

Plain Truths

BY "SAM SOLOMON"

"If an offence come out of the truth, better it is that the offence come than that the truth be concealed."

THERE IS AT LAST a movement. The ponderous old machine of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews has begun to stir itself in the matter of reform, concerns itself with the things about which important sections of golfers have been agitating for some time past. It is a fine old machine, that Royal and Ancient, and splendid service has it done to the good game of golf. It is made of strong stuff right through, and it has helped the great empire of the game along.

But there are few things that work as well for ever and for ever as they did when they were new, or, if not when they were new, when they were otherwise at their best. It does not seem that anything goes on improving for all time; the evidence of the last few years clearly points to the conclusion that man and human nature do not so improve, and if not they, what then?

We do not set out much to criticise the constitution of the Royal and Ancient club at the present time; there are other things to think about. But this is the beginning of a new era, mighty questions are afoot, changes and reforms which were only talked about in a light and pleasant way five years ago, are things to be insisted upon now, and the world of golf will need some evidence that the Royal and Ancient Club is in sympathy with the spirit of the times before it becomes fully determined to trust the resettlement and the future of this world-wide game to an exclusive community of persons ordering things autocratically in a corner of a small county on the east coast of Scotland.

Be not mistaken. We do not ask, expect, or desire that the controlling authority of the game should show sympathy with any revolutionaries whatever; as we have no sympathy with them ourselves. Nor sympathy with cranks, nor with those who would make mad innovations to the game. But that authority must be in sympathy with the spirit of the times, and it must display a good and fair appreciation of the mind of the great golfing communities from which by distance it is far separated.

This now is the real time for a movement to be made; the between-seasons, at the end of the first disordered, wayward year of peace, and before the season at which it is hoped and believed there will be a serious settling down to the new order, is obviously and essentially the time for it. This is now the time for the trial of the stymie and some other features of the game against which charges have persistently been laid and, as it has seemed, with some reason.

So the old ponderous machine at St. Andrews, respected by golfers for its worth and its dignity, has moved in answer to the demand for some sign of appreciation of the existing circumstances of the game to which we are all

attached. The movement has been awaited with anxiety; it has been received with something like impressive awe. It is always a solemn moment when the gods bestir themselves and take notice of the mere crawling mortals. Then there is lightning and thunder in the air, and great events portend.

BUT AMERICANS—and many others, so we think—are less impressed than we had hoped to be by the news that has come across the seas about the results of the sitting of the Golf Parliament of St. Andrews, though indeed, being self-elected, it is no Parliament, but just an autocracy. If it should happen in the course of any comments or suggestions that we should do injustice to this authority—as we would strive in sincerity not to do—let it be urged in advance that in such case only the authority is to blame for the meagreness of the report of its proceedings, determinations and intentions that it has given forth.

Why should this authority also, hoping for allegiance as it does, veil all its thoughts and schemes in dark obscurity? Has there not been enough damnation worked in the world in recent years through secrecy, for the evil, uselessness and folly of it at all times and in every circumstance to have been publicly and finally established? Would such a botch and bungle have been made of the Peace Conference in Paris if it had not been conducted throughout on the foolish, ridiculous lines of secrecy? What is this strange, contemptible tendency in human man which leads him, whenever he attains any position of authority whatever, and is supposed then to be working for the people, and for the common good, and purely on behalf of all, to begin at once to secrete his every action, to suggest and make mystery when there need be none? It is a way, of course, of pretending to be important, but it is out of date.

Following the precedent of governments and conferences the Royal and Ancient Club is always secretive in its legislative methods, and let it be assured in sincerity and good-will that by this it is surely leading to its own undoing. During the summer season it was given out, apparently on official authority, that the stymie question, at the invitation, the urgent invitation, of the United States Golf Association, backed by American golfers of every sort and condition, was being taken into its close consideration and that a definite recommendation was about to be made. It was even suggested what the nature of this recommendation was likely to be—a compromise by which the stymie that was laid against a player by the other man and ball was not to be a stymie but that the stymie which a man set himself was to remain.

