

WAYS AND WISDOM

THE PICK OF NEW THOUGHTS FROM THE OLD WORLD
OF GOLF

THERE ARE SOME thoughtful notes in the London *Times* upon the never decreasingly important subject of pitching with the mashie. The writer truly says that when we watch professionals play their pitches we cannot but be struck with the fact that it is that crisp, decided downward stroke that causes the ball to soar upward so beautifully into the air. "There is nothing original in this statement; it has been made often before, but we cannot din it too often into our own ears. Possibly, because it seems paradoxical, we do not act on it as we should. For myself I watch professionals more than do most people, and I always come away from a match thinking that I have never been sufficiently impressed before with this one point of their play. It is not merely in the pitching of professionals but right through their iron play that these qualities of hardness and decisiveness of striking are conspicuous. The amateur who learnt the game in something the same way as they did, has the same quality, but not as a rule to the same extent. Indeed, I am inclined to wonder if this, which was always a feature of professional play, has not become still more noticeably so during the last few years. After the first day of the big tournament at St. Andrews a gallant colonel, who has played and watched good golf most of his life, announced that he

proposed entirely to disorganize his own iron play for the next month by imitating what he had seen; and it was this concentrated venom of hard hitting in the last inch or two of the stroke that had so impressed him.

As with anything else worth learning, hard practice is necessary; first of all, practice in a secluded corner, and after that practice in a game. It is painfully easy, when we come to playing a real hole, to relapse into our old ways, because we know that by them we can get over the bunker and somewhere on the green. That way, however, no improvement lies. The really earnest learner must reconcile himself to sacrificing some half crowns to his opponents; and some also to the ball-makers since if he come down hard, as he is told, but on the top of the ball, he will inevitably disembowel it. But these losses, as the too business-like hymn expresses it, 'repaid a thousandfold shall be.' So let him remember to keep his head and his body still, and top gladly and hopefully on."

PUTTING PRACTICE

AT THE INSTIGATION of a correspondent, *Country Life* has been considering the question as to whether practice is of any use in putting. The writer says that a famous billiards professional, after watching the game of golf, declared that if he took up the game he would do nothing but practice putting till he could make

sure of holing out at four yards; after that he would learn "the golfing strokes." To be sure he underrated those difficulties of putting which were suggested by the correspondent in this case. He would never make quite sure. But he showed great acuteness in seeing that the putt is a stroke apart from the rest of golf, and that by practice much may be done to play it successfully. "I was decidedly impressed the other day," says the writer, "by Mr. Hilton telling me that only in the last year or two had he, after serious study, adopted a definite style of putting. Though he had always had the reputation of being a fine putter, yet he chopped and changed his style. Now, for some time past, he has inflexibly adhered to a style in which he holds his hands rather far apart, keeps the left wrist as still as possible and pushes the club through with the right hand. It is a style rather suggestive of Mr. Sidney Fry's and partly, I think, founded upon it. As one who has always admired it, but never mastered it, despite much practice, I believe this to be the soundest style for any practicer to aim at. The left hand can be made the master hand, but the decided mastery of the right hand marks some great putters. Let anybody go out and watch one of these players, and then go home and practise assiduously the doing of the work with the right hand; let him stick to it resolutely even if he has a bad day or two or even a bad week and he will be a better golfer, less worried by the eternal search for a new tip, and not striving vainly to remember what made him putt successfully last week."

A SYSTEM FOR CONCENTRATION

THE MOST CASUAL spectator of Taylor's play in Championships must have observed that he forces himself relentlessly to keep under his higher qualities of mind and spirit. How it is done he alone knows, and even he might find some difficulty in explaining his method. But one mechanical device which he adopts is plain for everyone to see. When he is taking part in an exhibition match the *Morning Post* says, he wears his cap on the back of his head, or set jauntily sideways, and he will willingly catch the eye of an acquaintance in the crowd. In fact I have once, when acting as referee in an exhibition game, had to interrupt him in the middle of an apparently humorous story, to which he was listening, and request him to play his shot. But when he is in the pit his cap is pulled so far forward that little of his face can be seen except his jaw, which cannot be hid. No sane person would then dare to disturb his concentration by addressing him. We may learn from Taylor's example that he who would succeed at golf must concentrate all his powers, mental and physical, on the business immediately in hand, and that effective concentration may be achieved by persons whose varied gifts of intellect make for distraction. If he can do the trick University Professors, Cabinet Ministers, even the Editors of newspapers, need not regard themselves as fatally handicapped by versatility of brain and catholicity of intellectual interest.

Pending the delivery by Taylor of a lecture on the value of concentration at golf and the means whereby it

may be accomplished I venture to describe my own comparatively futile efforts to improve a woefully mercurial temperament. These efforts have necessarily taken the form of resolutions such as every golfer makes in bed on the morning of medal day, and generally breaks as soon as he starts his business. For example, "Never speak unless you are spoken to" is an excellent rule. I have often sworn to observe it, and as often broken my oath.

I do better with Rule 2, which runs "Swear not at all." Observance of this rule involves more than the mere avoidance of language which cannot be printed here; it means that you must not point out to your opponent or your caddie that you really had abominably bad luck at this or that hole. Ordinarily it is not very difficult to resist temptation in this matter; but when the other fellow has his turn of ill-fortune at last, and calls the listening earth to witness that there is no justice in heaven, can you, gentle reader, refrain from reminding him of an incident which happened earlier in the round, and proved the boot to be on the other leg? I cannot.

