

## CHAPTER VII

### AMARYLLIS IN THE GARDEN

I CANNOT claim to be the first to apply the word inspiration to golf, for putting by itself is an inspiration, as some one before me has well remarked ; and I fancy some of us know the happy feeling of being truly inspired on those glorious days when all our putts seem to go right of themselves. Alas ! those occasions are painfully rare compared to the less happy but too oft-recurring days when our putts either mostly go wrong or, if right, seem to get there by a pure fluke. Now, the question is, does inspiration of the special brand I advocate help towards this truly inspired putting or the reverse ?

Personally I cannot declare positively that it does help ; but this much I will say : my inspiration, by which I mean striking the ball with the lungs filled and the breath held, does undoubtedly tend to keep the head still, and in putting the importance of keeping the head still is the one point on which all the golfing authorities that I have ever heard of are agreed. Except on that single point the teachers of golf disagree more or less in their doctrines about putting, and where great doctors

disagree I most assuredly am not going to be so presumptuous as to trot out any private prescription of my own. Or, if I did, it would have to be a mere vague aphorism, a generalization such as certain quacks love to ladle out, something couched in this sort of style: "There is no bad putting, there is only wrong thinking, wrong belief."

This does sound like quackery, but all the same the *dictum* really has a core of value hidden in it, just as some appalling quacks have unquestionably got hold of some real truths. Only believe in your heart that you can putt; only force yourself to have faith; your long putts will veritably go as dead as Colonel Bagey's, your short putts will go in. Quackery or not, that this is true I from my heart believe; nevertheless it does not quite solve the problem, because even as you look steadily at the ball and draw back the putter to strike, how are you to tell whether you do actually believe or whether your forced faith is no more than a make-believe? For there are two sides to your brain, and while one says, "I believe," the other may sneer aside, "Self-deceiver, you don't!"

So there you are. Faith is the solution, but who can show us the recipe for getting faith? Every one of us knows that if only he has confidence he can putt with anything at all in the shape of a putter, be it of iron, aluminium, or wood. Be it made with an upright lie or a flat lie, with a long shaft or with a short one, ay, he can putt with a walking-stick or an umbrella handle if it comes

to that ; nothing matters if only you can and do believe that you can. *Potes quia posse videris.*

But though I dare offer you no recipe for getting faith, O weak brother, I may say a word or two as to practice. One way of salvation for players such as you and I are is to practise hard at our putting, and the plan I recommend to you is to keep a private snook, a Bogey Colonel of your own, and play against him, provided that, as with all other practising, you don't go on at it too long and get stale. Remember that great aphorism of Voltaire's about education : "Every method is good except the one that bores you." Don't let your putting practice be a bore, then. Make a course in your garden and see in what score you can do the round of six or nine or twelve holes, taking two strokes a hole as your bogey.

Merely striking a lot of balls at a hole, hit or miss, is no use. You must play a whole round to score and play against a recognised ideal. Then, when you have begun by holing, say, three holes in or under bogey, it becomes a real effort to keep it up and go on to hole the remaining three, or six, or nine, or whatever number of holes you may have agreed on with yourself as the complete round, without letting The Terrible Colonel beat you. Such practice is far more useful than knocking balls casually into holes, it is also more amusing, and of course it is best of all when you can get a friendly opponent to oblige by taking you on.

Supposing that you find a partner for your garden golf you may make the game infinitely more varied

and interesting by the following scheme. Let us say that you have laid out a course of nine holes on a lawn the size of a tennis ground. Give each of the nine holes its own name, Kop, Pisgah, Centre, and so on; you must then write each name on a small square of cardboard, and put the lot of them in your pocket. Stand at one end of the lawn and at haphazard draw a name from your pocket. You and your partner then have to tee up where you are standing and play to the hole you have drawn. As soon as you have holed out there, draw another name, tee up beside the hole just played, and play to the one you have now drawn. When the holes have all been drawn and played you will have done a nine-hole round which had this excitement about it, that when you started it you had and could have no knowledge as to the order in which the holes were going to come or as to their length. Rounds thus played would practically never come two alike, and consequently you must be studying fresh putts every time, seeing that the length of each hole will depend upon how far it lies from the one drawn immediately before. If instead of doing this you always play the same nine-hole course you get too cunning, experience teaching you the strength of every putt over well; but this simple device of drawing the holes by lot instead of playing them in a fixed order affords an infinite variety, and makes it much more like actual play on the links.

As physical strength counts for just nothing on the putting green a lady partner (if you are lucky enough to find one may give you just as good a

match as a man. But if you find that when playing with a lady you are conscious of a natural repugnance to beating her (or being beaten by her!) try taking her in as a partner and making Colonel Bogey play your best ball. If that arrangement makes the battle too easy for the pair, of you combined, you may even concede him a point, possibly even two points, in order to produce a desperate fight, but the Terrible Colonel is apt to be a stiff enough proposition anyhow. Take him on, then, and back up your partner bravely in her struggle. Never mind if the Colonel does beat you; after all there is no harm done. Even if you have not sported with Amaryllis in the shade, you have played golf with her in the garden, and like a certain noble Roman you may write on your tablets, "Liem hunc non perdidit." "I have not lost to-day." And did not you enjoy yourself the better for her company? I used once to know out in the Far West a certain truly sporting tribe of Red Indians (not yet, I hope, quite extinct), who had a fine saying, "No happiness without a woman!" But I fear there are golfers who would hardly subscribe to that sentiment on the links.