

CHAPTER VI

INTENSIFICATION

THERE is one extra-special petition beyond all others that every golfer must have often felt inclined to offer up:

O wad some Power the gittie gie us
To see oursel's as ithers see us!

Robert Burns may not have been a golfer, but he saw deep into the soul of man, and he knew—none better—how hard it is to get outside ourselves. This indeed has been the most real of the difficulties we have had to contend with, even though inspiration, the first point that we considered, hardly requires an external view. Your own internal sensations can tell you all about drawing the air into your lungs and holding it there, and you know just what you are doing without the aid of the eye. But when it comes to such a matter as the body being twisted through a right-angle or the wrists being properly bent at the top of the swing an outside view would be a real convenience.

The best way undoubtedly to get such a view would be to have a cinematograph film taken showing you in the act of swinging; you could

then study the moving picture of yourself over and over, and spot your faults at your leisure; this might, however, cost rather more money than you care to spend. Let us see if we can find a less expensive substitute.

The simplest method of all is to call in the aid of the sun, not by the roundabout plan of getting yourself photographed on a film, but directly. On a sunshiny day, then, take your stand with your back to the sun, club in hand, and watch the tell-tale shadow of yourself. It will tell you if you rocked sideways on your stance, if you got your hands away, if you came well on to the left leg at the finish. One thing especially you can note accurately by this means, how much your head moves during the shot. Put a mark where the middle of your shadow's head comes, at the moment when you are addressing the ball; swing, and see where the shadow of the head has got to afterwards. I have tried this experiment with one of the finest golfers alive, one whose style experts have frequently singled out for praise, and I find that when he has the sun right at his back the shadow of his head at the finish is a good six inches more to the left than it was when he was addressing the ball. The shadow of the head does not move away from the mark during the up-swing, nor during the down-swing before the ball is hit, but afterwards it does move those few inches to the left, as also does the shadow of the body as well. I take this to be evidence that the fine golfer in question finishes with the weight of his body trans-

ferred to a considerable extent to the left foot, and this accords exactly with the impression left by the numerous pictures illustrating the way in which an ideal finish shows the left foot firmly planted and supporting the body. In ascertaining how far your own swing fulfils these desirable conditions you can have no better ally than the sun.

Take in the next place another most essential point, that of the firmness of the grip, and ask yourself, "Do you intensify in the down-swing?"

Neither your own eye nor some friendly instructor's eye can tell you anything whatever about that; it is purely a matter of internal self-observation. Swing at a daisy, and note the grip of either hand. What is your rule with regard to it? According to the best advice you should take firm hold with your left hand in order to start the club up with the wrist, and you are to keep that hold till the club gets to the top. The right hand must grip loosely in order to allow the club to turn as it goes up. To clench the club tightly with both hands inevitably produces a stiff cramped swing that would not do at all. But if you go on to perform the down-swing with this same loose grip the blow is likely to be both feeble and inaccurate. As the club descends the grip of both hands should tighten so that at the moment of impact the club is held as firmly as possible. The force of the blow delivered by the whole of your bodily frame has to be transferred to the club by the hands and thereby by the club to the ball. Supposing, then, that the hands holding the club are slack they cannot but

fail efficiently to transmit the force of the body to the ball, and the resulting blow will be feeble.

If on consideration you come to the conclusion that your grip is weak you may try to strengthen it if you like by various gymnastic exercises, such as by squeezing balls, using dumbbells, and so forth, or even by simply clenching your hands tightly at intervals during the day whenever your memory reminds you to do so. This sort of thing is ineffably tedious, but there is no doubt you can thus strengthen your grip very considerably if you will be at the pains.

Do not forget, moreover, to look at the grips of your clubs occasionally; the place where the fingers come is apt to get polished and wants to be roughened again with a few touches of the file. Some men use pitch to help them to keep tight hold of the club, and presumably they find it to their advantage. If you try this do it cautiously, for if you are thin skinned a grip with too much pitch on it—too much for you, that is—would be quite liable to skin your hands. In all such matters, of course, common sense is above all necessary. There is no need to play the fool and say, "Happy thought! try pitch," and go out to play in a competition after putting a lot of adhesive stick-stuff on your clubs for the first time in your golfing life. The right place for a man who acted like that would be the golf-course, attached to an idiot asylum.

I believe some men have experimented with oval and polygonal grips, but the innovation can hardly

be said to have become popular. Possibly it may suit a few people. All one can say about it is to repeat the old jest, "For those who like this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing they would like." Similarly rubber grips seem to suit some golfers better than leather. And similarly one can only say, "Chacun son goût."

To return to this question of intensifying: the little dodges and appliances above mentioned may or may not be of some use; they can hardly make much difference; the all important thing is your own will-power. Fix your mind on taking the club up with a firm (but not a desperate) grip; then, as it descends in the down swing, tighten your fingers on it for all you are worth. Nothing, inspiration only excepted, will do your blow so much good as this intensification of the grip at the psychological moment. It must take place in what is only a fraction of a second, and it must take place in the proper fraction of the second. Do it before the down-swing begins, and you cramp yourself; do it after the club has hit the ball, and it is a mere futility. There is only one proper fraction of a second in the case, and that comes during the first half of the down-swing. See if you can stab your will broad awake to put "vinegar and vitriol" into that proper fraction. I have no objection to offer to the gymnastics, or the hand-grip exercises, or to taking up carpentering as a finger exercise, and all the rest of it; but these things are mere aids: what is vital at the critical quarter-second is the power of the will. Intensify.