Rule 3 is only broken by those who carry their own hazards round with them. It runs, "Don't blame the caddie for your own mistakes." A scratch player can give several strokes more than the handicap odds to one who having missed a drive, tries to persuade himself that he would have hit it if that blessed boy had teed the ball higher (or lower). I remember playing long ago for the Oxford Graduates against the House of Commons. My partner in the afternoon foursomes had lost his single match in

the morning because, as he affirmed, he had forgotten to bring his lofting-iron with him. This so distracted him that when he missed his drive to the sixteenth hole in our foursomes he stood on one leg and exclaimed repeatedly, "I've left my pitcher behind!" The moral of the tale is obvious. Even at this long interval of time I am pleased and proud to recollect that we won our match. Probably one or other of our opponents had some subjective reason, more compelling than my partner's, why he must lose.

CUTTING WITH THE MASHIE

IN THE PAST I have noticed says George Duncan, that amateurs, in order to get the ball to stop, have been playing that horrible "cut" mashie shot, which I warned you against several weeks ago. They have not been trying to get the maximum of backspin in the direct, on the line of flight, manner that is the only good way of doing it. That dragging of the face of the club across the ball in order to get more spin on is right inasmuch as it does get more spin on, but it puts the wrong kind of spin on the ball. It puts left to right spin, and as a consequence the ball in its flight goes to the right, and after it has pitched it goes still further to the right. More than that, cutting your shot means that you are losing backspin and you are not stopping your ball, you are merely encouraging your ball to run, and it will run away from the direction in which you are playing. To make a ball stop as quickly as you can you must strike it a downward blow, and your club head must travel all the time in the line of flight. If you have taken the shot correctly you will have

taken turf also. It is the spin that does it. If you wish to check the progress of the ball you must impart backspin to it. If you want it to run away to the right "cut" it; if you want it to run away to the left, "hook" it, and it is just as reasonable to tell you to hook a ball as it is to tell you to cut it.

LONG HITTING

MITCHELL AND DUNCAN are slim and light and of average height. Clearly, then, sheer physical power is not an essential of tremendous hitting. It may according to the *Daily Mail* help some players to give the ball a little bit extra at the impact, but there are other ways of securing that end. In the opinion of men famous for the length of their driving, the wrong way is to depend chiefly upon bodily power, which is the mistake the ordinary individual makes when he seeks to add distance to his tee shots.

He braces himself for a mighty effort, and thus produces a state of muscle-constriction. In particular he grips like grim death; he has great faith in holding the club tightly. All these stupendous hitters will tell you, while they hold the club firmly—especially with the thumbs and forefingers—so as to prevent its turning, they do not grip it as though they had it in a vice. There is a certain element of ease, they say, about the third fingers and the little fingers. These fingers are capable of exercising a tighter hold than the others, as anybody can prove himself by gripping a stick with all his might; and they are the cause of most of the trouble—declare the experts—among the rank and file of golfers who strive to hit the ball very

great distances.

Watch Mitchell driving. The club goes up easily, without any sign of physical tautness. It goes up very quickly; that, I suppose, comes of confidence. It comes down a great deal more quickly. It is the very ease of the bodily pose, its perfect balance, and the free play—as distinct from that tightening—of a pair of strong wrists that puts pace on to the club-head and produces the length of shot.

HEAVY HEADED DRIVERS

UPON THE SUBJECT of drivers with heavy heads, upon which, following the example of Abe Mitchell, who with a heavy-headed driver has been despatching the ball such extraordinary distances lately, there is said to be something of a small boom in England, Mr. Henry Leach in the *Illustrated and Dramatic News* says, "Instead of purchasing new clubs, discontented and hopefuls have been keeping professionals busy in pouring molten lead into their drivers' soles, and later in increasing the size and weight of the bullets so formed, fortifying the lead in the back of the same clubs, and so approaching nearer and nearer to Mitchellism. They are engaged in a dangerous practice, and in most cases they might do better for themselves and their futures if they left this weighting alone, and were contented with applying a coat of black varnish to their old clubs if so disposed. If they begin this weighting business without strong reason and deep conviction they are almost certain to proceed to excess, which is the pity, since it is quite likely that a royal commission of comparatively

stiff and middle-aged scratch men who did not begin the game at St. Andrews in their childhood and are consequently realists in their attitude towards golfing dogma, would declare that for men of like condition with themselves who have difficulty with their wayward and unsteady swings, the drivers generally employed are too light in the head. Consider that it is an easier thing to preserve rhythm in swinging a sledge hammer than in swinging a slender cane. Therefore there is a certain great truth in the weight idea; but Abe Mitchell himself has too much knowledge and reason to advise the multitude to follow his own example, as to the value of which he himself seems to have certain suspicions. It has to be remembered that he is a strong man physically, and is specially powerful in the wrists, whence is produced most of his marvellous length.

He, then, can swing with great effect a heavy-headed club that would be too much for ninety and nine out of a hundred others. Of course, if the player is of the Samson strain and can really wield such a thing with the ease that the ordinary man swings a feathery affair, that is a different matter; weight then must tell. Those who would urge the danger of adding weight to the driver will naturally point out that Harry Vardon, one of the prettiest and most effective drivers, uses always a very light club, but the example, after all, is hardly so convincing as it might appear to some, for Vardon is the genius, and there are few who can gain salvation by attempting vainly to copy methods which appear to spring so much from the spirit and the instinct that even their author seems at times scarcely to understand them.

