

Ways and Wisdom

THE PICK OF NEW THOUGHTS FROM THE OLD WORLD OF GOLF

SPEAKING OF PRACTICE, which is a subject that with winter looming on becomes important and again the correspondent of the Morning Post says that solitary practice may be obtained almost as well indoors as on the links. It is not absolutely necessary to hit a ball when one is endeavoring to acquire the sentiment of the intention to hit it properly. And even a busy man may handle a golf club in his study for ten minutes or so more than once a week without unduly curtailing the time which he ought to spend in reading, say, the published works of Mr. Bernard Shaw! Golf is an art like painting or play-writing. And art differs from business in that it is practised, at least partly, for its own sake as well as for reward. Many an artist works as hard as anybody who does something in the City, and he derives as much satisfaction from seeing his work improve as from finding himself able to command a higher price for it. There are some who hold that fozzlers get greater and purer enjoyment out of golf than do the champions of the game. This opinion would probably meet with Mr. Shaw's approval, since he commends by implication those who play games but do not work at them. And this is the fozzler. But it is demonstrably a stupid view to take, since it is at variance with historical facts. In the course of a long and varied experience of golf and golfers I have only known one man who, after attaining that degree of proficiency

which is represented by a handicap of scratch, has voluntarily abandoned practising the game while his powers remained unimpaired. But I number among my acquaintance several men, and at least an equal number of women, who have given up golf because it bored them to miss the ball more often than they hit it. A reasonable amount of work might have enabled them to overcome their disabilities and provided them with healthy exercise and entertainment in their declining years.

Let the Ball Lie Close!

YEARS AGO, when the rubber-cored ball was coming into use, says the same writer, Mr. John Ball justly condemned it because it "eliminated the bad lie" from the game. The new invention was much easier to get up into the air than the unkind guttie, and it went, comparatively, much farther off iron clubs. A cuppy lie in those days meant the loss of half a shot to the man who could not use brassie or spoon with effect. In 1914 Major Hezlet fought his way to the final of the Amateur Championship without once taking a wooden club through the green. He could not have done it when balls were made of solid guttie. Then the master-stroke was the brassie-shot, which pinched the ball out of a cup and laid it at the hole side. Mr. Ball played it to perfection at the crisis of the 1895 final, when he beat Mr. Mure Ferguson on the Dun Green.

The modern substitute, the push-cleek or push iron, as it is illogically called, is a good stroke, and pleasant to play, though destructive to the turf. But it lacks something of the artistry and the pure delightfulness of its predecessor. However, when all is said, it still remains true that a plentiful provision of difficult lies is necessary for the full enjoyment of golf. The difficult lie has two advantages; the one physical, the other spiritual. When one succeeds in hitting a cupped or hanging ball truly with wood, or even with iron, he experiences a tingling sensation in his fingers which not even the cleanest of swipes from a tee can produce so fully. When he fails in his ambitious attempt he has an excuse ready to salve his wounded vanity. Therefore let the ball lie close.

Taylor on Post-War Golf

DISCUSSING GOLF in the new conditions and circumstances J. H. Taylor, the five times open champion now says:—I have asked good players how their game stood the test of their own criticism upon it. They acknowledge that they found it very difficult. The long game does not bother them a great deal; it is the shorter and more subtle parts that worry. In the matter of strength, especially in the approach shots, they found themselves astray; invariably were they too strong. I quite appreciate this. During my temporary absence from the game for six months, whilst working at the Navy and Army Canteen Board, I found the same thing happened when I returned to play. I attribute it to the fact that my wrists became rigid and strong, and quite unresponsive to the feel of the club. As successful approach play and putting is primarily a matter of "feel"

