

PLAIN TRUTHS

BY "SAM SOLOMON."

THESE ARE DAYS of points, of particular systems and series of such points, and especially of Fourteen Points. The President (and incidentally let us remind ourselves once again that the American statesman, who, in many respects, is regarded as the most important man in the world to-day, exerting most moral force upon the peoples, is one of the keenest golfers and most devout believers in this form of recreation)—this President Wilson knew well how and what he wrought when he refined a gigantic and confusing mass of thought, suggestion, and intention upon the life and circumstances of the world to a few simple and lucid propositions which embraced the essentials, established an irreducible minimum, and stood for a system by which the nearest approach to universal satisfaction might be achieved, and happiness with it all.

The Fourteen Points, whether you approve of them or whether you do not, do in essence constitute a system for civilised progress and happiness. They have for their object to make the work of the world easier and better to accomplish, to help humanity on. And they seem to include a little of many things as one might say. Attention has been fastened upon them, and they have assisted study of and argument upon a complex problem which otherwise, in its vast extent and baffling variety, seemed too difficult to grasp. They gave us something definite something concrete, and so they satisfied a human desire, the demand of man for something exact, a numbered code.

In many crises of the world, numbered series of points have thus been produced. There were the Ten Commandments to begin with; Monsieur Clemenceau has been led to observe that the President needed four more for his set than the Deity required for the complete regulation of mankind. Once arrange a set of anything, and the mind is to some extent affected by the magic of a number. The number Seven has special qualities; consider the Seven Ages of Man, the Seven Wonders of the World, and so forth. Mr. Wilson could not reduce his scheme for world arrangement to seven points, so he made it twice seven—if he thought of it in that way.

But, if you will reflect upon the matter you will see that almost any number will serve for a code of anything, and be serviceable and helpful. The thing to do is decide upon a number and attach your principles to it afterwards, always keeping the number as small as possible for the sake of simplicity and ready comprehension. Five ages of man could have been marked with as much significance as seven, and ten special wonders of the world could have been clearly defined and separated from all others.

If it be not improper to suggest it, experience has shown that there are more than ten offences which might be forbidden to erratic and sinful man, so prone as he is to invention and ingenuity in wrongdoing. But a number of some kind is essential, and it is by the magic of a number that the President has caught the attention of the world.

LET US NOW follow his example; permit ourselves to consider what may be the Fourteen Points of Golf. But how and why? If the rulers of the game, at the beginning or later, had been informed by some imaginary higher authority that they could have no more than fourteen separate laws for play, I doubt not that they would have made up a satisfactory code, one embracing all essentials and leading to the fairest play. It is because they had no number, no limitation, and so lost themselves in a confusing and impossible effort to provide for each contingency that the high authorities have burdened us with a perplexing medley which no one man fully understands, few have read right through, and which is as far from serving every case as if there were but half the number.

One imagines that with Fourteen Rules of Golf we might have proceeded very well, and all would have known and understood them. It is not our business here and now to choose such a set of fourteen; but reflect for a moment on the long way we should go in the way of complete and satisfying legislation when with the first of such points we should set it down that the ball shall be played from where it lies, the fundamental principle of the game. Then would come the exceptions, and with thirteen vacant places for them they are well provided for. But the rules are made and it is feared it would need more than one world war so to bring the minds of men to sense in all matters as to lead to the unmaking of the grand multiplicity of St. Andrews in favour of some smaller and more intelligible set of conditions.

Some months ago in these pages we fixed upon a number in advance for a standard set of clubs and afterwards selected the clubs to suit the number chosen. There was some agreement that it was an interesting and educative process. One has been told that readers derived instruction and new ideas of importance to their game from this selection and thoughts engendered in the making of it. But now we could concern ourselves with neither rules nor clubs. To what good purpose then shall our Fourteen Points be applied? Mr. Wilson's object with his own famous set of Fourteen was the good and happiness of mankind. Is it an aim too ambitious for us here to seek for Fourteen Points that may lead to the happiness of the golfer? That would be a great achievement—to make the golfers happy.

