

PLAIN TRUTHS

By "SAM SOLOMON"

TAKING THEM for all in all, the golfers are good men as modern standards go—for in this world, as we see it in these tumultuous days, it becomes difficult to feel that any men can be really good. But the golfers are as good as others. Yet there are some bad men among them. You and I know them. We have seen the mote in our brother's eye. We should not like to bear ourselves upon the course in our many matches in the way that these persons with their mistaken systems of conduct and attitude towards the game do bear themselves continually and, as it seems, with a certain arrogance of indifference to the feelings of other people of better sense and views.

These persons irritate us intensely; we derive some consolation from the reflection that we are not as they are. It seems to us upon a dispassionate consideration that we are perhaps more worthy of the game than they are, and that in its essentials, its general conception, its traditions, and its practice, the real, great golf was hardly meant for such as they are. These persons have advanced peculiarities in their manner of holding themselves towards the ball; they take up strange stances; their swings and movements in general are most abnormal, and they accomplish results far better—inexplicably better—than they deserve to do, by means that can only be described as immoral in the golfing sense. Their remarks and criticisms upon what they do are commonly gross and in bad taste, and they display an ignorance of the true principles and practices of the sport. In their conversations round the nineteenth hole they show themselves to be acquainted with the inwardness of the game, as we are wont to call it. They are as heathen; they do not understand.

Two things about these persons are a special irritation to us. One of them is this, that by some strange dispensation of the powers, an altruism that seems to be utterly exaggerated, these persons seem to derive as much happiness, enjoyment and satisfaction of heart and soul from the game as do we ourselves. Indeed there is a certain buoyancy about them, a jovial heartiness, an air of experiencing at every moment *la joie de vivre*, that make us sometimes suspect that in their own crude way they may even derive more satisfaction from the game than do we ourselves with our intense respect for it and our constant care. It should not be, but yet it may.

It is a point that is difficult to understand. We who murmur of traditions, of championships, of straight laws and customs and what is right and wrong, see to our wonderment the man with a twenty handicap, or it may be more, playing a sort of game, as he would call it, in a garish costume, with ill-kept tools of freakish design, treating with contempt all the strictest principles of the practice of the game, and enjoying it so thoroughly, so deeply, that he would not change his state for that of any man, be he the winner of many championships.

There is a great mystery about these stupid people. Now, when such an

enthusiasm in golf is being established after some brief interference with the game because of war, it is likely that they will be more in evidence than ever before. We are told that with the new attitude to life, the new activities, the new necessities, a great new population will flow immediately into this game. In their ignorance they will enter it as barbarians might storm their way into a city of delight and fancy. It is a horrible thought!

And what shall we do? There is only one thing that we can do. We must learn to be tolerant, for above all things golf, which exposes all the weaknesses and yet at the same time marks the qualities of the human nature of a man, is a game that calls for tolerance, the very most of it. We in recent times have been practicing all kinds of hatreds, doing our best and our worst in many ways, and these are now times when towards our own we must at all events be tolerant. That might be a watchword for some who need one in the season that is just about to unfold itself. It will yield a dividend in happiness. It might almost be made another of the "points" that we recently discussed.

THE OTHER of the two things that we said are a special irritation to us in connection with these persons is that, as we have had reason to know, they seem at times to regard us in something of the same way that we regard them. They have in fact perceived notes in our own eyes. They have made remarks upon us—not spitefully, or very unkindly it is true, but in the manner of jocular criticism. It has come to our ears that they have called us faddists, and they have suggested that we are preoccupied with our own notions about the game. In this again they have shown that they do not understand; but it is annoying that such persons should even think that our own manners and attitude towards the game, and our methods of practicing it, are incorrect when we are so scrupulously careful in these matters, and again it is yet more irritating that those who by accident, as it may be, or in some careless or confidential way repeat these things to us or in our hearing, appear to have a certain sympathy with those other persons and not more of it for us.