and delicate finger play, it requires quite a few weeks' constant practice to bring them back to their former more or less satisfactory state. To those who are restarting the game I would strongly advise the policy of going "canny." To get the atmosphere and to get into the skin of the game periods of hustle will prove of little or no value. Far better will it be to gradually build up the sense of the game from the beginning. The successful player is one who attunes his whole being to the development of that consciousness that enables him to see through to the why and wherefore. Unless one can discover the reason of cause and effect, any other knowledge is purely superficial, and will not stand the acid test of actual play. Do not be too enamoured of the prodigious length of drive, however seductive this might be. Rather be content with the moderate length ball, held to its work by the rein of a perfect control; a ball that is driven as with a direct purpose. Obviously it is better to hit a ball that is guided to its destiny than one that is flung, and is an easy prey to the four winds. Concentrate on placing the ball in the desired spot with every club, rather than playing in a haphazard manner in the hope that it will pan out rightly. In a game of such exactness as golf one has no right to hope in this way. One should not complain if badly-conceived efforts meet with a just retribution. My readers will perhaps think this intense concentration is wholly unnecessary in a pastime that is only a game played for pleasure. My answer is that one cannot derive full enjoyment from any game that is not played as well as is individually possible. It has been said, and truly said, that golf is not a game, but an

institution, and I think it will be found, as the years go by, that this aphorism contains the seed of a great truth. It will be found that golf is the one game necessitating a certain amount of physical effort that can be played by men disabled in the war. So long as a man retains the use of one arm or one leg it is possible for him to obtain a great deal of pleasure from it, and health-giving pleasure at that. It is the one game that he can play by himself, untrammelled by the thought (except in a foursome) that if playing badly he is letting his side down. He can receive a handicap from the greatest of players and make a game of it. The loss of an arm is a greater drawback for a golfer than the loss of a leg. It is possible to drive a long ball with but little rotary movement of the body, I recently received a great object lesson as to the possibility of this. Standing at the tee at Mid-Surry, I saw an officer, who had lost a leg and had an artificial one fitted, drive one of the very finest tee shots that I ever saw. Low, long and evidently of great power, it must have been 250 yards in length. I could not help remarking that if he could get this distance with only one leg I dreaded to think how far he could have hit had he not been disabled. The loss of an arm is more serious, although with suitably made clubs a full measure of enjoyment can be obtained.

Favorite Clubs

CURIOSLY ENOUGH, I do not know says a writer in *The Daily Mail*, that I have ever heard of Braid or Taylor possessing a club which might be put down as the real pet of the bag. To be sure, Taylor must be very fond of his mashie and Braid of the cleek with

which he makes those half shots that fly so unerringly but neither perhaps is so definitely established as a favorite club as Vardon's "mongrel" (a sort of straight-faced mashie, if such a contradiction of ideas may be permitted), or Duncan's spoon, or Ray's steel-bolted driver that was destroyed in the fire which burnt down his shop at Oxhey. Vardon, I believe, seldom uses his favorite nowadays; it has seen so much service that it could not stand much more. While it retained a measure of its youthful strength, he had bits of metal let into the back of it so as to keep the head—worn by constant activity—up to the necessary weight, but there came a time when it could not stand much more, and so it had to be put aside to rest in its old age. The golfer may ask, "Why not have it copied?" But this was a club of very peculiar soul and temperament; it defied the copyist. A good many attempts were made to produce the same kind of thing; the results looked the same, but they did not feel the same nor would they produce the same results. Vardon came into possession of it by chance in a shop in London. It had no name on the head; the only thing known about it was that it hailed from America. Its odd appearance attracted him—its face almost straight, wider at the nose than a driving mashie and gradually tapering to a small, narrow heel. He found it something like fifteen years ago, and used it regularly during the heyday of his career, playing running up shots with it, getting out of long grass with it, keeping the ball low against the wind with it, always doing something with it that no other club would accomplish quite so satisfactorily. A club that can be trusted is a friend to

be guarded. The most trying person in the world is he who wants to borrow it. For one thing, it is not likely to help him. It is seldom so docile in the hands of a stranger as in the grip of its owner. It is a club with ideas as to the individual who should waggle it, and its master knows its preference in that respect.

The Eye and the Ball

Iron Shots and Putting

WE PROBABLY LIFT the eye less frequently and flagrantly in driving than in the shorter shots. If this be so, the Times' correspondent reflects, the reason I take to be this, that driving is the most mechanical of the golfing arts. We seem to put a penny in the slot or press a button—use what metaphor of the kind you will—and the swing once begun carries itself through to the end with an impetus which is, comparatively at least, beyond our control. Consequently, it is more difficult for any one piece of the mechanism outrageously to misbehave itself. In the case of the half-iron or mashie shot, wherein there is less swing and more hit, we never, even for an infinitesimal fraction of a second, lose consciousness: there is no irresistible rush: we feel as if we had entire mastery of body and club throughout, and for that very reason make the grosser errors. In the short putt we come to what may be termed a most completely voluntary act; there is a total absence of that sensation of winding ourselves up, as does the pitcher at baseball, and there is assuredly no stroke in which we can be looking, farther away from the ball when in the act of hitting it. Moreover, in putting we not only look prematurely forward towards the hole: we let the eye wander backwards

