Chapter III. The Grip of the Club

I attach the utmost importance to the manner in which way the club is gripped, and being a convert to the overlapping grip I am a great believer in that method. For many years I used the ordinary half-finger, half-palm grip, the same grip as Abe Mitchell adopts to-day. Vardon started the boom in overlapping. I believe J. H. Taylor has never gripped in any other way; Mr. Laidlay did it long before any of them, but it was left to Vardon to make it fashionable. Amongst other converts were Braid and Ben Sayers, who told me it took him six months to hit the ball straight in the new way. He, like most other players who let the left thumb lie down the shaft for the first time, had a tendency to slice. But perseverance prevailed, and all Sayers wishes now is to be forty years younger. Mr. John Ball and Sandy Herd are notable players who could not be converted to the new method, though I believe the latter had a go at it, but he missed the feel of the club in his palm. Mr. Hilton got as far as allowing the little finger to overlap, but never got the left thumb down the shaft.

All other things being equal, there is a sacrifice of power in adopting a finger grip, as one has much
more power with a palm grip, but I thought the finding of the fairway more often was worth the sacrifice. Another important point in favour of the finger grip is that one has greater freedom of wrist, and this makes shots possible that are not 'on' with a palm grip. Now there are all sorts of overlapping grips, and quite a lot of golfers get overlapping and interlocking confused. For instance, a pupil of mine assured me he had been taught the Vardon grip. His tutor was a friend, by the way. The first thing I noticed was that he had a bad interlocking grip and several enlarged finger-joints. I asked him what was wrong with them, and he assured me it was gout. I said I thought it was the way he gripped his club that was the cause of it, and he admitted that his doctor had said it was not gout. I met a professional the other day who had the same trouble through adopting an interlocking grip.

One often sees a grip in which during the waggle the club is slipping and sliding between the first finger and thumb of the right hand. As we waggle so we shall swing, and the player who has a sliding grip during the address will let the club slip in his swing. I know only one golfer who gets a good result from a sliding grip, and he took some time to convince me that he actually had such a grip. Unfortunately it is only too true. I am referring to James Sherlock, and there is no question about his results. He is a great player, who would have been greater had he had a punch. J. H. Taylor may also be mentioned amongst those who allow the club to slide at the top, but in Taylor’s case it is so very
little—from the second knuckle to the third of the right forefinger—whereas Sherlock allows his club to drop into the web at the base of the thumb. I think Taylor would get equally good results if he were, like Vardon, to make the V that is formed between the thumb and forefinger smaller, in which case there is no room for slipping; but this would not apply in Sherlock's case, as he depends upon that slip to complete his up-swing. If he were to shut up that space between the thumb and forefinger, he would have to pivot more in order to complete his swing, and I suppose he knows which is easier.

Sandy Herd has a similar right-hand grip to Sherlock, except that he shuts the space up so that there is no sliding. Mr. John Ball, though he has a palm grip, wedges the club firmly in the web, and though there is a certain amount of 'give' there is no sliding.

Then there are those good players Mr. Hilton and Edward Ray, who relax their grips at the top more than most other players. A certain amount of relaxing takes place at the top in most people's swings, and the fact that Ray allows both palms to leave the club is to be accounted for by the length of his swing. He has an upright swing which goes beyond the horizontal, so that it is impossible for him to keep his hands shut. In other words, if Ray's swing were not so long he would not open his hands so much at the top. I account for Mr. Hilton relaxing at the top by the way in which he holds the club. His grip is more of a finger than a palm one and the fingers are rather spread out, so that at the top they have much more difficulty in keeping their
position on the club than if they were crowded together in the first place.

I have never yet been able to fathom why I should have played for quite a long time in my early career with my left hand below my right, although I would always throw a cricket ball with my right. I have a youngster who overlaps his left over his right, holds the left hand at the bottom and can’t do anything else. He has a sister who never attempted anything but the orthodox way. It cannot be imitation in the boy’s case, as he never sees anything but the right below the left; but it seems natural to thirty per cent. of youngsters to grip with the left below the right. One sees it every day amongst very young caddie boys, but never yet have I seen a grown-up beginner grasp a club in this fashion. Fortunately I was persuaded to change my grip, and went ahead from then.

Another type of grip often seen is that in which both hands tend to be under the shaft. Sometimes the left is where it should be, but the right is under. The eternal struggle is against the natural tendency of the master hand—the right—to dominate the situation, and thank goodness we have one piece of old teaching that still holds good to-day, namely, ‘loose with the right.’ This means that we must not grip tight with the right hand when addressing and at the start of the up-swing.

I really think the worst grip of all is the one where both hands are under the shaft, of course in opposite directions. The left hand is in such a hopeless position and the right in such a strong one, that
the latter takes charge and ruins the swing. As a matter of fact we should strengthen the left, as it has quite a lot to do with the making of the swing. This should be done by bringing it over towards the right. We should weaken the right by bringing it towards the left.

There is no doubt whatever that one can get greater distances when both hands are on the right-hand side of the club—in other words, when all the knuckles of the left hand are showing and the knuckles of the right hand are pointing to the ground. But this brings about a tendency to shut the club-face which is dangerous. The ideal position of the left hand is such that it holds the club well in the roots of the fingers, so that two knuckles are showing, while the thumb is lying on the shaft and pointing down the back of it. I often find this left thumb stretched at full length down the shaft, but this is not a good plan. Some golfers do not pivot so much as others, and in their case it is advisable to have three knuckles of the left hand showing. This showing of an extra knuckle will give a tendency to shut the club-face at the top, and so counteract the normal tendency to slice produced by incomplete pivoting. I admit this is rather a desperate cure, but slicing is a desperate disease, and I know this showing of the third knuckle has given good results in the case of golfers who lift the club to the top with the right hand.

The small finger of the right hand fits plumb on the knuckle of the left forefinger, and with the right hand as with the left the club should be held in the
roots of the fingers. I have great difficulty in getting my pupils to hold enough in the fingers, as they naturally feel more power when holding in the palm; but it is so much easier to control the club with a finger grip that it is worth making the sacrifice of power. By bringing the hands as close together as we do in the overlapping grip, we also lose a good deal of leverage, but an extra twenty pounds in leverage coming down is not so valuable as the fact of the hands working in harmony. The hands should be closed as much as possible: and most important of all, we must not grip tightly with the right hand when addressing or at the start of the swing. To do that is to 'press.' The right hand should only begin to take charge when the club has travelled half-way on the up-swing.

Of course the expert player can shift his grip at will. For instance, should he wish to cut a shot or make the ball rise quickly, he then brings both hands more over the shaft, which has the effect of opening the club-face. Should he wish to get a little draw, he brings the left over to just the extent of showing another knuckle and puts the right under. This has the opposite effect and shuts the face. Even when he is not 'trying something,' the left hand naturally alters its position on the club. For example, the nearer he comes to the hole the greater will be its tendency to go more under. This is a very slight alteration, but it should take place. Finally, the great thing in the grip, no matter how you hold the club, is not to put any tension on the grip of the right hand until you are well on your way on the up-swing.