

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. Georg 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.

(Continued from last month)

What we have written about the downward blow explains how often the professional with his irons and sometimes with his woods has a very limited follow-through. It also explains the fozzles and perplexities of his pupils who obediently try to tack on a follow-through of the one pattern to every stroke. Let me say, however, that the downward stroke does not at all connote a stiff cleaver-like performance. It is as carefully timed, as rhythmically delivered as the more familiar stroke firstly described. Let me add that it is the stroke employed when turf is properly taken; the meaning of which is that the ball being struck before the bottom of the swing is reached, the club naturally follows slightly into the ground. There is no virtue in taking turf *qua* turf. As Miss Leitch very shrewdly remarks: "Taking turf is the effect rather than the cause of a good iron shot."

It is one of the common-places of golf that anything more than a half-swing with an iron club is useless and dangerous. James Braid, in particular, is very emphatic in insisting that at the finish of a full iron stroke the club should rise very little if anything above the horizontal. Unless one delivers a downward blow it will be found impossible without seriously jarring one's

arms to arrest the club at the point desired by the author of "Advanced Golf"; but, taught to deliver such a blow the stroke is so easy that one wonders the hint was not given by the eminent master. Nevertheless, one *may* play a full iron with good results by an ascending blow if the lie be good, the wind favorable and the proper stance and swing be adopted.

The ascending blow, I would repeat is ordinarily confined in its use to favorable conditions of wind and lie. I say ordinarily, because Taylor sometimes uses it to escape from sand. If lies were always good and the wind always behind us, golf would be a simpler game. The advantage and necessity of the descending strokes appear chiefly when winds are adverse and the lie is bad. At the same time, however, it is clear that with a favorable lie we may attack the ball with either kind of stroke. It may safely be advised that, as a general rule, the best results, both for distance and direction, with iron clubs are got by means of the downward blow. I recall a certain hill-top green, a full iron shot distant, which I could never reach and stay on until I adopted the downward stroke; but it needs conviction to play up a hill by playing downward! Suppose it is a long tee-shot that con-



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STANCE AND SWING FOR PUSH
SHOT—A DOWNWARD BLOW

fronts us with a strong wind. The books all tell us how it should be done, the ball nearer the right, the hands correspondingly in front, swing shortened somewhat, and the rest of it. We will add what they all omit: Deliver a somewhat downward blow. You will probably have an abbreviated follow-through; and the hands instead of finishing over the left shoulder will finish well stretched out at about 45 degrees. Do not worry because this is not according to the classic model of Harry Vardon at the finish of a full drive, for that well-known picture presents the finish of an ascending stroke. But we may also execute this wind-conquering shot with good results, when there is no hostile wind; and it seems, as we shall see later, that many players are beginning to do so habitually. Let it be borne in mind, however, that under the adverse conditions of a poor lie, a hostile wind, entombment in grass or sand, or when we require the pulled shot, the running-up shot and the push-shot, we must do

something more than what most of the champions in their books instruct us to do. We must have the mental conception of a ball rhythmically smitten downwards. Unless we have this clear idea or visualization, we will never play these shots with comfort or full confidence.

One further mark of difference between the two classes of stroke may be mentioned. The whipped-up or ascending stroke is a bent-arm stroke; while the descending blow, although it may be free enough in the swing-back, results in those out-stretched arms at the finish with which the pedagogues tell us to play our iron shots. If they would simply tell us to stand and play for a downward blow they would greatly curtail their own troubles and vastly facilitate our progress.

The simple differentiation in strokes which we suggest to clarify golfing theory explains the mixture of truth, and fallacy that underlies the theories of Mr. P. A. Vaile, who has written much and often on golf. Of one of his pet notions that instruction should begin with the putter, working backwards to the driver, little need be added to what Vardon has effectively written, page 92. The very next club to the putter, the mashie, is probably the most difficult in the bag; the mashie swing is not merely a segment of the full-swing with the driver and it would be more than doubtful wisdom to put it so early in the hands of the neophyte. At the same time we note that Mr. A. C. M. Croome in "The New Book of Golf" advocates, both for beginners and those who are off their game, what he calls the fundamental shot, which he describes as "a long putt played as stiffly as is compatible with some freedom in hitting." With a cleek or a mid-iron one could easily cover a hundred yards in this way. But we wish to refer chiefly to those seemingly radical opinions of Mr. Vaile, asserted with no lack of emphasis and with small reverence for great names, which denounce what is called the "fetish of the left," proclaiming also the predominance of

the right hand, and the keeping of the weight upon the left foot. Mr. Vaile has written copiously on other points of the game, but the three points we have cited are the most important positions he assumes in his various writing.

