

THE GOLF GRIP

How to make the left hand play its part

By GEORGE DUNCAN

I HAVE long since arrived at the conclusion that very many golfers of moderate ability—yes, I will say the great majority of such players—limit their possibilities by a failure to dispose and use the left hand in the way that is best adapted for the game. Most people realize that the grip is a matter of considerable importance; that it needs to be studied; that a fault in it is the cause of many a bad shot and many a sad case of long standing mediocrity or worse. I submit that the left hand is the one that requires by far the greater measure of attention because it is not what might be called the natural hand for playing golf. If it were, we should nearly all be left-handed. We find that hardly anybody whose instinct it is to pursue the pastime in that manner ascends to a high standard of skill, and that most persons who begin left-handed only start to improve appreciably when they can be induced to stand the other way round and persevere with a principle that is foreign to their impulse.

The right hand is the hand with which we play golf, and what we need to do is to find a means of inducing the left to act as a worthy ally and to perform more than it is inclined to accomplish without proper management. If we propose to strike a blow with a club, a stick, or any instrument held in the left hand, our involuntary prompting is to grasp the said instrument very much as we should grip it with the right hand. Let the reader put this point to the test. Let him take a club—if he has none near, or the space is limited, the domestic poker will serve—and standing in the ordinary way for a right-handed shot, prepare to swing the implement with the left hand only. In four cases out of five where golfers of limited ability are concerned, it will be found that, during the address, the back of that hand is practically vertical to the plane of the floor or ground. That appears to be natural order.

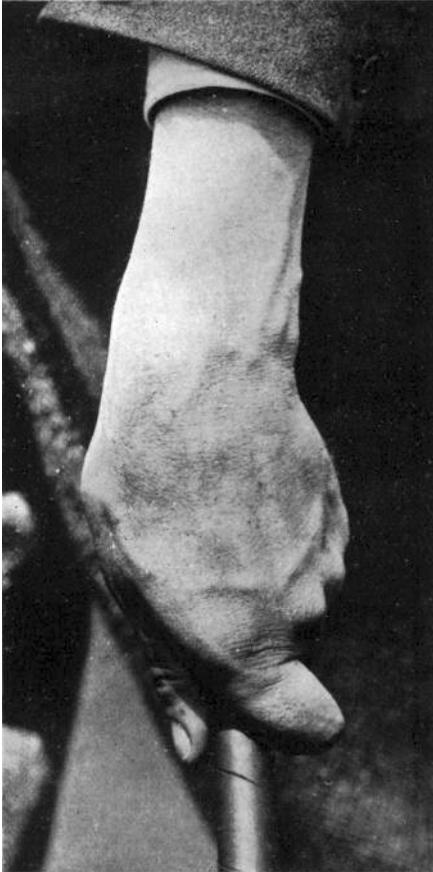
The swing is duly performed. There is a feeling of impotency about it. Somehow, it seems impossible to invest the effort with power when the club is held in this manner with the left hand. Now try a slight change of grip. Instead of having the thumb pointing straight down the uppermost part of the shaft, which is the commonest and perhaps most natural disposition for it, bring the hand over so that the thumb may be planted on the side of the shaft which is farthest from the direction in which the ball is to be sent. That is to say, let it be pointing to the back of the head of the club instead of to the top of the head where the maker's name is inscribed. This

alteration will result in the top knuckles of the first three fingers being brought into view; the hand will be far more over the club than in the former experiments. Try another swing in the new circumstances. In nearly every case it will be found that there is an altogether greater consciousness of power in the left hand. There is command over it; and you feel as you near the ball that you can hit it instead of merely poking falteringly at it, which is the sense that prevails when the hand is on the side of the shaft and the thumb on top.

Herein lies, I believe, a considerable measure of the secret of accurate as well as strong hitting. The left hand does not fall so naturally as the right into the position that affords it the greatest opportunity of doing the most that is in it. It has to be persuaded into that position and made to adopt it as a kind of second nature. At the outset, the grip does not strike one as being particularly comfortable, but only a little perseverance is required to dispel the early feeling of strangeness. A few half-hours of practice or two or three rounds will make it part of the instinctive order, and I am convinced that it is the first law of method for that aspiring golfer to master.

