GREAT GOLFERS IN THE MAKING

BY THEIR OWN HANDS

EDITED BY HENRY TRACE
THE QUARTETTE

ALEXANDER HERD
JAMES BRAID

J. H. TAYLOR
HARRY VARDON

(At St. Andrews on the eve of the commencement of the great international foursome, England v. Scotland, 1905)
GREAT GOLFERS IN THE MAKING


EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY

HENRY LEACH

WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

SECOND EDITION

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(The Frontispiece is by Fairweather; the portraits of Laidlay, Harris, and Robb, by Elliott & Fry; and those of Hilton and White by Ullyett.)
INTRODUCTION

SINCE my own part in the preparation of this work has been merely that of organiser and editor, with here and there a little literary assistance given to those who asked it of me, I am free to speak of its merits, and I do not fear that the golfing public, always thoughtful and discriminating, will fail to concur in the suggestion that it is one of considerable present and permanent value. The chapters of which it consists contain a mass of the most interesting and authentic golfing history such as could have been collected by no other method.

"How did you come to take up this game?" is the question that the golfer is always asking of his fellows in these days, for there is nearly always something subtly curious about the manner and the circumstances of the beginning of one's golf. In the following pages the question is answered in close detail by nearly all the foremost golfers of the day, and by some of those of a generation which is dying. But it is not only from this point of view that these autobiographical stories are interesting to the general golfing reader. They are valuable to him also if he gives them the attention which they deserve, inasmuch as they indicate in a very large measure what are the secrets of the success of these great players. These men tell how they learned the game, what were their chief difficulties, how they overcame them, and so on, and they encourage the persevering golfer and clearly point the way in which he, with certain limitations, may go and do likewise.
This, indeed, was one of the chief ideas I had when organising the work, and to strengthen the feature as much as possible I asked each writer to state in his contribution what, on reflection, he regarded as the most important morals of his experience, and in the majority of cases this request was thoughtfully complied with. Moreover, each writer devotes himself to some speciality with which his name and reputation have become associated. Thus we have Mr. John Low making his characteristic plea for the playing of the game for the sheer love of it and the intellectual enjoyment which the solution, or attempted solution, of its many problems affords, as opposed to the commoner practices which are often borne of the mere desire of victory. Mr. Edward Blackwell, again, tells us all about his long driving; that never-to-be-forgotten invader, Mr. Travis, as well as Willie Park and Jack White, champions of putting, unfold some secrets of this perplexing department of the game; Mr. W. Herbert Fowler, who has probably raised up at Walton Heath a finer monument to himself as a course architect than any other amateur, speaks of the construction of courses; and the famous triumvirate, James Braid, Harry Vardon, and J. H. Taylor, give the best of general advice to earnest aspirants.

As further indicating the value and authority of the book I may be allowed to point out that the contributors among them have won the following championships and other first-class honours: Open Championship, 26; Amateur Championship, 9; Amateur Championship Silver Medal, 12; Royal and Ancient Club's Gold Medal, 8; Royal and Ancient Club's Silver Cross, 7; Royal and Ancient Club's King William IV. Medal, 7; the St. George's Challenge Vase, 5; Irish Open Amateur Championship, 6; American Amateur Championship, 5; Canadian Amateur Championship, 5; American Open Championship, 1; Welsh Amateur Championship, 1. They include every winner of the Open
of British golfers with cruel force the general outstanding principle that good putting is nearly everything in the modern game with the rubber-cored ball, and that the man who can putt perfectly might—as a professor of some note once declared—beat anybody. The professor went so far as to say that the perfect putter could beat anybody though his play in the other departments of the game might be merely moderate. That was evidently an exaggeration of the case; but it is now apparent that brilliance in play through the green is not so essential to the aspirant to championship honours so long as the putting is of first-rate quality. The player of good average merit with his wooden clubs and irons, who is a first-rate putter, will beat the man who is splendidly clever in the long and medium-short game, but who is nervous, unskilful, and constantly at fault on the putting greens. Mr. Travis proved that beyond any further argument, and only a few days later in the open event Jack White dotted the i’s and crossed the t’s of the American, if, indeed, any dotting and crossing remained to be done. Then in 1905, at St. Andrews, in the open event again, it was demonstrated that a man has no place in the championship competition who is not reasonably certain of being down in his two putts on the green. In a tournament when the standard of putting was very low, the honours went to the only man who nearly always got down in his two putts, a man who has never been regarded as a brilliant putter, but who has schooled himself to the essential ability to get the first one dead and then not to miss the next. This was Braid.

