

INSPIRED GOLF

CHAPTER I

THE SIN OF ACEDIA

THIS little work is a humble attempt to come to the rescue of the golfing backslider. The backslider may be taken to be a player who, after having been for some time familiar with the game of golf, finds himself (or herself) slipping steadily back instead of forwards, which for a keen hand is a truly miserable state to fall into. The victim of the lapse is quite aware that something or other has gone radically wrong with his golf, and yet he is quite unable to discover what is the matter. He tries desperately hard to cure himself, only to find that he grows more and more uncertain of his stroke; and in this unhappy condition he is apt to fall into the sin of acedia. Acedia is an old monkish term for a spiritual numbness, a sort of dull acceptance of the fatal feeling that nothing is or can be of any use. When this state of acedia proves to be chronic, as too often happens, the victim sees an awful future before him; he sees himself as a weak and erring

brother, knowing that such he must ever be, and, worst of all, not caring.

Take heart, poor victim! Others before you have suffered, and some at least have found out what to them has opened a way of escape. Try, at any rate, the simple remedy I offer. You can fall no lower than you are; you may take a turn for the better. And with my very best wishes for your salvation I plunge in *medias res*.

I take for granted that (like myself) you are either a regular double-figure handicap man or else your backsliding has brought you so low that your allowance ought to be reckoned in double figures, and that, in short, your present plight is such as to leave you not the shadow of a chance against a scratch player unless he concedes you a dozen strokes or more. Take yourself as such then; and now you need not be too proud to condescend to the comforting assistance of a liberal tee. A tee only a single millimetre in height may suit the ideal of the plus handicap man, the great artist in golf; and if it pleases you to imitate him do so; but remember that for you his ideal method may prove only a hindrance, just as of old the armour of Saul was to David. You know yourself for a weak brother; very well, then, accept the fact, and do not be afraid to accept anything that helps your weakness. The plus man, as I said, may tee up his ball only one millimetre or the twenty-fifth part of an inch. Do you tee up yours a quarter of an inch, a half inch, a whole inch, nay two

inches even, if by any means you can but give yourself the confidence that you are not going either to top it or to schlafl. Take a club, take any club you like, driver, brassy, cleek, iron, stand six feet back from the ball, and try a preliminary swing at a daisy: if there are no daisies a scrap of paper or a gun-wad will do as well. Address your daisy, and waggle as much as you like. Even a weak brother (or sister) has the right to waggle every bit as well and every bit as much as the plus player. While you waggle watch your breathing, watch just how you draw the air into your lungs and exhale it again. Now inhale deeply, then exhale, wagging all the time, and as you finish exhaling sole your club behind the daisy. Keep the club soled a moment while you draw in a full inspiration, shut your lips tight, and hold your breath. Now, now—instantly but slowly—take the club up—still hold'ng the breath—up to the top of the swing, pause there for the barest fraction of a second, and then swiftly deliver your blow. Not till the club comes away after passing the daisy are you to let your breath go out fully and freely. This is the inspiration I speak of, this delivery of the blow when the lungs are filled with air and the breath is held. Here is the secret out at last. Practise it, yes, practise it assiduously, with faith and hope, and what before seemed impossible will come easy to you. You will cease to slide backwards; you will be another golfer, a new man.

There is no mystery about the thing, no faking, no doping, no magic. It is no mechanical trick of a fancy club fitted with a concealed spring, or of a new ball filled with something more elastic than rubber. The secret is in you, in yourself. Here, inside your chest, you have lungs; fill them, and strike with them filled. There you have it! You cannot believe in so simple a remedy? Try it.

Of course inspiration does not supersede all the knowledge, the painfully hard-won knowledge, or golf which you already possess. For the most part the old maxims that you have so often repeated to yourself were true before, and they remain as true as ever still.

Take only a few of them:

1. Eye on the ball.
2. Slow back.
3. Start the club up with the wrists.
4. Left wrist hollow not arched.
5. Grip with the fingers.
6. Grip tight with the left.
7. Grip tighter in the down swing.
8. Upper arms near the body.
9. Left hip well round towards the ball.
10. Left shoulder well down to the ball.
11. Backbone the axis of swing.
12. Head as still as possible.
13. Follow through with the arms.
14. Hands away.
15. Left foot at finish firm on the ground.

Well, there are fifteen of them, anyway, to be thought of at once and consecutively; they might easily be multiplied to a full hundred, a figure enough to make the golfer recall the predicament of the unfortunate insect with her hundred legs:

The centipede was happy, quite
 Until the toad in fun
 Said, 'Pray which leg goes after which?'
 And worked her mind to such a pitch
 She lay distracted in the ditch
 Considering how to run.

The golfer's grip of the stance with his feet has been described as almost quadrumanous, but his brain has to work more like clockwork even than a centipede's.

Moreover the fifteen maxims above cited are all positive commandments, all 'thou-shalts'; of 'thou-shalt-nots' the list is just as long: don't press . . . don't sway . . . and so forth.

But there, never mind the number, and don't let them worry you; have faith in inspiration, and go on swinging cheerfully at the modest daisies on your lawn. I say on your lawn, for that is the sort of quiet place where you should first practise inspiration, if the idea, as I assume, be new to your mind. For Heaven's sake do give the new idea a fair chance and don't let it run away with you; don't go off at once to make a match with a friend and proceed to play round with the notion that this novelty of inspiration is going to do you a lot of good. The novelty will infallibly thrust all the older ideas into the

background, and though you may have been badly off your game before you may find there are lower depths still to which you can fall, which is very far from the result I am aiming at.

No, the new idea must be introduced discreetly and without disturbance to the great company of ideas already huddling together in the dimly lit chambers of your inner self. I sincerely hope that inspiration will prove a godsend to you, but the pressing need is to prevent it from becoming a curse and upsetting your poor bewildered brain worse than the centipede's. How to solve this problem will be the next point that we have to consider.