Chapter XI. How I Cure Faults

In the last chapter I imagined a complete beginner coming to me and asking to be taught golf. This time I will imagine another and more common case, that of the golfer, more or less mature, who comes to me in a state of despair and says, 'I'm slicing everything,' or 'I am hitting all my pitches on the socket,' or whatever else his particular trouble may be.

Golfers who are thus for the moment unhappy I may roughly divide into two classes. First of all, there is the man who has not got what I call the 'ball sense.' He probably never could or wanted to play games when he was a boy, and he has taken to golf when he is middle-aged because his doctor told him he must. He will never make a player: he has no instinct for the game and no power of balancing himself—a very, very important factor in playing games; still, in his way he enjoys it and wants to play as well as he can. The most that can be done for him is to make the best of a bad job. Nevertheless a great deal can be done to help him, and I have had plenty of experience in trying to do so.

First of all there is something to be done for a player of this type by artificial means—that is, by having his club adapted to his weaknesses. He
nearly always is inclined to slice, and this I would counteract by making his club with a hook. With a young athletic pupil I would not do that. I would not give in to his weakness, but would teach him to swing properly so that he did not slice. But in this case that is past praying for, and the hooky club if it does not get rid of the slice will reduce it and give him confidence. Also I would give the player a whippy club in order to give him a little more length. He will never be able to hit hard, and the artificial device of the springy shaft will make up a little for this deficiency.

I find that there is a peculiar kind of swing which is best suited to this rather feeble kind of player. It is first a fairly short one, because as a rule the further he is away from the ball the worse he balances himself. Next, it is what I think of as a 'round and up' swing. I do not know if that will convey anything to other people. I mean that the swing should begin by being a flat one, with the club going well round and pretty close to the ground. That does away with the strong natural desire to pick the club straight up with the right hand. But this player cannot complete the swing on these lines. He cannot get round enough and pivot freely. If he tries he will swing himself completely off his balance. So after the club has gone round a little way I teach him to take it up and then stop. In short, it is a swing that begins by being flat, then becomes upright, and then stops fairly short. It is not a powerful style on one for the man who can ever hope to be a good player, but it will produce a certain amount of steadiness, and the
player is more likely to balance himself decently well. In the case of a player to whom I teach this stop-gap method of driving I impress on him the fact that he ought to specialise in the short game. There is no reason why he should not pitch and putt, especially putt, pretty well. Let him be content with short but reasonably steady driving, and then learn to pitch and putt. If he does, he may come to beat a good many people who ought to be beating him.

Perhaps no one of my readers will like to think that these remarks apply to him. I hope they do not, and I will now come to the normal reasonably athletic player who is for the time being in a bad way either from one fault or another. He is more often worried about his driving than about anything else: so I will begin with that, taking the commoner golf faults or diseases, whichever you like to call them, in turn, and suggesting some remedies that are generally effective.

Suppose, then, that this golfer comes to me and says, 'I can't do any good at all. I'm hooking like blazes and smothering the ball.' Of course there are various things that may produce hooking, but the chief one that I look for first is the opening of the right hand and lifting the right elbow high in the air at the top of the swing. I am not sure that I am not putting the cart before the horse. I think it is rather the lifting up of the right elbow which tends to force the hand open. The result is this. Feeling that his right hand is open at the top and that he has lost control, the player makes a grab at the club on the way down. He succeeds in catching it, but by thus seizing it he shuts the face of the club. When he hits the ball it
is with the club-face turned over and the nose turned in, and of course he smotheres the ball. This is a trick it is quite easy to fall into, especially if one is tired. At the end of last season when I was dead stale I had a turn of it. I could not stop that right elbow going up, and round went every ball to the left. A great many people make it more fatally easy for themselves than they need by opening the right hand as they waggle. Then they are naturally inclined to do it as they swing. Those are especially given to it who, while they are wagglng, have the right elbow working backwards and forwards quite clear of the body. Let them resolutely keep the right elbow well into their ribs as they waggle. There will be much less tendency for the hand to open or the elbow to go up. I have sometimes seen this cure work like a charm. You will never see a good player with that right elbow wandering away from the body in the address.

Now suppose a still commoner case. The despairing one says, 'I'm slicing everything. I feel I'm going to before I start. I can't keep the ball out of the rough on the right.' It is very long odds indeed that he is not pivoting enough. In fact in nearly every case of slicing the trouble boils down to just this —lack of pivoting. The player won't start his swing with the turn of the left shoulder, and the more frightened he gets the less will that left shoulder do its office. He cannot so to speak 'get round the corner' in his swing, with the result that at the top he is in such a position that he must come across the ball on the way down. The left shoulder is one constant sinner: the right hand is another, as I have
dinned into my readers' ears right through the book. The two almost seem to conspire together. If the swing begins with the right hand taking charge, it is very difficult for the left shoulder to come round properly. So let the slicer mind that shoulder and hand and keep on pivoting.

