

BRAID ABOUT THE IRONS.

This is the Second and Concluding part of a very practical article in which the old champion, James Braid, one of the most powerful Iron Players who have ever played the game, gives some valuable advice on technical points in connection with the Short Game.

NOW I WILL indicate some of the points to which the average player needs to give more particular attention than he does in the making of particular shots with particular clubs.

Take, to begin with, the fullest shot that should be made with the iron, a three-quarter shot from a range of, say, 150 yards, in normal circumstances of wind and weather. If much wind is against the player the stroke will probably need to be made with a cleek, but if it is at his back a mashie will be taken instead of the iron. In each case the same shot will be played, and the description of it will apply to each club. The mistake that many players would make in the case of the opposing wind would be that instead of taking the cleek and playing the same three-quarter shot with it, they would be disposed to persist with the iron, lengthen the swing with it, and attempt a hard forcing shot about which there would be no reliability, of which the club is not really capable. For this and all other shots with iron clubs the grip should be slightly tighter than the grip that is given to the driver, and the wrists should be held as taut as possible, with next to no flexibility in them. The length of the shot must be regulated entirely by the length of the backward swing within the limit indicated. The longer the swing the greater is the velocity of the club when it reaches the ball. As to what the extent of the backswing should be in particular circumstances of length to be obtained, no definite rule can be laid down, as everything depends on the natural power of the player, and what will be a full three-quarter swing for one man will not need to be more than a short half for another. The player will find out for himself his own capabilities in this respect, and will adjust his shots accordingly.

I have already indicated the advisability of his swinging more slowly backwards than is the general custom, of there being the slightest suspicion of a pause at the top of the swing, and of the necessity of keeping the left foot thoroughly firm. In the

case of this extreme shot with the iron there must necessarily be a little pivoting on the left foot, but not nearly so much of it as when driving, and the shorter the shot becomes the less there should be, until at last it is reduced to the least possible give of the heel. While the swing should be of an upright character, the shot should be played low down right through. The hands should be kept low, and, above everything, they should finish low, for it is the great mistake of a large proportion of players that they finish with their hands up as when finishing a drive, and with the club pointed right up in the air. Except in the case of a full cleek shot when the length is wanted, and which does not come within the present category of iron shots, there is only one in which the club should finish with the shaft in a vertical position, and that is when a pitch pure and simple is being played.

For an iron shot, even one of the fullest type, the club at the finish should be very little above the horizontal. When he points his club up at the finish he has inevitably raised his hands in order to do so, which is not only wrong in itself, but brings about another mistake, which is the unconscious raising of the body. This lift of the body at the finish of iron shots is one of the commonest faults to be seen on the links, and it is more frequently than anything else the caused of topped balls. Let the head of the club seem to go straight forward towards the hole and stop there. Only in this way can certainty of direction and cleanness of execution be made sure of. If the circumstances suggest that the shot should be played fairly well up to the hole, and that there should be some drag on the ball when it comes down, a little turf should be taken from under the ball at the moment of impact, and not behind the ball before the club gets to it. This is a most important point, and one in regard to which mistakes are commonly made.

The shot just described is simply a long iron shot up to the hole. When the range

is shorter, say, within 120 yards, with no adverse wind to encounter, and the ball is thus within comfortable distance of the green, it is a well-defined pitch and run that is generally called for, and such a shot needs to be very carefully calculated. The common error is that the place of pitching and the proportion of pitch and run are never properly determined. If the ground is fairly even I generally play the ball to carry three-quarters of the distance and to run the rest, and I think that this proportion should be the basis of the calculation in most cases. There is considerable difference between the manner of playing this shot and the one which has already been described.

In the first place the player should stand more in front of the ball, and the club should be taken a little farther out in the backswing, with the arms rather more extended. The wrists should not be turned up so much, and should be held a trifle more stiffly. All this helps towards controlling the club, and full control at the top of the swing is the most essential quality of this stroke. What most players lack is the ability to control the club completely when the back swing is stopped at this point, and the way in which they can best improve it is by practising the work of the wrists and forearms, and particularly by cultivating the habit of the little pause (we will still call it the suspicion of a pause) at the top of the swing. In this case, run being wanted after the pitch, the ball should be taken quite cleanly. No turf should be taken. At the finish of the stroke the wrists should be slightly turned over, and should be fairly stiff. In all these iron shots the left foot should be pointed more towards the hole than in the case of the full shots with wooden clubs, and the more open does the stance become in accordance with the nature of the shot and the requirements of the case, the more is the left toe turned in the direction of the hole. Generally one will play this stroke with an iron or mashie, but when a low ball is favoured—and I believe in such a ball whenever the circumstances permit—there is nothing so good and reliable as the approaching cleek.