Now some will exclaim immediately that surely golfers as golfers are always happy, or at least happy on the average as one might say. I feel a doubt. They are interested, fascinated, spellbound, but that is not quite the same as being happy. They are never satisfied, are constantly discontented, striving for the unattainable and often slipping farther and farther back from it, always envious of others.

I have sometimes thought that the only time when the golfer is only truly happy as a golfer is when he is not engaged in golfing. It is rarely when at the play that all occurs as he would have it do, that it is pure perfection all the way. But once or twice in the life of a golfing man is that the case. Yet when in playless moments he is reflecting upon the game and his own performance of it, he has a soaring idealism, he is optimist, he is perfec-

tionist, his capacity in imagination is magnified by many times, he remembers the good and is oblivious to bad, he holds transcending hopes for his future life, memories of the faults and foibles of his golfing friends are banished from his mind, and truly he is a happy man. Therefore let us say that no golfer is happy until he does not golf—necessitating clearly for the justification of the game that he must have golfed to reach this state, and must continue to do so for its preservation. Here in seeming contradiction is perfect sense. But we set ourselves to discover now how to make the golfers more completely and continually happy, to eliminate some of this contradiction, to lead them on in fact to a higher state. Perhaps indeed it may be done.

ON A FIRST and general consideration we perceive that it must be attempted largely by a process of philosophy and system of conduct. If you will think of it the golfers you know who seem happiest in their game are those of a philosophical kind.

Some with alacrity will now declare that if you will furnish them with Fourteen Points for practice, fourteen nearly infallible recipes for good or even almost perfect play, that is all they need; but there they are surely wrong. It is by such materialistic greed they are so often most piteously undone. Real happiness at golf never can come through the most excellent performance, for there is no maximum and final stage of excellence; hence there can never be complete satisfaction. Indeed the nearer we approach the heights the greater often is our discontent. The finest champions have said that never in their history have they played a perfect game; no round has ever been accomplished that might not have been a little better. Therefore in this domain of skill and achievement there shall always be regret. And consider the beginner and the man of the eighteen handicap; what happiness are theirs! The argument is clear.

The golfer then must be saved from himself, he must be turned from the path of materialism, be convinced that Fourteen Points of practice though they might be named would not be for his advantage, and that he must seek happiness by other paths, by conduct, thought and by philosophy. Such might be called the spiritual happiness of the player; it is the best for him, the most enduring. Yet our Fourteen Points should be comprehensive and there may be some admixture of practice with philosophy. Are there not certain points of practice that are cardinal, fundamental, without a proper observance of which no game and no philosophy and no happiness ever could be built? Truly, these are few, they are very elementary and alas! they are the most neglected. Because they are so simple they are held in a half contempt.

We shall then include these very few points of practice, being so essential, in our code of Fourteen and choose the rest according to our further consideration. It shall be an object to select others that shall be as needful as the fundamental points of practice, and make a homogeneous and comprehensive whole of this system of our golfing conduct. Let us take the points of practice first.

THERE IS NOT a doubt as to which is the first among them. It is as a basis of golf, a secret of it, a mystery of result. The foundations of the game are laid upon the principle of fixing the gaze—or "keeping the eye"—upon the ball during the entire process of the stroke. It is the Alpha and the Omega of the game. Golf may be played by persons suffering from many physical disabilities, by men with one leg or one arm, and so played reasonably well. A keen American sporting gentleman, head of a great business firm associated with athletic goods, who was one of the most devoted golfers in the world lost an eye in an automobile accident, but determined that with the one remaining he would gaze more fixedly, more acutely, at the ball than even before, and lo! his play suffered not, but if anything was improved, and gold medals came his way again.