If this was not a wholly satisfactory solution to some minds, and if Americans considered it was a thing to argue upon, at least it was a beginning. But why at that stage could some fair and open communication not have been made in the official manner?

Now we come to a statement that has been made officially, the only one we have. It has been made at the annual business meeting of the Royal and Ancient Club, the time for all such statements, when the Rules of Golf Committee, not being an independent body, has to submit its report and recommendations to a full meeting of the members of the club. And we are told that the Committee presented to the Club a report in which they recorded the

opinion that "in order to preserve the balance between the power of the ball and the length of the hole, and in order to retain the special features of the game, the power of the ball should be limited. Such investigation as the members of the Committee have been able to make leads them to suggest that in the present circumstances this object would be obtained by fixing a minimum size."

This is prettily worded; it states the case, and not too much of it. To talk of "preserving the balance" between the power of the ball and the length of the hole, is expressing things in a new way and one less crude than the common form of statement to the effect that the balls drive too far, which nevertheless is well comprehended by the people, and as for "balance of power," is it not a phrase which was much used in European politics, and which the wise men say stood for a thing which led more surely than anything else to the recent war? To that extent, anyhow, it is a bad phrase, and it were better that some new one had been taken.

But let us pass on for the moment from this question of "the balance of power," for there is another one which, whether St. Andrews thinks it or not, is more important, and for which in this extract from the secret report we look vainly for any reference. But we discover it in a sort of addendum, a little speech made, on submitting the report, by the chairman of the Rules of Golf Committee, whom all golfers will concede is one of the wisest and most thoughtful men in golf, Mr. John L. Low. It is a point as to whether Mr. Low is or is not a shade too conservative for one of the positions of highest authority in golf in these democratic days. He is broad-minded in many senses, but he is strongly prejudiced in favor of some forms of conservatism. We have heard many people express a doubt whether he really loves the old wooden putter so much as he pretends he does, and whether, when he plays a match, all that he is concerned about is the joy of the playing, troubling himself, as he says, not at all with considerations of the winning or losing of the game—a strange proposition.

But readily do we grant that conservatism in golf, as in some other matters and affairs in these tremendous times, is a fine thing, and rather would we have it than revolutionary change. We would prefer the spirit and form of the oldest and best of games to remain intact. If we have desires in reform, we would rather sacrifice them than incur risk of real injury to the spirit and form of the game. That is why in a measure all good golfers must be conservatives, and why they must respect even stronger conservatism in others than they themselves possess.

HOWEVER IT IS STILL the fact that some reforms, good ones, well thought-out and advocated for long past, might be practised without the slightest injury to the form or spirit of the game, nay rather would they tend to improve them. One of these suggested reforms, well debated and considered, is the matter of the stymie. Upon this question there are different opinions. The British golfers, it appears, give greater support to the stymie than do the Americans.

The Americans are almost solidly against it. They consider it is stupid, illogical, ridiculous and unfair, and that it spoils their game. Moreover, the situation is anomalous and almost intolerable because in the ordinary way of golf, in private matches—which constitute ninety-nine per cent of the golf that is played—the stymie is not countenanced and does not enter into the play. It enters into the case only when competitions and championships are in progress, and when, as a matter of formal loyalty to St. Andrews, the rules are applied intact, just as they are imported from Fifeshire. There has been one slight variation made already, it is true, in circumstances which all of us well understand. It were well that there should be no more such variations; too many of them might lead to the construction of such a wide gap it would mean complete separation.

But this situation is bad for all concerned, and though most American golfers disapproved of the action that was taken in the middle west one can understand after all the spirit of revolt in favor of common sense that led the golfers in those parts to play a championship without the stymies. We here now endeavor to discuss briefly this situation without passion or prejudice, for we (or I who write) are with the minority who can see good and sport and test of human strength, will and endeavor, in the poor stymie which with all its faults we consider to be unfairly dealt with. We have expressed ourselves about it aforesaid; the old arguments need not now be traversed again. But we recognize also the general American feeling against it, and that should be considered in some better way than it has been.

