

TWO RECENT BOOKS

THE BALL AND THE BOOK

Golf Books

Fifty years ago, remarks Mr. A. R. Crawley, author of an entertaining book just published by Methuen & Co., entitled "The Book of the Ball," the story of ball games could have been written in one volume by one man. To-day it would require an encyclopedia. Certainly, as regards golf, at least, the available literature less than twenty years ago was exceedingly scant. To-day in the words of the well-worn hyperbole, they are as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. Just twenty-four years ago the Badminton book, edited and chiefly written by Horace G. Hutchinson, appeared. It set the style of good-humored writing about the game which, fortunately, has had many imitators. In spite of several heresies, as the

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majority would now term them, such as the advocacy of an exalted right elbow at the top of the swing, and the recommendation that the driver be allowed to drop into the web of the thumb at the same point, the book remains a valuable one for its clear elucidation of general principles.

In 1887 appeared the *Art of Golf*, by Sir Walter Simpson, the friend of R. L. Stevenson, admirable also for its genial wit and facile style, but failing to reveal any definite theory of the game, and rather affecting to treat various strokes (a trick which the author of the Badminton Book caught and exaggerated) as matters of mystery.

There was, later, Willie Park's excellent manual, copies of which were very rare in America. I knew of only one, passed from hand to hand with injunctions what to do in case of fire over night.

Nowadays the books on Golf are legion, and yet who will say there are too many. The inevitable fault of most is that each fails to recognize the undoubted fact that there is more than one way to play. To read Vardon one would suppose there is only one sound way to grip the club and yet this would be to put aside the results achieved by Aleck Herd, Messrs. Hilton, Blackwell and Jerome Travers to name no others. Nor will Vardon or Duncan admit any virtue in the flat swing notwithstanding the shining example of J. H. Taylor. Braid and Taylor are perhaps a little more liberal than their co-triumvir but even they fail to make it clear that there is room for variety in such matters as swings, stances and grips. An interesting book, indeed, would be a *Golf Variorum*, compiled from the great masters showing how they sometimes differ and thus giving more variety of choice to the neophyte.

Why Golf Soothes

"What is it that makes the action of knocking a little white ball with a crooked stick so soothing to the nerves of the middle-aged clerk or sugar-broker?" Such is the question put by Dr. Gilbert Slater as quoted by Mr. A. R. Crawley in *The Book of the Ball*. And the worthy doctor, after remarking that no one has ever given answer to the question, proceeds to say that the word "club" gives us a clue to the proper response. The club of the Fiji savage and the club of the golfer differ in appearance only, not essence. "The little white ball represents nothing less than the skull of your enemy. When you smite it with brassy or cleek, your nerves thrill to the very stimulus which maddened uncounted generations of your ancestors through ages of paleolithic savagery in tribal warfare." The pleasure of cracking heads at Donnybrook Fairs and such places is, according to this theory, precisely similar to the pleasure of a sweet impact at Golf.

Psychological

A Lawn Tennis player, says Mr. Crawley, was once winning a match hands down at Wimbledon,

when a friend passed by, and remarked, "Well Played!" The player heard the sound but did not catch the words: "Eh! What? What?" he asked. "I said—Well Played!" "What? I can't hear what you say." The man's concentration was ruined, and he lost the match he had nearly won.

The complicated movements of a full swing are automatically performed when successful. "We fail," says James, the psychologist, "whenever we are preoccupied with the way in which the movement will feel. We pitch or catch the better, the more exclusively optical our consciousness is. Keep your eye on the place aimed at and your hand will fetch it—think of your hand and you will miss."

Why Putting Is Difficult.

Mr. Crawley lets us into the secret. "The Golf ball is not heavy enough for perfect progression on the turf. It just lacks that fraction of additional weight which would allow it to overcome its own resilience and that of the turf."

We have all noticed that sometimes the turf grips the ball effectively; but when the greens are fiery the gripping by the turf is of the slightest and putting becomes the most difficult of operations. The delicate touch required in putting is, then, a muscular or sensory appreciation of three things, viz: the weight of the ball, the requisite force for its propulsion, the degree of turf friction. This sensory appreciation is complicated, however, by the kind of swing employed and the swings that are possible are two in number; in the one the left wrist bends; this is the method of C. B. Macfarlane of recent sandwich fame; in the other the wrist turns, giving the club a slightly rearward action.

