

THE TWO SWINGS IN GOLF

BEING NOTES ON GOLFING THEORY

By R. Stanley Weir

Golf Faults Illustrated. By G. W. Bedlam, and J. H. Taylor, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Golf for Girls. By Cecil Leitch. George Newnes, Limited, London.

The New Book of Golf. Edited by Horace E. Hutchinson. Longmans Green & Co., New York.

How to Play Golf. By Harry Vardon. Geo. W. Jacobs & Co., Philadelphia, Pa.

The Golfer's Tip Book. By G. D. Fox. The Musson Book Co., Toronto.

Advanced Golf. By James Braid. Geo. W. Jacobs & Co., Philadelphia, Pa.



ALTHOUGH since the publication of the Badminton Book and "The Game of Golf," by William Park, Jr., not a few expositions of the theory and practice of the game have appeared with the seal and signature of recognized champions and experts, yet it can hardly be said that we have been presented with a clear, unequivocal statement of some illuminating, general principle that would simplify instruction and test the worth of contending theories.

Theoretic golf, indeed, threatens to become discredited as a mass of purely empirical rules from which little profit can be derived; because the moment you are reduced to enumerating, prior to any stroke, a series of precautionary maxims, that moment you are seriously handicapped. Many are tempted, therefore, to discard the reading of books of instruction on golf as of no practical utility; and, while admitting their interesting charm as personal documents, to find in individual play and experiment the only way to success. The same argument, however, would also lead one to dispense with professional coaching which, for the greater part, consists of admonitions to do this and not to do that. Our best instruction, then, would be a purely mechanical imitation of the best models that

opportunity affords: the professional or the scratch members of one's club. So that we are reduced to the humiliating confession that the art of golf, notwithstanding many efforts of modern writers, and the help of the camera, is irreducible to rule or principle.

I venture to think, however, that the truth is hardly so unpleasant as this, and that if we have not been able as yet to see the forest it has been owing to the number of the trees. An attentive reading of the attractive books before us, and of others not a few, combined with reflection, observation and experiment, has suggested a simple classification or generalization which the writer humbly submits to his fellow-golfers of open mind. He would premise that he offers nothing startling or novel in the actual practice of golf. He does not presume to dispute anything that the great masters have written. He is prepared, if need be, to swear by Taylor, Braid and Vardon. But he ventures to suggest or supply what he considers a defect in their theoretical presentation of the game, a rather serious omission in their description of the swing.

That they have given us all the practical details, he will admit, but they have failed, he ventures to say, in their exposition of theory so that golf remains much more mysterious, occult



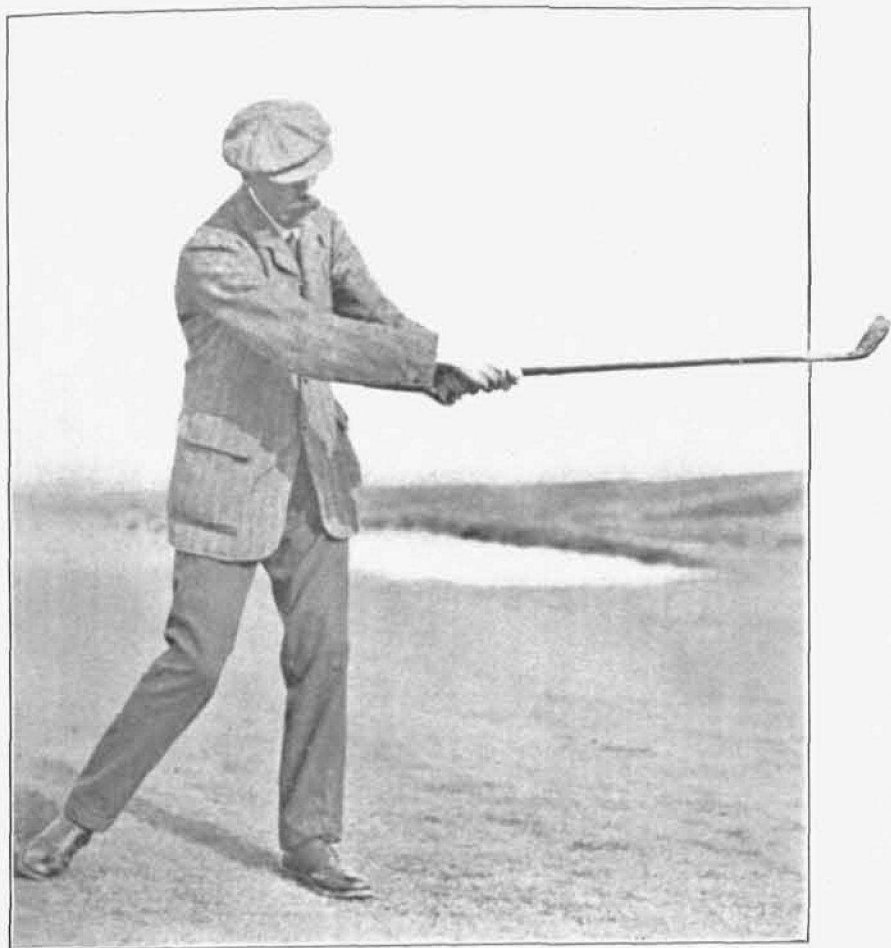
Courtesy of Geo. W. Jacobs & Co.

