

EMPEROR OF GOLF

Stormy petrel of the world's golf-courses for over twenty years, Henry Cotton has crowned his triumphant career by once again winning the Open Golf Championship.

SEVEN thousand people cheered Henry Cotton as he sank the most courageous putt of his career to win the 1948 Open Golf Championship at Muirfield.

Probably half a million listeners heard the applause on the radio. As I sat in my armchair with the excited voice of Stewart Macpherson, the B.B.C. commentator, almost drowned by the acclamations of the crowds round the eighteenth green, my mind went back to the Southport Tournament in 1932, when another crowd cheered as Henry Cotton missed a putt to tie for the first prize.

Seldom has any athlete experienced greater bouts of popularity and unpopularity in so comparatively a short space of time. Henry is once again the idol of the golfing public, having confounded all the critics who thought that forty-one was too old for any champion to stage a comeback.

Always Henry

You notice, by the way, that he is always called Henry. Christian names shed a very interesting light on their owners. If you are christened Henry and are a particularly amiable type, the chances are that you will be called Hal by your friends, and even by the public. If you are normally amiable, you will be called Harry.

To remain Henry, even to your closest friends, means that there is a streak of austerity in you which forbids any friendly abbreviation or nickname.

Henry has been called many things in his time, many of them rude. He has also been called the Emperor of Golf. His game has been described as majestic. Personally, having known him for nearly twenty years, I regard him as the Gene Tunney of golf.

The points of similarity are considerable. The man who beat Jack Dempsey for the heavyweight championship of the world was barely a middle-weight until he was twenty-

five or twenty-six, but by sheer hard physical exercises he built himself up to over fourteen stone.

Henry Cotton at the same age was barely eleven stone. He, too, built himself up to what must now be thirteen and a half stone at the least. Both men are highbrows. Neither man has ever sought popularity. Gene Tunney genuinely liked reading Russian novels. He really had one of his greatest thrills when he spent two or three days with Bernard Shaw. This was not ballyhoo on the part of the fight promoters. It was strictly accurate.

Complete Cosmopolitan

Henry Cotton knows much more about Russian ballet than the vast majority of balletomanes. He also knows much more about European politics than most people, including myself. He is a complete cosmopolitan, talks excellent French and tolerably good German and Italian.

As a gourmet he has few equals in spite of his delicate stomach, which has affected his whole career so much. He is a very fine judge of wines, particularly Rhine wines and Moselle wines. He can discuss almost any subject without embarrassment and with knowledge.

The reason is not far to seek. Wherever he has played in tournaments—Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, the United States and South America—he automatically meets and talks to ministers, princes, business chiefs and other celebrities who take an interest in golf. But, as far as possible, he does not talk golf to them.

When I played golf with him at Monte Carlo he did not talk shop. He showed a much greater interest in and knowledge of Max Intraor and the black-currency spivs in the South of France. He knew the inner details of the private lives of all the premières danseuses in the ballet. He was on intimate terms with the Chef de Sécurité in the Casino.

So much for Henry the cosmopolitan. Henry the golfer first hit a ball at the age of eleven.

He went to school at Alleyn's, Dulwich, and two or three years later took part in the first Boys' Amateur Golf Championship, in which he was defeated in his first round. His brother Leslie was also keen about golf, and the two youngsters took the view, while still at school, that golf offered a better business career than accountancy or any other city job.

The operative word in the case of Henry's career has always been 'business.'

Got A Job

At the youthful age of seventeen he got himself a job as assistant professional at Fulwell. Two years later he talked himself into a job at Langley Park as a full-blown professional.

From that moment Henry decided to better himself in every way, and incidentally to better the status of every golf professional in the country.

With the exception of George Duncan, who was paid £800 a year by the late Lord Northcliffe, there was scarcely a golf professional in the country earning more than £5 a week. Their position in the

social scale was definitely humble. Their professionals' shops were tin shanties. If they played in a tournament, or even a championship, they lived in digs or stayed at some distinctly humble hotel or guest house. From the very start Henry was determined to rise above patronage—or perhaps I should say patronising—however friendly the patrons.

At the age of twenty he took a decision which altered his whole career and was largely responsible for the phases of unpopularity which were to dog him later on. With a very few pounds in his bank he went to America—not so much in the hopes of winning any money in competitive golf, as to sharpen up his game and to see how American golf professionals lived. "This is going to be a voyage of discovery," he said.

An Adept Learner

What did he discover? He discovered that American golf pro stayed at the smartest hotels, drove the most opulent roadsters, dressed gaudily, lived at the top of their income and treated big golf as show business. Henry was an adept learner. He returned to England full of an entirely new concept of the proper status of the golf pro.