Players with peculiarities, and antidotes for them, when harmful of themselves, have been known with strange and mysterious success to defy almost every other recognized principle of the game, but no man has ever cast his gaze elsewhere than at the ball during the making of the stroke and then succeeded. It cannot be done on earth or as we believe, in heaven. It is by this stern gaze upon the ball that the mind makes its reckoning, and by an amazing process which for its wonder and exactness is beyond our human comprehension, adjusts all the nervous and muscular machinery to that marvellously fine degree that brings the head of the club at last precisely to the ball.

It should always be understood that the object and necessity of thus, as we say, keeping the eye upon the ball is not, of course, to see merely where we shall strike, as some of little experience might vainly suppose, for the player knows that there is indeed no conscious aiming, but to afford the mind, acting subconsciously, the connection and information that will enable it to start the engine and make it work with its fine and full precision.

A long discourse might surely be prepared on this affair of keeping the eye upon the ball, but here, in the mere passing of the principal point, two things only would be murmured, and the first is that many persons, playing badly, think they keep their eyes well upon the ball, when they do not, and the second is that this gaze should be intense, it should in itself represent an absolute concentration of mental and nervous effort.

There is a difference between just looking at the ball in a pleasant kind of way, and keeping the eye hard upon it all the time, making the mind itself, as it would seem, press severely upon the ball through the medium of the eye. This is not fancy; it is the greatest truth in golf. Friend, if you look lightly upon the ball, look harder and harder still, and make a note of the difference in results.

NOW THE SECOND POINT, another of the practical few that are as inviolable principles, is that of the necessity of maintaining the still head throughout the stroke. One might add the still body too, but the still head ensures the other. The fine calculations of the mind, acting subconsciously and with a far finer protection than would be possible if they were consciously done—as indeed they could never be—and the beautiful adjustments and

working arrangement that it affects with the myriad little muscles of marvellous man, would come to nought if the player failed in his little conscious duty of maintaining perfect stillness. One hears at times of a great—no, not a great player but one who somehow has achieved success,—disregarding this Second Point of ours. By a system of allowances subconsciously applied and the application of mighty strength from a tremendous frame he does it, but he is a law unto himself, which no man dare copy nor should ever try to do. The law is truly inexorable. And again, like the other, familiarity with its essentialness often creates a carelessness, and men think they are still with the head, or assume a stillness when it is not the case.

This stillness needs a constant effort; it cannot be assumed, and it is not a natural state. It should be thought of always, and the effort should be to become stiller and more still in the head, and by the head with the body too. Thirty in a hundred of shots that fail are due to letting the eye escape from the ball, and forty of what remain are caused by the slightly moving head.

THE THIRD POINT is the good old rule of the slow swing back of the club. It is a firm rule, and a safe one. It is evaded sometimes; there are fine players who make their backswings swiftly, but yet you will find in such cases that even those fast backswings—which yet are rare—are slow compared to other movements, for these are quick men, quick in all their actions. The slow-back movement is essential for steadiness, for enabling the mind and the muscles to co-ordinate with accuracy and regularity and to do their work in proper composure, and as the result of this to ensure that accurate timing which is one of the chief secrets of success. It is the slow and smooth and steady swing of the club upwards to its farthest point that counts the most and governs all the rest, for when the club is at its highest the stroke is really finished in a sense, for the rest will happen almost of itself.

THE FOURTH POINT is of the wisdom of a tendency towards a reasonable scepticism as to what is written and is told, particularly in the way of all dogmatic teaching, for it is by false dogma that many good possibilities of success have been undone. The ancient golfers were no doubt wise and learned people. They knew much about the game; and, with their dogma, there was a sound and healthy conservatism. But they did not know everything. Human knowledge has advanced much in a century in every direction, and some of the secrets of golf have yielded to the immense practice and keen intensification of thought that have been applied to the game. Yet still some of the old dogmas die hard, and, living, they work injury.

Examine then some of the old principles of play that have been passed on through the generations, and by reason and investigation decide upon them. In their passage through time they have often become distorted until now they bear a meaning and convey a suggestion that they were never meant to hold.

