

CHAPTER III

NO TRIFLING

WELL, you have now had one shot if no more at inspired golf, and the next question for you is whether you care to go on with it. People do vary so very greatly with regard to matters of this sort; some folks are quite able to make up their minds in half a minute as to whether a thing is going to suit them, or the contrary; whereas others may take a month to think about it, and then they don't know. "If you hear me talk," as the Far West cowboys used to say when I was ranching out there fifty years ago, you will scarcely content yourself with giving inspiration so mean a test as only a bare half minute; you will try it, at the least, let us say, for half an hour. And be sure that you make that half hour's trial a fair one. Whether you choose to strike at a free ball on the links or at a captive in the garden give your mind wholly to the act of striking, and do it with 'intention' in the full philosophic sense of the word. Don't go worrying yourself about what may happen to the ball; leave that to take care of itself; concentrate absolutely on what you do in the striking.

There lies the essence of all practice that is to be of any real worth to you, concentration. Knocking a golf ball casually about may be good enough as a form of exercise in order to open your pores and limber up your muscles, but it won't help your golf much. To improve, you must bend your whole mind to the shot. Twenty shots struck with intention are of more value than two hundred which are only half meant. Give yourself time to think between them; twenty in half an hour will be quite enough. And use self-examination. Analyse after each stroke, think where it differed from the previous stroke; think of what you would wish to alter in the next. Don't beat your breast or use Western cowboy swears, if you top or fozzle. Say to yourself plainly, "that happened because I broke some law," and then see if you can spot which law it was, and when and how you broke it. Tee up again, and try now to break the same law in the same way next time. Above all don't worry. Smile at your failures. Smile.

Remember that your practice should not go on too long. Such powers of attention as your mind may have are invaluable, but they are also easily overstrained. Look backwards and reflect on the days of your youth, when you were a boy at school; how long a single hour in form when scemed, how weary and inattentive your mind used to grow before the end. Yet then you only had Latin and Greek to wrestle with, or perhaps Euclid. Now you are up against golf, a

very different proposition from trifling with *Propria quae maribus* or the *Pons Asinorum*. As I once heard a wise old clerical golfer exclaim with fervent emphasis; "Remember you can't trifle with golf!"

He was absolutely right, and therefore you cannot afford to trifle with this inspiration idea. No, give the cure I have ventured to suggest to you a fair show; don't give it only the dregs of your mind; let each inspired shot have the full benefit of every atom of will-power you can dispose of. If you do this faithfully you soon will be able to judge whether the cure is likely to suit your case or not.

Suppose it does not, then *cadit quæstio*. There is nothing more to say, and you may shut up these pages; it will be better for you to go on as you are. But if the inspiration tip shows signs of being a help, then don't hurry the cure. Don't start out to make trial of it by going out at once to play in a match and insisting on sedulously inspiring before each shot. Of course you might do so and find it a help right from the start, but you might also find it tend to make you too self-conscious and so put you off. Go on and play your match by all means, golf is a game and what you are after is amusement, but don't insist to yourself while playing that you are going to inspire. If when you strike off you find that your breath is inclined to hold itself, as it were automatically, why let it do so, but don't worry over it. Don't go asking yourself every time did you or did you not inspire before that shot. On the contrary, try to play your game in your

ordinary style as far as you conveniently can, letting all this new inspiration business slide.

But the next day—or better still the same day, after you have finished your game and have had tea and' rected—then take out a club and ball and give your inspired golf a few minutes trial, just enough to be interesting but not to make you feel stale. Do this daily for a week, and then go out and play a match in which at every tee, and if you like, before every shot through the green, and before every putt, you practise this new scheme of inspiration. A week will have given you time to adjust yourself to the new dodge mentally and bodily, and you now are not likely to find that it makes you produce anything worse than the weak brother's usual performance with which you are only too painfully familiar. Even if you do fall below your own humble par, you may ask yourself whether this is not simply due to nervousness caused by the novelty, and try whether after playing a few more matches this first nervousness will not disappear. If you still find yourself losing games steadily when you know that you ought not, then you will at last have a fair right to say, "Inspiration for me is a fraud."

Here let me make you a present of one suggestion. It is just possible that there was no need for you to inspire, because you had already been practising it unconsciously, just as Moliere's *bourgeois gentilhomme* had talked prose all his life without knowing it. There is such a thing as a habit changing itself automatically and this

may have been the case with you. Think over the past. Was there ever a time when you noticed a sudden improvement in your game? Possibly at that very time you did, quite spontaneously, adopt my remedy. James Braid has told us that from being only a moderate driver (moderate in his class, that is) he suddenly became a long one without knowing why. Can it have been due to an unconscious alteration in his way of breathing? If so he must be the very Monsieur Jourdain of golf.

Well, we may leave that matter to settle itself; each of us must analyse his own inner consciousness in his own way. But let us suppose that after a week's private practice you try inspiration in a match and find that you seem to be the better for it rather than the worse. Then go ahead, but continue practising your new method in private as well as in matches.

And do not forget that if Monsieur Jourdain's prose was unconsciously acquired the rest of the desired accomplishments were attained by purposeful application. The *bon bourgeois* did not trifle over the education of a *gentilhomme*, but carefully concentrated himself on what might seem the most trivial of details. You should imitate him on this point no less carefully, and whether you are thinking of inspiration, or wrist work, or follow through, or any other maxim, at the very instant of the act you must focus your whole mind on it, and, as the writer of Proverbs has it, 'Do it with thy might.' There is to be no trifling with golf.