IT IS CLEAR THAT BRAID IS DELIVERING A DOWNWARD BLOW

and difficult than is at all necessary. Any description of a golf swing involves, perforce, some mental conception or theory which the reader absorbs. If this mental conception or theory is defective or one-sided, as I fear it has hitherto been, the results in practice can only be imperfect. It is not given to every golfer, however eminent, to describe accurately his own performance. To deduce principles from facts is to philosophize—a high task. But if we could be supplied with some working-theory that would be applied with good practical results to the various conditions of lie, wind and turf that we have to meet in our play, in-

stead of as hitherto, a theory that is applicable only to a nicely teed-up shot and a favorable wind, we should be blessed with a minimum of exasperation and a maximum of pleasure in our reaches after more perfect play.

My working-theory of the game, then, is that there are two distinct kinds of swing that the golfer should understand and recognize instead of the one which he has been taught to apply to all situations. These two swings or strokes are first, those that are delivered with what may be called an *ascending* blow; and, second, those that are delivered with a *descending* blow. The ascending strokes are those



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THE RESTRICTED FOLLOW-THROUGH NATURALLY RESULTS FROM
THE DOWNWARD BLOW

made with the ball nearer the left than the right foot; the descending strokes are those made with the ball nearer the right foot. By an ascending blow is meant one that strikes the ball just as the club has passed or is passing the nadir of the swing; and, by a descending blow, one that reaches the ball just before the lowest point of the swing. Let us put aside as of no practical importance any minute inquiry as to the momentary period of time and very brief space during which the club proceeds horizontally. The golf swing is either circular or elliptical

and who will may try to satisfy himself whether there are any straight lines in a circle or an ellipse. Such investigations are as useless for playing purposes as the attempt to determine how long club and ball are together at the impact.

All good strokes are either of the upward or the downward type. These strokes are not new to golf. Every competent professional plays them; every good text-book describes them after a fashion. The difficulty has been and is that they have not been recognized in our theoretical exposi-