THE NEW SITUATION created by the report of the Rules of Golf Committee does not seem calculated to assist the case. We are sorry to think that it comes not far from being a taunt, and a laughing at sentiments that are strongly held in the United States and are entitled to be treated with great respect. For in this addendum, as we may call it, Mr. Low made a short speech, of which a brief report—official it is taken to be—is afforded. In this speech the Chairman of the Rules of Golf Committee said that the decision mentioned in the report had been come to "with no intention of launching out upon a wholesale scheme of reconstruction. Golf required no programme of that kind. There was no intention of, making the hole larger or of removing the 'fun' or the call for skill which the stymie provided. But as regards limitation of the power of the ball and the matter of standardization, the Rules of Golf Committee had a definite proposal to make. They had formed their own views, and, after the United States Golf Association and other bodies had been consulted in the matter the definite proposal would be submitted to the club." So spake John Low. That is an exact and untouched report as transmitted to us of what he said.

LET US WITH CALM and sense, and undiminished respect give answer to Mr. Low. Why did he murmur about a "wholesale scheme of reconstruction"? If the Rules of Golf Committee has been thinking, even negatively of such a

thing it is the only golf body that has. Nobody wants such a thing; nobody has suggested it. Then why mention it—if not for the deliberate purpose of clouding the issue? All other golfers of sense and experience are as well aware as Mr. Low that "golf requires no programme of that kind." One does not even need to be a conservative to know that. Yet there is a difference between the laws and principles of the game on the one hand, and the management and regulation of its affairs in accordance with those laws and principles on the other, and it should not be readily assumed without consideration that the position of the Rules of Golf Committee is quite so unassailable as that of the laws and principles of the game.

The Royal and Ancient Club and the United States Golf Association must work in absolute harmony and agreement with each other, or there may be a division attended by consequences that all would regret. There would be two games where now there is only one. On its part it is shown beyond all possibility of question that the U. S. G. A. has gone to the limit in respectful consideration of the St. Andrews authority; nothing could have exceeded its dignified deference. In the early stages of the war, when the stymie question in America had assumed an acute phase it was mentioned to St. Andrews, who by reason of the war could do nothing then, but promised to consider the whole question later. With this, of course, the U. S. G. A. was satisfied. The Royal and Ancient Club is now under the strictest possible obligation to fulfil its promise and to do so carefully and with sympathy.

But we are now informed in this official report, and its addendum, that there is no intention of removing the "fun" of the stymie—and at that it is dismissed. And this, despite the fact that a few weeks ago it was semi-officially announced that the stymie question was being considered, and it had virtually been decided to propose that an alteration, in the rule should be effected, making it that the stymie made by the player himself should remain but that the stymie his opponent made for him should be abolished. When we say that this was semi-officially announced, we mean that it was stated that this was said by the St. Andrews authorities in answer to questions put to them, and that after extensive publication of the statement no steps were ever taken to deny it.

Again, if in regard to any of these other statements of the case as between the U. S. G. A. and St. Andrews there should now be denials and variations—a considerable possibility—let it be said again that we only take the word of St. Andrews as represented in the printed and official statements that have been issued, and which have not been denied. It seems now that something more is needed than this blunt statement by Mr. Low that the Committee "has no intention of removing the 'fun' ", etc., of the stymie—surely a bad form of expression, for whatever else may be said of the stymie there is really nothing funny about it, nor indeed about anything else in golf, which is fortunately not and was never intended to be a game of "fun."