Thus it becomes almost an instruction to the beginner that he should

raise up his left heel as he begins to make his backswing, when in truth it were better that he did not do so until he were obliged, as in time he would be. By this raising of the heel, and a pivoting on the toe, instead of a bending on the inside of the foot, a shakiness and an unsteadiness of the leg are cultivated that work sad havoc with the stroke. So it is with many other points of teaching. Dogma is wrong in the matter of the style of stance; it is wrong again as regards length of club and a dozen like details. Do not reject the dogma, but consider it.

Golf is a game of freedom. It is necessary to keep the eye upon the ball, and to maintain a stillness of the head during the stroke, but after these there are few rules of method that are applicable to all cases and that need no modification in any. The player may listen to suggestion, be glad of information upon new discovery and the treatment of golf complaints, but he should be sceptical always. He should watch and wait before he acts, and he should guard against impulses towards change which is a besetting sin of many players.

THE FIFTH POINT is one of the best of the collection, as to most of the men it will seem the most amazing. It is that when they play they should always try their best. They will be astonished to be told that they rarely do so. They feel that their golfing lives are one long-drawn out and almost painful effort, but much of the pain comes from failure, and that from carelessness. It is the carelessness, the neglect of detail, and the want of intensity in effort that bring about so many mishaps.

The time for the utmost intensification of effort, extreme care in every detail, for trying the very hardest, as we say, is when the player is already as it seems, at his best and is nearly satisfying himself, for it is then that the man with a foolish and exaggerated confidence begins, perhaps consciously, but often not, to take liberties with the principles and with his own proved and essential methods. He may think, and he may sometimes say, that at last he knew the game and that it is so easy now to him that he could play it with closed eyes or standing on his head. He is mistaken. For a day he may have some happiness in this confidence, but then there is a disastrous fall.

Golf is jealous of its difficulties; it will not be treated lightly. Swift retribution attends upon the trifler. And there is no state so dangerous, so pregnant with the possibility of quick disaster, chaos and failure, from which recovery is more than ever difficult as that when there is the first lapse from the topmost quality of a man's game through this carelessness, for immediately there is a nervous apprehension, an increasing fear and exasperation, a sudden appeal to remedies, drastic changes, and in a few minutes, in a hole or two, the man is floundering, the old good game and all the confidence have gone. They have been sacrificed to carelessness. Hard will it be to regain them.

Keen effort is more necessary when at the top of one's form than at the bottom; it needs moral courage to strain the effort and the care to the utmost when the play seems good, but effort is most remunerative then. Catch

your game and keep it. Men who have not played for long, or who have suffered through some temporary disability, a cold, a toothache, a feeling of being unwell, often wonder why it is that then they surprise themselves and play better than they thought possible, perhaps even better than ever before. Sometimes afterwards they seek specious explanations and persuade themselves that it was imagination after all and that they did not play so well, yet often it was the real truth. Why do the men who have lost legs and arms in the war learn to play again so wonderfully well?

It is the same in both cases. The man who has not golfed for many weeks or months, and fears for the value of his performance, so with him who is sick, or him who is disabled, knows that he must try the more, he is careful of the smallest details of execution and he intensifies his effort to the utmost. Never was his eye fixed so intently on the ball, never was his head so still, his backswing so steady and well-measured, his liability to press so small. And so he succeeds. Consider the champions; they never cease to try, and they are never careless.

PATIENCE makes the Sixth Point for the game; its virtues shine and fructify in golf. Hustle is good for many things; the young man in a hurry often races to the front in life. But patience on the links is best. A player may be passing through a bad time, an aggravating streak of inferior form. Let him wait and be careful always; let him not press for his recovery, experiment with many changes and strange remedies or great revolutions. Form should be waited for, with diligence and care in practice; it can never be forced. And so again, guard against impulses; and then again let ambition pursue a slow and steady course.

