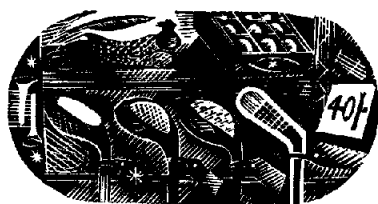


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5

CHOICE OF CLUBS

THE SELECTION OF CLUBS IS A VERY IMPORTANT step, more especially for the beginner to take; as in the latter case, the tools the novice chooses and plays with for the first time must inevitably influence his after game. We shall, therefore, take the clubs *seriatim* in this chapter, and explain, in each case, what constitutes a good club, by describing the requisite qualities; giving some advice *negatively*, by showing, *inter alia*, the bad effects arising from the adoption of clubs other than those we shall recommend.

DRIVERS: The shaft of the play club should taper well towards the head; if the wood be properly seasoned this thinness will not impair its strength. Thus a powerful spring is obtained in the lower end, just above the whipping, whilst the upper part of the shaft remains stiff. This is the true driving shaft, and none other. If a spring is allowed to creep into a shaft all the way up, the head from its great comparative weight, must twist about when the club is rapidly brought down for the stroke; and the chances are, in such a case, that the ball is hit obliquely and driven in an erratic manner off the course. Again, a perfectly stiff shaft possesses little driving power. It is a favourite vanity of some Golfers to cultivate an arched back to their driving shaft, so that it has the appearance

of being weighed down by the head. This is a grand mistake; for in making the swing, the head is certain to be influenced by this crook, and is very liable to come down obliquely, as in the case of a supple handle. If this bend is meant to flatten the *lie* of the club, the same result could be obtained at the club-maker's, without the necessity of spoiling the shaft.

The head of the play club should neither be very deep in the face nor too broad across the back. It is very common to see clubs with the first peculiarity: many indeed, firmly believe it the easiest, and assuredly the safest, club to drive with. Undoubtedly the tyro will *at first* hit his ball more certainly with a head of this description; just as at Billiards a muff can effect strokes with a mace which he would likely miss altogether were he to use the tapering cue; yet no one, in the latter case, will ever assert that he can become a good player with such an instrument. In order to strike a ball with a deep-faced play club, so as to raise it a little in the air, (the only safe way to drive), the performer must of necessity *baff* the stroke, as it is descriptively called; that is to say, must force his club-head so close to the ground that the momentum acquired by the swing is checked and greatly lessened; whereas a thin faced head, better adapted to catch the ball *below* the centre, skies it without the same danger of hitting the turf heavily in the process. Thus we prefer a thin face for scientific driving. Then if the head be over broad-backed, the Golfer loses the chance of many a full swipe out of rutty ground, or from off the declivity of a hillock, and must have recourse to his grassed driver or his spoons.

The weight of a play-club, and, indeed, of any driving club, should depend entirely on the nature of the shaft,

being heavy or light in proportion to its stiffness or flexibility. As a maxim, however, the Golfer Agile should not use much lead; it imparts little additional impetus to a ball when hit cleanly with a correctly executed swing, and is apt, moreover, to strain the shaft, and destroy the accuracy of his aim.

Regarding the lie of a club intended for effecting distance, whether it should be flat or upright, little can be said which would determine a choice in every case, as it altogether depends on the stature of a player, and consequently on the length of his club; the rule being, the longer the club, the flatter the lie. As will appear in our after remarks on style, a rather flat-headed play-club is preferable for long driving.

Finally, and this caution applies to almost every tool in the set, the leather grasp on the shaft should not be thick, but raised very little above the wood. Thus a wonderful command is obtained over the club, which is in a manner lost when the golfer has to compass an unwieldy bundle of *rimd*, more resembling in shape the handle of a cricket-bat than of a slim and graceful play-club.

The grassed driver differs but little in make from the play-club. Its head should be somewhat heavier, and the shaft stouter in proportion than in the case of the other; and the face deeper, else in the soft grass, which is the peculiar province of this club, the head is apt to pass under the ball altogether.

These are the general qualities which ought to characterise this important class of clubs. We shall now require to make some remarks on those in general use amongst Golfers Non-agile.

To judge from their usual turn-out, gentlemen of this class do not at all assent to the view we have taken of

driving clubs. Their play-clubs in general are remarkable for very long shafts, which are either very stiff, or—no *juste milieu*—very supple; in fact, as the golfing vulgate hath it, 'perfect *tangles*' ;* and, independence being the mode, the head is invariably large and ponderous. We never could satisfactorily account for this perversity of choice, putting sheer whimsicality out of the question; and we shrewdly suspect that the proprietors themselves of those gigantic tools could give no sufficing reason why they used them at all, except perhaps that they consider them as supplying the force their style of play is minus of. We have, in speculative moments, been inclined to attribute it all to the club-makers themselves; and have (perhaps unjustly), likened their sales unto the manner a smart linen draper does business, when an antiquity comes in 'from the country' to invest in the fashions, and is talked into the triumphant possession of unsaleable enormities. Now, supposing this guess to be correct, we do not blame the club-makers; for, independently of exhibiting every desire to please their customer, they always aim at turning out good 'sticks'; and, indeed, it is no object for them to keep any other. *They* know, however, better than anybody, the eccentric tastes of Golfers Non-agile; and when such a customer presents himself for a driver, the presiding genius of the club-emporium instantly 'takes his measure,' and produces accordingly some amazing tools with the peculiarities aforesaid. Our Golfer, who of course is keen for the game, flourishes the recommended weapon scientifically in the air; looks critically at the shaft; ventures an objection for the appearance of the thing which, of a certainty, is instantly over-ruled by the vendor; and,