We are set to thinking. We appear to be in a difficulty with our happiness. It seems that the only remedy for our irritation and our embarrassment is that difficult tolerance. Upon the next occasion that one of these persons sinks a putt of twenty yards from the edge of the green and then explains to us how well he is putting, how he has adopted some new methods, has acquired a new putter, has developed a skill and certainty with it—thus lays unblushingly this colossal fluke to his own credit—we shall make an exercise in toleration. We shall endeavor to be sympathetic. We will listen and make no comment save in friendliness and congratulation. Whatever be the inward pain this we will do. A new time is coming, and after much pain of the world we must try to be happy, all of us, and bear kindly with each other. We shall leave those notes alone.

BUT ALL THIS about the strange and stupid golfers was really prompted by another aspect of these persons, or a section of them. In this matter we

think we have an even stronger case. Perhaps some of us have come to think that whatever splendours there may be in some ways about war, its noble sacrifices, its tremendous efforts—it is not all great. What poor stuff afterwards do some of the enthusiasms of the beginning of a war appear! We come to understand the thousand hypocrisies of a war, their hateful influence upon the characters of men. However, that is in passing. This last war anyhow, had to be; it was not a matter for our choice. And we made the best of it in every sense.

But we come now to reflect upon the attitude of some sections of our golfing community—the same as corresponding sections of other communities—during the early stages of the war period. They lost their bearings. They were overcome with their own enthusiasms. They went crazy. They insisted or suggested that nothing in the world was of any account but war. They almost hinted—indeed they did hint—that war was a beautiful thing. It is not. It is a cruel, wicked, ugly, loathsome thing in which we only participate because we are obliged to do, and it is the most appalling reflection on the life of the world and its civilization that it could be possible for a brutal, bloody, disgusting creature like William Hohenzollern to impose it upon almost a world of peaceful, working people.

War may be great and games may be small. It is true that one uses up lives by the million and the other does nothing but strengthen those that remain and make them better in the present and in their possibilities for helping the world along. But no sincere thinker can come to any other conclusion than that one game of golf is better than a hundred years of war, and that the life and works of that ex-imperial skunk were in moral value of far less account than the play on a single putting green. This is not nonsense. It is plain, cold, simple truth. Think it out, reason from the beginning, consider the mere facts of life and death, and you will understand.

But those people we mentioned who were overcome with their own enthusiasm. They said at the beginning of our entry to the war, that we should do nothing but think of war, and act towards it, work for it, and everything. That was right in that every man should give of his best, but they would have it that there was to be nothing but war, and that for the time being there should be an absolute end to everything else. There should be, so they said, an absolute end to games. If these persons had had their will there might have been an end to something else, meaning the United States of America.

Happily—as one among many good and strong factors—there is a President of the United States who does not lose his sense in a crisis. He sets a good example. He keeps the body fit that it and the mind with it may do their business well. And chiefly he plays golf whenever he can. He did so throughout the war, and he is doing it in the half-peace to which we have now attained. But the others at the beginning, the fools among us, groaned that it were very wrong to play. However, for the most part the United States played and in due course it won the war.

NOW IT was one of the peculiarities of these persons in the intensity of their early war enthusiasms that they affected to neglect, or to deride, or to treat with contempt, those who were attached to the game and remained attached to it. Those who were friends of theirs, whom they praised whom they respected and looked up to because they were in various senses great at the game—and most likely out of it—were no longer, as it seemed, of any account with them. They ignored them.

No class of men has done better in the war, done its duty more thoroughly than the professionals of golf, and yet—would you believe it?—there have been those people here and there who have affected in the war to regard them and all that they stood for as of no account—or worse, persons to be disregarded completely, those who did nothing in the world but play and make others play. The same attitude with a difference was sometimes shown to great amateurs, but in this case stern lessons were sometimes taught. O, the shallow opportunism, the miserable superficial hypocrisies of war-time enthusiasms which do bring out for full exhibition the littlenesses, the meannesses, the contemptibilities of some sorts of human nature.

AND NOW see the sequel. The great golfer, be he amateur or professional, is coming into his own again. Those who disregarded him begin to respect him now. They make advances towards him; they praise him; they ask questions about him; they talk about him, and the things he does and can do. They seem now to regard him as a fair member of society, a worthy person, an asset perhaps to the community. They have changed their attitude. Indeed they are now enthusiastic about these people. It is strange, this amazing insincerity. Is is the result of war.

Let us, men of a good game and a great country, try to be honest with ourselves and with this sport. It is a good thing. It is as good now as ever it was. And it was as good in war as it is in peace. On a close consideration, I am not sure that it was not better.

