

DRIVING

III.

THE PRACTICE AND PHILOSOPHY OF SIR WALTER SIMPSON.

This is the third and last of the three sections in which the late Sir Walter Simpson discusses the all-important subject of driving. He does it characteristically and thoroughly. Principles and methods, as previously suggested, have changed somewhat since the days when the "Bart" produced his famous work on "The Art of Golf;" but when the reader has made the necessary allowance for this circumstance he will find that most of the precepts have as much value to-day as ever they had, and some appear, after such a lapse of time, to be almost original!

IT WOULD BE profitless to describe more of the endless twists and twiddles with wrists and elbows which golfers acquire, seeking for a long swing in the wrong way, which is the same thing as seeking for it at all. Hundreds of balls are daily "foozled" which would be struck but for these little spasms after the club has reached its proper goal. One sees them all over the links. They remind us sometimes of hairs which have grown too long and split at the ends; sometimes they suggest blind men groping their way.

It must strike any one who thinks of it, as curious that so many should wander so far from the main road in search of a swing. One reason is, as already indicated, that swings are among the things which, according to Longfellow, "are not what they seem." Hence the errors of imitators. The professional appears to wind his club round his back. It is not so. It is the club which winds round him, not because he wishes it to do so, but because his muscles, though knit, have their natural elasticity. The player is in the centre of a circle, at a point in the circumference of which is the ball. The more nearly his club head describes a perfect segment whilst driving, the better. But it is not possible to make a true circle swiftly with a springy wire, which the player is, or a springy club shaft, if you will. He is even a bad shaft, weak in some

places—for example, at the wrists. Let a player look upon his left arm as a part of a club. He can see at once that it will not lengthen his driving to have a break in it somewhere. He might as well expect to lengthen his swing by putting joints in the actual wooden shaft, strengthened (say) with strong india-rubber bands, spliced over them, to imitate human joints. In other words, every joint of the fine driver's left arm below the shoulder is as taut as the extensor muscles (I rather think these are the ones) keep it without undue attention to the point. I have said the left arm. I should say nothing about the right, were it not that I might be supposed to mean that it too was to be treated as part of the shaft, and that I was advocating that stiff dunch from the shoulder with arms not naturally bent but rigidly straight, by which many late beginners remove their ball from the tee. In true driving, the right arm has to accommodate itself in the swing back. It is loose and obedient. Its elbow joint has to flex, and it is not until it is brought back to within a foot of the ball that it joins with the other in the work of driving—not till after impact that it becomes master, the other slave.

Fine players are not only apt to lead others astray by appearing, to the superficial observer, loose and flexible in every joint, but knotless contortionists, who are really so, look stiff and

ponderous. Learners are thus doubly impressed with the idea that a free and a flabby swing are one and the same thing. Nor is it easy for them to be disabused of their error. No man can see himself strike, and thus learn that the swing he has adopted, the flexibility he feels, is visible not as ease but as awkwardness. Nor is there much chance of finding out his errors by comparing his sensations with those of good players, who, as a rule, pay no attention to such matters. Curiously enough, if pressed to say something, it will often be (I have got this answer from many professionals), "My longest balls are when I feel I've got my wrists into it." This misleads the tyro terribly, although it is true. The professional gets this sensation from a full, taut, india-rubbery swing. It is the result of his determination to get back to the ball as soon as possible. The other takes it to mean that he ought to get as far from it as he can by allowing the club to master his wrists. One day an adversary sought my praise for the way in which he was driving with his iron. I said (which was apparent), "You have a fuller swing with it than with the play club." "You mean the opposite," he answered. I repeated my commentary, and he rejoined, "That is curious. I've been off my iron play, and am getting into it again by taking a half swing." But I was right, which he admitted after experimenting in the matter. In driving from the tee this player had a long—a very long—swing, if by that is meant the distance the club head meandered from the ball before coming back to it. In addressing, his arms, instead of having the natural bend, were straight as bars. They took the club a long way off, flexion of the left elbow took it further, flexion of the wrists another foot. By stretch-

ing, over-reaching, relaxing, his journey was the longest possible; but travelling far and swinging long are different matters. With his iron he described a true segment of a circle, every muscle as stiff and taut all the time as when the ball was struck.