However, it is clear, and stated, that the U. S. G. A. is to be consulted before further action is taken, but again the wording upon this matter is un-

fortunate. We are told by Mr. Low that "the Committee has formed its 'definite proposal', and after the U. S. G. A. and other bodies have been consulted the definite proposal would be submitted to the club." Here again, we would assume in charity that Mr. Low has spoken carelessly, for if his statement were taken quite literally and exactly, it would indicate that the consultation with the U. S. G. A. would be merely a formal matter and that the Committee's "definite proposal" would be submitted for ratification just the same, no matter what the result of the consultation were. This would not be a respectful or considerate attitude, and it is beyond doubt that it is not the one that St. Andrews would adopt. It were better that there should be no thought of a "definite proposal" until the consultation between the two great authorities has taken place.

AND HOW ABOUT this consultation? We are given the names of four persons who, we are informed, will constitute a sub-coimmittee "for the purpose of conferring with the outside bodies interested in golf," these being Mr. Angus Hambro, Captain C. K. Hutchison, Mr. Stuart Paton and Mr. A. C. M. Croome. Presumably one of those "outside bodies interested in golf" is the United States Golf Association which officially represents and by elected representatives stands for vastly more golfers than all other elected golf authorities in existence throughout the world. We have heard of some of the players named as constituting this sub-committee, but are not aware that they have any qualifications whatever for dealing with the U. S. G. A. upon a matter of this kind, or that they are in the least degree enlightened upon the American attitude. From inquiries we have made we are satisfied that in nearly every case they begin by being prejudiced against it. This is unfortunate.

No "conferring" of this kind will be advantageous. No argument by mail will serve. The matter is urgent and it is important, and the proper way to deal with it—along with others that need adjustment—is by personal conference between delegates of the two authorities, and the U. S. G. A. should have some assurance that the St. Andrews delegates represent the feeling of British golfers. Otherwise the result cannot be satisfactory. And again, if this matter is not now settled to the full and complete satisfaction of all concerned there will be dissatisfaction in the United States which will be expressed in a regrettable form.

If in any of this there is injustice done to St. Andrews, or to any person, it is to be repeated that ridiculous secrecy and official and semi-official statements which have stood till now are responsible. As it is presented to us, the statement by the Rules of Golf Committee stands for the most autocratic and inconsiderate attitude that that authority has ever adopted towards the vast community of the players outside its own land, and this is not the ideal moment for the adoption of any such attitude as that. The best one can hope, is that there is some misunderstanding, or incorrect reporting, and that the statements given out by St. Andrews do not represent the whole truth of the situation nor represent it in its best light.

LET US TURN NOW from these matters of controversy to a lighter theme. Months ago there were remarks about the new intensity with which sporting affairs were being considered and conducted in the fair land of France, and of the firm intention of the French people, seeing what sport had done for America and England, to devote herself more and more to it, and of all sports to golf. France was a devotee before the great trouble descended upon the world, and it may now be said, as it was then, that she is the third golfing power. The game has been renewed in France with some enthusiasm and determination.

But like most other things that are to be encouraged it needs a propaganda, and men who come home from France tell us of one curious thing, that never in any circumstances is golf ever mentioned in the French newspapers now, little enough as it was mentioned in them before the war. That is a strange thing. The English newspapers have been full of it since the beginning of the year; the American newspapers have borne witness to the great resumption. But in France there is less printed about golf than of any other game, though the French never were great in their recording of such matters.

Those who come home from France, some of them, say that to the best of their knowledge and belief, founded upon observation and inquiry, there has been only one reference to the game in any general daily newspaper since 1914, and that was in the foremost newspaper of the capital at about the time when the German delegates went to Versailles to play their humble part in the Peace Conference there. That newspaper is "Le Temps," and to it once a week one of the foremost writers of the time, Abel Hermant, contributes a gracefully-written causerie dealing with persons, occurrences and thoughts of the time, which is one of the chief and most delightful features of French journalism. M. Hermant discusses many things in "La vie à Paris" every week; nothing is ever immune from his gentle and witty attack. It is he in this famous causerie who has been the only one to write of golf in French since the war was over. This unique circumstance must be recorded, and the quotation must be made, trivial as in some senses it may be. It has a peculiar interest of its own. The view of French writers towards the game was never that of others.