It was the same in other countries. Perhaps, strange to say, France was as honest with herself as any other country in the matter of sport, little enough as she had of it. In England the anti-golfers of the war-time, the early period, made a sad display. Men were afraid to show their clubs, they crept by devious ways to the links, and in public they forbore to speak of golf. (Some-time later, long before the ending of the war, they came to understand that they were thus not patriots but fools and so they gave that nonsense up).

In the summer of 1914 when the golf boom in Britain was at its height, a new boom of an intenser kind than any other, the great champion golfers were as the leaders of men. Some super enthusiasts became happy golfers in their smile, a little attention from them. They were interviewed; their words were hung upon. It was noted what they did and thought about in private life. No doubt that was exaggerated enthusiasm; it went too far. It was stupid. . . . But in the war the great golfers were almost forgotten.

They were considered as being persons of no account. It was not thought well to talk about them.

But when the war was over the old enthusiasm suddenly revived, and it was more exaggerated than ever. Those great golfers have come into their own again. The hero worship on its old ridiculous system has been re-established. More is being made of the great players than they are entitled to or desire. Some may say that all this is natural and right, and that the war attitude is justified by the war conditions and circumstances and the peace attitude by the peace conditions and circumstances. No, that is false logic. If a thing not directly connected with either war or peace, but just a matter of general life is good in peace it is good in war; it does not change.

And in the matter of adulation and hero worship, there is a little tale to be told. It is British and it is rather good. It is being said that Lloyd George, the British Premier, who has taken keenly to golf in recent years, once observed that if he was compelled to change his personality and had any choice in the matter he would rather be Harry Vardon than any other. Perhaps Lloyd George never said any such thing; if he did, it is unlikely that he meant it, especially as he is reported to be a man who is very fond of himself. Anyhow if he did somehow cease to be Lloyd George and become Harry Vardon instead he might not, after the next few months lose much in fame. Before the war Harry Vardon was almost certainly known to more people of the earth than Lloyd George. Such a time may come again. At all events such as Vardon do not go out of office, out of power, all at once at any rate.

However, that is only the beginning of the little story. A golfer who had been to Jersey, where Harry Vardon was born, was telling it. And he said that when he was playing one of his rounds on the Jersey course his caddie said to him in a most solemn and impressive way, "Look, sir! There's the house that Harry Vardon was born in." The golfer gazed in the distance; we do not know what he thought. But after a few moments, the caddie, feeling that he had for master a true disciple of the game, whispered to him, "If you go and ask his old mother for a glass of water, sir, perhaps she will let you look round the house!" Now is not that a pretty story of great golfers who came into their own?

THE OTHER DAY we encountered a golfer who declared that by fortuitous chance, a combination of devilments, in the course of his match with a favorite and desperate opponent, he had lost by three and two when but for these peculiar assaults of fortune against him on seven special occasions he would for absolute certainty have won by a hole or two. It was one of those "if" reckonings which are so easy and customary among golfers and which seem so convincing to the parties most intimately concerned. *If* something had not happened, a little thing, perhaps but the lipping of a hole, the shot would have resulted differently, and the hole would not have had the same issue. Everything that followed might have been different. We who may be most interested

are finally convinced that it would not have been the same; hence our deep consciousness of the weight of our own misfortune. But the trouble is that it *did* happen. And argue as you please, given precisely the same circumstances—and not a previous experience of them, bear in mind—and the same thing must inevitably happen again. It is as useless to argue against such an obvious proposition as to consider the possibilities or otherwise of the sun rising upon the morrow. Let that be remembered.

Yet it appeared to us that our friend had been duly afflicted, and that there was some reason in what he said. He declared to us with emphasis and in sorrow that for seven strokes at seven different holes he had been served with hanging lies of the most pronounced and difficult character. Upon each occasion he not only fozzled—this term not generally suggesting a loss, though it might not stand for any gain—but worse than fozzled, inasmuch as on three occasions the ball had been so much turned aside from its proper line that it had been embedded in woody entanglements. Each time the hole had been lost, though on the play, apart from this, it had seemed that most of those holes would have been won. The hanging lie certainly caused the difference.