Then what is the putting moral that the last Amateur Championship, at Hoylake, emphasised? In two or three different ways, and taking the best golfers of the day for its unhappy media, it laid stress upon the fact that there is nothing that is certain in golf, and that what is often least certain is what appears most so. Particularly it pointed to the uncertainty and difficulty of the very short putt, and the
contributions through the medium of *Golf Illustrated*, which I was editing at the time. If such a privilege had not been extended to me, the task would have been vastly more difficult than it was. At the same time I should mention that since their appearance serially, the majority of the articles have been carefully revised by their contributors, and in many cases have been considerably extended, particularly in the matters of “reflections” and “morals.”

And finally I have to thank all the contributors to this volume, the men who stand in these times for the best golf that is played, for the admirable manner in which they have supported me towards the fulfilment of the idea of the work. The labour of organisation and editorship has not been light by any means; but it would have been impossible in the absence of the intelligent sympathy of these thirty-four players, the majority of whom I am pleased to number among my personal friends.

HENRY LEACH

LONDON, January 1907
I TOOK up golf in self-defence. In 1895–6 I was in London and learned that the Niantic Club, of Flushing, Long Island, a social organisation of which I was a member, intended opening a golf course.

I had seen the game played at Wimbledon and Mitcham, but it did not in any way appeal to me at that time. However, I equipped myself with a set of clubs, and on my return to New York had my first game in October 1896, on the Oakland links, a nine-hole course on Long Island, and one which is a very fine educator. Most of the holes are of an undulating nature, and it is essential to bring off the shot successfully, otherwise one is confronted with a hanging lie of some kind. This early experience has proved very helpful. From the very first I became an infatuated devotee. Every available opportunity found me endeavouring to put into practice the various strokes described in the works of Badminton, Park, and all the other authorities I could seize upon. Otherwise unaided I worked away, encouraged by gradual improvement, save in the matter of putting. I was too much concerned with what I then conceived to be the more essential elements—driving and approaching—to devote any close study to such a trivial and unimportant thing as putting. And it was not until three or four years later that I managed to acquire any real grasp of this vitally important art.

Encouraged by minor successes in tournaments I took
part in the U.S. Amateur Championship of 1898, lasting a few rounds and putting out such men as J. G. Thorp (the runner-up in 1896) and Foxhall Keene, only to succumb to Findlay S. Douglas, who administered a sound drubbing. He again beat me the following year, but by a small margin. In 1900 we again met, in the finals, and I managed to emerge successfully.

In 1901 ill-health sent me abroad, and I played over the various championship links and met several of the foremost players, but made a poor showing. Returning in time for the Championship, held that year at Atlantic City, I again annexed the title, as I also did in 1903 at Nassau. The 1900 meeting marked the last appearance of the gutta ball, and that of 1901 the advent of the rubber-core. The latter I tried for the first time only the day before the tournament commenced, and played with it throughout.

In 1904 I entered for the British Championship at Sandwich. Early in the spring I had received a letter from my old friend Devereux Emmett, who was at that time staying with some friends in Ireland (County Meath), and this letter, in view of its encouraging character and the successful daring of its prophecy, is now one of the most cherished mementoes of that eventful visit to Britain. "My dear Walter," Emmett wrote to me under date March 23, "I hear you are coming over to Sandwich to have a try at the Amateur Championship. I hope this is true. I will be there to root for you. I will be at the South-Eastern Hotel, Deal, from 23rd May until after the Open Championship. There will be some great golf going on. May 27, St. George's Vase; 28, England v. Scotland, Amateur; 31–June 3rd, Amateur Championship; June 4, England v. Scotland, Professional; 8th and 9th, Open Championship; 6th and 7th, Professional Tournament at Deal. I have been riding hard all winter and have only played golf twice, but have gone out in a field and driven a ball quite often. At this time of the year in this pasture country you can go on driving a ball for miles without losing it. I am going to be a month at Portmarnock in Ireland, before I go over to Sandwich. Let me know where you will be staying at Sandwich, and when you go there. If the
weather is calm I think you will win the thing, but if it is very windy the chances are in favour of some powerful slogger like Hunter or Maxwell. The carries are terrible against a stiff wind. I wish the links were Prestwick. They don’t begin to know how good you are over here, which will be greatly in your favour. I suppose your poor old Garden City has been frozen solid all this cold winter. We have had nothing but rain here. Such storms I never saw. I never put up with such hardships out hunting as I have this winter.” In a postscript he added, “Get over as early as possible. That links wants a lot of knowing. As I remember it the greens are not large, and most of them must be approached from short distance with a mashie or iron, not a putter.”

