Chapter V. The Transference of Weight

In first-class golf there are three different methods of transferring the weight of the body during the swing. There is first the sudden pivoting of Braid. Then there is Ray's double body movement. This consists of a half sway to the right during the first half of the up-swing and then a half sway forward to adjust the balance while the swing is being completed. Thirdly, there is Herd's swing. Herd's method consists in starting with most of his weight on the left foot and then transferring it to the right. In all cases this is the easiest way to get there in the up-swing, as there is little screwing up of the body from the hips to be done; but it is the most dangerous also, as every golfer knows that a sway when not properly timed is fatal.

Ray's double sway and half screw of the body is to be recommended rather than the complete sway. Here again timing is a more vital factor than in Braid's method of screwing up the body in the same amount of space that it occupied during his address. I much prefer to see a player 'standing up' to hit the ball. By that I mean I like to see a player make his up-swing without using any more space than he takes up during his address. Taylor and Mitchell have this merit: as I call it, they 'stay there.' Remember,
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however, that the great thing is this: in whatever way these various players arrive at the top of the swing, they always maintain their balance. Some men have the gift of balance, and poise at the top of the swing comes fairly easy to them. Whether it comes easily or with difficulty it is enormously important.

Every good golfer unless he is a swayer addresses the ball with most of the weight on the right leg, and it is a perfectly natural procedure on account of the right hand being below the left. This pulls the right shoulder down and the extra weight on the right leg follows, unless it is fought against by an unnatural squaring of the shoulders.

A good swing is made as much with the body as it is with arms and wrists, and here the great difficulty arises. First of all, most of the weight being on the right leg is already ahead of the club, and this has to be got 'inside' as soon as possible, so that the levering of the bodily weight can work against the club and so help it to the top. It is essential that the club-head should lead: I mean by this that the club-head should pass and get ahead of the hands at once. Simultaneously with the movement of the club-head the left shoulder and right hip should begin to turn and the left heel leave the ground. I have said before, and say emphatically again, that at the start of the swing the right hand must not be allowed to overpower the left. If it does so the left shoulder, which is the main factor in making the up-swing, is left behind, the club-head does not pass the hands easily enough, and long before the club-head reaches the ball the swing is ruined.
Lots of nice smooth swings are entirely one-handed—that is, left-handed on the way up; the right hand is simply on the club waiting to put in the blow coming down. This sort of swing is made by a slow turning of the wrist, but one never sees swingers of this kind very long hitters, though as a rule they hit the ball straight. Should the left hand be allowed to make the whole of the up-swing, speed is lacking: in fact the whole movement is slow, and speed means distance.

In the two-handed swing, which is the natural method and is adopted by nearly all good players, an immediate turning of the left wrist is not necessary provided that the left hand is held sufficiently over the shaft; the natural half roll of the left forearm is enough during the first half of the up-swing. It is from that point onwards that the left wrist begins to turn and work its way under the club-shaft. I should rather say that it works its way towards that position, as I do not recommend the left wrist actually under the shaft for driving. The only turning that the right wrist does is when the club has got three-quarters of the way up; then the right wrist makes a half turn towards the head. This is a very important movement, for if this is done the club is in such a position that it must hit the ball from the inside.

When I say that, I am thinking particularly of those players who do not pivot very much, either because it is their natural method not to do so, or because they find it physically difficult. They may be too old or too stiff or even too fat. In the case of those who pivot freely, the turn of the shoulders naturally brings the club at the top of the swing to the right
position from which to start the downward blow. With a restricted pivot this position is not reached naturally, and then this little half-turn of the right wrist is valuable in getting the club there. If you try a swing with very little pivoting you will see that this is so. You will realise that you want the turn of the right wrist in order to feel that you are comfortable and can hit out. Without it you will feel that you are going to hit across the ball on the way down.

I can think of one very fine player who had this half-turn of the right wrist in a very marked degree. This is James Hepburn, who is now in America. He stood remarkably fast-footed in his up-swing and so did not pivot much, but he had to perfection this knack of turning the wrist so as to get the club to the right place to hit from. Massy has something of the same thing. It is this wrist-turn which causes the little flourish of the club which used always to be called his 'pig's-tail twiddle'; but he has a good deal of pivoting and freedom as well.