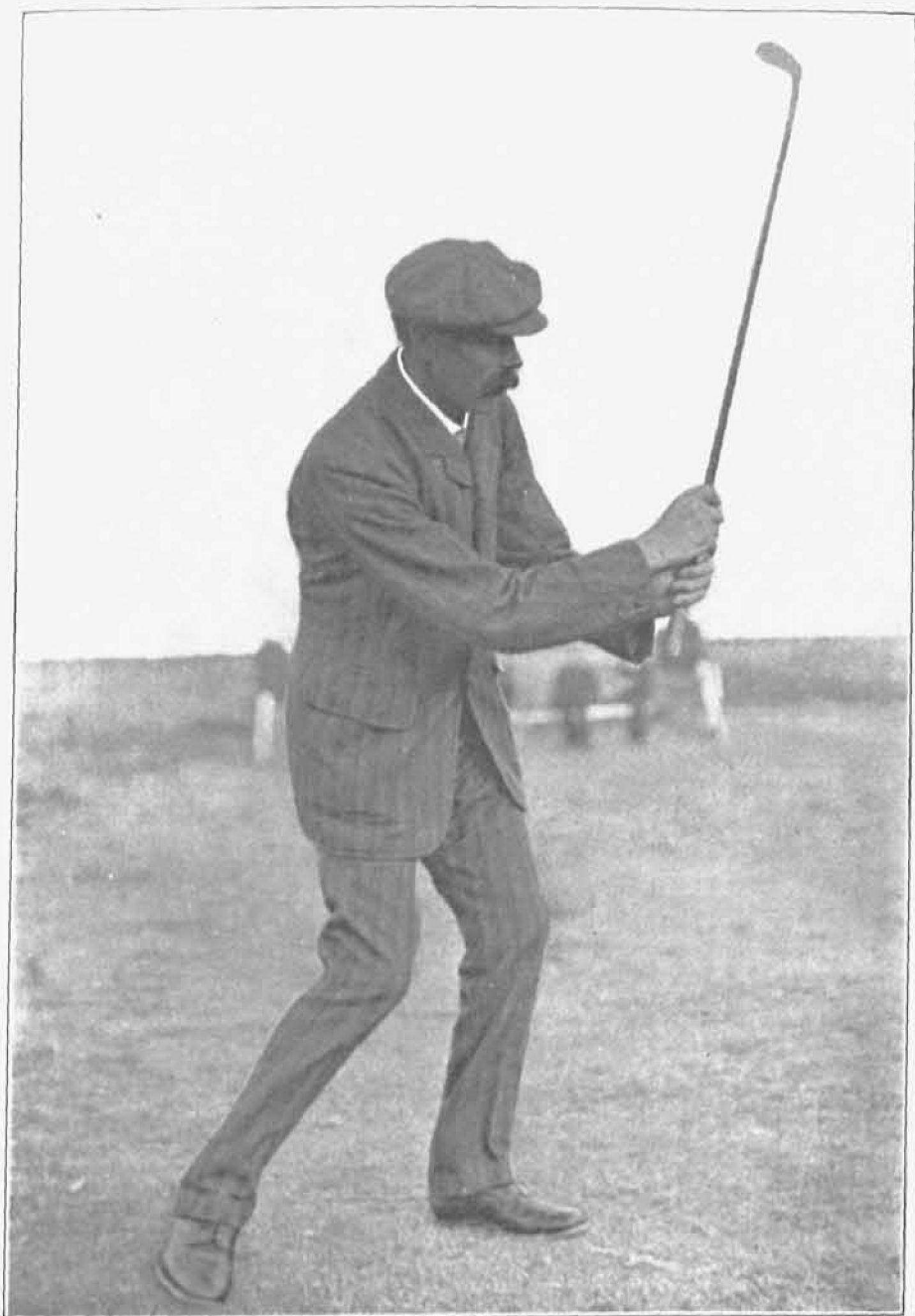


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BRAID IS WHIPPING-UP THIS STROKE. IN A MORE TYPICAL ILLUSTRATION OF THIS STROKE THE BALL WOULD BE RATHER MORE TO THE LEFT. LATER PICTURES WILL SHOW THIS

tions. We have all been taught to believe that the golf swing is One, whereas it is Two. Great pains, indeed, have been taken by writers and coaching-experts to explain the orthodox tee-shot, but they have not taken equal pains to explain that under very oft-recurring circumstances a distinctly different kind of shot must be employed. If only the pupil were told that sometimes the ball is whipped up and sometimes it is smitten downward, accord-

ing to differing circumstances, he would be in possession of an enlightening formula that practically dispels the whole mystery that has so long befogged the game. It is manifest that if there are but two kinds of strokes available for any required shot, and if the player understands the nature of each, his task, whether the ball be upon the tee, the fairway or in a bunker, will be the easiest possible under the circumstances.



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THE FOLLOW-THROUGH SHOWS THAT THE SWING HAS BEEN UPWARD

I may now explain more particularly the respects in which I conceive these two kinds of stroke to differ. The ascending stroke is the ordinary shot, with the driver, brassy or spoon, that is so fully described in the opening chapters of any standard book of instruction. It is the orthodox shot for a good lie with favorable wind. The descending stroke, on the other hand, is the shot employed against the wind or to negotiate a bad lie. So much may be broadly stated. And if all that the masters of the game have written about cuppy lies, bunker shots, and playing against the wind is attentively considered, and the available photographs studied, it will be found that the shot called for under such conditions is the descending blow; although, strange to say, it has not hitherto been recognized or described as such.

Although we are most familiar with the ascending stroke in the drive from a good lie, it is an equally legitimate stroke with any club, provided the lie be good and the wind not unduly adverse. The reason so many players have trouble with the cleek, for example, is the mental indecision that results from being unable to decide how to smite the ball. If the lie be good why not use the cleek precisely as you would use the driver from the tee? There is absolutely no reason why the shot should not be successful. But to do so in a cuppy or indifferent lie would be folly. In such case we must adopt the downward blow with the ball nearer the right foot. The ascending blow, under the favorable conditions above mentioned, may likewise and is, by the masters, applied to half shots, quarter-shots, the chip-off the green, and even the putt. In the shorter shots it may not be recognizable by the onlooker, but the instructed player knows what he is doing; he has a perfectly definite mental attitude, so to speak, in every stroke.

But although the ascending blow may be played under these conditions by every club in the bag, this is not to deny that the descending blow may also be used in like circumstances. We may state the correct practice, as we con-

ceive it, in the following way: Given a good lie and non-adverse wind, one may attack the ball with either the ascending or the descending blow; but, given a bad lie or a hostile wind, we shall make use of the descending blow alone.