On my arrival I repaired to St. Andrews, but played so badly there, and also at North Berwick, that I put off going to Sandwich as long as possible, in the vain hope I might get back on to my game, for I did not wish to begin that way at Sandwich and thereby be more or less unnecessarily prejudiced against the course. So afraid was I of this that on getting to Sandwich I simply took a putter and a few balls and walked over the course. Singularly enough, with almost the first ball I struck I realised my game had come back. For the first time since landing I could “feel” the ball —a sense that was hitherto entirely lacking in every department of the game. Confidence thus re-established, I played a number of practice rounds with growing improvement. In the St. George’s Vase competition everything went well except the putting, which was rather ragged. In the effort to get back to form in Scotland I had managed to add considerably to my stock of clubs, and was then using a putting cleek I got at North Berwick. One of my compatriots suggested my trying his Schenectady putter. I did so, and it worked so well that in almost every round during the meeting I ran down two or three unusually long ones—and missed only a few short ones. I recall one of the latter at the Maiden in the final with Mr. Blackwell, and some day I hope I may entirely forget all recollection of the slight cheering which greeted the failure.
Perhaps the closest match I had was with Mr. Reade, who had me two down with four to play. The tussle with Mr. Robb was also very close. On the eleventh green an incident occurred which called forth some subsequent comment, arising from a misapprehension of the facts of the case. I had laid my approach putt dead. My caddie was holding the flag, and being an Englishman—and one of the poorest caddies I have ever had, by the way—and Mr. Robb being a Scotchman, he did not understand the latter's request to take the flag-stick out, Mr. Robb being away at the edge of the green, but understood it as a request to pick my ball up, which to my indignant astonishment he was in the act of doing, when I burst in with, "What the devil are you doing?" whereupon the ball was instantly replaced and the incident was closed so far as Mr. Robb and I were concerned. I know I lost the next hole, however.

The other matches were devoid of any noteworthy features, unless one excepts the magnificent display of driving as furnished by Mr. Blackwell, which made my own efforts in this direction seem absolutely puerile. Mr. Hutchinson's game, especially his iron play and putting, commanded my highest admiration. The showing made by Mr. Hilton was disappointing, and was marked by an evidence of nervousness singularly unexpected from a player of his mature experience and accomplishments.

I had a somewhat amusing experience at Sandwich. After the first day or so Benny Sayers displayed a very strong interest in my play, and asked me if I ever went in for training. Now it happened that about a year after I had commenced golf I conceived the idea that my game would be improved if I stopped smoking and drinking—not that I consider I do either immoderately—drinking, at all events. So a couple of weeks or so prior to one of the Lakewood tournaments I cut out both. I found that while it made no difference in my long game my work on the green was simply childish—I couldn't putt at all. Well, that settled all training for me, and I have never since allowed even golf to interfere with my smoking or drinking when I feel like it.
H. CHANDLER EGAN

WALTER J. TRAVIS
TRANSATLANTIC CHAMPIONS

GEORGE S. LYON
So I told Benny of my experience, much to his horror and surprise. His system of training, it appeared, not only tabooed all indulgences of this sort, but also embraced massage treatment—rubbing in Elliman's embrocation all over. In return for his kindly interest I compromised on the rubbing, and to cement the bargain he loaned me his favourite spoon. I don't know that the perfunctorily performed massage treatment had any real virtues, but I do know that the spoon was of valuable assistance. Many a time since, Benny, have my grateful thoughts wafted over to you at North Berwick, and also to Taylor, Harry Vardon, and Braid for the keen and sympathetic interest taken in my welfare that week.