The releasing of the left heel simultaneously with the club-head starting on the upward journey should be a gradual movement. One should be careful always to feel the weight that has been taken off the left heel being transferred to the ball of the great toe. The weight passes gradually up the right side until the up-swing is half accomplished. Then the left side starts to take charge of the weight in the levering process, and continues to do so until the uptake is completed, when the ball of the left great toe will be carrying its maximum amount of weight; the maximum allowable, that is to say, but not all the weight.
Bear in mind that all the weight cannot now be on the left, otherwise there will be no balance. When coming down the levering process takes place in converse order, the right side tearing the weight from the left, and passes down until the club catches up with it at impact. Just before impact the left heel is on the ground to receive the weight coming forward on to it. Before this point has been reached, however, the left toe has already had a great deal of pressure on it. I have experimented on this subject and got other people to observe my left foot very closely during my swing, and I have found that half-way down in the down-swing, which is the moment of maximum effort, my left toe is trying to dig its way into the ground harder than at any other time. Incidentally, the fact that half-way down is the moment of effort can be seen in a rather interesting way from photographs. Look at the face of the player, as well as you can, in the series of driving photographs. Clearly he is making a great effort half-way down. At the moment of impact there is, by comparison, an appearance of relaxing. This is particularly noticeable in any photographs of Taylor hitting the ball, although when you watch him in real life you may get the impression that it is at impact that he is putting in all he knows. A little while after impact the relaxation seems to disappear, and there comes again the appearance of great effort, as if the player were hanging fiercely on to the club to stop it flying out of his hand.

However, this is to wander away from the left heel, which had just come on to the ground before the
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actual impact, in order to receive the weight. By the
time the shot is finished one should be able to do
away with the right foot altogether, but I think the
question of a good or bad drive has been decided
before then. The important question is how the
weight is distributed at the top. If the body is
balanced at that point, then the finish will naturally
be right.

The height of a shot all depends upon the amount
of weight that was on the left foot at the top of the
swing. For instance, if one wishes to keep a ball down
against a wind, extra weight is crowded on to the left
during the uptake. Braid is our longest hitter against
a wind, and this is partly because he is naturally
heavier on his left foot at the top and partly because
he adopts the shut-face method. If a player is heavy
on the left foot at the top it means that the weight
will be much later in its transference to the right on
the down-swing. It appears to me that in Braid's
case his weight gets behind his club only at the last
possible moment. This makes his blow a descend-
ing one and so keeps the ball low.

Taylor, like Braid, hits nearly every shot a descend-
ing blow, but does it in a different way. Instead of
transferring extra weight on to the left foot during
the up-swing, Taylor when he takes up his stance
stands a little more in front of the ball than most
people do. Consequently his weight, like Braid's, is
more forward than that of, say, Vardon, who might
be described as having a tendency to hit the ball up.
I might express it in other language by saying that the
bottom of the arc is reached in Vardon's case sooner
than in Braid's or Taylor's on account of his having more weight on the right before impact. Vardon can lean over and hit the ball down when the occasion demands, but that is not his natural way of hitting a ball.

In iron-club play, except in a full cleek shot, the transference of the weight is not quite the same as with wooden clubs. What we all wish to do when using an iron is to hit the type of shot that starts low, gradually rises until it reaches the end of its flight, and then comes nearly straight down. In other words, we want to hit the ball a descending blow beneath its centre. There are two ways of playing this shot. One consists in a marked transference of weight on to the left foot during the up-swing; the other in standing more in front of the ball when addressing it. I recommend the first method. It seems to me much easier to time the transference of the weight when the swing is in action than it is when the weight is put in front before the swing is started. When I say that there is a difference in the weight movement between wooden-club shots and those with irons, I mean that the weight goes forward on to the left foot sooner in the case of an iron shot. The swing is a shorter one; therefore less pivoting is required, and so the transference of the weight forward feels more like a gradual leaning forward from right to left than anything else. The real difference is this, that the left leg does nearly all the weight-carrying throughout the stroke, and the shorter the shot the more noticeably is this so. At the same time we must have some use for the right leg. The extent of
that use is this: when we start the shot the right will be carrying most of the weight. After we have once started the swing we can very nearly do without it.

There are times, of course, when one has to play a different type of shot than the one with a low trajectory; one has often to get a ball up quickly, it may be with a brassy shot or it may be with a mashie pitch. Naturally we cannot play a full shot with any club without putting a little weight on the left foot. This is the shot in which we have to balance the body without putting more weight on the left foot than we can help. When it comes to the high mashie pitch we can all but do away with the left leg, as it should not have any weight on it during the stroke. But here let me emphasise the fact that what is in this special case a virtue is in playing the ordinary approach a vice. In playing the ordinary approach this is just the trouble of most golfers, that they are short of weight on the left foot during the uptake. One has always a chance of adjusting the weight when a full swing is made, as the club after passing half-way on the uptake begins to move forward and so brings the weight with it; but when a half-swing is being employed as in an approach, there is no chance of the recovery of balance if the weight is allowed to follow the club. I always tell my pupils to lean against the club during the uptake when a half-shot is being played. The tendency is always to allow the weight of the body to follow the arms and club to the right, and then to hit from a position in which all the weight is on the right leg, whereas it should be mostly on the left.