Chap. XIV. Likes and Dislikes among Courses

I do not feel that I want to express my views on golfing architecture at any great length, although I have strong likes and dislikes both amongst individual courses and the different types of courses.

It might be imagined that as I am so whole-heartedly in favour of the 'All air route,' I should also be in favour of cross-bunkers. It was Taylor who said that there were no bunkers in the air: he is a great exponent of the 'All air route,' and he wants lots more cross-bunkers. I know he thinks that far too many of them have been done away with and too many have been put at the side. Well, I agree with him about making the ball do as much of its work as possible in the air, but I don't agree about the cross-bunkers. As a matter of fact I am all against cross-bunkers, and like plenty of hazards at the side.

It seems to me that you can never put a cross-bunker in quite the right place. At any rate I have not yet found the man who can. Cross-bunkers, when all is said, do not bother the good player. Almost their only use is to trap the man who half tops his shots, and the good player does not do that. But hazards skilfully placed at the sides of the fairway will always bother the best player in the world.
He is the man I want to see bothered. It makes the game so much more interesting.

I like dog-leg holes very much, and for my own particular benefit I like them best when the bend in them is towards the right. That is frankly because it suits the kind of shot I can play best. There are some very good courses where the bend is generally to the left. Addington is a good example. I think nearly all the dog-legged holes there turn to the left, and I do not like that so well. Everybody to his own taste, and I suppose the best and most interesting thing is to have some holes of both sorts.

I have a great admiration and liking for Mr. H. S. Colt’s courses. I always feel that I can play any one on a ‘Colt’ course. Perhaps I have been lucky on them, but they are certainly very good. Mr. Colt does not build fortifications across the fairway, but he is very skilful in placing his side hazards so that they catch a shot that may be pretty good but is not quite good enough.

If I am asked which is my favourite course, I give my answer unhesitatingly—the old course at St. Andrews. I think it is the best, and if I have got to play a match which is really of some importance, that is where I want to play it. St. Andrews has got a character and features that you find nowhere else. What I like about it is this, that you may play a very good shot there and find yourself in a very bad place. That is the real game of golf. I don’t want everything levelled and smoothed away so that by no possible chance can your ball take an
unlucky turn in a direction you don't like. People think and talk too much about 'fairness.'

Of other famous courses I ought to be fond of Westward Ho!, as I had the good fortune to do very well there, but the course did not really appeal to me very greatly. It is better than Deal, and perhaps I am ungrateful to Deal also, as I won the Championship there. After St. Andrews, among the Championship courses I put Sandwich. Although in the days of the gutty there was so much said about the long driving needed there, it is under modern conditions just a little short, but it is a good sound test of golf and there is plenty of wind there, which is a great thing.

When it comes to inland courses there is for me only one, and that is Sunningdale. I think it is beyond any doubt the best, and very fine golf indeed. When I wrote that sentence there was one course that I had for the moment forgotten, and that is Gleneagles, but now that I have remembered it I stick to my original opinion. No doubt, however, Gleneagles is an attractive course. When I first played there the ground was soft and the tees a very long way back, and I thought it a little too much of a long drivers' course. After I had left it I felt for a little while that I had left a little of my punch behind me there. Now, with much trampling of feet, the turf has hardened in a remarkable way and become much firmer. The tees have also, I think, been a little shortened, and altogether Gleneagles is by no means the fierce course that it was. But for the ordinary golfer at any rate it is none the less enjoyable for that.

When I was in America in the summers of 1921
and 1922 I found that the courses there had improved out of all knowledge since my visit in 1911. Then the architecture was of the dull, old-fashioned, inland type. To-day there is a very high standard everywhere, thanks to the work of such architects as Messrs. Donald, Ross, Devereux Emmett, W. J. Travis, and I certainly must not forget Mr. C. B. Macdonald who created the National and the Lido. Also our own architects Mr. Colt, Mr. Alison, and Mr. Fowler have done much good work there. One general criticism I venture to make on the American practice of soaking the greens with water. I think it makes the approaching too easy. Many a half-topped shot will stop on the green when it ought to run over it. However, the Americans are developing their grass for greens on such good and scientific lines that I expect that they will get their greens gradually firmer and do away with the soft ones.

I have played on the National and admired it very much indeed. I wondered why the Championship could not be played there, but, I suppose, perhaps the accommodation is a difficulty. To my great regret I did not play at Pine Valley, which many people tell me is the hardest course in the world, nor on the Lido, which others declare to be better and harder still. Though I never played on the Lido I think I know something about it from the many descriptions I have heard. I was told that when Gene Sarazen played there it half broke his heart with its difficulties, and to my mind it certainly should be a Championship course, if a day could be picked when there are
no mosquitoes there. Good as American golfers are to-day, I think they would be better still if they could or would test their powers more in the wind, but they struck me as not being very fond of wind.

Of all the courses I played on none was better than that of the McGregor Country Club at Saratoga. It was still rather new and the fairways not yet quite developed, but I thought that Mr. Emmett had made a wonderfully fine course. There are splendid sandhills there and altogether it is 'the real thing.'

Another that I thought very good was the Inverness course at Toledo, where Ray won his Championship. It is, I should say, just about as difficult as Sunningdale. The turf is very good and it is nice and open. I remember that I did a 68 and 69 there, but in spite of that Mitchell and I got beaten by Mr. 'Chick' Evans and Bob Macdonald. The course of the Highland Club at Indianapolis looked like becoming extremely good, and now, dodging back to New York, I thought Mr. Travis's architecture at Westchester-Biltmore very skilful indeed. It is a capital plan to have, as they have there, one good and very difficult course and one—shall I say—decent one where you can enjoy yourself. Pelham, Jim Barnes's course, I should call a 'good inland course' and not too desperately difficult.

Of the Boston courses Myopia is very nice, but personally I did not think it another Sunningdale. Brookline had been a good deal improved since I first saw it, and it is very pretty and charming, but honestly I do not think it quite a Championship course in these long driving days. Chicago, perhaps
the most enthusiastic town about golf in the world, is not blessed with very good land for playing on and most of the old courses there are rather flat and dull. They are making some much better ones now, however. Shoreacres they think perhaps their best, and it is good, but I thought there were rather too many ravines. Old Elm, laid out by Mr. Colt, is very attractive and the turf very good. It is not quite of Championship length, but, indeed, what courses are to-day? I don’t think I ever saw better greenkeeping than that of Pirrie at Old Elm. Skokie, where we played in the Championship, did not greatly impress me and the second nine holes were too short.

I wish I could have played at Oakmount, near Pittsburgh. I believe it is a fine course and it has this little idiosyncrasy, that all the bunkers there are raked in such a way that your ball is always in a furrow which half hides it. I remember Jim Barnes talking to me about these ruts, as he called them. Personally I like the chance of getting either a very good or a very bad lie in a bunker, and it seems a little monotonous to be always punished and to the same extent.

Finally, I think that the best turf I saw on the whole American continent was at Hamilton, near Toronto, a very good course indeed. Generally speaking, the turf in America is different from ours in one curious way, namely, that the ball does not lie close but is lifted a little off the ground, and, as I said, this probably accounts for the difference in methods with iron clubs which one notices between the players of the two countries.