For the run-up shot the stance should be taken so that the ball is almost opposite the right foot, and the swing should be considerably more of a round-the-body

swing than in the case of any other shot with an iron club. It should be just a little gentle round swing. One of the most important points to attend to in the playing of this stroke is that the stance should be taken very much closer to the ball than usual. This will make the man *very* firm on his feet, which is essential, and he will be well over his ball, and therefore in the best position for controlling its direction. At the finish of the stroke the arms and club should be straight and stiff, pointing in a line directly along that in which the ball is travelling, and this can only be brought about by the player standing close in. In the backswing there must be less turning of the wrists and more stiffness than ever, and at the moment of impact the hands should be slightly turned over, that is to say, the right hand should be disposed to turn palm downwards. While I would not absolutely insist upon this in ordinary circumstances, I think the (movement is most useful and really necessary on a windy day, serving, as it does, to give very much more control over the ball. Everything depends upon the ball being hit absolutely truly. True hitting is as important in this case as when putting, and the majority of run-up shots go wrong simply because the ball has not been hit properly. When the player gets to within a short distance of the hole and makes a run-up shot, he often finds his normal tendency to take his eye off the ball too soon to be greatly increased, and therefore when practising this shot it might be well for him to make it a rule that he sees the place where the ball was after the stroke has been made. It may bring about much cleaner hitting, and make a considerable difference in his play. For a much shorter stroke the swing will of course be shorter, and the finish will not be so high; in fact, the shorter the run-up the more closely will the stroke resemble a long putt in the manner and method of playing it, until at last, when the ball is only a few yards off the edge of the green, the putter itself may be taken, and the stroke is then really nothing but a long putt.

Now for pitching there are a few special and very important points that need to be insisted upon more than they generally are in the early days of a golfer's experience.

Pitching is not nearly the difficult matter that so many players often fancy it to be; they would usually find it not in the least difficult if they did not very regularly disregard the principles of it. The stance, of course, must be a very open one, with the ball fairly well towards the left heel and the hands held a little more forward than usual and low down, so that the heel of the club, and the heel only, is resting on the turf. Then the player should, so to speak, sit well down to the stroke—that is to say, both legs should be very perceptibly bent at the knees, and the general position should be something in the nature of a crouch. This, in itself, exerts a strong tendency towards lifting the ball up in the desired manner; it is impossible to get it up properly if the player maintains a position which is at all erect and stiff. Above all, bear in mind that this bent position must be maintained until the absolute finish of the stroke, for by far the commonest fault in pitching is the raising of the body when the club is being raised in the finishing of the shot. The back swing should be a very upright one, and there should be considerable overturn in the action of the wrists, although the wrists and the forearms should nevertheless be kept fairly rigid. The player must never lose the sense of power and control in them. As soon as he does that it is all over with his pitch. Turf is most usually taken with this stroke—a very fair amount of it sometimes, which will vary somewhat according to the particular kind of pitch that is wanted—and the concluding feature is the upright finish, in which it differs from any other approach stroke with an iron club. No matter how short the range may be, if the ball is to be made to pitch properly the club must be brought very nearly to the perpendicular at the end of the stroke. If this is done, and the ball is taken as it ought to be, there will never be any difficulty in getting it up properly, and it will be found, also, that there is as much stop on it as is generally required.

Very rarely, indeed, do I consider it to be necessary to adopt any special measures to put what is called cut on the ball. When the thoughts turn towards such a necessity the use of the niblick may very confidently be recommended. It is hardly necessary in order to regulate the swing of must be very firm, and that while the left knee bends in a little towards the right

and the left foot a little over in order to allow of the movement, the heel should only just leave the turf.

THE FIRST POINT I would suggest is that the golfer should always fight against the wind when he is within easy reach of the hole, and make use of it when it requires some effort to obtain sufficient distance. As we are beginning with the shorter shots, we may then determine to play our approaches up against the wind as much as possible. Instead of wind, or as well as the wind, there may be the ground conformation to be considered, and here the same principle will hold good: always play against the hill, unless you require it to aid you in gaining distance.

