

THE GENTLENESS OF GOLF

A Refutation of That Popular Misconception: the Profane and Ill-Tempered Golfer

BY ROBERT STANLEY WEIR

BEING a family man, I spend quite a few Sundays of the Golfing Season in town, and, instead of pacing the happy links with Putnam or Baylis, often find myself doing the Fifth Avenue of my city instead, accompanied by Winifred or Marjorie. Of course, one is sure to meet on such occasions some of one's friends, similarly Sabbatarian, for domestic reasons; and dreaming, like oneself, of *déshabille* in the easy, white togs of golf; of showers hot and cold in the clubhouse after the game; of that delightful deglutition (not sold at any price) yclept the 19th hole; of the lounge and drowse upon the piazza in the cool of the afternoon; of the blithe companionship at dinner when good digestion waits on appetite; of the delightful fatigue; of the blessed slumber, at the close of a perfect day, that crowns all.

As hats are raised on these Sunday walks what is it, if not a certain extra warmth in the murmured "How do you do," a somewhat more cordial smile in the countenance, a brighter gleam in the eye of this approaching promenader that leads Marjorie to ask:

"Is that a golfer, Dad?"

"Yes, my dear. Why?"

"Oh, I thought so."

Perhaps the next comer is old Harper, pounding the pavement with his stick, or whirling by in his open car. In either case, he also greets us with a gleam in his eye. Old Harper and I have known each other for two decades at least. Our salutations have always been invariably friendly and decorous; still, they have been touched a little with the casual; as with that multitude of others one nods to indifferently for half a lifetime. But two years ago I proposed him for Kanawaki. Hence the gleam whenever we meet; for since then Old Harper has suffered a golf-change.

"Is that nice old gentleman a golfer, too?"

"Yes, my dear, he is."

"I think," says Winifred, "that all your best friends—the ones that smile—are golfers."

This was quite an acute observation; and a true one.

Who, indeed, but has observed what a softener of manners golf is? The tradition among the uninitiated is, of course, that the game is an encourager of blasphemy. But, as the late Lord Tennyson remarked in one of his poems of certain detractors, "Let them rave!" Golf is an assuager, an emollient; and an encourager of silence, self-control, and nobility. I have known the most uncouth and brazen of brigands, accepting office as caddies for the sake of filthy lucre but disdaining the whole business at the outset as essentially beneath contempt, finally and speedily becoming polished into gentlemen of address. The Foleys come to mind at this point; and Harries, always so point-device in his accoutrements. Harries had one of the Foleys as caddy one day and a different member of the tribe a few days following. As chance would have it on the latter occasion they met another golfing

party to which the first Foley was attached as caddie; and the following conversation (far from *sotto voce*) took place across the course, as the two groups passed each other.

Foley Number One (utterly regardless of Harries' sensibilities): "How is he playing?"

Foley Number Two: "Rotten!"

Was it the meekness with which Harries bore this stinging jibe that, begetting remorse in the Christian way, converted the Foleys? Was it the daily observance of the little courtesies and deferences and compliments between

designs this year upon the Championship. Albert has two to his credit already. "Going to do my best, sir. Hard to get time to practice, sir." I ask him to have a look at my clubs; and he overhauls my kit. "Irons all right, sir. Cleek's good, sir. Spring gone out of the driver, sir. Need a new shaft, sir. Mashie all right, sir. Yes, sir. Don't over-swing to start with, sir. Good day, sir." Soft voiced, modest, skilful, honest; and civil without subservience; so would I qualify, as a class, the professional Golfers I have met.

Does the reader remember the story of Tom Morris who won a laughing bet with Colonel Somebody that he could not hole out of the bunker in the next stroke? By a fluke, Tom did the impossible. The Colonel handed old Tom his cheque the next day. "Na, Na, Sir," said old Tom. "We were na serious."

The Golfer, obliged to play for nearly three hours, and during that time to work in silence with nerves alive but schooled, to exercise courtesy to his opponent, whatever his secret sentiments toward that individual may be, to offer congratulations if he is himself the loser; in short, to subdue all unworthy primitive emotions, ought to grow into something of a gracious superman. And of these there are many. It is a treat for example to watch Jerry Travers play. At Ekwanok two years ago I saw him, in the semi-finals, play against the redoubtable Travis. Then indeed Greek met Greek. How impossible to measure the keenness, the grim determination, the unceasing activity of brain, the watchfulness, the nerve-tension that fairly exuded from the players and made itself felt in the gallery! I doubt whether half a dozen words were exchanged between the contestants during the thirty-six holes played. But when all was over and the Adonis of the links, as Putnam named him, proved the better man that day, nothing could have been more cordial than the genuine congratulations of the older player. I said it was a treat to watch Travers. It was a treat to watch them both. Both men could easily blaze out in wrath upon occasion; but being self-schooled, they had learned the wisdom of self-control.