before striking. Young Tommy Morris said that amateurs were prone to this straying backward of the eye in iron play owing to the seductive glitter of the polished iron head. No doubt he was right, but this particular fault always seems to me most frequent in putting. It is so dreadfully easy to take the putter back crooked. We may "pinch" the clubhead inwards or we take it outwards in the manner of one circumventing a stymie by means of a cut. We know that it is absolutely essential to take the club back straight, and we watch it as it goes back painfully and jerkily inch by inch. There are few more disastrous habits, for it is destructive of all freedom.

The Follow Through

CONSIDERING THE MERITS of the follow through, about which there has been some discussion in England lately, the same correspondent writes:—Those of us who have something of a settled game would do ourselves more harm than good by whispering "Follow through" upon every teeing ground. On the other hand, we should never forget it altogether. If we find our follow-through disappearing, even though the ball seems still to fly tolerably straight and far, we should consider if all is well with us. No follow-through today portends a breakdown tomorrow which may yet be averted. The simplest plan of course is just to determine that the club *shall* go through after the ball. This sometimes acts like a charm, smoothing out, we know not how, the tangles of our upward swing and so making all the rest delightfully easy. We may hope that this is what will happen if we are fit and in practice, and take ourselves in hand soon enough. But we must

not forget that if we are not finishing the stroke there is some reason for it beyond pure cussedness on our part. We are off our balance at the moment of hitting, and for that again there is some antecedent cause. Certainly it is a dangerous policy to try to find out what is the matter with us before we are actually ill. Nevertheless, we may save ourselves from a bad time and that symptom of a vanishing follow-through is neglected at our peril. We can follow through too little. It may be a question whether we can follow through too much if we do it in the right way, but we certainly can in the wrong way. In particular we follow through too far and too fast with bodies. There is no surer way of preventing the clubhead from coming through than by letting the body through too quickly, and this is a desperately common fault.

The thing that has to follow through after the ball is the head of the driver. If it does so properly the player's body may nearly always be trusted to behave itself properly too. The danger of keeping our bodies too still is with nearly all of us infinitesimal. Some players who follow through magnificently do not finish with the hands over the left shoulder at all. They have a nameless gift of flinging their hands away right out after the ball, and there at the finish the hands remain in front of the striker's head. Such is Mr. Lester Balfour-Melville's follow through, and there is no finer to be seen in all golf; but it must be seen in real life or a real photograph: in a posed picture he looks as dull and copy-bookish as do all the rest. This finish of Mr. Balfour-Melville's seems to me such an admirable model because it shows just that which is es-

sentia and does not emphasize the unessential. Some people spend their souls on trying, so to speak, to complete the circle and dangle the club far down their backs at the finish of the stroke. By doing so they probably acquire far too long a swing, and also the habit of finishing with their stomachs (saving your honor's presence!) far too prominent. Judging by the styles to be often seen, it is a common failing to think that the ball can be hit with the stomach. There is in fact scarcely any part of the body less well adapted to the purpose.

Vardon on Experience

HARRY VARDON SAYS he thinks that anybody who remains more or less constantly in touch with his clubs ought to continue to hold his position in the game until well over 50. "There are some fine players to whom we have to give a good many years," he said, "but I don't see anybody to fear particularly. I believe that the old men will be at the top again yet. Of course, the limbs and bones become a bit stiff when one is getting on in life, and every now and again I have felt—and seen in other people—something very like a cramped way of swinging. But that is only because we have been doing other kinds of work and cultivating muscles that are no good for golf. When we get the right muscles going again, I think it will be shown that a man can play first-class golf till he is nearer 60 than 50." He points out that long training in the game impels a veteran champion to attempt with confidence the most difficult shot in the perspective if it will gain for him an advantage. Very often it involves such risk that the slightest miscalculation will be fatal!—the ball will be

hopelessly bunkered—just as exact calculation will gain a stroke. The less learned golfer does not care very frequently to chance this shot; he prefers to play safely for the par figure for the hole because if he attempts the other thing he is at least as likely as not to fail. "I think that 8 times in 14 the experienced player will bring off the very difficult shot in which he allows himself only the smallest possible margin of safety so as to secure the perfect effect, and that when he does not quite accomplish it he will generally play it in such a way as to keep clear of serious trouble," said Vardon. "That is where experience as an advantage."

