

# RANDOM REFLECTIONS

By A. C. M. CROOME

THE first Duke of Wellington is reported to have said that for six months in the year the climate of England was the best in the world and for the other six months he did not know a better. This opinion is so contrary to that frequently expressed by other competent authorities that one would suspect the holder of it to have been a golfer if there were not conclusive evidence of his innocence. Over here we can never be sure, however fair the sky when we get up in the morning, that it will not rain before night-fall, and there are many days in the year when it is idle to hope that the weather will lift. But at the worst of times, except when snow intervenes, it is always possible for a determined man to play golf. When a county cricket team goes on tour several packs of golf clubs are invariably included in the luggage of the party. The owners of them are guarding against—possibly even hoping for—a blank day on the cricket ground; and when the umpires decide that the pitch is too wet for play to commence, they are off to the nearest links with a most suspicious air of gaiety. Cricket, though a sedate and leisurely game, only affords intervals of complete leisure to the players when the weather is wet. Much more do the followers of more strenuous but more intermittent sports decline to be parted from their clubs. It is a common experience to meet a man who has been on tour playing lawn tennis or football, and to find him most ready to talk about the golf matches in which he has engaged on bye-days. In these blessed islands those who can afford the time and expense may golf on at least 320 days in the year if they are minded to. Consequently we have no season in the proper issue of the word; at least we have no off-season. The game is, of course, different, and requires to be differently played, in winter and in summer. And, 'pon my soul! I cannot say which form of it is the better. Similarly, when I am at Westward Ho! I feel sure that I am playing on the finest links in the world. Take me to St. Andrew's, and it is borne in upon my mind that the Old Course is still without a rival. At the moment of writing I am inclined to plump for winter-golf. It is so delightful to get a bit of your own back from the scuffling flat-catcher, who ventured to win not one nor two matches in the summer when the ball would run freely. Now you have got to drive decently, and achieve a really respectable carry if you mean to do any good; nor is there any doubt in my mind that the really exhilarating golf is played in the air. The wind-cheater from the tee and the run-up approach were profitable and respectable strokes when the guttie ball was in use, because it gave only reasonably good results when cleanly hit. With these rubber-cored

things the former is often hard to distinguish from a half-top, the latter from a confused scuffle. Again when the course, through the green, is dead and slow the wooden clubs regain that share of dominance which is theirs by right. The tee-shot must be really hit and must be followed by an equally stout second off brassie or spoon if the par-four holes are to be taken at the proper figure. Of all the strokes in the game the full swipe with a wooden club makes the strongest appeal to the senses, as well artistic as physical. It is good to drive a cricket ball straight over the bowler's head into the pavilion. At rackets the back-handed half volley which kills the service an inch above the board produces a singularly pleasant sensation. The cut-stroke which beats chace a yard on the floor of a tennis court is as alluring as either. But the thrill of a perfectly timed tee-shot, which brings out the music of a favourite drive-shaft, is unequalled by anything which golf, much less other games, can offer. On the intellectual side its superiority is equally marked. The player of cricket, rackets, tennis, depends to some extent on his opponent for his chances to bring off the master-strokes. The golfer may stand poised on the teeing-ground and cry, "Alone I did it!" In summer his opponent may get past him with a coarse blow off the toe of his club, but in winter his ball is there, and t'other fellow plays the odd for sure. I, being an altruist and wishful for the profit and enjoyment of my fellow-golfers, hope that the example set by Mr. J. D. Travers, when he won the Amateur Championship of the U. S. A., will not be widely followed. None can drive from the tee with an iron without loss of pleasure; few can play the game with maimed rites and win matches over a long period of time. Just at first, I make no doubt, the self-denying ordinance produces a feeling of confidence which leads to success. But only a genius can keep it up. Last autumn I played a certain amount of golf with Mr. G. L. Jessop, the famous cricketer. He had temporarily discarded the use of wood and was winning a decent proportion of his matches by driving from the tee with a disreputable old cleek. No remarkable power of observation was needed to note that his ball, though seldom off the course altogether, did not go quite straight down the middle, and that its trajectory varied alarmingly. I thought that there was a good time coming for his opponents, who would get their own back when he had completely broken himself down by pressing to keep upsides with normally powerful hitters using the proper instruments. It was so likely that his iron play through the green would suffer. Sure enough, the last time I saw him he said that he could not hit a shot! Here we