Mr. Vaile's restatement of theory illustrates once again the danger of the partial point of view. In my opinion he is both right and wrong. I have not the slightest doubt that in delivering the ascending blow, at all events, the weight of the body at the top of the swing is chiefly borne by the right. This is certainly the case in the ordinary mashie shot that Taylor plays so well, for example, and in the ordinary whipped-up tee-shot with the driver. How can it be otherwise when the left knee bends and the left heel rises and the body turns on its axis rightwards? Moreover, the ball being to the left, the left hand must have the chief control, if a disastrous hook is to be avoided. The snap of both wrists as they meet the ball is plainly discernible in any ascending stroke. The so-called "fetish of the left" simply means that the left hand gives the proper line of retraction and that it must turn more or less under the shaft according to the bigness of the swing. The maxim "left hand firm, right hand loose" does not mean a loose right at the impact. It simply means and has always meant that the right hand must accommodate itself to the left in the backward swing; otherwise the swing will lack freedom, ease and correct relation of wrist to club. Nobody has ever denied that the right hand comes into every good stroke; but its functions, though indispensable, are certainly not so constantly dominant as those of the left in the shot that is whipped up. Now there is a certain difference in the stroke when we play the descending stroke. The snap of the wrists at the impact is not so noticeable as in the ascending stroke. The wrists are somewhat stiffer as experiment will show. The arms instead of bending during the follow-through tend to throw themselves out; which is good. Moreover in this



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TAYLOR PLAYS AN ASCENDING STROKE

stroke the power of the right is more consciously exerted. Still another feature is that the weight of the body is retained on the left to a greater extent than in the first kind of stroke. It is clear that this must result from standing in front. Now I am convinced that Mr. Vaile understands the descending blow in its essentials so well that in his enthusiasm for it, he quite ignores the ascending stroke. Nay, so strenuous a protagonist is he that he denies or is blind to the fact that there is still another kind of stroke; and this is where, as I think, he grievously errs. He has missed the simple fact that good golfers habitually make use of two kinds of stroke, each of which permits numerous modifications of its own, and is governed by methods easily distinguishable by the player himself although not so readily by a looker-on.

Mr. Vaile is of opinion that the wind-cheating skimmer is the drive or big shot of the future. As a matter of fact that shot has already arrived, or, rather, for it was always with us, it



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TO GET THIS FINISH, THE BLOW
MUST BE A DESCENDING ONE

is increasing its vogue as a result of the soft ball, and the craze for distance. There is a very interesting chapter in "How to Play Golf" headed the "Trend of the Game," in which, page 15, Vardon says: "In the matter of golf, we are becoming a nation of pullers. I fancy that nearly everybody is standing just a trifle more forward than in former times in order to produce in some degree the effect of the pull and consequent run. Very rarely do you see a man trying chiefly for the carry, which is, I venture to assert, the proper and, in the end, most satisfactory way of playing golf." "Gradually it has been realized that the greatest length can be obtained by playing a flat shot with a pull with the result that during recent years this style of stroke has become predominant. Players of all degrees of ability have discovered it and employ it habitually. Sometimes

the ball flies so low and comes to the ground so soon that one might imagine the player had missed the shot. But no, it is his method, and the ball runs and runs and does all that is necessary." But, as Vardon would admit, we may also play a plain straight-forward wind-cheating shot without pull and that is the shot Mr. Vaile commends. It is our old friend the shot against the wind and is played with the downward blow. If distance is all-essential then by all means let us employ the pull or the plain wind-cheating skimmer — the downward blow well-off the right; but this need not delude us into believing that it is the only good tee-shot in golf and that the methods of the other are mere fetishes. The wind-cheating shot may be the shot of the future; it is by no means unknown to the present. To exaggerate its characteristics to the point of decrying and denying the true and long-accredited characteristics of the ordinary full stroke is to fall into a serious fallacy.

Now even at the risk of some repetition I will endeavor by way of recapitulation and further elucidation to apply my theory to the principal strokes in golf, and this as concisely as possible:

1. *The Tee Shot.*—Here even under wind-free conditions we have a choice of strokes. With the ball nearer the left foot we may execute the orthodox, classical swing, an ascending whipped-up blow with full follow-through, as the standard and typical portrait of your favorite golfer discloses; or, with the ball nearer the right foot, we may execute the downward stroke with a more restricted follow-through and with extended arms. In the case of a hostile wind, however, or in playing for a pull, our stroke will be exclusively the downward sort. A pulled shot with the driver, it may be remarked on the authority of Taylor, is largely a big running-up shot, but this is not the occasion for further analysis of it. The slice is an upward stroke.

