

# Golfers' Early Errors

By JAMES BRAID.

(Open Champion, 1901, 1906, and 1906).

HERE is a right way and a wrong one of playing every game that is worth the playing, and it is inevitable that in learning to play any such game the novice only gains success after making a multitude of mistakes and then, by correcting them, learning something more of the secrets of methods than he knew before. But while this is true of every game, I feel certain that it is far more true of golf than of any other, for it is not once in twenty times that a man or woman learns to play even a quite average game without in the first instance having committed practically every possible error, and that not accidentally but very often deliberately, believing for the time being more in the mistake than in the true method. It is one of the mysteries of this wonderful game as to how human nature permits the young players to have patience through such a long period of bungling and failure, and certainly the average player who has attained a fair degree of skill and certainty in his play, looking back on all his past experience and what he has gone through, has some considerable cause to congratulate himself on his perseverance, not to say his pluck. He has fought the good golfing fight.

Let me say that in the case of players who do not begin when they are children I do not altogether believe in those who never make a mistake from the start but drop into a very fair sort of game right away. Certainly this implies a considerable aptitude for the game, but in the light of experience it is rather unnatural, and one feels that the man who never makes a mistake and has a single-figure handicap when he has only been at the game a few weeks will have a bad time later on, and that his handicap will stick for a long time at a point some way up above scratch where he will be passed by the others who made all the mistakes that it was possible for them to make and got rid of them afterwards. Slow and sure is a very good way of getting on in golf.

## MAKING THE BALL TALK.

Men are in error with their golf the whole way from the time before they begin to play at all until, if ever, they bring their game up to the championship standard. They are always "finding something out," as they call it, and the discoveries that they make are to them of the most wonderful and interesting character, and I doubt not that this constant novelty, and the most interesting character of these results of the daily researches, is another of the chief causes of the popularity of the game. Before they take up the game people make a great mistake in the view they hold of it and its difficulties, and this is to a large extent responsible for their subsequent trouble. It seems such a very easy thing to hit a golf ball with a club, the good players who are watched seem to do it with so much certainty, and the evils of duffing, scuffing, pulling and slicing are so undreaded of, that the man who has not played cannot see where the difficulty comes in, and it seems to him that a capable player ought to be able to do almost anything except make the ball talk.

I was once playing in a match with Harry Vardon at Beckenham, and at one of the putting greens, when we were both a very long way from the hole, Vardon ran down a very fine putt. I followed suit with one almost exactly like it, and I need not tell golfers that for players to hole putts of more than ten yards' length one after the other like this means very fine putting, such as even champions cannot do very often, more in the pity. As we were walking away from the green we heard the loud voice of a spectator in the crowd explaining to someone else, "Oh, but, you know, those men only do that kind of thing for the sake of the applause!" That gentleman was quite plainly not them a golfer, despite his undertaking to ex-

plain things to his friend. I trust he has become one since, because if so he will have realised the enormity, and even folly, of some of the earliest errors that he made in connection with the game.

## CLUBS VERSUS METHOD.

The game is held too cheaply by those who know nothing about it, and it is the most fatal mistake to begin play without a very complete respect for it. A week, or even a couple of days of play, is generally enough for a complete conversion on these points, though it is a curious thing that a man often plays better on his very first day than he will do for weeks afterwards, and particularly has it been found in experience that, despite the irregularity of his methods, he gets better results from shots made with his cleek, and holes more putts on the green, than many players of fair experience. I think that that is the result of the sublime confidence that does not even yet permit appreciation of the difficulties of the game, but by the second day that appreciation has come and the confidence is broken—sometimes for years. It is then realised that the greatest strength, a fine athletic build, supple muscles, a keen eye and a good physique generally are not much use if the man has not got the real grit for golf.

Some time since there was a story abroad that one of the professional strong men had offered to bet that, knowing nothing whatever about golf, he would go out on to a tee and drive a ball as far as any experienced player. If such a challenge was really made, it is a pity that nobody took the strong man on, for it is certain that he would not have had a look in.

