



6

ON STYLE OF PLAY

OUR PREVIOUS CHAPTERS HAVE BEEN MERELY preliminary to the exposition of the art of Golfing; dealing only with the accessories and means employed in carrying out its principles, which we shall now treat of under the general heading of style.

In the practice of Golf as in Billiards, a good style or mode of playing is almost everything. How often do we see the beginner blundering away by himself at both these amusements without chart or compass—day after day repeating and confirming his errors, so as almost certainly to preclude the possibility for the future of his ever becoming a player. Again (but how seldom this!), we see a muff getting his first lessons from an M.A. of the sport, handling his club with the *aplomb* of the redoubtable 'Allan' himself—and in a few weeks completely distancing a beginner of our other sort of two or three years standing. Most earnestly do we desire, in this preamble to our dissertation on style, to impress the fact on the uninitiated reader, that mere animal strength never yet made a Golfer; that *knack*, as science is cantly phrased, and not force alone sends the reeling ball on its lengthening flight—extricates it from the tufted grass or thickset whin—and directs its devious but unerring course over the undulating putting green to the goal; and that the weakest

ON STYLE OF PLAY

arm, nerved with a knowledge of the art, is more than a match for thews and sinews, however stalwart, minus the first principles of the gentle craft.

As a familiar illustration (just as the philosopher learned swimming from the motions of a frog), we ask the novice to look at, and reflect on the style of play exhibited by little ragged urchins (those Arabs of the Links), who, their tiny arms of some six or seven years growth, with stunted abortions of clubs which might have been Heaven knows what in their palmy days, execute the most miraculous strokes. Watch the astonishing ease and skill which grace every movement, and no doubt will be afterwards entertained, but that Golfing is an art, wholly an art, and nothing but an art. Again, if a further analysis be necessary, let our tyro examine the styles affected by players of maturer years, who, from a careless acquisition of their first rudiments, or from natural causes, rely on main strength, peculiarly shaped clubs, and a gracious Providence, for any success that may attend them. He will find that their style of play is made up of segments of parabolic curves—angular sweeps—horizontal, perpendicular, and erratically curving strokes,—exciting from their very incongruity some reasonable doubts as to their efficaciousness. Attentively considering the results obtained by these extravagances, our novice will find that they are experimental failures, and that they are not so easily accomplished as the simple style of play we shall shortly set forth. Again, therefore, we assert in reference to the use of the clubs by non-agiles, what we laid down before in treating of the clubs themselves,—that no difference in kind is necessitated by the division of Golfers into two great classes, contra-distinguished as players agile and non-agile. There may be a slight difference of *degree*;

for instance, in the length of the swing or the rapidity of its execution; but these are so perfectly obvious as to require no special comment. Therefore we premise that our remarks in this chapter must be held as applicable to both classes of players.

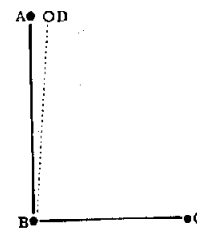
DRIVING: Long driving, if it be not the most deadly, is certainly the most dashing and fascinating part of the game; and of all others the principal difficulty of the Golfers to acquire, and his chief delight when he can manage it. We trust therefore that our succeeding hints will be closely considered and followed by the beginner; as in such event he may rely upon being soon able to send the ball on its soaring flight with certainty and ease.

Our remarks on driving as applicable to the use of the play-club, the grassed driver, and to the long and middle spoons, may be divided into three parts, viz:

- 1 Position;
- 2 Grasp of Club, and
- 3 Swing.

(1) The player should take up his position strictly in the following manner:—His feet should be moderately apart, but not so much so as to compel him to stand on tiptoe with his left foot when swinging the club; to obviate this difficulty effectually the left foot should be turned slightly inwards, thus imparting a firmness to the position; and the ball should be nearly opposite the left foot at a distance proportionate to the length of the club used, a good medium being from two and a half to three feet. It is better to err in standing too far from, than too near to, the ball, as a greater freedom of sweep may be indulged in. The true relative position of the player

to his ball will be best illustrated by a slight diagram, thus—



Let the points B and C represent the position of the feet, and let A B be at right angles to B C; then the point D is the true relative position of the ball to the Golfer, nearly opposite his left foot B.

The advantages of this posture will be demonstrated when we come to the swing.