Frankly, he overdid it. It must be remembered, however, that he was not yet twenty-two when he returned; and youth's indiscretions are more pardonable than those of middle age.

To the golfing world he seemed to have grown too big for his boots. Nor did he get on as well as before with the members of Langley Park Golf Club.

Thus it was that when, in 1931, I took the boat train to Dover from Victoria, I found in my compartment a rather pale youth, elegantly dressed, also travelling to Belgium. Henry Cotton had pulled out.

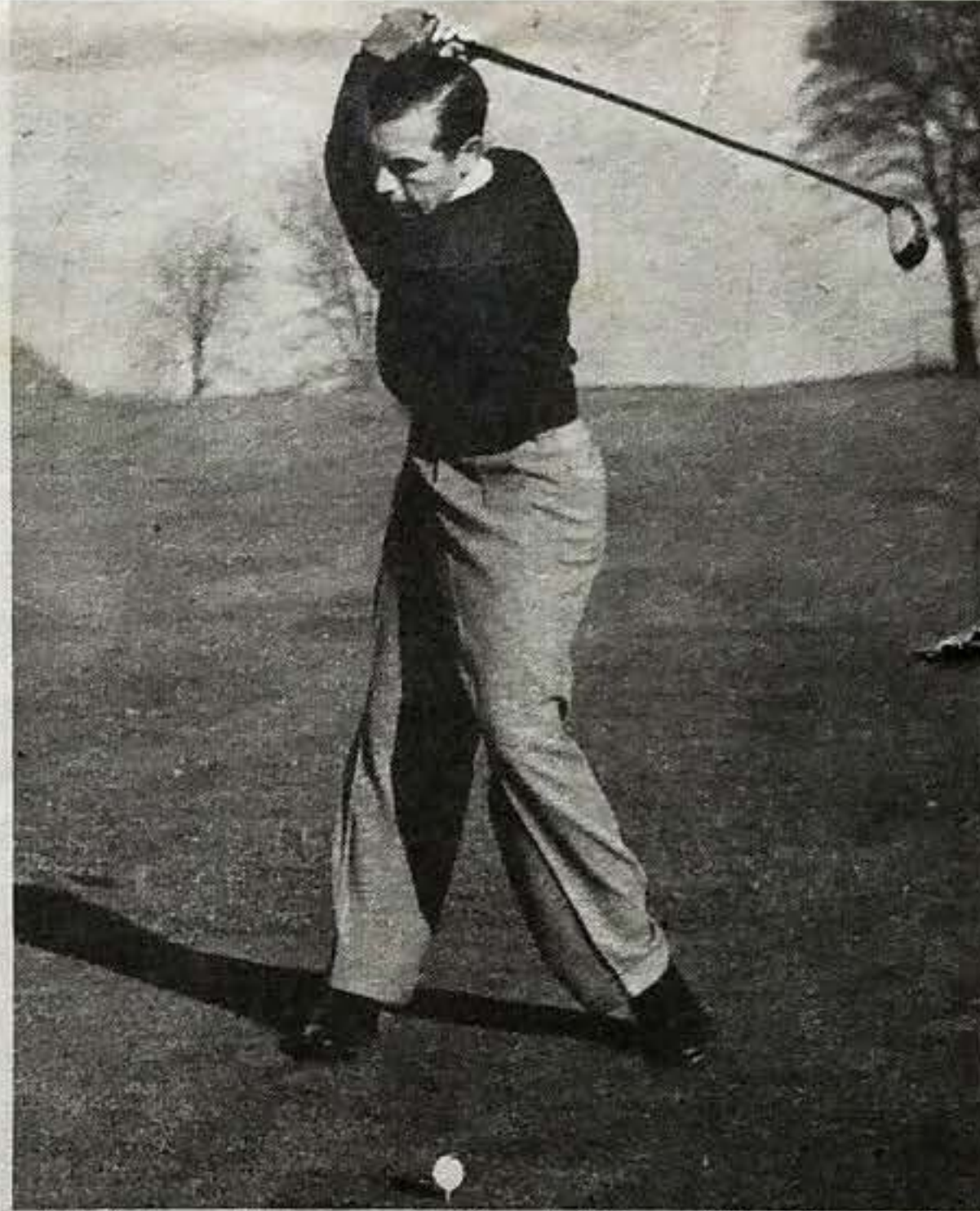
It was a sheer gamble on his part. The Waterloo Golf Club, some miles from Brussels and by no means the best in the neighbourhood, had offered him a job although their membership was small and their resources were scanty. Henry had already made up his mind to accept the post, although he had not yet seen the course when we met on the train. A few weeks after this flying visit he took the job.