There used to be a tradition that Mr. Travis had his opponents beaten in virtue of some hypnotic influence. I can well believe it. You cannot walk for three hours or more with a keen, silent, skilful and determined opponent without having your poise upset. The Travis-hypnotism was, it would appear, exceedingly active when the British Championship was brought to America in 1904. Mr. Edward Blackwell all but acknowledges it, unconsciously, in his account of the match. As everybody knows he was in the finals with Mr. Travis and this is one of the things he said about him: "One thing that struck me very much was that he was the most silent player that I have ever played against in my life—really a most extraordinary man in this respect. During the whole of that eventful day he only spoke to me once before the match was ended and that (Continued on page 90)



GOLF à la FILM

Here is a really impressive golf picture. It portrays not less a personage than Miss June Caprice the new Fox Film star who, it is said, is soon to displace all other movie lassies from public favor. Miss Caprice, it may be observed, likes to play golf in black satin slippers. Her putting—which is accomplished with an ordinary driver, faced the wrong way—is said to be characterized by an almost deadly accuracy. Nothing however in her golfing style is more worthy of study than her original grip of the club. If you wish to emulate it, simply fancy yourself doing three widely divergent things at the same time: (1) playing shuffleboard, (2) pushing a carpet sweeper, and (3) hoeing potatoes

Harries and his friends, the "Thank you" to the Foleys themselves for this and that, in the progress from hole to hole, that disarmed their tribal rudeness? Whatever it was, the Foleys, in time, became as though they had seen a great light. They, too, like old Harper, suffered a golf-change in their own way. Life, after golf, was never again the round of maledictions and fisticuffs it was before.

I have noticed, too, the gentleness of golf in the professionals of the game. When the winter of our discontent is past, and the days of spring with the first touch of green have come, the first visit is always to Albert's shop. There is always the handshake and the enquiry for wife and kiddies; the examination of new stock—proof of industry during the winter. "Thank you, sir. Very well, sir. Hope you've been well yourself, sir." I enquire, or used to before the War, if he has

The Gentleness of Golf

(Continued from page 71)

was after we had played a few holes in the morning, when he remarked that my driving was remarkably long." It is rather singular, however, that in Mr. Travis's account he made precisely the same remark about Mr. Blackwell—that he was the most uncommunicative player he had ever played with.

I HAVE seen many eminent golfers in my day—English and American, professional and amateur—and they were all noticeable for a singular calmness and courtesy of demeanor that is almost unique among sportsmen. The gentleness of golf makes them great. Most competitive games in the open—baseball, hockey, football, lacrosse, and the like—resemble battle. It is in these contests that we stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood and, in Shakespeare's phrase, imitate the action of the tiger. The golfer never imitates the action of the tiger, believing that

There is nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility.

Never does he jostle an opponent. He assumes a virtue if he has it not; and, ere long, the virtue becomes as if to the manner born—it becomes natural. Braid, Taylor and Vardon might make a barrel of money by touring in America. I wrote to Taylor not long ago, suggesting that, golf being dead in Britain just now, he write a book like Braid's or Vardon's. It would certainly have a great sale here. But what does the big man say? "I have not the heart to write about golf while this war is on." There spoke a superman. The British golfers have all gone into silence. Many alas, like Jack Graham, whom that blithe and rare golfer, Chick Evans, so greatly admired ("The best of them all," he said); Norman Hunter, too, who was here with Hilton, and many others, will never come out of it.

THE fate of Jack Graham, of the Liverpool Scottish, reminds us that the stern dictates of war sent another tall fellow into silence at Koodoosberg, South Africa, sixteen years ago, and we still lament him—Lieutenant Tait of the Black Watch,

twice amateur champion. John L. Low has written an account of his life which every golfer should read. Freddie Tait was very human. It is related that, not liking the location of a certain hole on the eve of an important match at St. Andrews, he and a fellow-conspirator, Colonel Lamb, procured a hole-cutter and changed the hole overnight. There was an awful row with the offended committees, but there was such an abundance of the nobility of golf about Freddie that he was forgiven; and Mr. Low has this final word in his book: "A man may be a fine player, but a bad golfer; even as well-born persons are not always gentlemen, or great theologians good parsons. A golfer in the fullest sense of the word is a man in the first place and a player in the second; Freddie was this true golfer." I don't know any other game in which sheer humaneness obtrudes itself to such a degree. We not only know the style of play of our big golfers, we know *them*. Let any one be too keen a legalist, too scrupulous of his rights, ungenerous, and he fails to attain the standard, no matter how well he plays this stroke or that. The etiquette of golf, written or unwritten, compels mutual deference—a kind of brotherly love which beareth and endureth all things—witness this incident: Sandie and Geordie had played a keen match of thirty-six holes, somewhere in the North Country, and at the end the match was all square. Neither was quite content to leave the question of supremacy undetermined, and Geordie said:

"Ah'll play ye a'chteen holes the morn's morn to decide the match."