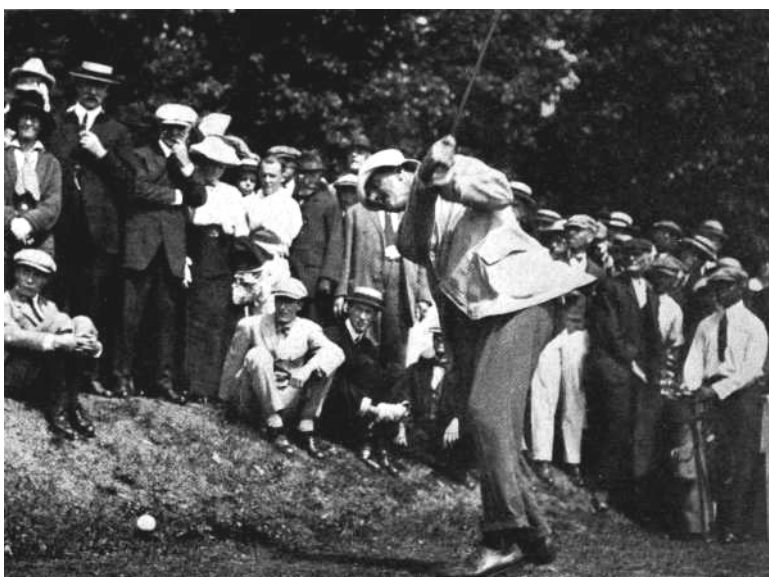
## G O L F I L L U S T R A T E D

have examples provided by two far from ordinary athletes. I hold very strongly that their imitators are more likely to achieve Mr. Jessop's results than Mr. Travers's. They tell me that Mr. Travers is encouraged to the illegitimate process of the iron by the disposition of the hazards on the courses over which he habitually plays. Returned visitors have stated in print that there are not half enough bunkers in the United States. If this is true it follows that the shot which a Scottish caddie calls "as guid as a better" is worth playing for. Manifestly the swipec with an iron from the teeing-ground of a long hole must have some hook on it if it is to merit that description. Now the "played" iron shot is always cut, and that heavily. The ball, if it swerves in the air at all, will come in a trifle from the left, and regularity rather than extraordinary length will be the characteristic virtue of its flight. This shot cannot be an adequate reply to the normal drive of a golfer good enough to enter for a championship. At present I feel convinced that only an exceptional player can with impunity go on hitting full shots in two radically different ways with the same club. For the short game it is another matter. You may

pitch, or run up, with one and the same mashie. But I shall have to see a number of other golfers, besides Mr. Travers, play fancy strokes on the teeing-grounds before I change my opinion that such tactics are unsound and in the long run unprofitable. I will give a reason for the faith which is in me. At St. Andrew's the bunkers are mostly on the right and the outward and homeward courses run parallel and close to one another. Consequently, you may hook to glory and get a lie; in passing be it noted that even if your ball is teed, you will very likely have an awkward shot from the left onto the green. Of these two facts the former seems to have made the deeper impression on the minds of youthful Fifers. In consequence the school which ought to be the most prolific in the production of fine players has for years given us few who are much good away from their native links. The typical St. Andrew's man frames for a hook with every long shot, and complains that he is cramped at Hoylake and other places where the left-hand side of the course is heavily bunkered. The

American professionals whose entry added so much interest to the competition for last year's open championship indicated by their style that they had been trained to bring the ball in from the right. If their home courses favor the cultivation of the pull, the sooner their character is altered by the opening of cross-hazards, and pot-bunkers on the left, the better for the rising generation. There may be two opinions about the relative value of the pitch and the run-up from short distances. There can be no doubt that the long game should be played in the air even when the ground is flat and clear of hazards.

I started this desultory screed with some idea of writing a summary of the most notable results which occurred in 1913, Mr. Ouimet's victory at Brookline and others. When I begin to recall the history of the past season it is brought home to me that golf, like all other pastimes, is essentially selfish. Of course it is not so bad as cricket, football, tennis and other games in which each player endeavors to foil his opponent's attempts to do what he wants with the common ball, and altruism comes into it in so far as it is the duty of each party to a match to make the conduct



