Regia, crede mibi, res est succurrere lapsis.
(Believe me it is a kingly act to help the afflicted.)
J. H. TAYLOR

I

THE RENDEZVOUS

One day in the late autumn of 1924, John Henry Taylor, five times a winner of the open Championship, wishing me to set certain social and political ideas of his before the British public, promised, as a bait, to teach me the fundamentals of golf, and for this delightful purpose agreed to go away with me for the inside of a week to any place I chose to name.

His idea was not only the friendly one that I should become a steadier and truer golfer, but the propagandist one that I should become the mouthpiece of a philanthropic passion which has long consumed him; the exponent, if I liked, of his golfing methods, but certainly—this was the quid pro quo and also the sine qua non—of his philosophy of life.

So altogether pleasant were the days spent in his vigorous company, and so naturally did he unfold his philosophy of life in the midst of explaining the mysteries of consistent golf, that I propose, for the better entertainment of the reader, to set down the record of our companionship in the form of a simple and intimate narrative as true as memory can make it.
the finest in the country. Even in the present difficult circumstances, the greens could be rolled and the holes changed once a week. But the thing to do was to make some arrangement with the authorities whereby neither horse nor cow, pig nor fowl, nor any other creature under heaven, was allowed to play Old Harry with the greens.

I think these remarks a little hurt the old general. He turned to me and very confidingly remarked:

"The selfishness, the bad manners of young people in these days, passes all belief. It's very sad; very sad indeed. I have just come from the seventh green. Horses have been ridden clean across it. Now, would you believe that? Right across it." He heaved a deep sigh, shook a sad head, and looked at me for sympathy with something of the pathos that we see in the eyes of an old dog.

That night I received my first golf lesson. After dinner, and after a cup of coffee in the hall, Taylor and I crept silently away to a vast smoking-room with no fire to warm it, and therefore unoccupied by any sensible person, and there gave ourselves up to the science of this "royal, ancient, and funny game."

"Now the first thing I want you to understand," said the master, "is a matter of extreme importance. Golf is not a game of strength. Get out of your head the notion that it is a game in which a man demonstrates his capacity in the way of brute force. You may think I that am beginning with a platitude and laying emphasis on a proposition that is so self-evident as to be tiresome; but I want you to believe me when I say that your supremest need at the moment, as it is the supremest need of ninety-nine long-handicap men out of a hundred, is an entirely new mental stance towards the game, and an entirely new intellectual grip on its science.

"Assure yourself that golf is ninety-five per cent. mental, and only a miserable, contemptible, and measly five per cent. physical. If you Coué this idea into your sub-consciousness, and make it absolutely the first article of your golfing faith, your handicap will come down with a run. Let me explain what I mean."
"You can hit a long ball. I have seen you do it. You can hit not only a long ball, but an accurate ball, a ball with direction. You did this in our game to-day, and you did it several times. Why didn't you do it every time? How was it that again and again you sliced, topped, and stabbed your ball? I was watching you all the time, and I will tell you. When you hit a long true ball, your character was in charge of your body; it was a mental stroke. You went slowly back, you came unhurriedly down, you kept your head still, your body was flexible, and you got your wrists in at the last moment. When you sliced and topped, your character was a miserable deserter. It wasn't there at all. Your body was working like an animal in a panic. There was no mind in the stroke; nothing but body—and a flurried body at that, all stiffened and clumsy. You snatched back the club; you hit from the top of your swing; you lifted your head; you came off your feet, and you looked as foolish as a man is meant to look whenever his body plays the ass with his mind.

"Do not be impatient. Presently we will come to the strokes. I will tell you about the drive, the approach, and the putt, giving you the benefit of my experience in such matters. But do please believe me when I tell you that the most valuable advice I have to give you is the advice I am now giving about your mental stance.

"Golf is a game of accuracy. Its master word is accuracy. Whenever you take a club in your hands the first idea to enter and possess your mind should be the idea of accuracy. You are not to show off your physical strength. You are to give proof of your accuracy. I don't care whether the club is a driver or a putter, the use to which it is to be put is the same—accuracy. It is to send your ball where you mean it to go—straight up the fairway, or straight to the hole. Accuracy, accuracy, always accuracy. If you make yourself master of this idea, I can promise you, apart from anything else you may learn from me, that your game will improve out of all knowledge.

"Accuracy is not a physical thing, but a mental. Strength doesn't come in. It's a purely mental idea. Little men can be more accurate than giants; a young girl measuring her accuracy against the physical perfection of a young Hercules can lay him low. That is why golf is so beautiful a game. It calls upon the mind for one of the greatest of its qualities, self-control, self-mastery, self-direction. No bodily strength is of any avail unless it is completely under the subject of the mind. And bodily strength may even be a hindrance and a danger unless it is the obedient and unquestioning servant of the will."

