

## CHAPTER VIII

### AMBIDEXTERITY

AND now let us leave our putting with Amaryllis in the garden for a while and switch off the train of our ideas to quite another line. I have said that the real difficulty you want to overcome in golf is mental, seeing that what is required of you is the concentrated effort of mind needful alike in order to recognise your faults and to amend them ; also we saw that for this purpose an outside view of your swing can be of great help and that the weak brother would be well advised to get the sun at his back so that he may be enabled to detect his faults as they are faithfully repeated by his shadow. This shadow image of yourself certainly lends an effectual aid to visualising the various positions successively occupied by the head, body, hands, and feet, in the process of delivering the blow, but at the same time it can hardly help you much towards the mental analysis of the mysterious reasons why your arms and legs should insist on getting themselves into the various false positions they incline to fall into. There is a method, however, which some of us have found helpful towards this analysis, namely, to reverse every one

of the bodily positions by striking the ball left-handed. The inversion enables the observing mind to follow the details of the action much closer.

To make trial of what is in fact a very simple experiment borrow a club from an amiable left-handed friend and tee up, that is if you can harden your heart and persuade yourself to take a full left-handed shot at a solid ball, or you may simply try a swing or two at a daisy with the lack of one of your own right-handed clubs. Don't worry over it, but dash away cheerfully, remembering that if the result of the experiment pleases you it will be a simple thing to buy a few old left-handed clubs cheap either from a professional or through the exchange columns of a newspaper, and so go into the thing properly equipped on your own.

Assuming that a confiding friend has lent you one of his clubs, tee up with care and address your ball left-handed. Here, by the way, let me insert a caution. If you are using captive balls be sure the string that restrains their flight lies pointing well forward as you address the ball. If it does not, the clubhead is liable to entangle itself in the string and then the ball becomes like a certain Hebrew prophet according to Voltaire, *capable de tout*. It may come right round and hit you very hard on the head, or fly off behind you and break somebody's else's head, or it may only break a window, but it is pretty sure to do some mischief or other. You have to look out for this when you are striking in the ordinary way, but it is particularly likely to happen when you start on so awk-

ward a thing as striking off left-handed. Also I would say, and this is most important if the club is a borrowed one, don't tee the captive ball so that the club can possibly strike against the nail or staple to which the string is fastened. If you do you will find that a strongly marked impression has been made on the face of that club, and the owner won't love you much for that!

So tee up, as I said, "with care," which is the way the caddies at "Westward Ho!" were of old taught to do, and keep your weather eye open to see how you are going to shape as a left-hander. If you happen to be naturally ambidexterous, even the first blow will quite possibly be all right, only unfortunately nature's plan is to make very few of us after that highly-desirable double-action run-both-ways pattern. The famous founder of the Boy Scouts is said to have such perfect ambidexterity that he can write two letters to two different people at once, one with his right hand and one with his left; but then he belongs to the class of the "rara avis" described by the old Roman writer as "most like to a black swan."

No; more probably your first attempt at a full drive left-handed will end (like the marriage service) in amazement; you will hear the club whistle through the empty air and behold the ball, still teed up in situ, looking you meekly in the face. At this sight old memories will revive, carrying you back to your first week of golf, when you not rarely missed the globe altogether without having the ghost of an idea why. Be consoled, then, for

missing some of your early left-handed shots and persevere: you will find yourself hitting them presently, and probably surprise yourself by finding how correct the form of your left-handed finish can be, even though the ball may travel but a little distance. Why the ball should not fly farther when the swing seems correct is hard to say; it may be due to the weakness of the left arm, or to the feebler grip of the left fingers; but you will be doing uncommonly well if one shot in twenty goes anywhere near as far as your ordinary right-handed blow. The distance that you get, however, is not of real importance; the point is to utilise the strangeness of the reversed position of the body so that the mind can analyse the details of its movements and educate itself to carry on the same analysis till more effectually when you return to right-handed striking. Concentrate on this, and experiment not only with a driver but with the other clubs.

Let me repeat, don't worry yourself in the slightest over this left-handed golf: if it amuses and interests you, well and good; go on with it as long as it continues to do so. If you keep it up for a couple of weeks there is no reason why you should not make a match with another weak brother (or sister), one it may well be even weaker than yourself, and go out and play a whole round with nothing but left-handed clubs in your bag. I will venture a guess that you will be mightily pleased if at the end of the eighteen holes your score is not something a bit worse than sevens.

But the moment left-handed golf bores you, drop it like a hot potato. I am not recommending the thing to you as a penance, however much you may deserve to do penance for your golfing sins, and however able and willing you may be to scourge yourself down the back with a left-handed club in the most approved Penitente fashion. The Penitente performer, whose bleeding back surprised me so that day in New Mexico I have told of, was almost as ambidexterous as the founder of the Boy Scouts himself, so much so that he criss-crossed his lacerated skin with alternate right and left-handed strokes, laid on most impartially. But then he wasn't doing it to amuse himself; that I can swear to; whereas you, O weak brother, I hope, are getting some pleasure out of the attempt to find a cure for your sins; if you can't enjoy yourself when you are playing a game, it is about time for you to get off the planet.

So long as it amuses you, then, practise the method of inversion, and remember that the ability to play a left-handed shot may sometimes be really useful. When I was teaching rifle shooting (another of my hobbies) I always urged my young friends to shoot from the left shoulder as well as from the right. They may find it convenient some day to aim thus round the left-hand angle of a wall without having to expose the whole body, while on horse-back it is the only way to fire off your weapon squarely to the right except by the awkward plan of holding the rifle as a pistol. So with a golf ball: some day you may discover yours

in a bunker where you can't get at it right-handed at all, but where a left-handed club, if you have one and can use it, may land you safely on the fair-way. After blundering into a bunker, a triumphant extrication like that puts you in heart again. You need not despise ambidexterity.