The ascending blow requires that the stance be so adjusted that the ball shall be nearer the left foot. In every such shot the follow-through is free and conspicuous. It is a bent-arm stroke. The descending blow is played with the ball nearer the right foot. The follow-through is restricted. The arms tend to stretch themselves out at the finish. The folly of trying to tack on an exuberant follow-through to a descending stroke must now be very apparent.

It will be seen that, of necessity, the power of the stroke is applied rather sooner in the descending stroke than in the other. Consciously delivering the blow downward and putting in power at an earlier stage than when the ball is nearer the left, doing this and knowing that your follow-through will be limited to narrow compass, all vastly enhances the pleasure of the game and the quality of the play.

The ascending stroke, then, is, as its name implies, a whipped-up stroke, most familiar in the ordinary drive from the tee, but, also available in smaller strokes. It is with an ascending blow that we play those pitched mashie-shots that J. H. Taylor describes. In playing them the great Taylor does not expressly take turf. Only when the lie is bad or indifferent does he take turf and then he delivers a downward blow with, as a necessary feature, a very restricted follow-through. And yet how often do we hear it said that one should always take a little turf with mashie or iron! In point of fact this should never be done when the lie is good, nor, when the upward stroke is employed. Sometimes the lie is good but the wind is mightily adverse. Stand in front under these conditions, and deliver the downward blow.

The enormous importance of the downward stroke in which, as we have said, the ball is struck an instant be-

fore the bottom of the swing is reached, is to be seen when we reflect that it is absolutely the only effective means of contending from the tee against a strong wind; that it is the only way to negotiate a bad lie; that it is the only way to recover when half-buried in grass or sand; and that it is the only way to execute the running-up shot, the mysterious so-called push-shot, or the intentional pull. If this be true I think my criticism is justified that heretofore we have not been frankly told by authority that besides the full tee-shot on which we bend our first energies, whipping the ball up and away with an upward blow, there is also another kind of stroke by which, owing to the forward stance we are obliged to take under certain conditions of lie and wind, we deliver a deliberate downward blow and do not worry over a diminished follow-through.

Our theory also puts in its proper place the purely empirical rule that we should take back our irons uprightly. Taking the club back, after it has addressed the ball from a point nearer the right foot, it must of necessity be taken back rather uprightly; and this will be true not only of irons thus played, but also of wooden clubs thus played. It also follows that, playing your irons with the ball nearer the left foot, you need not and should not take them back uprightly, but follow your normal method. In fact, given the right conception of the two swings, these matters of swing, upright or otherwise, very readily and naturally adjust themselves.

Our theory also solves the much-debated question as to whether the right or the left hand should be dominant in the swing. Thus put, the question betrays a radical misconception; for the golf-swing as we see, is not one but two. There can be no doubt that, standing behind the ball, the left hand enters with decision into the stroke. On the other hand, standing in front, the right hand may safely assume control in the downward stroke. I am of opinion that the left hand should always determine the line of retraction, no matter which stroke is played; but when coming down for an ascending stroke it is the left hand that perceptibly snaps; with the descending blow, the right hand or right forefinger, as the bigness

of the stroke may warrant, may be allowed more boldness.

I have just been reading Vardon's chapter on the push-shot and desire to write with all due respect of anything that great player has put his name to. It is a highly interesting chapter. It explains that the swing must be upright, that one stands closer to one's ball, and distinctly more forward than usual. It is explained that the ball will rise quickly but maintain a low flight to drop as sharply as it has risen with very little run. All this is written together with a good deal about a mysterious back spin, "the ball spinning lightly up the face of the club at the instant of impact," a statement which is perhaps open to considerable doubt. But of the prime requisite of a downward blow, with the resultant restricted follow-through, the great champion is singularly silent.

Now it is only just that in my possibly somewhat sweeping criticism of the literature of the game, I should make an exception where it ought to be made. In her interesting little book, which is written for girls, but which might well be studied by men, Miss Cecil Leitch, who, receiving odds it is true, brought no less a personage than Mr. Hilton into camp on a well-known occasion at Sunningdale, comes very close to the truth, is quite "warm" as children say. Indeed, she just misses a complete recognition of the all-important differentiation of strokes that we are endeavoring to expound. "In correct iron play" says Miss Leitch, "the club should strike the ball just before the bottom of the swing and while still moving downward." Elsewhere she writes: "Tom Ball amazed me by the length of his iron shots considering the shortness of his swing. At the finish of his stroke, the club-head was barely as high as his knee." It is perfectly clear that Tom Ball was playing frankly and crisply a downward blow and that his follow-through was restricted accordingly. Miss Leitch, it will be seen, comes very near an important generalization; I would only demur that it is sometimes equally "correct" to play one's iron with an ascending blow *e. g.* for a pitch and run when the lie is good.

(To be concluded next month)