* *Scottie* for a gigantic sea weed.

rather inclined into the belief, from his enthusiastic faith in everybody and everything connected with his favourite pastime, that it is 'just the fit' the manufacturer asserts it to be, forthwith completes the transfer by adding it to his set, and in due time, has to *invent* a new style of play to suit his purchase.

If there *must* be a difference in the clubs appertaining unto Golfers Non-agile, a necessity which, however, we by no means admit, let it be simply a difference of degree. Let their play-clubs be a little heavier, if they will, than those recommended to our other class of Golfers, but in such case let the shafts be made of corresponding stoutness to counteract the twisting influence of the extra lead. Their driving clubs may be also grassed more than is customary, to ensure elevation to a stroke, when little velocity is acquired in consequence of an imperfect swing. Thus the functions of play-club and grassed driver will be in a manner merged; and in the practice of many players of this class, we find such to be the case. As for the apparent necessity of having extra sized clubs, the idea is unreasonable and totally useless in practice.

We have made those strictures on the predilections of Golfers Non-agile, with special reference to driving-clubs, as a moment's reflection will show that none other of the set are capable of, or are, indeed, ever subjected to, material alteration of any kind. Spoons are necessarily, from their application, tough heavy tools; and nothing would be gained in any instance by departing in the slightest from their established make; on the contrary their peculiar usefulness would be materially affected. Then irons are obviously of an unchangeable character, and so simple in form, that it would puzzle the most theorising enthusiast to invent another, or at all events, a better mould. Lastly,

on the putting green, all players are on the same footing in respect of clubs; strength and a lithe organisation are no longer of superior avail, and thus the same tools are common to all. Our succeeding remarks in this chapter will be considered, therefore, as applicable to the case of every player.

SPOONS: Long Spoons are not unlike the grassed driver in their general appearance. They are, however, more stoutly made; the shaft rather shorter and not tapering so finely; and the head larger and heavier. The stiffer and tougher the shaft is, the better it is adapted for *jerking* a ball out of bad ground, (a favourite use of the long spoon which will be afterwards duly explained), without fear of being snapped in the process. The spoon or slope in the face of the head should be greater than that of the grassed driver, as elevation of the ball is of primary importance in a spoon shot.

The same remarks we have made on the lie of a play-club are applicable to the long spoon, the style of play being, as will afterwards appear, nearly identical in the use of both.

Middle, short, and baffing spoons, should have even broader heads than their elder brother; and a little additional lead is not objectionable, care being taken that no spring is allowed in consequence to influence the shaft, especially in the case of the last two. The lie of these spoons should be rather upright, as the player, on account of their stunted size, has necessarily to stand much closer to his ball than usual. The slope of the face in these clubs should be in the same degree from point to heel; thus the ball, even if not struck exactly with the centre, will receive the benefit of the spoon all the same, and will be sent in the right direction.

There are no further peculiarities which demand special notice in the spoon family.

IRONS: The shafts only of iron clubs, as may be inferred from their name, are made by the club-makers, the heads being fashioned by the blacksmith. We may remark here that this latter artizan, if he be at all an expert hand, will copy an approved iron-head very closely, and thus exactly fulfil the taste of the player who has found a model which suits him. The shafts of the bunker and driving-irons should be tough, with little or no taper in them, spring being anything but a desirable quality. The head should be deep in the face, more so at the point than the heel, as the former is the more powerful hitting part; it should also be well spooned, curving a little in the centre. For reasons which will appear in our Chapter on Style, we prefer the head of the iron not to be much rounded at the heel. Golfers generally like the lie of their heavy iron to be upright, as in a number of cases they have to stand over, or very close to, their ball—situations which would render a flat lie peculiarly inefficient.

Some bunker irons of the old make are round bottomed; the idea being that they could thus cut better into a small cup or rut; but for general work such a tool is dangerous, the chances being that the ball is not hit exactly with the centre of the head, in which case it must inevitably be topped by the point or heel passing over it, and either burying it deeper than ever in the ground or effecting its extrication at the price of a severe cut. Besides, we shall show in our Chapter on Style how the ordinary level bottomed iron may be used to eject a ball from a rut or deep cut, with quite as much precision as the antiquated 'round-head.'