I question very much whether I shall ever indulge myself in the pleasure of participating in another of your champion-ships. For one thing, I'm sorry to say that, keenly as I love the game—I believe I am more attached to it than ever—I have lost in a large measure the keen, competitive spirit which formerly animated me in big events. Now I no longer have the "thrills"—that ecstatic feeling which, I have found, helps so much towards success.

Now I am asked to say something about the principles of golf as I view them, and in particular about the value of putting. I am not a believer in long driving, which is not at the same time good driving, and I think that even yet, after the lesson has been many times taught to them, many players hopelessly underestimate the value of reliable putting. Putting was one of the last matters I made a close study of when I took up the game of golf. The first thing that strikes you when you come to analyse the game is that of the total number of strokes played in a perfect round of golf nearly half the number are absorbed in these little putts on the green. As I have already said, it took me some time to make this discovery. But when I did I gave my whole mind to a solution of the problem. Supposing a hole has a bogey of five. It is meant that the player shall be on the green in three strokes and shall have two left for the putts. If the hole has a bogey of four, he has to be on the green in two, and has two left for putting. If it is a bogey of
three, he must be on the green with his tee shot and has two left for putts. This is the simple mathematical reckoning of the business; but very few golfers seem to put it to themselves that putting is really half the game; that they have twice as many putts—and, alas! sometimes more—as drives in the course of a round, and that, therefore, bad putting at a hole is twice as costly as bad driving, and excellent putting infinitely more remunerative than the very finest play from the tee. On the green at last, you may, indeed, very often gain a whole stroke; and it is the stroke that tells.

Now watch the man who drives the longest balls all through a round, and count the number of times when, in his desperate efforts to drive farther and farther, he goes clean off the line and into rough grass or other entanglements; then count the number of times that he loses the hole as a consequence of getting into these difficulties, and reckon for yourself how much his long driving has benefited him.

Unless a man can absolutely depend upon himself surely it is better to practise a little self-denial in driving and keep straight. Let your opponent go into the rough grass if he likes. Apart from this view of the matter, consider how very seldom does the long driver, even when his stroke is well played, gain anything substantial over the average driver. Take a hole of average length—say, 350 yards. The latter drives his tee shot 200 yards, and, being left with a comfortable iron shot to the green, is perfectly satisfied that he has done everything that is humanly possible under the circumstances. He is nicely in the middle of the course, clear of all hazards, and his second shot will be as easy of accomplishment as it was ever meant to be. He has insured himself against all accidents; that is to say, he has taken twenty or thirty yards off his drive and been guaranteed for safety.

Now what does the long driver do? He smites the ball to the utmost extent of his power with the object of out-driving his opponent. Why he does so he himself sometimes does not know. He cannot possibly reach the green, 350 yards away, in a single stroke. Therefore he will have to play a second shot to reach it, as his opponent had to do,
and the only difference will be that, if his drive has come off as he intended, he may have his to play from a range of 120 yards instead of 150 yards, as in his opponent's case. That is not a very tangible advantage after all. And he has run all the extra risk of trouble.

If a player stands a chance of gaining a whole stroke by tremendous driving, as distinguished from average driving, at a hole, let him by all means run the sporting risk if so disposed, which he must undoubtedly run when he makes the attempt; but before he makes up his mind to do so let him mentally map out the play at any given hole, and see whether, in the absence of fozzles, there is really any good prospect of his gaining that stroke. If he does this fairly and logically he will see that very seldom will he gain it.

When I came to study putting at the beginning I realised that there were two chief essentials in it, which, once mastered, made it comparatively easy. The first of these essentials is that the ball shall be made to travel in the proper line for the hole; and the second, that just sufficient strength shall be put into the stroke as to ensure the ball reaching the hole with so very little to spare that there shall be no risk of its running far past. Anybody can be taught with practice how to putt straight, but nobody can give him a hint of value as to how to putt with the proper strength. This is more an instinct than anything else. Nearly everybody has his own style of putting, and it is only with hesitation that I advise particular methods; for if a man is a good putter, as putters go, it is probably best for him to keep to the style which he has very likely dropped upon by accident. You cannot be dogmatic about putting, as you can about the methods of driving, for there is far more liberty in method. However, there seems to me to be some chief principles, adherence to which I regard as very helpful.