"But", said I to the Miserable, "hanging lies are golf; they are the game; they are even almost as the best of the game. They represent one of the supreme difficulties, the overcoming of which marks the superior player. You must play them. Golf makes no allowance if you cannot, and you have no right of complaint. The rules of golf make no provision for the excusing "if".

He admitted the reason. "But alas !" said he, "I cannot play them!" And so we told him to proceed and learn, with the parting touch of consolation that in seven in a round and a lost shot for every one he had indeed had more than his deserts even though he were the vilest fellow in the whole of North America. But how to learn ?

THAT BRINGS ME to this point, which I believe to be true, that of all the oft-recurring special difficulties on the links that which is the least studied, the least practiced, the least provided for, and yet the one which most regularly exacts the fullest penalty for ignorance in dealing with it, is the hanging lie. Is it not so ? There are different degrees of the hanging lie; but on every course that is not absolutely flat, does it not generally happen that on an average at least once in a round a player has a hanging lie to deal with, and it is constantly the case that it happens at a critical time ? How many of these hanging lies are followed by good shots—as good as they would have been if the lie were fair and level? At a guess one would say about from five to ten per cent. It is simple reason, and convincing then, that if a player masters the hanging lie he has gained a great advantage, which may in general result be worth as much as a few extra yards added to his drive—or more. Here is a plain moral pointed. Go, friends, and place your ball on the downward slope of a hill or a slight decline, and from there practice with great pains, having absorbed the written and spoken teaching beforehand.

The great professors and the smaller ones, all those who tell the way, will give advice upon the playing of the hanging lie. They *give* different advice, but then all players give not upon almost everything, and much of it is good. One thing certain is that if the player is given to playing regularly upon a hilly course, or if he is going for the day to play on such a one and attaches some importance to the game and the result thereof—and if he is a golfer of some thought and skill to whom, as one might say, a club makes a difference, then he should have a special club for those hanging lies. It is a kind of club—one is thinking of course of cases when distance is wanted, and therefore of wooden clubs—that is useful for other things, but particularly for situations of this kind. For consider, that in almost whatever way one plays the stroke, the natural loft or angle on the face of the club is diminished by the circumstance of its having to be played along a line that is not horizontal. If therefore the loft is reduced, the picking-up power of the club is likewise lessened, and this is certainly one main reason why so many strokes that are played on hanging lies result in topped balls.

Therefore to our special club we should give more loft—much more than usual for we wish not only to facilitate operations, but to give confidence to the player that they are so facilitated. At the same time, and for much the same reason, the face of the club should be shallow. James Braid once invented a kind of baffle or spoon which had most of the desirable qualities for picking the ball from hanging lies, though it was not meant for that so much as for bad lies in general, and he designed the club so that the sole was not flat but convex. If your happiness for a day or more depends on the extreme effort being made in your game, and the "ifs" of afterwards being reduced to the minimum, there should perhaps be something in the nature of one of these special clubs in the bag.

THE THEORY of the stroke is not complicated, though if you were to ask a dozen players what it is perhaps not more than one or two could give the answer. The others have not troubled, and so, in spite of years of experience and warning, it still happens that each time the hanging lie is presented it comes as a new problem and a desperate one at that. The correct treatment is to make sure of getting well under the ball but at the same time to guard against any excess of method in this direction for the getting-under business is often overdone, and we know what happens then.

To this end hold the body very steadily in the backward swing and be careful that the right shoulder does not drop before the ball is taken; but after impact allow the body and club to follow the ball, as one might say, down the slope from which the play had to be made. Such is this following movement when properly and effectively done that some of the best players have been seen with their right knees almost touching the ground when they have completed such a stroke. Give the left hand much of the management of the stroke; let it begin to come through just the veriest trifle before its proper time, and let it seem to put a little nip of its own into the impact. All this will tend to

overcome the reluctance of the ball to rise as a good ball should.

In playing this stroke it has to be remembered that there is always a tendency to slice, so counteract this tendency by placing the left foot a little nearer to the ball than usual. One of the greatest risks in playing the stroke is that of lifting the body in making the backward swing, a strong and peculiar tendency that seems to be inevitable as the result of the land formation. But if our friends do as we say there should be something saved in shots this spring.