The muscles of the shoulders, arms, and legs, should be allowed to play loosely before being knitted in the sweep of the club, and the knees should be relaxed and slightly bent.

(2) A correct manner of holding the club is of the last importance for a scientific style, and is most difficult to inculcate. The accomplished Golfer depends quite as much on the flexibility of his wrist as the sweep of his arm; both, indeed, being essential for long driving. It, therefore, follows that the club ought to be so held as to allow the free play of the wrists without effort. The practical result will be found to be, that the left hand must impart the motive power, the right hand direct it. The club, therefore, should be grasped firmly by the top

in the left hand, thumb upwards, and the back of the hand to the stroke, and laid across, taking care that the club-head lies with its natural slant on the grass, since, this hand keeping it from the slightest variation during the stroke, the club returns to the ball in the downward sweep exactly in the same position as when it was grasped. There is but little difficulty about the management of the club with this hand.

The right, which directs the club, and applies the force given by the left hand, takes hold of the shaft very loosely close to the upper hand and nails upwards, so that the club handle lies along the middle joints of the fingers with the thumb laid gently across, but not pressing the shaft. Let the Golfer, having his club grasped strictly in this manner, then try an experimental swing, allowing the shaft to play loosely through the right hand, acquiring its motion principally from the left, and he will find that the club is permitted full latitude of sweep without any strain on his wrists; that he has complete power over its movements; and that the club-head does not, in returning to the ground after the swing, alter its position.

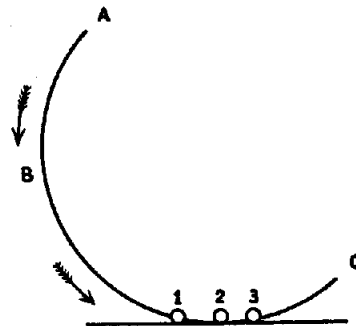
That he may thoroughly understand the advantage of this mode of grasping his driver, let the novice hold it tightly with both hands (a very common error indeed), and then try a swing; his wrists will be strained; and the club-head will return to meet the ball as fate directs, as he will be compelled in the swing to relax his right hand and allow it to accommodate itself to the motion of the club. Again, let him lay his thumbs *along* the shaft, and he will find his swing awkward, uneven, and consequently powerless. These difficulties are all of them obviated by adopting the style we have above recommended.

(3) So far the path has been smoothed for the scientific swing, which marks the Golfer's attainments in the art as surely as demivolte and caracole in the tourney used to establish the equestrian fame of the chevalier '*sans peur et sans reproche*.'

The Golfer having placed himself in proper position, and having got his driver correctly in rest, proceeds to take the aim at the ball preliminary to the swing. This is accomplished by one or two gentle oscillations of the club to and fro, off the wrist only, to ascertain the exact lie of the ball, and get the hands in working order. Sometimes these oscillations are performed over the ball, sometimes behind and on a level with it; the latter mode we prefer. Taking aim will be learnt in a single minute from seeing a crack player going through the preliminary flourish, but cannot be very lucidly explained here; we may remark, however, that some Golfers overdo it altogether, aiming for minutes consecutively before sweeping for the stroke; a custom neither useful nor ornamental.

The perfection of a driving swing lies in its approximation to three-fourths of the circumference of a circle, the same circuit being performed by the club in its upward motion as in its descent. This latter point is an advantage easily appreciated without practical experiment, as it is sufficiently obvious that in the double movement of a sweep, where the motion is continuous, the club is brought down in a circular direction more naturally when it has been swung upwards immediately previous in the same way, than if the club had been raised in an abrupt diagonal or other irregular manner. Again, that a circular is the best descending course for the club, when combined with the position we have

before inculcated, will immediately appear from a consideration of this diagram:



Let A B C represent the circular course taken by the downward sweep of the driving club; and let 1 be a ball placed opposite the right foot of the player; 2 another placed equidistant from each foot, and 3 a ball placed nearly opposite the left foot, as we have advised in our remarks on position. Then it will appear that ball No. 1 will be struck before the club has acquired the full momentum of the swing, and will besides either be topped and buried in the turf, or driven feebly, the grass being cut in the process. Ball No. 2 will be hit somewhat better, but still not cleanly, and receiving no elevating impetus, will be driven low along the course. This position, we may remark, is a favourite one among Golfers Non-agile, and necessitates the frequent use of the grassed driver we have already commented on, that the ball may be lofted in the stroke. But ball No. 3 will be struck by the club when beginning to ascend, and consequently at the instant of its having acquired its greatest momentum; this ball therefore receives not only a powerful blow, but also from

the club face turning slightly upwards, receives an ascending motion, without the slightest danger of the turf being lacerated in the process.

