

BRAID ABOUT HIS IRONS

The old champion, James Braid, one of the most powerful iron players who have ever played the game, explains the average man's commonest faults and the way to remedy them.

THE CHIEF MISTAKES—all of them really serious—that are made by players who have had some seasons of golf, but are still evidently and knowingly weaker than they should be in the short game, may be stated.

They play to the full value of the club, and make swings that are too long, being very much like those swings made with wooden clubs. Their swings are nearly always full ones, and they never take the care to cultivate anything else. A full swing should seldom be made with any iron club, for when it is made that necessary control over direction is lost. Of course we often speak of "a full iron" and "a full mashie," but in doing so we mean really a full swing for an iron and a full swing for a mashie, which I would set down as being a three-quarter swing in relation to that for the drive. This is to say, that a three-quarter swing should generally be the limit for any iron club, and if there is a doubt about its giving enough length with the club that has been taken, that club should be exchanged for the next one more powerful.

So, in this sense, I do never believe in playing to the full value of the club; but, on the other hand, I think it is quite essential that a player should cultivate not only three-quarter swings, but what are to many the more difficult half-swings.

He cannot do this properly until he abandons at least two other faults with which a far too large proportion of golfers grow up in their iron play. As the swing is shorter, and as di-

rection means so much and length so little, it is necessary that the swing, such as it is, should be, as it were, less free and loose and more compact. For all iron shots there should be less twist of the body, less bending at the knee, and particularly less pivoting on the side of the foot. A large proportion of players of considerable experience seem to think that the pivoting is essential to a shot of any kind that is longer than a putt, and that accordingly it is the proper thing to pivot. But their object should be to pivot as little as possible in iron play, and to do their utmost to keep their left foot steady the whole way through. Of course, for, say, a three-quarter swing with an iron, it is necessary to release it considerably while the backward movement is in progress, but for shorter shots it should always be the endeavor to keep the heel as low down as possible. This in itself does a great deal towards steadying the body and making the player concentrate himself on direction almost unconsciously; it tends to make the shots come chiefly from the arm and wrist, where what we may call direction shots ought to come from, and not from the shoulders and the body.

The other point of error is in the speed of the swing. Generally speaking, iron shots, and particularly the shorter iron shots, are played too quickly, and there is far too much hurry at the turning point of the swing. This is obviously a fault which was created when the player was learning to drive, being then most seriously told that there must not be

the slightest suspicion of pause at the top of his swing, or he might just as well not have swung his club backwards at all. As in so many other details, his swing with his irons then became modelled on his driving swing.

Anything in the nature of a pause at the top of the swing for a full drive kills all the force of the stroke; but in iron play it is not the same. It is necessary that there should be the most careful deliberation; and therefore one is almost inclined to say that the slower the stroke is, until the club is actually coming on to the ball, the better, and I certainly believe in there being so much of a pause at the top of the swing as the player can at all events feel and be conscious of, even though it cannot be seen, and the shorter the stroke that has to be made, the greater should be this pause within reason, as one might add.

To some people it may seem very wrong thus to counsel the stoppage of the club at any point from the time that it is started on the backward swing until it has finished the follow through; but I am quite certain that this one little hint is often sufficient to convert bad iron players into something very much better. The effect of the pause is to steady the player, to enable him to adjust strength and direction to the utmost nicety, and to come to a clearer understanding with himself as to how the stroke is going to be finished, than he would otherwise be able to do, for in the case of all iron shots from the full three-quarter iron to the smallest chip with a mashie or run-up from just off the green, it is most absolutely necessary that the finish should be quite right, the character of the shot being generally entirely decided by the finish.

Now, to come down from the gen-

eral to the particular, the player needs to realize what iron shots he has at his disposal for all the different distances and positions with which he may be confronted in the area that lies between the putting green and 150 yards from it. It is within this 150 yards' range that the real iron play begins. Then it should be quite as much a question as to what kind of shot to play as what club to use, for it is too often not realised on these occasions that there are two distinct types of shot that may be employed on most of them, particularly when the range is short, and that there are even considerable variations in these types. You have the pitch-and-run in one class, and the run-up in the other.

The former may be sub-divided into many different kinds, from the pitch with so much stop on it that there is practically no run, to the pitch-and-run in which a fairly long run-up to the hole is a feature of the shot. The run-up is capable of many variations, even though all of them are subject to the same principle and the same style of play. And then, of course, there is the full three-quarter shot with the iron, which, to some extent, is in the nature of a pitch-and-run without any definite regulation of either.

What the player needs to realise more than he does is that there is not, and never can be, anything that is in the least orthodox in the short play to the hole. On a good course, one may play often without having two approach shots that are in all respects exactly alike. The approaching game is particularly one in which the player is left entirely to himself, and is called upon to exercise his powers of thought and judgment; and while

the shots of the short game need most careful execution, and are in many respects most difficult, it is hardly too much to say that most players of a little experience lose more through their faults of choice of shot, mere errors of judgment, than they do in any other way.

