

Fallacies of Golf.

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ONE is frequently asked to account for the remarkable difference in the quality of the game of the professional and the amateur at golf. The answer which is usually given, namely, that the professional plays much more, is no doubt to a certain extent the correct explanation of the great difference, but there is a much deeper cause than this. As a matter of indisputable fact, the leading professionals, and, indeed, some of the most prominent amateurs, in their published works, teach the game on lines quite opposed to their own practice.

Now, we may accept the statement that the published works of the greatest players do affect the game of a multitude of players. It stands to reason, then, that if their tuition is wrong the game of the amateurs who follow their teaching must suffer. I say unhesitatingly that the game of golf is suffering severely on account of the false teaching which is unfortunately associated with some of the most famous names in the history of the game. It is easy to make general statements of this nature; so to be specific, let us take three portions of the game which are absolutely of fundamental importance, and deal with them particularly.

The three I shall select are: (1) The distribution of weight in the drive; (2) the power of the left hand and arm as compared with that of the right hand and arm; and (3) the study of putting. It is my intention to analyse the teaching of Harry Vardon, James Braid and J. H. Taylor. We must admit that these names stand for all that is sound and good in golf, and their published advice to players should be of the same nature. No good golfer will believe that if it be shown to be otherwise any one of the famous triumvirate would desire it to remain uncontradicted. I do not think that anyone deserving the name of golfer could imagine one of these players giving false instruction to a pupil whom he was coaching; yet, if my criticism be just, that is what each one of them is doing in his published instructions.

We shall take first the matter of the distribution of weight in the drive. Vardon, Braid and Taylor all state emphatically that at the top of the swing the weight should be almost all on the right leg. This, I maintain, is utterly bad golf, and not in accordance with their own practice. I shall quote them.

At page 68 of "The Complete Golfer" Harry Vardon says: "While this is happening, it follows that the weight of the body is being gradually thrown on to the right leg, which accordingly stiffens until at the top of the swing it is quite rigid, the left leg being at the same time in a state of comparative freedom, slightly bent in towards the right, with only just enough pressure on the toe to keep it in position."

At page 56 of "Advanced Golf," James Braid says: "At the top of the swing, although nearly all the weight will be on the right foot, the player must feel to distinct pressure on the left one, that is to say, it must still be doing a small share in the work of supporting the body."

At page 207 of "Taylor on Golf," J. H. Taylor says: "Then, as the club comes back in the swing, the weight should be shifted by degrees, quietly and gradually, until when the club has reached its topmost point the whole weight of the body is supported by the right leg, the left foot at this time being turned and the left knee bent in toward the right knee."

Now, these men have accounted for 11 Open Championships between them; but I say, without any hesitation whatever, that in this statement they are spreading false tuition, which is fatal to the rhythm of the swing and utterly opposed to their own practice.

Harry Vardon himself is the most striking refutation of this false doctrine. From the moment his club leaves the hole his weight begins to go forward, until at the top of his swing it is mostly on his left foot. It is this perfect management of his weight which to a great extent accounts for the wonderful rhythm and accuracy of his strokes; for in it lies the great secret of the golf-

drive, the preservation of the "centre," if one may use the word, of the golf-swing.

The truth of this fundamental point will readily be seen on looking at plates xxiv. and xxv. of "Great Golfers."

Two things have led all writers astray in dealing with this matter. Firstly, the player pivots on the inside of the sole of the left foot. This makes his contact with the earth look light, although it does not require much mechanical knowledge to know that that is no indication of the strain thrown upon it. Secondly, the right leg is stiffened and twisted, and this torsional strain is by many, not unaturally, mistaken for weight.

Vardon's adjustment of his weight at the top of his swing is very marked. Many years ago I saw a statuette of him at the top of his stroke, and speaking from the fulness of ignorance, I said, "Look where his weight is, all on his left foot. Surely that is very bad form." It was not long before I found out that it is of the essence of sound driving to get the weight on to the left at the top of the drive.

Vardon, Braid, and Taylor are unanimous in this mis-statement. They are also unanimous in saying that in the stance and address the weight is practically evenly distributed. They are, of course, unanimous in saying one must not move the head by the fraction of an inch in the upward swing. We shall therefore tie them down to this last well-known golf axiom by stretching a wire taut across the line to the hole, at right angles to it, and within a quarter of an inch of their necks, or the side of their faces. This will not hamper them in driving, but as they must not sway away from the hole we shall require them to drive, putting their weight on the right foot and without touching the wire, which is, of course, on the side further from the hole. Following their instructions it should be feasible, but they would require to be comforters, or suffering from abdominal hyper trophy, to execute the manoeuvre.

It seems that in this matter there is what the lawyers will call a *prima facie* case for the prosecution. It will be interesting to know what the defence consists of, because Vardon is not alone in showing by his perfectly executed strokes the best condemnation of his fundamentally unsound teaching.

We now come to the old, old story of the power of the left, the father of more slices than all the bread-knives in the golf clubs of the world. This wonderful delusion has received some very severe knocks during the last few years, but with the assistance of such great names as Vardon, Braid, and Taylor it is small wonder that it lingers on.

Right through "The Complete Golfer," Harry Vardon, by implication, supports this utterly unsound idea. At page 126 he says: "This is one of the few shots in golf in which the right hand is called upon to do most of the work." And again at page 92: "It is necessary that in the making of this stroke the right hand should do more work than the left, and therefore the club should be held rather more loosely by the left hand than by its partner."