Having demonstrated thus far the advantages of this swing, we shall now show how it is to be accomplished.

The arms should be held loosely, out from the body, and slightly squared. The legs and the body generally should follow, as it were, the club; that is to say, should yield gently to its motion. The left foot especially should not be fixed immoveably on the turf, but should lift slightly to the swing so as not to strain the leg. The eye, from the moment of taking aim till the stroke is accomplished, should never be taken off the ball. This last point is the chief maxim in golfing. Let the eye wander never so slightly during the swing, and down comes the erring club aimless on the turf, or in some equally false direction.

The club is then swung in a wide circle back from the ball and round the shoulder as far as the left arm can stretch, without, however, causing the shaft to touch the back. This upward stroke must be done in a deliberate manner. Then, without the slightest check in the swing, the club must be returned with increasing velocity in its downward circuit, the *palm* of the right hand pressing the handle to accelerate the motion. Care should be taken not to diminish the rapidity of the swing on striking the ball; at first, indeed, the right hand should relinquish its grasp of the club rather than check the force of the stroke.

Struck in this manner a ball must receive the greatest momentum, with ease and certainty to the player. We would again impress upon the beginner the great importance of a correctly executed swing. This once acquired, golfing becomes truly delightful; for as we

said before, long driving is the fascinating part of the game. At first, the novice may practise the swing without a ball, by aiming at a particular spot on the turf; the sharp *chirrup* of the grass will at once tell the accuracy of his stroke; and thus his wrist will be rendered flexible and strong, whilst a correct style will be more rapidly acquired.

The grassed driver, long, and middle spoons, as before stated, being used for effecting considerable distance, are played with much in the same style. If less distance be required in handling any of these tools than could be accomplished by the same club if necessary, it is swung in either of two ways; with a full swing of diminished velocity, or with a quick half sweep which is performed almost entirely off the wrist. These uses will come quite naturally to the beginner, after a very short practical experience.

Although it is very desirable to strike the ball cleanly for any stroke, and with any club, still it may happen that the lie of the ball will not allow such a correct style of stroke. It very often occurs that a ball gets hidden or partially imbedded in heather, a tuft of grass, a yielding rut, cup, or young whin—situations of distress which would intercept and destroy the swing of a regular driving swipe, and very probably splinter the shaft. These predicaments have occasioned a certain style of play, technically called 'Jerking.' This can only be done with tough-shafted clubs, such as the grassed driver, long or middle spoons. A jerking stroke is managed by *hitting the obstacle* as close *behind* the ball as possible, and well below its centre, with a quick half swing, a good deal off the wrist. The player must allow his stroke to be stopped immediately on striking the intercepting grass, whin, or

whatever obstacle it may be; should he attempt to make his club follow through it, as on open ground, the probable consequence would be that the shaft would be shivered, while no additional impetus is given to the ball. This jerking game is exceedingly effective when swiping in the wind's eye, but must only be attempted with a strong and rather heavy headed tool. Some Golfers jerk every stroke through the green, indifferent whether their ball lies in a cup or on a beautiful *plateau*; but we need scarcely say that such a system is quite illegitimate, and very destructive to the green.

We shall now consider the style of handling those remaining clubs of the set which not being primarily intended for long distances, are not wielded with a driving swing.

The short spoon is played a great deal off the wrist, with a quick half or three quarter swing, and is so nearly allied in its uses to the middle spoon that we need not further particularize. The swing of the baffing spoon, however, differs still more materially from what we have described as adapted for driving; a difference resulting from the peculiar province of this club, viz., to sky a ball without causing it to go any distance. The Golfer must, on account of its shortness, stoop considerably to the stroke, which is done by a short, quick, half sweep entirely off the wrist. The ball must not be hit clean; the club-head on the contrary must hit or *baff* the ground immediately behind the ball, thus causing elevation without any fear of distance. If the player take up his position properly the grass is not injured by a baffing stroke, being struck with the flat of the head, not with the bone.