Let us take a case in point as to the use or abuse of wind, and start to play an approach to the ninth hole at St. Andrews; the ground is quite flat and the green is large. Suppose a stiff west wind is blowing, *i. e.* off the right-hand side, it is obvious that, if the wind is used and the ball played with pull, the moment it reaches the ground it will run at a great pace, and with much uncertainty as to distance. The question which confronts us is how to obviate this, and the simple answer is to play the ball low and with slice to the left. The slice will bring the ball up against the wind, which latter will hold the ball, and keep it straight, and, best of all, the shot can be played firmly, for it will have little chance of over-running the hole. This seems to me so important that were the wind contrary, as well as from the right, and my ball so far from the hole that a full medium iron shot seemed demanded, I would take a middle spoon and slice it up against the wind. Take the opposite wind, *i. e.* from the left. With the short approach there is no necessity to use this wind for the purpose of gaining distance; our one idea must therefore be to fight against it, and use it as a cushion for our pulled shot—off the nose of our middle iron. In this case also the ball will be held straight by the fact of the two forces fighting against each other, namely, the pull on the ball coming from the right and meeting the wind which is coming from the left. These principles will equally apply to shots which have to be played over a hazard with the hole situated just beyond the difficulty. The ball which is held up by coming against a side wind will fall dead; the ball which comes in with the wind will run.

Probably most firstclass players agree that the half shot is at once the most difficult to play, and the most useful when mastered of all golfing strokes. It is the stroke which at once stamps the player as a finished hand. The crowd can play wrist pitches and full mashie shots and the like with fair accuracy, but fails when it comes to the control of the club, which is so these intermediate strokes. Every player probably has some one shot which he feels most certain of executing with success; but happy is the man who can say that the half iron shot has no terror for him. Vardon much prefers the half shot to the full shot for approach work, and in this particular his opinion is at variance with that of Mr. Travis, who holds that clubs should, if possible, be played to their full value. "According to the distance of the green so does the experienced player regulate the stroke by the particular club employed. It is easier to play a full mashie shot, for instance, than a half iron. Given that the ball be hit true, each club has a certain maximum range, and the player should familiarize himself with the full capabilities of his clubs, and govern his approaches accordingly." This is the view of Mr. Travis, and I give it in order to contrast it with the Vardonian theory. Personally I never play a full shot with an iron or mashie unless from a bad lie. The half-shot, however, can hardly be played from a bad lie, as the club-head is too apt to turn when coming in contact with the uneven ground.

The secret of successfully playing half shots lies not in stance, not in the downward swing, not even most of all in correct timing, but in the perfect control of the club in the backward swing. If a player knows exactly where his right hand is and what it is doing as he draws back his club, he is not far from apprehending the regulative principle of this most difficult of strokes.

I do not suppose that any one ever lives to any length of life without locking a door and knowing that his action has meaning. Two desires are very common at times in man: the one to shut up himself, the other to shut up someone else. In a match of some interest Andrew Kirkaldy was opposed by Andrew Scott, of Elie, and the stake was £100. Toward the end of the seventy-two holes struggle Andrew held the lead, and was one up and

three to play, a good advantage but not a certain one. On the sixteenth green Andrew holed a long putt, which placed him in the position of being dormy. "The door's locked noo," shouted Andrew, as he almost ran to the tee. He had shut out the possibility of defeat anyhow, and as a matter of fact he won by three up and one to play at the next hole. Thus there are many reasons for locking doors, though the action of turning a key is in itself a very simple one.

I have said that the action of turning a key is a simple one, and owing to its simplicity I have chosen it to exemplify a stroke in golf which is very useful under certain circumstances. The other day when playing a foursome, my partner and I took counsel together as to how he should play his approach shot. The conditions indicated a running stroke, for a long smooth stretch of turf lay between us and the hole, which was situated on the top of the sloping bank, which terminated exactly where the ball should be pitched, and also settled that it would be necessary to hit it pretty hard. The ball was pitched on the right spot, and seemed to be struck with sufficient strength, but it failed to reach the hole by a very long way. My partner was a good player, but he told me afterwards that he had never thought out any plan of "making a ball run."