Nowhere does Vardon explicitly uphold the idea of the left hand and arm being the dominating factor in the golf stroke. It is merely by inferential references such as those quoted that we can gather that he gives his adherence to this time-honoured fallacy; but it is interesting to notice that in the whole of "The Complete Golfer," although there are "few shots in golf in which the right hand is called upon to do most of the work," the famous author does not specifically describe any one stroke in which the left hand is called upon to do most of the work. Neither, so far as I can remember, does either Braid or Taylor.

We must, however, see what they have to say on the subject, for it is of scarcely less importance to the game than the all-important matter of the distribution of weight.

Taylor, at page 193 of "Taylor on Golf," says: "My contention is simply this: that the grasp of the right hand upon the club must be sufficiently firm

in itself to hold it steady and true, but it must not be allowed on any account to overpower the left. The idea is that the latter arm must exercise the predominating influence in every stroke that may be played. As regards my own position in the matter, my grip with either hand is very firm, yet I should hesitate before I told every golfer to go and do likewise."

Well, if taking a very firm grip with both hands had won me four open championships, and innumerable other prizes, I should have faith enough in it to tell others to "Go and do likewise." Even without these trifling incidents I have no hesitation in supplying what Taylor leaves, and saying most emphatically, "Go then and do likewise." If it is good enough for Taylor it will be good enough for you. It is the only proper way, and you may observe, although he "plumps" plainly for the time-honoured fetich, it is evident that he does not carry it out in his own play.

Speaking of the grip, Braid says: "I advise a very pronounced tapering of the grip—thick at the top of the handle and thin at the bottom, for it is the left hand that has to grip hard and tight, and the right which has to hold the club delicately to guide it."

The truth is that the grip, as in Taylor's case, should be very firm with both hands, and, as a matter of the very best golf, should never relax until the ball has gone on its way. The correct apportionment of power would never have entered into anyone's head but for the mischievous fetich of the left. Dame Nature in all other games and sports attends to that with unerring discretion. If we trust her, she will do the same in golf.

Braid is much less pronounced in his adherence to the fetich of the left than

That is where it does most of its work, but the right is in almost the same position, and is always master of the stroke.

Here is a question or two which one may ask disciples of the professors who preach the power of the left—

"If the left hand is the more important, why do the naturally left-handed not retain their advantage?"

"Why do they get left-handed clubs and reduce themselves to a level with their right-handed brethren?"

Of course, the mere idea, when it is analysed, is stupid, but it still obtains with countless golfers, and undoubtedly does much to injure the game of thousands of players.

A famous professional once tried the relative power of the left and right by driving a number of balls with each hand separately, but in exactly the same manner as they fall to the input in the ordinary drive. He found that with the left he was comparatively useless, both as to length and direction, while with the right he could drive nearly as far and as straight as with both together. Any golfer who has been a slave to the fetich of the left will be well-advised to follow Taylor's method—grip hard with both hands, and leave Dame Nature to apportion the work.

We have now to consider the question of putting, a matter of the most vital importance. Let me again quote the triumvirate.

Harry Vardon says: "The fact is that there is more individuality in putting than in any other department of golf, and it is absolutely imperative that this individuality should be allowed to have its way. I believe seriously that every man has had a particular kind of putting method awarded to him by nature, and when he puts exactly in this way



Golfer (who has taken to riding and been lauded among some flirts): "Confound you! That was a rotten shot! Why the dickens couldn't you put me on the green?"

many other writers. At page 55 of "How to Play Golf" he says: "A word about the varying pressure of the grip with each hand. In the address the left hand should just be squeezing the handle of the club, but not so tightly as if one were afraid of losing it. The right hand should hold the club a little more loosely. The left hand should hold firmly all the way through. The right will open a little at the top of the swing to allow the club to move easily, but it should automatically tighten itself in the downward swing."

This, in effect, subscribing to the fetich of the left, and in "Advanced Golf" in one place Braid almost does it again. In a matter of opinion such as this one hesitates a little to put one's own ideas against Braid's. It is quite different in a serious error such as our first point—an error which can be demonstrated beyond the possibility of refutation; but if this really is Braid's method of using his hands on his club, all I can say is: "Give me Taylor's, and let me grip firmly with both hands."

This fetich of the left is really, when one considers it seriously, quite an astonishing delusion. Why in golf alone should the inferior hand be promoted to the captaincy? What mysterious power does it possess in golf which it lacks in cricket or hockey or any other two-handed game?

As a matter of fact, the left hand at the moment of impact is in a singularly ineffective position so far as regards the development of power. The back of the hand is towards the hole. The real power of the left comes in at the beginning of the downward swing when the weight of the club is across the wrist in the direction in which it bends least.

he will do well, and when he departs from his natural system he will miss the long ones—and the short ones, too."

If Vardon holds this belief, we can readily understand that there is much individuality in the putting of his pupils.

J. H. Taylor (page 83 in "Taylor on Golf") says: "And here I may say at once it is an absolute impossibility to teach a man how to putt."

Again (page 243) he says: "In all other departments of the game I am of opinion, as I have previously stated, that the strikes may be taught, but in putting, never."

Braid, in "How to Play Golf," at page 119, says: "It happens, unfortunately, that concerning one department of the game that will cause the golfer some anxiety from time to time, and more often when he is experienced than when he is not, neither I nor any other player can offer any words of instruction such as, if closely acted upon, would give the same successful result as the advice tendered under other heads ought to do. This is in regard to putting."

Again, on the same page he says: "It is impossible to tell a man what to do in order to putt the ball into the hole. He must find out for himself, and make himself into as good a putter as he can by constant practice"; and "really great putters are probably born, and not made."

If we allow two strokes on every green, and it is a good player who keeps that average or below it, it will be quite evident that putting is quite *not* the game of golf—and it is the most important part. We are then confronted by the confession of the three greatest players in the world that they