as much down at it as up at the

³ A follow-on is not by any means the same thing as a follow-through, although it is a kind of follow-through. It is an exceptional mode of finishing a stroke, to be discussed hereafter, but is conspicuously absent from the style of the best examples of tee-shots. Nearly all great golfers hold back rather than follow-on in their drives. They seem to try to keep the centre of the swing as unmoved as possible. See article on "The Centre of the Swing," GOLF for August, 1904., p. 93.

⁴ Sir Walter is clearly of opinion that there is no short or royal road to excellence in golf. Doubtless this is true but if precepts are to be our guides in the absence of shining examples, let us be sure that our precepts are sound. With all that Sir Walter advances in this chapter I cordially agree, but I hardly think he has put the emphasis at the proper point. The modern analysis is more subtle and more exact than that

of the doughty Knight or even of Badminton. The chief thing about a good swing is the employment of the wrists. The wrists should sensibly begin to bend and turn as soon as the club is drawn back. In fact, it is the wrists (and mainly the left one) that draw the club rearward and upward, the arms following and the body turning in unison. And coming down, it is once more the wrists that do the work the remainder of one's anatomy following their lead. This is the modern doctrine as preached by Taylor, Vardon and Braid. Grips and stances will accommodate themselves if a correct use of the wrists is practised. Badminton's teaching that the arms should be well extended in drawing the club back has impeded many golfers, because the wrists, according to that method, do not act until the top of the swing when a fearful dip is made, or do not act at all. The arms acting as stiffly as those of a windmill.

other. He must use his club like a scythe; must sweep, not strike the ball. In my opinion the extent to which the player gets his hands over the club cannot be exaggerated. To have them well over is a *sine qua non* of an easy style. Beginners and others do not like the

Seen from the front, a perfect player's arms and club appear at the angle to each other shown in Fig 6. Imperfection lies between that and a straight line from shoulder to club head. Why getting the knuckles too far round is so common, so almost universal (see Figs 8 and 9),

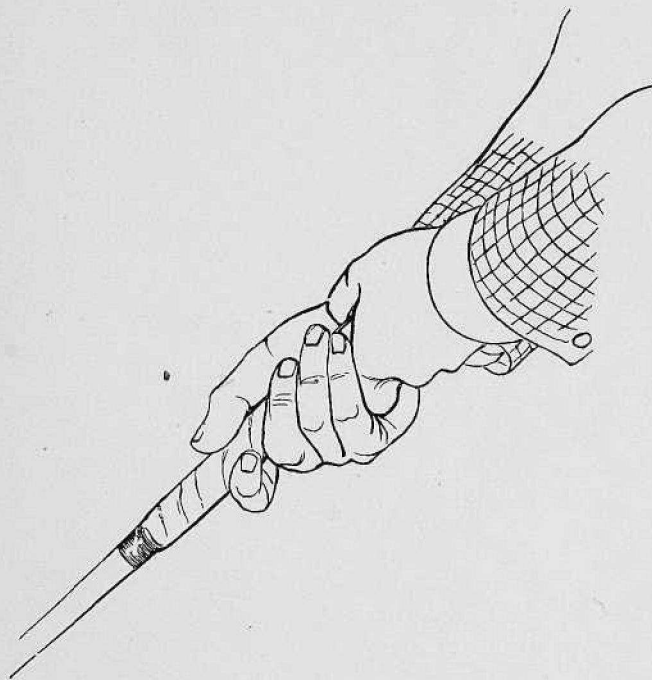


FIG. 8.

HANDS TOO FAR "ROUND" OR "UNDER."

position until they have proved it, until patience and experience convince them that the grip which is most convenient for catching the ball a hammer-like thud is not the best either for far or sure.

I say, "until they have proved it." Lucky for them, if they ever do. A very large percentage of players live and play and die with their knuckles pointing too much towards the ground, with their club at too obtuse an angle with their arms, and consequently without the possibility of ever having a perfect swing (Figs. 8 and 9).

is (besides that it gives the hammering power already referred to) that it prevents the wrists being used, and leads quickly to fairly steady driving, whilst the true position enables them to be employed, with consequent feeble and uncertain hitting. I would therefore strongly impress upon beginners the advisability of having their hands well over the club—of becoming steady by keeping their wrists taut, rather than by so gripping the club that their joints cannot bend. I say "hands." It should rather be "hand"

—the left hand. The right will look after itself. If the tyro acquires a grip which prevents him seeing his left knuckles, and which show him instead more than the first joints of his fingers

driver—a true, full style of the orthodox sort is impossible. The fault must be compensated by either a short, a broken, an overhead swing, or by some other modification, pronounced or slight in

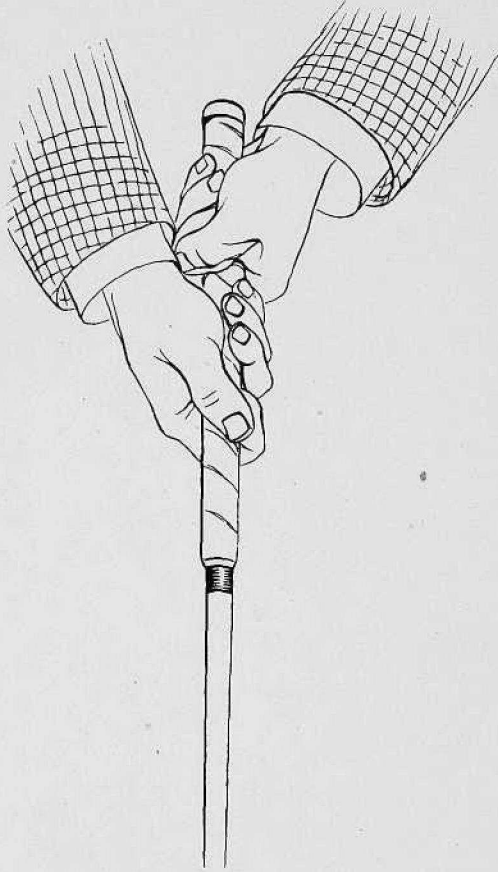


FIG. 9.

HANDS TOO FAR "ROUND" OR "UNDER."

(compare Figs. 7 and 9), if his club handle point to his waistcoat instead of well below that garment, there is no reason why he should not become an effective, but he never will be a pretty,

proportion to the cause. Let any one grip in this way, swing a club back to his shoulder, examine the constrained position of his right wrist, and he will see that one of these things is inevitable.

(To be continued.)