In short, then, a good swing seems to the onlooker swift and flexible; but if the player feels supple, he exhibits an awkward, stiff, straggling movement. The player ought to be, in his own hands, a stiff bow which he bends and shoots with. Of course, by practice, he learns to bend this bow with ease, and to shoot with accuracy. But when he goes off his driving the remedy is not to lengthen and loosen the string, but rather to tighten and shorten it.

Hitherto I have spoken chiefly of errors in swinging developed in the region between the shoulders and the point of the club. Those that can be made with the rest of the body are of a simpler nature, because, in regard to them, swings for the most part are what they seem. It is without dispute that the shoulder joints are to be used with perfect freedom and flexibility. If a man is reaching too far with them he does not need to be told. He feels his neck sink into his body. He knows that the more fully his trunk oscillates on its supports the better. He knows that his position once taken, his body ought not to sway to the right, nor to the left, forward nor backward. Not that he can count upon its never doing so. We often get into tricks of falling backwards, swaying away to the right, etc., but we are conscious of them. Every one knows that whether he play with straight or bent knees, they must remain straight or bent throughout the shot. The necessity for standing firm on the feet, however, although admitted, is not universally appreciated.

There is a prevalent disposition so to plant them as to make sure that the left heel will come away from the ground, as if this were of as much importance as a firm foundation. Indeed, I am inclined to think that it is of none at all. That the heel of good players does come away from the ground, there is no doubt; but, in the case of many of the best, how reluctantly!—and merely as if torn from it by the force of the swing. As I have said before, most fine players (I might say all who began young) have no theory, and can give but scant advice. One of the very best, when pressed for answer as to a certain peculiarity in his stance, said, "Do I stand so? I didn't know, (said as if it meant, "I don't care"). The only thing to think about is planting your feet in the ground—it doesn't matter where, so long as they are glued down." I said, "But your heel leaves the ground when you swing." "Does it? Are you sure? I don't think so."

A chapter on *Swing* would be incomplete without some reference to the maxim "Slow back." Every one acknowledges and feels that it is a sound one; but many fail to put it in practice, particularly those who have a slow ponderous style. This seems to be a contradiction in terms, but it is true nevertheless. The fact is, "slow back" is not an accurate term for what is meant. Those learning the game get puzzled. The professional does not appear to practise what he preaches. He seems to swing, and does swing, swiftly. What is really demanded by "slow back" is not absolute but relative slowness. If we compare the true swing to an india-rubber band, "slow back" means that it is to be stretched more slowly than it will recoil. By practice, men learn to set the spring quickly, and the rate is of no importance provided there be noth-

