Chapter VII. The Spoon and how to play it

I believe that I am supposed to be a fairly good player with my spoon, and it is certainly a club of which I am extremely fond. I would go so far as to say that it is one which on an inland course no player should be without. This is particularly the case on muddy courses, and at certain times of the year a very large percentage of inland courses are muddy.

There are different sorts of spoons with different degrees of loft on their faces. The one that I use I should call a mid-spoon. It is a good deal less lofted than the bafisy-spoons which are very fashionable to-day. It is essential that the club should have a shallow face, and personally I am all in favour of the rounded sole. The spoon seems to me a distinctly easier club for the average golfer to play with than a cleek or an iron. It is easier for him to swing, because he can take a full swing with it. It is a more upright club than the brassy. The player stands nearer to his ball, and so naturally the swing is a bit more upright also.

The spoon is a club with which a very great deal can be done by the man who is a real master of it. Mr. Hilton, for instance, has an extraordinary command over the club, and can do a variety of things
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with it; but then he has always been an extraordinarily clever player, and many of his accomplishments are altogether beyond the reach of the ordinary golfer. Mr. Hilton, by the way, once lost a Championship, that at Prestwick in 1898, by hesitating between his faithful spoon and an iron that he did not know very well. He took the iron, went into the famous Himalayas at the fifth hole, took eight to that one short hole, and then finished third one stroke behind Willie Park and two behind Harry Vardon.

The ordinary golfer does not in fact try to do anything very subtle or out of the common with a spoon. He will often, if he is prudent, use it instead of his brassy through the green when the lies are soft and heavy, as he has thus a far better chance of picking up the ball. Apart from that, when he is at his own proper range from the green with the spoon, he just stands up and tries to hit the ball truly and is very glad if he can do so. In the case of many players this is probably the wisest course, and the fewer tricks they try the better.

Of course, however, for those who can do it and are ambitious, there is plenty more to learn, and in particular the stroke in which the ball is cut up to the hole. This is the shot with the spoon. The player must think about hitting the ball an ascending blow, and in order to do that he must be light on his left foot at the top of the swing. I have, of course, said this before in dealing with the difference between a descending and an ascending blow, but I will say it again. The pivoting should be to some extent restricted: that is, the player must stop his left shoulder
—just a little and not too much—and not allow it to come round quite so freely as it would with a brassy. The finish of the swing must also be a little more under control. I am conscious in playing this shot that I do control my finish in some degree: I do not lash out quite freely, but it is an impalpable thing which cannot be exactly described. It is a feeling that the player must have rather than any precise thing that he must do; and indeed, in trying to do the various things that I have suggested in playing this shot, he must be particularly careful not to exaggerate them. One is always apt to exaggerate any piece of advice given one at golf, and I think this is especially so in a stroke which differs from the straightforward shot in a number of small ways none of which are very strongly marked. Generally speaking, when playing any kind of spoon shot I am playing more 'within myself' than with other wooden clubs, and that is the feeling which the player must aim at.

I am sometimes asked how my spoon shots compare for distance with my cleek shots. I suppose that my average ordinary spoon shot goes just about as far as I hit with a cleek, that is when I hit out really hard and freely with a cleek. On the other hand, when I really have a go with my spoon I can leave my cleek shot behind.

The most thoroughgoing spoon player in the professional ranks is, I suppose, Sandy Herd, for he does not carry a cleek in his bag. He is a real artist with a spoon, and can do more or less what he wants with it. During the last year or so I have noticed Taylor carrying a spoon and playing some beautiful shots
with it. I fancy that it spares him some trouble, and saves him perhaps from hitting hard with a driving iron. I think some of his admirers don’t quite like to see him playing with a spoon because they get less chance of enjoying his iron play, but much as I admire his play with irons, I don’t think he has done himself any harm with a spoon. I was under the impression that I had never seen Taylor use a spoon till about a year ago, but Mr. Darwin tells me that he used one which he called his ‘Toby’ as long ago as 1909 at Deal, when he won the Championship there, and no doubt he is right. So presumably he takes to it on and off when he feels in the mood for it.