There is no other sport in which ambition exerts itself so much as golf. Always one tries to be so much a better player, the duffer dreams of scratch, the old fozzler considers still that he has better days in store. This is well, but ambition overdone in golf, as it is so often overdone, leads too much to discontent and unhappiness and to a spoiling of the scheme. And herein is raised a doubt upon an old point of advice. It is good for example and for the encouragement of extra effort that a man should often play with those who are better than himself; but if the habit should engender discontent in him it were better to desist and play more with those whom he can beat.

After all quality at golf is comparative and an arbitrary thing. Vardon is only great because there are no greater. So he who is chief of a small golfing community, be his play as faulty as it may, should be a happy man, and it were well he should preserve such happiness.

And patience once again, ubiquitous in its application, is the winner of many matches. He who is many holes down should only strive and wait. Four lost holes cannot be recovered in four hundred yards. But the opponent will not always play perfect golf. It is by his failures, inevitable, that we shall most likely gain; our attempt at super-golf must lead on to more disaster. Victory must be waited for. A loss of three or four holes—a great loss indeed—must be regarded but as the phase, the inevitable feature of a game and a loss that by a similar fluctuation and steady endeavour may be repaired.

So it is a matter of control, of steadiness, of confidence and hope, and all-are summarized in the supreme virtue of patience.

SILENCE is the Seventh Point. It is a splendid thing in golf. It is the thought upon the play, the reflection upon it, the concentration, the consideration of the possibilities and the method that make it different from all others, a pastime of the mind, an adventure in ingenuity. To converse upon other affairs, politics, society, music and the drama, while the play is on and thus to abandon the mental part, playing the shots casually and as things to be quickly done with, is an offence against it.

A great player has said that the best golf is played in silence, and all who have experience know it is the most enjoyed. The prattling player is a nuisance on the course. He may consider himself sociable, but if he always knew what his opponent thinks of him he would be abashed.

THE OPPONENT ! Yes; he, the consideration of him is the Eighth of the points we make. It has been said that golf is a selfish game. Some points of selfishness it will indeed always retain. They are essential to it, but they are only moderate and limited selfishness after all. Yet, a great selfishness is often, far too often, exhibited in the conduct towards the opponent. It needs to be remembered always that he, poor man, is less concerned with your own tribulations than with his own, or his own delights. One's immediate failure should not hinder from instant appreciation, by a slight and casual but sincere word, of some specially good achievement of his own.

But still be rare with praise, for constant flattery is poor and despised stuff. Do not condole if opponent goes from bad to worse, and makes throughout a miserable mess of things; his own pain is enough for him and sympathy at such times is out of place in golf. It irritates. And the man who complains often of his own bad fortune, or relates the better achievements of other days, the narrative of which does not in the least interest his friend, is no true golfer, and some day he may know how bad and hated he really is.

There are some poor creatures who even complain of the good fortune of their opponents; they loudly declaim against their luck and call on heaven to make a careful account of it. But heaven has nothing to do with them, for these are not golfers but merely beasts.

WE SEEM HERE in our grouping of the points to have come upon a triptych, of which the Ninth point, sincerity, makes an excellent centre-piece. For though golf is an honest game, it is often played by liars. It is a little thing that, like the fisherman, they give accounts of their achievements that are unwarranted by facts. It is worse when they make practice rounds for themselves and agree that they will not count against them such failures in strokes as they feel could never occur again. And from this it is an easy transition to a habit of self-excuse, to the discovery of faults and agencies for evil in all that is outside themselves and to the habitual rejection of the errors that have been made, the carelessness committed, the incompetence

displayed. In the long run the habit of sincerity makes for satisfaction, peace of mind and an abiding happiness.

IT IS EASY to be fine in victory, not so frequent to be modest in it. It is best of all to be good in defeat. The Tenth point is to be a good loser in the phrase of the old formula, which is rarely so well respected as it is thought to be. Too many fellows are only half-good losers. They complain little, they scarcely qualify, but they do not own up. He who wins has the absolute right to the spontaneous, generous and wholly unqualified homage of the vanquished.