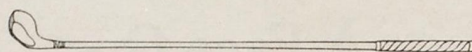
"Well, Geordie, ye ken ah was thinking o' gettin' marrit the morn's morn."

"My, but that's a peety," said Geordie. "Could ye not put it off?"

"What? The match?"

"Na, na. The marriage," said Geordie.

"May be I could," said Sandy.



The Once Unquiet Sex

(Continued from page 35)

privation and lack of the smaller comforts of life. The thing that must have impressed the British Minister of Munitions, David Lloyd George, when he paid his visits to the French factories, was the grim determination on the part of the working people to do everything possible to help their country. Fresh from his own troubles with the laborites, he found no standing on "rights," no cautious thought about the future. The men had no distrust of the women, no apprehension as to the effectual substitution of a workwoman for a workman. In fact, the men seemed to think only of how the women could be made as efficient as the men had been.

THE war has lasted so long, and the attention of women was turned so soon to state needs, that, in cases where elaborate training is necessary, as in the chemical industries, many have gone a long way in the direction of fitting themselves for the higher sort of work. There women are almost the only students in some of the professional schools. It is expected that, at the close of hostilities, there will be a great increase in the number of French women doctors and women lawyers, while others of their sex are attending the newly opened schools where they are fitting themselves for scientific farming and the efficient and profitable management of rural property.

IT is only in those parts of the world which are not involved in the war that the Unquiet Sex is still unquiet. The advocates of the rights of women, as distinguished from the rights of men, go on repeating the old arguments and stick to the old generalizations. They don't seem even to suspect that if they looked abroad they would find an argument ready made to their hand, an argument more difficult to answer than the familiar one, "but women can't fight." But even for that old objection there is now an answer, for it is a matter of general knowledge that women have been fighting, as witness the cases of all the sturdy girls of Russia and Serbia who have served their country and died in her ranks. Perhaps, among other things, the war will go far to settle the age-long "women's question," that has existed since the time of the Caesars.

Get Distance in Comfort

MAKE YOUR SUMMER
STROKES IN A

PIVOT SLEEVE (Trade Mark Registered) GOLF COAT

THE ONLY GOLF COAT
with self-expanding plaits.
The only Golf Coat that meets
every stroke requirement—back
swing, jerk stroke, or follow
through.

THE ONLY GOLF COAT with self-
expanding plaits *guaranteed* to re-
turn to closed position at normal.
FREE MUSCLE AND SHOULDER
PLAY—PLUS COAT PROTECTION
AND DRESSINESS.



The
Spreading
Plait
of The
"Pivot
Sleeve"
Golf
Coat

MADE to Individual Measurements by
this Sportswear Tailoring Establishment.

FEATURING the Favored Warm Weather Zephyr
Weight Rainproofed Shantung Silk—will *not* water
spot. Imported expressly for our tailoring use.
Hand-loomed Donegal Homespins, Scotch Tweeds
and Cheviots.
KNICKERS in White Linen Crash and Buff Colored
Washable Linens.

Resident Golfers and visitors to New York are invited to call and try on a
specimen coat—full line of all sizes expressly for try-on purposes.
Or communicate with our Mail Order Service connected with our Custom
Tailoring Establishment—samples and self-measurement charts on request

FOR GOLF
TENNIS
CRICKET &
OUTING
WEAR—
the plain
and striped
pre-shrunk
English
Flannels

SILK
SPORTING
JACKETS
for Country &
Sports—
with Flannel
Trousers.

PH. WEINBERG & SONS 30 John St.,
TAILORING SPECIALISTS IN NEW YORK
"SPORTSWEAR" APPAREL

JOHN WANAMAKER GOLF STORE



BLUE FLASH

The New American Golf Ball

Mesh-marked; true-centered; far-flying

65c each

Sole wholesale distributor

JOHN WANAMAKER
NEW YORK and PHILADELPHIA

THE GENTLENESS OF GOLF

VANITY FAIR | JULY 1916



Reprinted from the Vanity Fair Archive

<https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/19160701061/print>

©2026 - VANITY FAIR ARCHIVE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.