The question of stance is a very important one, although in the same day you rarely see two players adopt exactly the same stance in putting. Some of them putt off the right leg and some off the left. In my opinion, the right leg is the better. Now, in putting, everything depends upon the
proper action of the wrists. The body does not enter into the question at all, for whilst a putt is being accomplished it should be absolutely motionless, and when it is not so there is a much greater likelihood than usual of the putt being missed.

I believe that putting should be done always with one hand—with one hand actively at work, that is. The left hand should be used only for the purpose of swinging the clubhead backwards preparatory to taking the stroke. When it has done that its work is done, and the right hand should then be sole master of the situation, the left being merely kept in attachment to it for steadying purposes. When only one hand is thus employed the gain in accuracy is very great. Two hands at work on a short putt or a long one tend to distraction. When the stroke is being made the grip of the right hand should be firm, but not tight, and after the impact the club-head should be allowed to pass clean through with an easy following stroke. The follow-through should, indeed, be as long as it is possible to make it comfortably, and, with this object in view, at the moment of touching the ball the grip of the fingers of the left hand should be considerably relaxed, so that the right hand may go on doing its work without interruption. Never hit or jerk the ball, as so many players do. There is nothing that pays so well as the easy follow-through stroke. And remember, finally, that very best of maxims—"Never up, never in."
'VARSITY GOLF, AND AFTER

My first connection with the game occurred when I was at Oxford. The University Golf Club made application to the Blues Committee, of which, as secretary of the Athletic Club, I was a member, for a Half-Blue for the eight men who played against Cambridge. The application was refused with ribald jest and laughter in something under half a minute. All I knew about golf at that time was that a friend of mine at Magdalen had purchased a red coat and announced his intention of getting his exercise at Cowley during the winter months, his doctor having forbidden him to row or play football. I do not think he ever got very far with the game, for a year later he did not know the name of the then Amateur Champion. He told me when we met after the Long Vacation that he had made the acquaintance of Mr. Horace Hutchinson, and had put his foot in it sadly. Being an omnivorous reader, especially of light literature, he knew Mr. Hutchinson's name, and shortly after being introduced to him asked him what work he was then engaged upon. Mr. Hutchinson said that he was doing a book on golf for the Badminton Library, and my friend expressed surprise, remembering that the publishers had promised that each volume in that library should be written by a practical expert.

I first struck, or struck at, a golf-ball just after Easter,
1891. Circumstances took me to Bournemouth, and my family, finding that the boredom produced by life in seaside lodgings was making me tiresome to them, suborned certain members of the Bournemouth Golf Club to take me over to Brockenhurst. I daresay they have since regretted the unwisdom of their action, though they have always recognised that it would be futile to give expression to their regret. I was not tremendously impressed by the game at Brockenhurst, but during the following summer I found that several men, on whose judgment about games I could rely, having played much cricket with them, had taken to golf, and were lamenting that they had not done so earlier. Therefore, when the Gloucestershire cricket season ended, and I was staying near Minchinhampton, I determined to avail myself of the opportunity.

For the next week my hosts saw nothing of me from the moment breakfast was finished till the soup was on the table. I was up at the common as early in the day as possible taking a lesson from Nicholls, the professional to the Minchinhampton Golf Club. My recollection is that I did not play any matches, but walked round with two of my friends morning and afternoon, and took another lesson in the evening until the light failed. Nicholls must have been an extraordinarily good teacher, because after a week with him I went straight to Sandwich, on the principle that the best was good enough for me, and holed in 96 just before my fortnight there was up. One incident in that round I remember most vividly. I topped my tee shot at the Maiden, and the ball lay among the pebbles; I had a go at it, and was mightily pleased to see it carry the guide flag. When we arrived at the green my ball was lying on the lip of the hole, and my opponent had a long putt for the half, since he was giving me a stroke there and at seventeen other holes. He made a valiant effort, but only succeeded in knocking me in. I have sometimes wondered whether I reckoned I was down in two at the Maiden when I made my score of 96. It does not much matter, fortunately, but it would have been a horrible affair if the difference between a
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