In order to make the most of a hand, which, in ordinary life, is never so involuntary in its movements and never so useful as the right save in the rare cases of ambidextrous or left-handed people, we need to introduce an equivalent of the boxer's "straight left." And the way to do it is, I am sure, to hold the club as I have suggested. It is a matter of having the full width of the wrist in a plane more or less corresponding to the direction in which you are striking; the strength which comes from that disposition is surprising by comparison with the limited power that is possible when the fullest extent of the wrist is vertical to the line of movement. As a teacher, I have studied this subject very closely—partly because it is the department of the golf grip of which most players are neglectful and partly because it is with the left hand that we first take hold of the club. For the moment, I am assuming that everybody is employing the overlapping grip. Such, I know, is not the case, but it ought to be. To the person who has experimented deeply and diligently, there can be no question as to its superiority over any other. There are people who declare that they cannot adopt it because their hands are too small, but they are mistaken. All that they need is assiduity. By way of proof of this statement let me obtrude a personal detail. I take eighth's in gloves, which

GOLF ILLUSTRATED



Position of the "Pullers," left



Correct position of the left hand



Position of the "Slicers," left

THREE WAYS OF GRIPPING WITH THE LEFT HAND

indicates, I think, that my hands are not unusually large. And I experience no difficulty in putting the overlapping grip into operation. One simply has to accustom oneself to it. That takes a little time, but it is time well spent.

Be it said that overlapping grips are not uniform down to the last detail. The position of the left thumb varies a trifle among successful players. The best grip is, I think, that of Harry Vardon, on which my own is modelled. J. H. Taylor observes the same method, and, I believe, always has done so. James Braid places his left thumb farther round towards the back of the shaft; Edward Ray not so far. These are minor matters; even a thumb with an important mission to fulfill in the vindication of a principle may be permitted a little individuality. The main point is that the overlapping grip welds the two hands into one and at the same time, makes them part and parcel of the club as no other arrangement can do. If the player is still convinced that this boon is beyond him, he may find the explanation in the thickness of the grips on his clubs. Thick grips are bad; they blunt the delicate "feel" of the most beautifully balanced instrument and naturally they cause the overlapping hold to seem a clumsy, uncomfortable means to an end. To have them made thinner is a simple business.

There is no need for me to attempt to describe the

overlapping grip. Every golfer knows it, or ought to know it, and, in any case, pictures convey a better idea of it than can be imparted by words. In connection with it, there is just one hint that I would emphasize. The "V" shapes which are constituted by the thumbs and forefingers of the two hands pointing down the shaft should be as narrow as possible. That is to say, bring the thumb and forefinger of each hand as close together as is consistent with comfort; if they are permitted to be at all wide apart the result will be a loss of power and control. So these are the salient necessities: the thumb and forefinger well together in each case so as to form "V's" of very acute angles and the back of the left hand over the shaft instead of down the side of it. Braid has his left exceptionally far over; the method suits him admirably as most of us have learnt to our cost at various times; but the average individual who went so far as Braid in this direction would be constrained to put his right hand too much under.

The club should not be held in the palm of the right hand; that state of affairs is apt to produce a dull stiff wrist. The grip with the right hand should be exercised mainly with the fingers, and to attain that end the principal consideration is to make sure that the right hand is not under the shaft. The most likely result of such a state of affairs is a pull. I know that a few very fine players, as, for instance, Mr. John

GOLF ILLUSTRATED



The "Pullers" Grip



True Overlapping Grip



The "Slicers" Grip

THREE DISTINCT OVERLAPPING GRIPS AS EXEMPLIFIED BY GEORGE DUNCAN



Harry Vardon



J. H. Taylor



James Braid

THE OVERLAPPING GRIP AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE TRIUMVIRATE

Ball and Alexander Herd, do hold the club well in the palm of the right hand and exhibit no affection at all for the overlapping grip, but they are the race exceptions who are always present to lend a touch of variety to a rule.

All that I have said thus far applies in the case of golfers who do not overlap by placing the little finger of the right hand over the forefinger of the left but who still employ a finger hold with the two V's visible when the player examines his grip. Here also the V's should be narrow so as to ensure a firm hold, but I do not think that, for certainly of effect, it is to be compared with the overlapping principle. It increases ten fold the danger of the two hands working against one another.

During the actual process of swinging it is important to retain a steady grip of the club from beginning to end. If, in practice, when there are opportunities for reflection, you are conscious that your grasp is slackening towards the top of the swing there is something to be remedied. So far as the left hand is concerned the palm will naturally open a little, but that will not be noticed, neither will it make any difference, so long as an unwavering grip be exercised with the thumb and all the fingers of the right hand. If you loosen the hold with that hand the club will drop into the web between the thumb and forefinger, with the attendant ills of over swinging, which embrace all the miseries to which the golfing flesh is susceptible.