There may be cups and there may be money; but the real sweet of victory to the good sportsman is the acknowledgment by the loser that the other has beaten him well. Hesitation to such confession is the poorest and meanest thing; it is so despicable that it is amazing a good sport should harbour men who are capable of it. Yet in the lower ranks of golf there are many of them; not so many in the higher ranks. It is bad in defeat to make mention of the ifs and buts or even to think of them.

Be sure of this that despite all reckoning the prejudice of interest and circumstance, even reason as it may seem, ninety and more of a hundred defeats are deserved on the merits of their cases. Then generosity, honesty in defeat is like mercy at another time, for it is good for the giver as well as receiver. It is a refreshing draught of truth that exhilarates and purifies, and no man goes so well with the general company, none lays up happiness for himself so well as the good sportsman who takes his licking well.

WE LEAVE the practical and the psychological. There are some bits of wood and iron for Eleven. The good golfer loves his clubs. He selects them carefully, with fine discrimination and knowledge of their points. The acquisition of another for his set is a serious thing. By a steady conservatism in such matters he comes to a better knowledge than before of the merits of those he has, and to a keener affection for them. The old companions of many seasons should be beloved things, well cared for, well maintained.

You may tell almost the full character of a man by the appearance of his bag of clubs and truly you may judge of him absolutely as a golfer. The rusty head, the unvarnished shaft, the ragged grip—alas! for the poor fellow who permits these things. His game, like his clubs, is little to him. The full joys of a splendid pastime are not for the likes of him.

AND AGAIN—Twelve—they are not for the other—often the same—who has no understanding and no keen appreciation of the dignity of this sport. There is none, there never has been any that embraces as much as a part of its splendid dignity, arising as dignity always does from age and experience, tradition, and intrinsic worth. Every player on induction to the game should be made to understand something of its history and its ancient customs. A golfing father should tell his son the old legends of the links.

They breathe of fine sportsmanship, and the healthy natural simplicity that is the essence of any true sport.

In more and more simplicity golf is all the better; excrescences on the game, freakishness, and too much elaboration of any kind, mar the natural simplicity, make a departure from true golf, lower the dignity and spoil it all. So does too much legislation and organization of any kind. The simple match, with the odds arranged between the men, is the best thing that the game can offer, and by such contests is its dignity the better kept.

AT THIRTEEN the rules come in. O, miserable rules indeed! Here we must be reasonable and sympathetic to the man whom we have so much adjoined. He has a claim to gentleness, for it is supposed that he should know the rules in their entirety of the game he plays, and that is not in the power of man. The rules of golf are a monument of human ingenuity in the preparation of confusion. But their faults do not justify abandonment, and the player who does not know the law or the main contingencies—and all the lesser are governed by the greater—is not entitled to his place.

Looking through that appalling list with the critical eye and sense, he will note the unessential, the merely formal, the redundant, and all that which is known as if by instinct and need not for remembrance be dwelt upon. He will find the rest are not difficult to learn and keep in mind, and they make knowledge that always will be useful. It is those rules that instinct does not teach—that are too seldom known and always should be, and indeed such rules are those that most justify the set.

FOURTEEN AND LAST, completing this casual pick of points there is this to be borne in mind, that it is true, as scoffers sometimes say, that golf is after all merely a game, a thing to play. It may be the best of games the finest thing for play. Those who know it well are sure of this. But life is not for play alone, and it is the law of nature that he who drains too dry the cup of any pleasure loses the full delight of it.

Here is another case where excess always stales and spoils, and it is for the happiness of the player, for his well-being and his success as golfer only, as well as for his citizenship, that he is warned against too much in play, and too much of talk and thought and reflection at other times. Every golfer should be keen, be enthusiastic, be utter in his affection for the game, but these he is by natural and inevitable tendency. The golfing bore is after all not a creature for admiration; he is rarely liked, and he cannot truly be a happy man.

There are the Fourteen points. Is it not agreed that one who adopts and abides by them, makes with himself a treaty for their adoption and practises faithfulness in their application must make a new and better golfing happiness for himself ?