2. *Cleek, Iron, Etc.*—We may apply precisely the same alternative methods

to these clubs. The masters of the game, as I read between the lines of their instructions, would recommend the downward blow as giving better direction; but with a good lie and little wind we may fetch off the prettiest pitch and short run with the ascending blow. With a bad lie we certainly will confine ourselves, if we are wise, to the descending blow. Here is where we take turf and, let us hope, replace the divot. With a bad lie, too, it is wise to select a club with some degree of loft.

3. *Brassy, Spoon, Etc.*—What has been written under (1) applies to these clubs. We are sometimes told to "nip in" for a cupped lie. How can we do this unless we stand with ball nearer the right and deliver the downward blow? Jerked shots of all kinds, it may be remarked, are downward strokes.

4. *The Mashie.*—With a decent lie play the Taylor shot with weight on the right and an ascending blow. If the lie is bad or doubtful, come rather down on the ball, and take a little turf. In both cases of course, the stance, relative to the stroke, depends upon our choice of stroke. It will be noticed that, owing to the narrower stance with the mashie, one may use the upward blow with the ball nearer the right foot. This apparent exception to our rule will not disturb the intelligent reader.

The Run-up and Push-Shot.—These are both descending blows as the stance is in front. There is no mystery about them. The only difficulties arise from misconceptions. The difference between the two strokes is that in the run-up we make a half-turn to the left with the right hand as the stroke is made or finished, it is not certain which. The push-shot, which is usually a bigger shot than the other, restrains this half-turn of the right hand and tries to finish with the face of the club looking upward. This is Braid's famous "punch," or "dunch" and Jack White illustrates it at page 47 of Wm. Fox's neatest golf book in the world. Taylor in his "Golf Faults" explains these



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A DOWNWARD BLOW AND THEREFORE A RESTRICTED FOLLOW-THROUGH

shots better than anybody. Read all that the other great masters have written about them; digest it thoroughly, and then say if this is not true: these are downward strokes.

The Chip off the Green.—This may be played either way; but the better method, unless the green is a downward slope or slippery, is to play the chip with a chop: with a downward blow, that is. However, let experiment convince and decide. Half the game of golf consists in knowing what kind of stroke you are making.

The Niblick.—We may use either stroke with this club. Taylor recommends using a cushion of the sand when bunkered and cutting across the ball. This means an ascending blow. The other method is where the professors abandon theory and say there is nothing for it, but brute force. They are wrong. Use a cushion of sand and

hit downward. Why are they afraid of telling to us to hit downward? When in long grass let us not attempt the ascending stroke. Let us hit down with a lofted club and we shall be amazed at our success.

The Putter.—There are two kinds of putts and recognition of this fact makes putting a delight. We may roll our putts with an ascending blow as the French have it (*rouler la balle*), or we may tap or stab them with a descending blow. If your hands are in front you are doing the latter; if behind you are doing the former. One of the nicest strokes in the world is a downward long approach putt. Let us regulate our stance accordingly. "James Braid told me," says Miss Leitch, "that on fast true greens putts should always be rolled, whereas on

wet or rough greens the correct method was to stab them." Our thanks to Miss Leitch, for the word of wisdom treasured, and passed on.

Finally let us remind ourselves that even after fully assimilating the two principles we have tried to expound, it will still be necessary to observe the old maxims: to refrain from swaying; to keep one's eye on the ball; and to relax one's grip, not to the point of looseness, but to the nice, exact point of accommodation, at the top of the

swing. I am tempted to enlarge on this question of the grip but that must be reserved for another occasion. I must say this, however. The proof and test of a good grip are not at the beginning but at the top of the swing.

Postscriptum.—A promising young golfer having perused the foregoing before the printer saw it asked leave to propound three questions which, with their answers, I feel impelled to reproduce here.

"First," said my young friend, "Is there any objection upon your theories to deliver a downward blow when standing behind the ball?"

"Let us adjourn to the links," was my answer, "and experiment." My young friend sent them straight to the first green with obviously downward strokes, although the ball was about opposite his left heel.

I was obliged to answer his question in the negative; but pointed out that his stance with his irons was noticeably narrow. With a wider stance, I thought that my general rule, as above stated, would probably hold good.

The second question was: "What sort of blow shall be delivered when the ball is just midway between the feet?" Here I had no hesitation in answering: "You may play either stroke according to what your best judgment will dictate."



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FINISH OF THE PUSH SHOT: A DOWNWARD BLOW