Handicapping

MR. CROOME SAYS he has long believed that the system on handicapping generally adopted in England could be greatly improved. Theoretically it is admirable. It aims at giving every golfer a label which shall accurately represent his form. In practice it breaks down. The limit of discretion allowed to handicappers is not large enough. They are obliged by custom to squeeze all their clients into an area represented by the difference between "owes 5" and "receives 24." The inclusion among the people handicapped to receive 24 of many who would require half a dozen, or a dozen, more strokes if they are to have a decent chance of winning a prize necessarily diminishes the allowance given to some of their betters. At the other end the smallness of the penalty allowed to be imposed upon the Hiltons of this world forces up the handicaps of the players who are not greatly inferior to them.

The result is that in golf, as in

politics, the great middle class is ground between the upper and the nether millstone. Below them is the proletariat whose vanity has to be gratified by the handicapping of the unhandicappable; superimposed upon them is the weight of the profiteers, in which class are comprised the tolerably numerous players of respectable ability whose handicaps cannot be lowered as much as they should be, because they have no chance against Mr. Hilton at less than four, six, or nine strokes. Consequently the unfortunates who get from eight to sixteen strokes of a handicap are out of it. It is seldom that one of them wins under medal play rules, and in match-play tournaments they regularly disappear after the first round. They are at further disadvantage in the last-named competitions through the existing custom of giving in match play only three-quarters of the medal odds. That custom is based on an abstract argument, and illustrates the folly of pushing a theory to its logical conclusion in practice.

On this matter another writer in the Times said some time ago:—Perhaps the best improvised form of handicapping where two players are doubtful who ought to give the other something, is one that adjusts itself as the match progresses. Whenever one of them wins a hole he must give a stroke to his rival at the next hole. The great thing to do after having won a hole is to make a point of at least halving the next, because the penalty of giving a stroke operates only there—or, at any rate, not until another hole has been won. The frequency with which, however, this concession of a stroke involves the loss of the hole and the making of the match all

square is rather astonishing. Harry Vardon once told me that he had taken part in a number of games of this kind against "plus" amateurs, and never succeeded in getting a lead of two holes from anybody. It is not a new method, but its vogue has increased during the war, especially on holiday occasions, when strangers have met.

Vardon and the Young

VARDON, as quoted by Mr. Robert E. Howard, declares that if he had a son he would simply tell him to watch some accomplished player and then try to reproduce exactly what he had seen. He would depend upon the imitative faculty of a boy to secure the right stance and grip and manner of swinging the club. There seems to be everything in this principle of teaching a boy golf by example rather than by precept. Nearly every great player remembers somebody who was a kind of golfing idol to him in his youth and on whom he moulded his methods. Mr. John Ball—who finished sixth in the open championship when he was 14 years old—imitated his father, himself a scratch player at Hoylake. James Braid had a model at Elie whom he followed all over the links, and Braid's son Harry—who is so

good at 18 that his father can give him only 3 or 4 strokes—obviously took his playing principles from his parent.

A good many zealous parents have their sons primed with lessons of an hour's duration, and a pathetic spectacle it is to see a boy undergoing the ordeal. He cares nothing about such admonitions as "Slow back," "Keep your eye on the ball," and "Follow through." He is too concerned with his own affairs and ideas. What he thinks is: "I'm going to do it as you do it." and he gets on all the better when he concentrates on that ambition instead of worrying about details. The suitability of golf as a game for boys has been discussed very often, but never very reasonably. Some people declare that it is not a good pastime for boys; others that they ought to be encouraged to play it. At any rate, there can be no harm in their learning the rudiments of the game, as they do in the holiday season, and in keeping in touch with it even when they are at school. It is a great solace in sedate middle age when more violent forms of exercise are no longer possible, and it is just as well then to have the golfing swing in the constitution as to spend years in an unsuccessful attempt to cultivate it.