Irons are not quite the unscientific tools they are supposed to be by those who do daily detriment to the course

with them; with regard to *their* uses also, we repeat that skill is of far more avail than strength; in fact the latter quality is only specially useful in a peculiarly obdurate whin or in the bottomless pit of a bunker. In these two predicaments the heavy iron must be used unavoidably in manner of a pick-axe; the mere extrication of the ball, and not distance being the object, in view. This iron in such cases is grasped firmly with both hands, swung diagonally upwards, and brought down *straight* in the same direction, *heel first*, close behind the ball, but not touching it. This kind of stroke, especially in the elastic sand of a bunker, will make the ball fly up vertically in the air; and, if neatly executed, will overcome abrupt faces, which otherwise would inevitably kill all chances of the hole. This jerking style of using the heavy iron, bringing it down heel first behind the ball, is also very useful when the ball chances to lie in a rut or small cup, where a spoon stroke could not extricate it.

The driving iron, when used for distance, is handled and swung exactly as a short spoon, with a quick half swing principally off the wrist. Some players shun the use of this iron in many cases where it would be specially useful, on the plea of its difficulty to play with; but it will be found that such Golfers have invariably a bad style of using this tool, the general mistake being a *full swing*, which on account of the weight of the head and its sharp edge renders the hitting feeble and uncertain. When this iron is used in very rough ground, our remarks on the style of play with the heavy iron apply equally to it.

The cleek or click is ubiquitously useful, and for almost every kind of stroke. It is therefore difficult, and, indeed, almost unnecessary to detail the various modes in which it should be handled; it is enough to refer the reader to our

previous remarks on this class of clubs. Before quitting the subject of irons, one circumstance is deserving of attention. If the player wish to decrease the ratio of elevation when using any one of the iron family, he has merely to stand with the ball towards his *right* foot rather than towards his left; a position which neutralizes the effect of the spoon in the face of the club. This, however, should only be attempted by the novice when the use of an iron, swung off the wrist, has become somewhat familiar to him, and when he can rely sufficiently on the steadiness of his play to experimentalize. The danger of such a stroke, as the reader will perceive from a consideration of our last diagram, arises from its jerking nature which makes the iron head liable to catch in the turf. We would suggest deferentially, from our wish to preserve the golfing ground from unnecessary harm, that the beginner wishing to acquire this peculiar use of the iron should do so when his ball is off the course.

PUTTING: We now take the putter in hand,—the deadliest weapon in the gentle fray. On the putting green the position of the hands is the same as in driving, with this reservation, that the putter is grasped very delicately: the position of the ball with respect to the player is, on the contrary, entirely different. The golfer should stand with his ball opposite the right foot, his knees well bent to suit the length of the shaft, the toes of his left foot turned out, and his weight resting on his right. His face, in this posture, being half turned towards the hole, he has, even in the act of striking, a view of the line of his put, and a certain facility is besides gained in the calculation of distance.

Putting should be done entirely off the wrist; the left hand merely holding the club and giving it the pendulum-

like motion required,—the right directing it. To put with the arms, as if they were part and parcel of the club, (a style we have nevertheless heard eulogised and defended,) is an awkward and faltering system. A putting stroke should be accomplished with a sharp, decided hit, not with a slovenly, hesitating shove. Beyond slightly pressing the ground behind the ball to ascertain its exact lie, there should be no aim taken with the putter, as it is wholly unnecessary.

With respect to the driving putter, when used to drive up the quarter shot to the hole, the same remarks apply. The position may be strengthened when a good deal of impetus is required, by the Golfer standing to his ball placed equidistant from either foot. This lessens the chance of missing the ball or lacerating the turf which the additional force of the half swing might occasion were the ball opposite the right foot. When employed to drive against the wind, a use we noticed in a former chapter, the driving putter is used much in the same way as in sending a half stroke up to the green.

These hints on the ways and means of handling a set of clubs, are all that are required to put the novice on the right track to compass the mysteries of the art. Details and special points we have in general avoided as embarrassing to the uninitiated, and will treat of them in our next chapter, which, in the main, is supposed to be read after the beginner has had some little experience. In conclusion, we would reiterate, cultivate style—play correctly and boldly,—if you do, success is certain.