

BRAID ON SLICING AND PULLING

In this instructive article and one that will follow it, the great champion, James Braid, treats of slicing and pulling and how to accomplish these effects when they may be greatly advantageous to the player, and does not discuss them merely as faults, according to the common custom. He shows when and how to slice and pull, and how the object of the player may be benefited thereby.

I

IF A GOLF BALL when struck always travelled in a straight line—taking the definition of the straight line as that which lies evenly between two given points, no matter where these points may be—golf would be very much easier to play, and it would be played generally to much better effect, that is to say, rounds would be played in fewer strokes than they are at present.

Pulling and slicing are among the most disturbing complications of the game that tend constantly to the player's undoing. In his early days on the links they are entirely his faults, and he tries to avoid them as he would the most dangerous hazards; for, indeed, as he knows to his cost, there is a close connection between them and the hazards. They remain more or less his faults, though they happen less frequently, for most of his golfing life; but if in time his skill becomes great, he may at least have them almost under his control, and then he begins to think of turning these old enemies to his service. But, unless his skill is great indeed, they are likely to prove treacherous servants, and the player who employs them may sometimes be tempted to the reflection that they were better in their capacity as open enemies.

Let me say at once that the idea with which many people grow up in golf, that they must make it their ambition to cultivate skill in intentional pulling and slicing, and that they can-

not play really first-class golf until they possess such skill, is a greatly exaggerated one. Nine times out of ten the simplest shot is the best shot; and the player who always wonders what kind of variation he can make on the ordinary full drive, or the ordinary shot with his brassey, to suit some special circumstances which he thinks exist at the time, and which are often largely imaginary, is laying in for himself a very big stock of doubt, confusion, and trouble.

Not for a moment do I wish to underestimate the value of the capability to play for a pull and slice when the occasion really requires one or the other, as undoubtedly it does sometimes. There are, it must be fairly stated, times when these shots—properly played—result in substantial gain to the player; and his ability to play them at such times is a quality of which he may well be proud, stamping him, indeed, as a very fine golfer. A pull or slice perfectly played is a splendid thing to do and to see done.

My point, however, is that these occasions are rare, and are, in fact, much rarer than the ambitious golfer who has, so to speak, got the fancy shots "on the brain," will allow that they are, so that he is often worrying about them, to the detriment of the plain, straightforward stroke which is so very dependable and so regularly serviceable. Therefore it is as if we need a large red label with the warning word "Poison" to be placed on these shots, and the strict injunction that they are

to be used only very sparingly, and according to directions. Players of the very best class use them far less frequently than others who are their inferiors do—or try to do.

Having thus come to some general understanding with my readers as to the limitations of the proper employment of the pull and the slice, I would state simply the occasions on which I consider it to be necessary to do either. Both are occasionally useful in order to circumvent some formidable obstacle which lies in the direct line between the ball and the place to which it is desired to play it; as, for example, a shed or building, a patch of ground which is out of bounds, a clump of trees, or anything of that kind, which it might not be wise or proper to attempt to carry. In such cases it sometimes pays better and is less risky to attempt to pull or slice round the obstacle, but such obstacles do not usually come in one's way except in the case of the second shot, when the first one has been off the line; or at least they ought not to do so, for they do not represent a good class of hazard.

Then there are some holes of the dog-leg variety which are constantly puzzling, particularly in certain winds. Generally it is a question of whether to attempt a dangerous long straight shot, or to play round with the necessary pull or slice. Thirdly, a little pull or slice is frequently expedient for the purpose of helping the ball to fight against a sideways slope of the course through the green, or in other circumstances to act with such a slope for an advantage to be gained. A little slice is also good to get the ball up from a bad or a hanging lie. But the time when they are of greater value than in any of these cases, and when they might be said to be more clearly

marked as the shots to play—shots for which there is no other proper equivalent—is when a ball of very full length is wanted right up to the green, and when there is a difficult wind blowing from the right or the left. In such cases we are often enabled by a combination of wind and slice, or wind and pull, to get an even better result than could be obtained from a straight, simple drive in the absence of wind; we make the wind favourable to us instead of being to a very large extent unfavourable.

Such circumstances are to my mind the big justification for the deliberate pull and slice as recognised shots in golf. Anything that will help us to gain length and preserve a safe line, when both are urgently needed, is obviously a valuable acquisition. It is no exaggeration to say that the pull or slice judiciously applied in the proper circumstances should result in a gain of a good many yards. In themselves, unaided by wind, they necessarily give a shorter ball than would be forthcoming from a good straight drive, apart from the loss of distance through being off the line, and this is particularly the case with the slice, as, by the very circumstances in which it is made, there is less power put into the stroke, and it is exerted in a less effective manner. I must describe the most effective manner of combination of wind with these strokes later; but in the meantime we must have some understanding of the exact mechanical way of playing them.

LET US take the slice first. The chief object in the variations of stance and swing that are made for the purpose of this stroke is to effect a very slight drawing of the face of the club across the ball at the moment of impact. Of course, it would be easy to

concentrate one's whole attention on this drawing or slicing the club across the ball and making quite sure of it; but it would be very difficult, by doing it so deliberately, to do the very little that is ample for the purpose and to avoid an exaggeration that would be hopeless; and at the same time it would be next to impossible to get the ball away properly. To produce a pronounced result, all that is wanted is the very least suspicion of actual slicing of the ball by the club, so little as almost to be better described as a tendency rather than an actual fact, and not enough for the player to be conscious of it at the time of impact any more than he is conscious of it at that time when he makes it accidentally. Therefore this extreme trifle is brought about safely and surely by an adaptation of the stance and the swing. In the matter of the grip there is little to be said, except that the player may discover for himself some slight variation of the usual grip which may help him in the other parts of the process of slicing.

For my own part I grip just as I would if I were trying to drive straight, though possibly now and again I may have my right hand turned a little over the handle of the club. I hesitate, however, to recommend this or any other as the "proper" way, since I am fully aware that there is no universal practice. While Harry Vardon makes no change whatever in his grip, there are some authorities of great importance who suggest a trifling change of the position of the right hand in the opposite direction to that at which I hinted, and so it seemed to be more a matter of fancy, or rather natural tendency, than scientific principle. Concerning the stance and the up-swing, however, one may be more certain. In principle and in practice

the stance that is clearly indicated for the slice is an exaggerated open stance, that is, one in which the right foot is well advanced, and I would arrange matters so that the ball is as nearly as possible in a line with the left heel. By such a stance you give a plain invitation to the slice.

The up-swing has to be of a more vertical type than for an ordinary drive, and at the top of it the shaft of the club is, as it were, nearer to one's neck. It is a straight swing, with as little as possible of the round-the-body business; and it follows that the body is not twisted for power in the same way as in the straightforward drive. But while this up-swing is, in a manner, simpler than in ordinary circumstances, it needs to be very carefully regulated; and I am inclined to recommend that it should be taken a little more easily than usual, for when you are slicing a ball it is of the utmost importance that the ball should be hit dead in the centre of the face of the club. If you do not make this a point of the first importance in the task upon which you are engaged, the probability is that you will take the ball some way from the centre of the face, and quite likely off the very toe, with the result that you will not merely obtain a slice but a very bad shot clean away to your immediate right. Your up-swing having been straighter, or more vertical, it follows that the finish will be along the same line, and what it amounts to is that the sliced shot needs more of an arm and less of a body movement than is the case when a long straight drive is made. This is as much as can be said for the methods of making the slice, which, simple as they are, will need much patience in cultivation to obtain any sort of reliability with them.

(To be continued.)