Golf And Other Games

Golf and Billiards have a certain refinement that makes them superior to all other games in tone and sentiment. Why is this? It is because the contestants are not face to face in battle fashion. As between the two games golf has the advantage because the player's ball is never interfered with. Even the stymie is felt to be foreign to the true spirit of Golf. The stymie indeed is the one blot and regret about Golf. No golfer ever lays one without secret compunction. He may appease his soul by the maxim *lex, sed lex dura*, but his sense of justice does not conform; he apologizes if he wins because of it he feels guilty.

Golf is the politest of games. The play, as Mr. John L. Low has pointed out, is in parallel not opposed lines. It is the game of the superman or will be when he arrives; for he will regard the interferences and oppositions of other games as altogether too reminiscent of the sanguinary conflicts and combats from which they have been evolved. All other games are played in silence; at least there is no rational conversation. What footballers or baseballers say to each other in their contests for primacy is not usually

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reported. In Golf you may discuss anything between strokes and while waiting on the tee, and in what other game do opponents, the match won and lost, fraternize and consort as in Golf—fighting all their battles o'er again? Even the professional and the caddie, it has been remarked, acquires a gentleness of manner, a self-control, a consideration for opponents, a habit of appreciation of others that few other

lock. The more impartial then will be our opinion of the book before us.

It is well worth reading for at least two points that we select from the one hundred and twenty-five pages of clearly written golfing matter; one of these being a bit of flat heterodoxy; the other, in essence, a somewhat obscure but highly important fact of golfing science.



By courtesy of Worcester Gazette

EX-PRESIDENT TAFT MAKING HIS ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW COURSE AND CLUB HOUSE OF THE WORCESTER COUNTRY CLUB

games, if any, can parallel. But, as golfers should add modesty to their other virtues we have perhaps said enough in praise of ourselves and the game.

COMMON SENSE GOLF

By CHARLES CLARKE, McBride, Nast & Company, N.Y., 1914

This book is ostensibly written for the vast majority of golfers who constitute what the writer calls "The Second Division," players whose handicaps range from thirteen to twenty-four, but are not without ambition to increase their skill.

The author is an English professional vouched for by Mr. Mottram Gilbert of Matlock. We may be pardoned at this cis-Atlantic distance for never having heard of Charles Clarke, Mr. Gilbert or even of Mat-

The heresy is that, for putts of six feet and under we should *look at the hole and not at the ball*. "Personally," says Clarke, "I have improved my holing out enormously since adopting this method, and there are days when I can scarcely miss a two-yard putt." How long, we wonder, has Clarke been putting after this fashion! He does not say. The method may work marvels for a time. In the next edition of his book (and we hope there will be more than one) perhaps Clarke will confess that he has gone back to the old way of keeping his eye on the ball and not on the hole.

The second point to which we wish to refer is of value. Clarke thinks that at the impact the hands and arms should have the feel of being held back

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so as to let the club-head go through first. In particular he affirms that the left hand must be held back to enable the right hand to come in effectively.

This is the old and still not fully cleared-up question of the snap of the wrists. Vardon, with great authority, denies any special function to the wrists. Braid, equally great, is equally positive that they have something to do in the way of flick or snap—a smaller swing within the larger sweep of the arms. Aleck Smith was, we think, the first to recommend holding the left arm back in his *Lessons on Golf* but he has not given us the reason why. I. H. Taylor is silent but photography would seem to show that he agrees with Aleck Smith in practice.

It is an undoubted fact that letting the ball have

it with the back of the left hand, hitting with the left in fact and guiding with the right, promotes the going-through of the club-head and a concentrated snap at the impact. Obviously there is a point in the down-swing when the club-head passes the hands. This point is at or instantaneously before the impact. The wrists twist, so as to accommodate the smaller circumference made by the hands to the bigger circumference of the club-head. If the hands try to keep pace and speed with the club-head only, there is no snap; the swing is lifeless. This is the point which Clarke strives to elucidate and we really think that his little book will help to make clearer the mystery of the flick or snap about which so much has been said and written.

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