Sometimes I find that slicing comes from the player being too heavy on his left foot. He starts with too much weight on it in the address. Then he does one of two things. Either he sways to the right to counteract it, or else he piles still more weight on to the left foot at the top of the swing. In either case he cannot turn properly and freely. The man who has too much weight on the left foot at the top of the swing constantly falls back on to his right foot at the finish. Very likely he attributes this habit of falling back to not having his weight enough forward. Of course he is exactly wrong in diagnosing his disease, and only makes it worse than ever by his remedy.

This habit of getting too much weight on the left is often caused by the player doing with his wooden club what he has been told to do with his irons. He is told to lean to the left and get his weight well forward in the up-swing when he is playing an iron shot. He finds that he plays his iron shots better in consequence, and jumps to the conclusion that this is the way to play all shots with all clubs. Not long ago a lady pupil of mine, a fairly good player, came to me very unhappy about her driving. About a month before I had given her some lessons in iron play, and now I found that she was trying to play all her drives like iron shots and getting far too much weight on
her left foot. I could not get her out of this trick at first. So at last I told her to try to sway. This was a desperate remedy, but it acted well. She did not really sway, although she thought she was doing so. What she did was to get lighter on the left foot, with the result that by the end of the hour she was swinging beautifully.

When a player is driving badly, whatever the particular fault he is committing, it is quite likely that he is taking his eye off the ball. But it does him no good to tell him so, or make him try hard to look at the ball. I don't believe in worrying about that. The thing to do is to search for the antecedent cause. One may be sure that he is doing something wrong in the earlier part of his swing that makes it almost inevitable that his eye should come off. The thing to do is to find out this something and get rid of it. When a man says to me in explanation of a bad shot, 'I took my eye off,' I say to him, 'But didn't you do something at the very beginning of your swing that made you do it?' If only one can get to the top of the swing properly the eye won't come off. I can never remember having taken my eye off unless there was something wrong on the way to the top.

I am not treating the old maxim, 'Keep your eye on the ball,' very respectfully, and I am equally disrespectful to another, 'Follow through.' I don't bother my own head or other people's about the follow-through. The club can't help coming through, quite as much as there is any necessity for, if the swing is properly made. Personally, on the days when I am hitting my best, I am conscious of less
coming through than usual. I wish I could hit the ball with as little follow-through as Abe Mitchell. Many people come through too much and think too much about it. Of course I may be wrong, but I never teach my pupils anything about following through.

When golfers come to me with tales of woe about their iron play, the thing they most often complain of is that the ball is constantly finishing to the left of the pin. This is because they will try to hit the ball instead of pushing it. Of course I mean 'pushing' in the sense in which we talk of a push shot. They are not bold enough, or have not faith enough to do what they know they ought to do. They won't get enough weight on the left foot, and they let their hands fall behind. The natural effect of this is to shut the blade of the club. It reaches the ball with the nose a little turned in, and the ball flies to the left.

I tell them to shove the hands a couple of inches forward when they are addressing the ball; but I add, 'For Heaven's sake don't move the weight with the hands.' The weight is to be moved on to the left foot, not in taking up the stance but as the club goes up. I know this is not an easy thing to do, but it has got to be done. I find it quite difficult to make myself believe that I can thus get my weight forward in playing quite short shots, but I play them best on the days when I really do believe it. A vast number of mashie shots (some of my own included) are 'fluffed' through this lack of weight on the left foot at the top.

A very common fault in playing mashie shots is that the player tries to scoop the ball up into the air. This
he does by a horrible bend of the left wrist on the way up, and a corresponding bend of the right wrist coming down. This bending of the left wrist going up is naturally followed by an opening of the right hand. Indeed it is all wrong from beginning to end. At Hanger Hill there is a hole on a terrace close to the club-house. The ball has to be pitched up on to the terrace, and at this hole I see lots and lots of players scooping away at the ball as if for dear life.

Finally, there is one painful and sometimes paralyzing disease with iron clubs that can attack champions as well as long handicap players. Needless to say it is called 'socketing.' This generally comes from having the left wrist locked. The player gets this wrist bent. He will not carry the left wrist boldly enough and far enough back. He gets his left wrist and also the club-face too much into the position which they should occupy in putting. My cure I express thus: 'Shove the club from the left shoulder, and get the blade of the club open.'

Occasionally there is a different cause. The player having got his left heel off the ground does not get it back to the ground by the time he hits the ball. I have seen very good players occasionally fall into this habit, and it is worth watching for.