Into The Headlines

In a matter of weeks the membership of the club had increased by 150. In spite of the attractions of much better courses like Spa, Le Coq, Zoute and Knocke, the club flourished, and golf became the snob game of Belgium, aided, it is true, by King Leopold's fondness for it.

In 1934, after the Americans had won our Open Championship for eleven consecutive years, Henry returned and won the title. Not that he had incarcerated himself in Belgium for that period. On the contrary, he had taken part in various professional tournaments in England, always getting himself, deliberately or otherwise, into the headlines. **One day it would be his clothes—a rose-pink pull-over with silver-grey trousers, blue and yellow spotted cowboy scarf and black and white shoes (wearing which he won first prize in a 1,500-guinea tournament).**

Another day he would be instructed to stop driving golf balls off a tee at Sandwich. Another day he would cause a furore by refusing to play in the Ryder Cup team against the United States because he did not want to be bound by petty restrictions affecting his return to this country. Another day he would



The driver and how to use it! Cotton's drive could be phenomenal.

scratch after qualifying in a 1,000-guinea tournament because his stomach was causing him trouble.

Henry has always been blessed with an acute sense of news value. Without any trouble at all he had become the most maligned golfer in Europe. Nevertheless, he pursued his steady, realistic course. He was a golf professional and golf was his business, not his pleasure.

When it was suggested by the Professional Golfers' Association that caddies should be allocated by ballot, Henry protested hotly. As on so many other occasions, he was entirely right. A good caddy is of paramount importance—to Henry more so than to any other first-class golfer in the world.

Not An Easy Man To Club

Henry has a tendon Achilles at golf. He cannot 'see' a line on the green. For this all-important department of the game he is very largely dependent on his caddy. Putting has been his greatest enemy.

Henry needs no advice from his caddy as to what club to use. He is not an easy man to club. Once in two rounds he can, if necessary, hit the ball sixty yards farther than his normal drive. (He did this at the twelfth hole on the old course at Walton Heath when he was in a tight spot. The carry was 285 yards!) The trouble with this extra-long drive, or brassie shot, is that it strains his side, and he cannot do it usefully except on rare occasions.

A direct result of his winning the Open Championship in 1934 was his invitation from Lord Rosebery to become the pro at Ashridge, which was then doing very badly. In a short space of time the caddies increased from five to fifty; four club-makers and their assistants were employed in his shop; membership increased enormously; and Henry gave innumerable lessons. To justify still further his appointment, he won the Open Championship in 1937.

He Is An Enigma

Came the war, and during the phoney period he played in a number of exhibition golf matches, which earned an astonishing amount of money for the Red Cross. Next he joined the Royal Air Force; but within a year or two his latent duodenal trouble was responsible for his discharge, and when I saw him shortly afterwards he seriously

doubted whether he would ever play competitive golf again.

Fortunately, however, he found at Monte Carlo shortly after the end of the war a French specialist who has completely cured him, with the result that not only did he become the match-playing champion of England in 1946, but has now won the Open Championship for the third time.

Henry is an enigma to all except his close friends. During the twenty-two years since he had the first proper recognition accorded to him in 1927—by *Everybody's Weekly*, who tipped him as the future Open Champion—he has taken chance after chance, and yet has never forgotten his one-track determination to make as much money as possible out of golf. And nobody can deny that he has succeeded.

He has become a director of Spalding's and a very highly paid salesman for a paper-making company. Nor must one forget the royalties he draws annually from the 'Cotton' glove. His arrangement with the Casino at Monte Carlo enables him to avoid the bleak English winter.

In London he lives in a suite at the Dorchester, with his rich and equally delightful South American wife with the odd nickname of Toots, having sold his charming house at Ashridge with its fourteen acres, where he had his own valet, chauffeur and gardener, quite apart from the rest of his domestic staff.

Henry is undoubtedly a character who believes in making hay while the sun shines. Only last week he was asked to give an interview for a weekly magazine. He replied that his fee would be seventy-five pounds. It is only surprising that he did not want to charge guineas. But then, what can one expect from a man who has earned £300 a week on the music halls, who complained to the Duc de Mouchy that the £52 10s. he received as runner-up in the French Open Championship was an insult, who told me ten years ago that his future was provided for even if he never hit a golf ball again.

Or of a man whose income today, from one source and another, is unquestionably in the neighbourhood of a gross £10,000 a year?

CHARLES GRAVES



The Open Golf Champion with his Trophy. At forty-one, Cotton has made a great comeback.