The driving-iron resembles the bunker tool in its

deep face, but it is a lighter club; and being used to drive the ball out of grief some distance, should be rather flat in its lie. The slope of its face should be but little curved, so that hits off the point may be effective and straight.

The cleek again is still more lightly shafted, and, perhaps, should be a little longer than either of the other two irons; as it is frequently the only club to be depended on in making a drive out of a hazard or broken ground. The head should be very little sloped back, and without a curve from heel to point; if too much spooned it is apt to sky the ball overmuch when distance is wanted, and if curved the hitting is rendered timid and uncertain. The lie of the cleek is decidedly flat; the more so if the shaft is prolonged for driving, according to the maxim before stated. If an extra cleek, of ordinary iron length, is kept to go through the rougher work allotted to this club, a little spring may be allowed to a long driving cleek, although the less the better when used among 'sticks and stones'.

PUTTERS: We now come to a consideration of the best card in the pack, the pet weakness of the true golfer, his putter; and nothing is more difficult than to define positively what a good putter is. This hesitation is not to be wondered at, when we reflect on the strange contortions which, under cloak of the name of 'putters', figure as such on the scientific green. Some, like drawing-room monstrosities of green china, appear only valuable for their surpassing ugliness; some have a strange affinity to the gnarled root of a primeval oak; some are certainly heir-looms of a century's respectability; whilst others are alone their own parallel totally unlike as they are to any existing thing in this earth beneath, and, for ought we

know to the contrary, in the waters under the earth. All of them, however, have a peculiar excellence inherent in, and inseparable from, their ugliness aforesaid; some redeeming quality which retains them, not as pensioners, but as efficient soldiers, on the player's staff; and not a few of their number are archived in the legendary charter-house of golfing tradition by the memory of some wonderful stroke. When, indeed, a peculiarly rugged and disreputable looking putter makes its appearance on the turf, we instantly have a strong impression, almost amounting to certainty, that 'thereby hangs a tale'; and before two or three holes are accomplished, a successful '*steal*' generally gives the fortunate proprietor an opportunity of demonstrating by an incredible narration that our presentiment was prophetically correct.

There are, nevertheless, certain qualities which reflection shews, and general consent evidences, to be the requisites of a good tool. For the short game, properly so called, we would recommend a slim, tapering, but perfectly stiff, shaft; no spring should vitiate, no flexibility give the lie to, the player's nice calculation. The curving back we deprecated in the case of driving-shafts, we strenuously advocate in the putter; the grasp of the handle in close putting should be light and free from nervous influence, and as this class of clubs is made exceedingly upright, this delicate manipulation can only be accomplished without disturbing the lie of the head, by having the shaft well crooked. It will then come naturally, so to speak, into the hand without the golfer's influence over the club being affected in the slightest.

The putter head we prefer to be narrower than the common make authorizes, for then a number of strokes on a rutty putting green may be played which would be

impracticable were the head broad. In the face it should be deep and perfectly perpendicular, that is to say, at right angles with the turf when laid flat on it, and without the slightest curve from heel to point; it ought also to be well loaded with lead to avoid the necessity of exerting over much wrist-power, which might destroy or render uncertain, the player's calculation.

Some golfers affect an iron green putter, fashioned much in the same way as any of the iron clubs, but having the face, as in the case of a wooden tool, perfectly upright and without a curve. We most decidedly counsel against their use; they are most dangerous inventions to play with, being liable to catch in the grass or soft soil, and have no counterbalancing merit.

The driving putter is a longer club, should be toughly shafted, and flatter in the lie than the others of this class. In other respects the two putters sufficiently resemble each other as to preclude the necessity of separate detail.

We shall close this chapter with some remarks, which may be found useful, on the woods employed in club making.

The timber best adapted for driving shafts of all descriptions, is red hickory. This wood is peculiarly tough, yet at the same time possesses a powerful spring without the drawback of too great flexibility; qualities which give it an infinite superiority over ash, which is generally too supple and not nearly so strong as hickory. Putters require a different kind of wood for shafting; and a very hard and close grained foreign wood, called by club makers 'green-heart,' is used for the purpose. It is very inflexible and admirably fitted for those clubs. Sometimes again lance-wood is used for putting shafts, and even for the handles of driving clubs; in the latter case it is very apt to

splinter, and can never be used to jerk a ball, nor indeed ever be depended on in trying ground.

The woods used for club heads are apple-tree, thorn, beech and others of the toughest nature. The first two we have mentioned are, however, by far the most preferable being exceedingly tough and capable of resisting the hardest usage without splitting. Beech is more commonly used perhaps, in the manufacture of club-heads, than any other timber whatever; not so much on account of its superior qualities but from the scarcity of the other woods we have mentioned as suited for this purpose.

A full sized play club shaft, according to the maker's standard, is about forty-one inches; and a putter, thirty-six inches, in length. With these data, and bearing in mind the relative distinctions we have shewn between the various clubs, the novice can easily approximate lengths to the rest of the set.