It might also be guessed that one of the chief mistakes made by golfers at the beginning of their careers is in placing too much belief in the club, at the expense of the method. They cannot be brought to understand that most golf clubs have really very little to matter with them, and that the good player can get the proper result from them almost every time, though, of course, every man has his personal tastes, and it is better that they should be satisfied as far as possible. To completely satisfy them is the work of years, and means the expenditure of many pounds, for it often happens that the player does not himself know exactly what he wants, but he would know if he had the right club in his hands, while when he does know it is frequently the case that a club which seems in appearance to answer in all respects to the right description has not got the right touch, and dozens of the same kind may be bought before one is found that has. This is particularly the case in regard to drivers and putters. It is no exaggeration to say that in the case of a really first-class player his bag of, say, a dozen clubs represents the pick of a couple of hundred that he has bought at one time or another, or even more than that, the selection having been gradually made in the course of ten years or so. Yet some beginners think they will get all their proper clubs, with which they will play away afterwards, in a week or so!

## FACT AND FANCY.

Clubs that satisfy, and which are added to the regular set of a good player are often come by accidentally, and not by looking for them. Sometimes there seems to be an inspiration in the case. For instance, think of the curious way in which Harry Vardon came by the putter with which he won his first championship. He had tied with J. H. Taylor, and had to play off two days later, the event being played at Muirfield that year. On the day in between he was in the shop of Ben Sayers at North Berwick, and in the corner he saw a rusty little cleek—not a putter at all, but just an ordinary cleek. A most extraordinary fancy seized him; many people would have said that it was a very wild fancy. He thought that if that cleek had a new shaft put into it, it would make a very fine putter for him, with which to play in the greatest and

most responsible game of his life, the next day. So he bought the old club, and had the new stick put in it, and the next day he played with it. Not the least queer part of the story is that when he played off his tie he putted as well as any man has ever putted in a championship before or since, and he beat his opponent. Now the young golfer thinks that he is going to go to a shop straight off and buy clubs which will answer his own purpose in much the same manner as this. Certainly he must buy clubs, else he will never get the right ones, but he must not expect to get the right ones at the start, and when they do not answer very well he must not take it for granted, as young players nearly always do, that it is their fault and not his, and that the proper thing to do is to buy more.

Personally, I am not a slave to any particular club, though I have strong fancies in the matter of patterns. It is a curious thing that whenever I have won a championship I have been absolutely besieged by friends and golfers generally who want to buy from me the clubs with which I gained the success. I let them go—many of them at all events. It takes gold to buy them from me, and I am Scot enough not to refuse a good bargain when one is proposed. Besides at the cost of two or three shillings I get the exact duplicate of the club, for the model of it is always kept. One cannot help wondering how many of these ladies and gentlemen think they are going to make a marvellous improvement in their game as the result of these purchases. Perhaps they may really be a little helped, simply because they gain a little in confidence for the time being, and that is always something. Of course more often than not the club is wanted as a memento.

## DREADFUL DIFFICULTIES.

A common mistake made by the player at the outset of his career on the links is his impatience with the cast-iron rules of method that have been laid down by all golfers that have gone before him. He thinks he knows a better way of doing things, and he will try it, and the worst of it is that when bad habits of this kind are contracted at the outset it is almost impossible, or at least very difficult, to get the man out of them later on, so that his game suffers for the rest of his life. There are right ways and wrong ones of doing all the strokes in golf, and the only stroke in connection with which there is any excuse for eccentricity is putting. In putting every man must be to some extent a law unto himself. His business is to get the ball into the hole, and if he finds he can do it better by standing on his head than on his feet, by all means let him stand on his head. One of the best amateur putters that I know of, a man who is most deadly at that most difficult distance, two yards, putts back-handed and with one hand, body, feet and arms being behind the putter and the ball.

After the player has had a very little experience, and knows the dreadful difficulties of the game, he too often goes to the other extreme, and in a pessimistic mood decides that good players are always born and not made, and that it is no use trying to become a good one in his case, as he was not born for such success. Certainly it is a good thing to be born with a natural aptitude for the game, but I think that all men can become very respectable players by carefully educating themselves up to it and persevering.

In my own case, for instance, there was a time when I was not only a very bad putter—one of the very worst I have ever known—but could not drive a ball of any length whatever. I was always overdriven with my tee shots, and then I always threw away my very last chance on the putting greens. And that was after I had had considerable experience in the game. How the improvement in my driving came about I do not know. It has always been a mystery to me. I went to bed a bad driver one night and got up a good one in the morning, and that is all I know about it. As for putting, the improvement has been the result of years of patient practice: there has been no gift of the gods about that.

Let me tell you, beginners, old players and mere spectators, this is a very, very hard game to play, and don't forget it.

## NEXT WEEK.

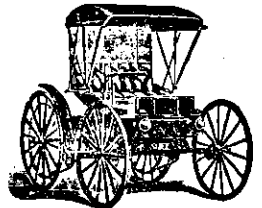
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