I remember Andrew Kirkaldy being partnered with a distinguished amateur, who was a stranger alike to Andrew and to the St. Andrews green. They were going to the tenth hole, and it fell to the visitor to play the second shot. As directed, he played to run the shot over the intervening ground and finally up the bank on to the green. He tried the shot, but the sting had gone out of the shot long before it had reached the hill, and the ball made but a feeble effort to accomplish the ascent. "You were quite wrong, Kirkaldy, a ball won't run up a hill like that," said the amateur, half in anger, but partly in gladness that Andrew's advice was proved to be wrong. "By Jove," said the professor—though he did not use the heathen form of the word—"if I had hit the ball it would have gone up that bank." And so it would, for Andrew is a determined as well as a scientific player. He would, moreover, have brought off the stroke mainly by the action of the right hand. And this action of the right hand when the ball is being

struck resembles the motion of the hand and wrist when turning a key in a lock from right to left.

BUT WE MUST PAUSE, as is our rule, and consider what we want the ball to do before suggesting the *modus operandi*. A ball with underspin will, we know, fly high and run but little; a ball with overspin will fly low, "carry" but a short distance, yet run a long way. The latter style of thing is, therefore, what best suits our purpose, if we wish a low pitch and a run. There is one class of shot, indeed, which rises high and yet runs for just the same reason that any other shot runs, *i. e.* because it imparts overspin to the ball. In this last-named shot the club hits the hard ground well behind the ball, then ricochets off the ground on to the ball, and so strikes it on the rise, overspin being the result.

The learner must try and gain a knowledge of the power of making a ball run, for the shot is of great use in many cases, and in some cases is the only possible one to play. Of course there are many ways we wish a low pitch and a long run. There is your putter or straight-faced iron and beat the ball along the ground. But suppose you have a small hollow or some rough ground just in front of you, this rough and ready style will hardly work. If the ball be lying slightly cupped it will be found to spring up in the air if simply beaten by a straight-faced tool, and the stroke will be a failure. No, in these strokes where you wish the ball to pitch on the level with sufficient running power to subsequently climb a hill it is necessary to impart overspin, and that can only be done by hitting the ball with an ascending blow. But to hit the ball with an ascending blow would seem to mean to hit it up in the air, and this is the natural result of the simple action. But the action which I suggest is not simple, but threefold. It consists (1) in hitting the ball under the centre; (2) in hitting it with a rising blow and with a slightly lofted club; and (3) in using the right hand at the moment of striking just in the way one turns a key in the lock

This running shot which I have endeavored to suggest is always played with pull. The point of the shot lies in the fact that the ball is hit under its centre but with the same class of blow which would effect a top had the part struck

been higher. The overspin exists, but does not immediately come into play, and does not, in fact, manifest itself until the ball has made the short carry, which is the result of its being hit below the belt. Running shots can be played with slice, but the stroke has little in common with that just described. The sliced shots are much easier to play, but they do not have the running power of the pulled ones, nor does the ball continue so well under command. It is much easier, of course, to make the ball curl with the sliced shot, and this is sometimes, but not always, an advantage. The difficulty with the sliced shot consists in keeping the ball low. If you hit the ball hard with slice it insists on going up into the air, and by the time it reaches the ground it has lost its legs, and therefore has no means of running. There is, as far as I know, no way of smothering the sliced ball; it demands freedom and refuses to have anything to do with "the locking of the door."

The greatest difficulty is usually experienced with half shots, and that is entirely due to weak work with the hands and wrists, and to the player losing control of his grip at the turning point of the swing. Once again I would mention that little pause as the most satisfactory remedy.

Finally, I must again impress upon the player the necessity of bringing all his keenest thoughts to bear upon the playing of an approach, and I might specially make mention of a point that is too often neglected, and that is the question of the side of the green towards which he will approach. Frequently the man plays straight at the hole without any consideration whatever of this matter. If he lays his ball dead this is all right, but it is perhaps unlikely that he will do so, and it may happen that the putting is very much easier from one side than it is straightforward, and that on one particular side it is easier than from the other. Thus if there is an appreciable slope of the green in any direction, it goes without saying that it is easier to putt up it than down it, and it is better to have this point in mind when playing the approach shot than to complain inwardly about the situation when the time for putting comes. Also, when the hole is in a corner of the

green it frequently happens that it is in very close proximity to uneven or rough ground, or even a bunker, and on such occasions it is obviously the safe game to play to the other side. I only mention such points as this by way of suggesting the need for the most exhaustive consideration of the surrounding circumstances

when any approach stroke is being played, and that as these circumstances vary considerably almost every time, there is not, and never can be, what we may call fixed methods in the short game, the golfer being left to himself and to his judgment every time. Thought and judgment are everything in the short game.