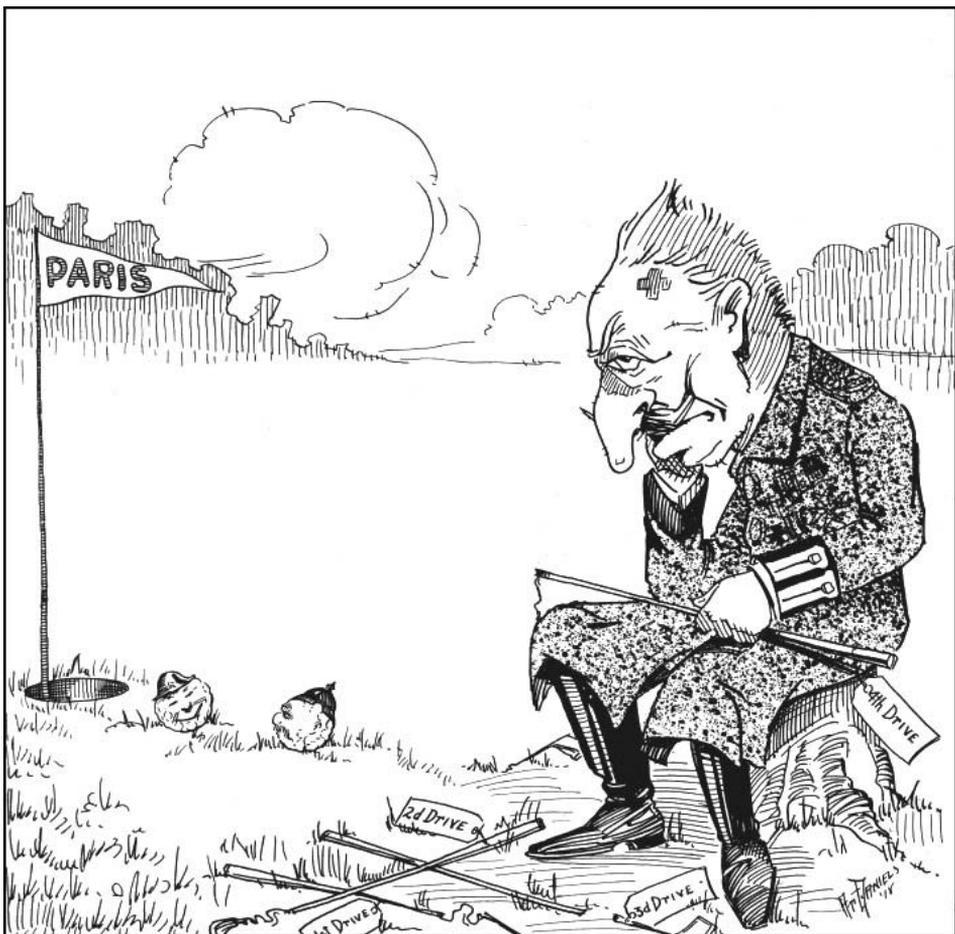
ing approaching to a jerk or wrench back. You must not be able to hear the club swish through the air as on the return journey. "Stiff back," "taut back," or "sway back," would be a more explicit phrase. Whatever it be called, the thing itself is a *sine qua non* of fine driving. When a player is merely pushing his hands round his neck instead of swinging, however slowly, and twitching them forward again, his caddy will be tempted to tell him he is too quick back, as much as if he is jerking it up round his shoulder. A good player who has temporarily fallen into any form of (to invent an ugly word) unpendulumness, on being warned that he is too quick back, will understand that he is not tightening all the muscles properly used in swinging equally—that he is merely flopping at the ball with his arms. A bad player, who has never learned what a true swing is, may only be made worse with "slow back." It may induce him to lift the club up softly and gingerly, with the kind of slowness necessary to grab a fly on his right ear, but which has nothing to do with driving a ball. A true swing is not like flashing a sword through the air, but as if forcing it through a strongly resisting medium.

Whilst the minds of golfers are, for the most part, unduly exercised about their swing before impact, tricks, jerks, and false curves in the other segment of their circle are scarcely thought about or observed. We wonder that A., with a short, spasmodic twiddle, should drive further and more steadily than B., who gets credit for quite a professional style. But if we look (not a natural thing to do, because the eyes instinctively wink when club and ball click together), B. will be seen "to follow," whilst A. pulls up short. Of the two evils,

crampedness after striking is perhaps more fatal than before it, or rather it would be more accurate to say that no one is contented to swing short back as many habitually do forward.

It is unnecessary to enlarge upon this part of the swing. What has been already said applies equally to both halves of it. The second part ought to be, as far as possible, a reflection of the first. In the case of good players who stand square to the ball, it is so in every respect, being a little shorter or longer proportionately according as a man stands "in front" or "open."

Falling in, falling back, etc., are as apt to occur in one half as in the other. Swaying the whole body forward after the ball is as likely to cripple driving as swaying away from it when taking the club back. It is not so common to let the right heel leave the ground too much at the end of a stroke, as it is to rise too much on the left toe. Nor do men need to keep a tight hold of themselves lest the club wander away by itself in search of a long swing. Loose-jointedness here rather betrays itself by a check a foot past the tee and a finishing twitch with the wrists.



STYMIED AGAIN.