At this point in his exordium I interrupted with a question. "I believe everything you say," I told him; "and ever since I began to play golf I have played with this thesis in my mind; but how is it that one day the thesis works and one day it doesn't? How is it that one day I do as I ought to do, and on the next do as I ought not to do?"

He looked at me like the severest of His Majesty's judges and made answer: "It is human to err, but there are certain sins of the soul which ought to be beneath the contempt of the civilised man. Let me say at once that health plays a part in this matter. One day it is easier for the soul to ride the body than another. That is why I am a frenzied apostle of health. Yes, I make that concession. But, all the
same, weakness of character is a shameful thing, and weakness of character alone can account for such variability as you have had the shocking brazenness to describe."

I bowed my head.

"But in this matter," he said, more cheerfully, "see how beautifully golf may help and strengthen a man's moral character. Suppose a miserable long-handicap man came to the reasonable conclusion that his contemptible unsteadiness is the consequence of a feeble and a sickly will; by dint of improving his golf he must at the same time improve his moral life. Let him make his will master of his body on the tee and through the fairway to the green, and he will find it far easier to resist the temptations and conquer the weaknesses which degrade his moral life."

"I have no desire to be unhelpfully hypercritical," said I, "but I happen to know a clergyman whose moral life is blameless and whose golf is quite as unsteady as my own."

"What about his health?"

I hesitated, unwilling to tell a lie, and was lost.

He got up from his chair and began to pace the room, holding forth with abounding eloquence on the subject of health. We are the victims of dietetic ignorance. We do not even know how to breathe properly. There is an Albar Breathing System advertised in the papers, a clergyman's invention. We use our delicate and beautiful bodies as no engineer would dream of using his coarse and brutal engine. How can we expect to be well? How can we expect that such ill-used bodies will do what our wills order?

"You must admit, however," I objected, "that personality plays an overwhelming part in golf.

Among the professionals are men who are as steady as a rock, and others who are either nervous on the green or uncertain in the rough."

"I agree. But, remember, personality means moral character as well as other things. I do not say that every man who is healthy and morally strong will be a great golfer; but I do say that without a strong will and sound health no man can hope to be a consistently good golfer."

"Well, let us accept the point, and get to particulars."

"But one moment more. I want to see in your face a look of conviction, as if I had revealed to you the supreme secret of the game, as if at last you understood what is required of you, in this first matter of mental stance. Do you realise that your mental attitude to golf is of the first importance? Do you perceive that if your master thought in addressing the ball is the thought of accuracy you will never press, never stiffen up your muscles, and so will never find yourself slicing, pulling, or foozling? Has it yet burnt itself into your mind that a right notion of what is required of you in golf will correct a dozen faults which are the direct consequence of a wrong attitude towards the game? My friend, I am telling you the great secret."

A smile broke up the intensity and sternness of his face. "Years ago," he said, "I had as a pupil a dear old general, with whom I became warm friends. One day he said to me, 'I think you feel that I am a man to be trusted, a man who if he give his word will never break it; now, Taylor, as man to man, and as one friend to another, I solemnly promise you never to tell a living soul if you confide to me the secret which I know very well all you professionals keep to yourselves.'
He meant it. He really believed that there is a secret of good golf which no professional ever discloses to his pupils. What hard hearts we must have, to see their agonies and withhold the merciful cure! A secret? There is only the one I have tried to hammer into your mind. Attitude! A right attitude. A due knowledge of what is required of you. And because this first essential is so apparently simple, so apparently obvious, not one man in a hundred will receive it."

He walked over to the fireplace, picked up a little bent poker from the grate, and said, "We will talk about the drive."

VI

THE WHISTLING POKER

With a rather menacing movement of the poker in his hand, as he approached towards the chair in which I was sitting, Taylor addressed me in the following fashion:

"You are back at school, and I am your master. Listen with reverence, but not with any strain of the attention; listen greedily, credulously, not sceptically, not hazily, and not with a flustered brain. Just listen."

"May the pupil ask," I inquired, "if that poker is the cane?"

"This broken and disfigured poker," he replied, "is intended to illustrate my remarks rather than to correct your stupidity."

"I am satisfied, and relieved."

"You may regard it as a stump of stalk and your mind as a blackboard."

I nodded the head that contained the blackboard and settled down in my chair.

"When you address a golf ball on the tee," Taylor said, with a deliberate and impressive emphasis, "you will find that your elbows are on a level with the waist. That is so, is it not? Very well; now I want you to imagine that a line is drawn across your body at the elbows; if you like, a chalk line drawn right around the body at that point—the point of the elbows and the waist. Let us call it the waistline. Now I want
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