M. HERMANT ON THIS OCCASION recalls a circumstance of his boyhood. He was taken by his parents for a short holiday in Touraine and one hot day when they rested at an inn, he overheard some young people near him talking loudly about a game called "cochonnet." This, by the way, is the French term for the game of bowls, but it was not that game evidently to which these young gossips were referring. One of them was describing it to the others, and he said "The game of cochonnet is a game which is played by three — *a trois*, not at Troyes in Champagne, but by three persons. The first throws a stone. The second throws a stone, but it falls in a ditch."

One of the listeners asked the speaker what happened then. He answered "You have followed me? The game of cochonnet is a game which is

played by three, *a trois*, not at Troyes in Champagne, etc." He went again through the plain, dull and largely meaningless statement, the only object of which appeared to be to perpetrate a stupid pun and create a silly confusion of statement. Truly it was enough to set anyone against the game of cochonnet, if that was all that there was to be said about it. And also, perhaps to set them against any other game of the kind if it were ever described in that way, or something to suggest it. And that was how M. Abel Hermant was turned against the game of golf ere he knew of it. He tells us that as a boy he listened to that description of the game of cochonnet, and it seemed so utterly absurd and meaningless that his curiosity concerning it was suddenly extinguished, and all desire ever to play such a game vanished.

But in recent days a strange thing has happened. He confesses us that he had come near to giving way to the temptation to play golf. "The appearance of a golf course is seducing," says he, "the attire of the players is of a rare elegance and the instruments of the game have for the profane a something indescribably enigmatic. At the first glance, when one is not initiated, one does not see what the interest or amusement of the parties may be, but those who practice this sport speak of it with so much passion that one permits oneself to be convinced by '*snobisme*'" He means by this term in its French application the foolish appreciation of what is the vogue.

"However," he goes on, "I realized that I should never play golf, on the day when I asked a specialist to be kind enough to give me some directions, and he answered me, 'Golf is a game which is played at six, nine, and as many as eighteen holes. . . .' I immediately recalled the game of cochonnet which is played '*a trois*,' and I felt that I would never become a golfer, that I could never take that game upon myself. I regretted it all the more when I was considering this incapacity, after having gone to the expense of costume, shoes and gloves, which are extremely dear and make up a considerable item."

"BUT I WAS ABOVE all mortified," M. Hermant gossips on, "at not tasting the pleasures of a game whose charm is such that the Germans, according to their customary policy, annexed it without ceremony as they did Shakespeare, even though it were a matter of notoriety that golf was invented in England and that Shakespeare was born there, even if he was not called Shakespeare but Derby or Rutland. We do not know which among their pretensions was the one that the delegates to the Peace Conference will sustain most desperately, but there is reason to believe that it is the German origin of golf since they landed at Versailles with arms and baggage—I mean with a complete collection of clubs. I imagine that they also brought, in addition to their secretaries and shorthand writers, a personnel of caddies; there would be reason to fear that they would not find on the spot urchins willing to follow them from hole to hole, the heavy bags on their backs, to smooth down the yellow sand on their departure and to hunt for their lost balls. Caddies are not of the age at which one hides strong feelings, and if those of La Boulie had gone on strike, if they had played there, the Germans perhaps would not have been

astonished since their newspaper correspondents recognized, after having seen with their own eyes our devastated provinces, that we have reason not to love them tenderly."

It is pleasant gossip. But amid it all there is one matter, perhaps, for serious reflection, since it bears a great significance. Was there no deep meaning to be attached to the taking by the German delegates of their golf clubs to Versailles when the Peace Conference was held there? Did it not indicate the German intrepidity, grasp of realities, determination to brave things out and make the best of a situation as difficult and exasperating as it could possibly be, and figuratively and literally play the victorious Allies at their own game? There is a something to think about in this.