Edward Ray playing his mid-iron from the tee at the short ninth hole, Baltusrol

of it as pleasant as possible to the other, which is a two hours' job — it may even take three with a sufficiency of practice-swings thrown in. Still, every honest golfer will admit that for him the really interesting events of a given period are those in which he himself played a principal part. I saw Mr. Hilton win the amateur championship at St. Andrew's, and incidentally watched that almost perfect putt which sent his ball into the bunker at the side of the 17th green, and gave Mr. Heinrich Schmidt a chance of winning a hole which he had lost three times at least. But a mental picture which causes me a far more distressful sinking under the waistbelt is that of my opponent in the first round of the tournament holing from six yards on the last green to win the match. I was present at Hoylake when J. H. Taylor played such marvellous stuff in the gale and the rain, and, my word! I can still feel the cold from which spectators of his performance suffered. But I am afraid that the details of his scores are blurred and confused in my mind compared with the recollection of the "I" which headed my card at

## GOLF ILLUSTRATED

Westward Ho! in the Kashmir Cup competition; there wasn't a really bad shot in the whole lot either. I remember well the professional foursomes at Deal, particularly the match in the semi-final in which I backed Vardon and Williamson to beat Taylor and Duncan, which they did, thanks to Vardon's pitching and Williamson's putting. But that match sinks into insignificance compared to one recently decided at Walton Heath, in which the other side did us in on the last game by laying us two stymies and holing four huge putts during the play of the last ten holes. We golfers are very like the Greek generals who fought against the Persians in the fifth century B.C. When they met to award the prizes for valor and wisdom after the invaders had been repelled, each member of the conclave was placed first by one voter, and, with one dissentient, the second prize was awarded to Themistocles. So we all, having decided, upon reasons sufficient to ourselves, who is the most considerable golfer of the year, shall unanimously place Mr. Ouimet second. His performance at Brookline is the most sensational in the history of the game. Admitting that Vardon and Ray ought never to have

let him vie with them on the second day, the spurt with which he finished his fourth round, knowing what had to be done, compels whole-hearted admiration. When on top of that he takes out the two professors, and beats them at their own game, which consists in breaking the nerves of the opposition by consistent brilliancy of execution, the language of superlative is inadequate to the occasion. I read also that he was much bothered by his caddie, who kept reminding him that he was laying on for the honour of his country against the invaders, and thus distracting his attention from the consideration of the shot immediately to be played. If Mr. Ouimet had missed a kittle approach with consequent loss of the championship, and had then brained the boy with his niblick, any jury of golfers would have released him from the court without a stain upon his character. Long years ago a competitor for the medal at Musselburgh was similarly hampered by an overzealous henchman. He was not expected to win at the outset; but he fairly excelled himself. His caddie, after every stroke, said, possibly

with a note of surprise in his tone, "Guid shot! Man, if ye play like that, ye'll win the medal." Coming to the second last hole the player had at least five strokes in hand over his nearest competitor, and, having hit a glorious drive, only had to play a reasonable iron shot to be sure of the prize, for the last hole was a very simple affair. "Tak' your iron! Tak' your iron!" croaked the apostle of the obvious in a hoarse whisper. "If ye play this shot, by God! ye've won the medal!" Maddened by the strain, his master took his iron, aimed far to the right, and drove his ball far out to sea. Then crying, "Will I win the medal now, Fiery, you devil?" he marched straight off to the railway station and took the next train back to Edinburgh. As one gets on in years a caddie becomes a

necessary evil. One cannot afford, or thinks one cannot afford (which comes to the same thing, for the chief difficulties of golf are subjective) to face the labor of carrying the bag and stooping to tee the ball. But only those players are really happy who can engage a deaf and dumb attendant, or are so supreme that not even a Scotchman dare offer his suggestions about choice of club and line of play. Apparently well-founded



Harry Vardon putting on the fourteenth green at Baltusrol

rumour tells us that Mr. Ouimet is coming over for the Amateur Championship at Sandwich in May. He will have the time of his life, if he does; because each one of his successive opponents will be entirely filled with that oathful desire for victory which is the first desideratum in an antagonist, and the vast majority of the spectators will also be hoping that he will be beaten, not so much by mistakes of his own, but because he has been out-shotted by a Britisher. It is the modern fashion to regard insularity as a fault in our national character. We make some superficial attempts to get rid of it. But scratch us and you will find us islanders still, and still convinced that there is no place like home. For example, I shall be mortally offended if the editor of this magazine alters my spelling of "honour" and "rumour" to suit what I consider to be a false and pedantic scholarship.

(Further installments of these "Random Reflections" by Mr. A. C. M. Croome will appear from time to time in the future.—The Editor.)