I think that perhaps the course architects of a past generation were to some extent responsible for so many golfers regarding the approach play as a rule-of-thumb sort of business, since so many courses were made on a fixed plan in which there was a long bank kind of bunker immediately in front of the putting green, and it was the golfer's business, as a rule, to do a pitch shot over this bunker. Generally speaking, this was not good golf, and indicated an entirely wrong idea of the possibilities of the game on the part of those responsible for such course construction. Practically these people disregarded the run-up as a shot in golf, treated it with contempt, and would not permit it to be played; while on the other hand, they called for pitching at every hole. Time has proved the mistake of this view, for to-day these hazards enjoy little of their old popularity, while all are agreed that the run-up is one of the prettiest shots in the short game, calling for the most perfect judgment and skill, and by which the greatest results can be achieved.

It is the duty of most golfers, therefore, to revise their views in regard to this stroke if they have not already done so, and cultivate it most thoroughly, not regarding it merely as a kind of big putt which may be done almost anyhow, so long as the ball is run along the turf. The run-up is not merely a shot to play when one is on the edge of the putting

green. It is most effective at distances of 50 to 60 yards right up to 100 yards, and even sometimes beyond that, the ball being given a little lift up to begin with to help it on its way. There are times, of course, when the ball must be pitched, and the golfer who cannot pitch well is in a very difficult position; but I would lay it down that whenever circumstances permit, it generally pays best to approach the hole with a low shot. This is particularly the case when there is a wind. Some people believe that when the ground up to the putting green is bumpy the run-up is too dangerous a shot to play, and that the ball should be pitched to get it clear of most of the bumps. If the green is so big that the ball may be pitched right on to it there may be some value in this view; but it seldom happens that the golfer is favoured to this extent; and if it is a case of pitching on the bumpy ground short of the green, and of running up over much of it, I think that generally the running-up shot is decidedly the one to play and the safer. It may be true that if the ball is pitched it may have only a single one of the bumps to encounter; but it has to be remembered that with the ball falling down so vertically, it may, and very often does, kick clean away at right angles on alighting, especially if the turf is hard; or, on the other hand, is impelled forward or stopped almost dead, according as to whether it pitches on a slope forward or against one. Therefore there can be no certainty in such a shot, and the experienced golfer who plays it must often feel that he is taking his life in his hands and placing an enormous trust in his good fortune. Against this there is this to be said for the run-up, that though the di-

rection of the ball may be affected by the bumps, the extent is generally quite small, and to all intents and purposes may be disregarded. And again, when the ground up to the green is quite flat and smooth, what can there be more reliable than the run-up?

Plateau greens are constantly an anxiety to the player who is approaching them, and he is frequently in a great state of doubt as to what is the safest shot to play. To my mind there can be no question as to which is the right one, unless the green is in quite a soft state. Considerable judgment may be necessary in estimating the effect of the bank on the run of the ball, and particularly what change it will make in its direction if the bank is being taken at an angle, but nevertheless the run-up is generally the best shot in the circumstances. To attempt to pitch on to a plateau is nearly always fatal, unless the player is aided by luck to a far greater extent than he has any right to expect to be. To take cases in point, the twelfth, the "long-hole-in", and the seventeenth at St. Andrews, where the greens are all plateaus, it is very much better to approach with a low run, if the player is within easy distance, than it is to pitch. More disasters have been caused by attempts to pitch on to the seventeenth when the course has been hard, probably than at any other hole anywhere. Of course if the green is really soft, so that from any kind of a lofted shot the ball can be depended upon not to run much, a pitch-shot may be played. A hint that it will be useful to remember when playing run-up shots to plateau greens, is that the bank on the edge of the green is generally softer than the level part of

the course, and that in Britain if the bank faces the southwest it holds more moisture than any other and will be softer still. Things of this kind make a difference.

If a pitch-shot has "to be played, why is the mashie so generally regarded as the only club with which to make it? The cardinal feature of a good pitch shot is the control that is exercised over the ball immediately on alighting, and the amount of stop that



MR. REGINALD M. LEWIS and his fiance, Miss Claire Bird, of New York, at Palm Beach. Mr. Lewis was Connecticut State champion in 1916 and runner-up in the recent South Florida championship. (Photo Int. Film Service.)

can be placed on it. Very frequently when the pitching is at very short range, the niblick is superior to the mashie for the purpose in hand; yet, though the virtues of this club have been preached by many players of the

highest class, the golfer who employs it for the purpose is often regarded as being somewhat eccentric, and as departing from the proper principles of play. I would not recommend the niblick for pitching at a longer range than forty yards, but for that and

under it is certainly a most effective club, for by its means the player can afford to pitch his ball almost right up to the pin with the comfortable assurance that it will stop almost dead on reaching the turf.

(To be Continued)

