Chapter IX.

The Putter's Art

I believe the original story about putting for one's living comes from North Berwick, when David Grant—himself a wonder with a putter—turned round on some one who was knocking the ball into the hole from all parts of the green and said, 'If ye had tae keep a wife an' six bairns ye widna putt like that.' But I doubt if having to putt well in order to live respectably makes much difference. It is the one department of the game where the handicap man can be as efficient as the plus man. I remember well when Mr. Walter Travis won the Amateur Championship at Sandwich, beating Mr. Blackwell in the final. I don't suppose more extraordinary putting has ever been seen in a competition which lasted so long. On the Maiden green in the afternoon Mr. Travis missed a short one. Perhaps it may have been about two yards, and one very agitated spectator exclaimed, 'Thank God, he is not infallible.' The Americans last year by the aid of Mr. Gardner were very near repeating Mr. Travis's win, but I am patriotic enough to believe that, although they have now some very fine players, until they send across another golfer like Mr. Travis who can putt well for a week, they will not quite succeed in winning our Amateur Championship.
In match play there is nothing more disconcerting than your opponent holing putts from yards off, especially if this sort of thing lasts for long. If the Amateur event were a seventy-two hole affair of score play, like the Open, I should then think that America, with players of the class of Messrs. Evans, Jones, and Ouimet, would have a wonderful chance.

According to Harry Vardon, American green-keepers are not cutting the greens so close as we do on this side. There is water laid on at most of their courses, and so they have what would be termed slow greens. Naturally these are easier to putt on than fast ones. These slow greens are not going to be good for American golfers in their invasions of our courses, as coming off slow greens on to fast ones is the very deuce; but of course in America there has to be a good thick bottom on the putting greens for fear of their being burned up by the heat. There is nothing that scares a good putter more than seaside greens that have lost all trace of their natural colour, where you can see the hole but no line to it, and the ground is polished with the sliding of those who have gone before.

St. Andrews I find the best test of putting, for by the time you have played your second or third round the green has become so slippery that it takes a brave man all his courage to go up and hit a three-yard putt firmly enough to give the back of the hole a chance: and yet this has to be done to keep the ball on the line. I know of only one good putter who drops the ball into the hole: most good putters give the back of the hole a chance.
If there is a conversation about good putters and Abe Mitchell is there, he will have it that hardly any one is a better putter than I am. It is very nice of him to say this, as it gives me lots more confidence than I should otherwise have. I remember that once Vardon, Taylor, Braid, and I were journeying from Prestwick, where Vardon had just won the 1914 Championship, to Turnberry. I was accounting to Taylor for my failure in the Championship. Putting had been my trouble. I really had been bad, as a matter of fact. I used my mid-iron to putt with for most of the last round. Taylor, always sympathetic, said, 'But you are one of the best putters in the world.' I half believed him, and putted well all that day at Turnberry. Confidence in oneself has a great deal to do with successful putting.

I started to swing a golf club when I was nine years of age, but it was not until I went to the Timperley Golf Club, eleven years afterwards, that I began to learn how to hit the ball with a putter. Sometimes I could knock the ball into the hole after a fashion with a cleek, but I had no method. Perhaps that still may be said of me. But really I did practise putting. When I went to Timperley I followed Tom Simpson, who left a few old heads amongst other rubbish there. One of the heads was an ordinary cleek which must have had at least a dozen shafts in it, judging from the look of the hose. Anyhow, my clubmaker put in another and made the head more upright, and that has been my putter ever since. I have tried a few real putters in the meantime, but I always fall back on the converted cleek. It's a funny thing about my putting,
but the quicker I putt the better I can hole them. When my courage is gone, I am looking at the line longer than usual and the actual stroke is slower. But that's only my own particular method: I would not say it would necessarily suit other people. If you are not a 'first sighter' take your time, but I don't see why you should look at the line from both sides of the hole. There may be method in this madness, but it should not be part of your regular game. You should be able to see everything by looking from the ball to the hole. I think this is necessary, and yet how often do you see the average golfer neglect it. I suppose that he thinks his handicap does not warrant this procedure; but every one should have a look at his putt, if only because he will very likely have to wait on the next tee.

Putting can be learned just like everything else, and it all depends upon the pupil, and of course upon his instructor, how well he learns. We hear of putting being an inspiration, that a putter must be born and not made, and various other excuses for bad putters. Inspired putting occurs on one of those days when you win your match about the twelfth hole and, after you have finished, your partner reckons up that you have only had twenty-two shots with your putter. One putt on each of the fourteen greens and two putts on each of the other four was the record at Timperley when I was there, but I didn't do it.

In order to be a consistently good putter a player must have a fine touch. This may be a gift and would, I suppose, be classed among the attributes of the born putter. I quite admit that if you are heavier-
handed than another man, he has the making of a better putter than you. A good instance of this is the case of Braid and Ray. Ray has the finer touch and is rated the best putter of the two. And yet for a time Braid was one of the best putters in the country. But he had to practise a lot in order to get the confidence to make him so. At one time he had a bad habit of moving his body. I call it a bad habit, as I did the self-same thing when I was learning to putt. And yet again the late Tom Ball was a great putter who moved his body when putting. But Tom would have been a good putter in whatever way he did it, as he had naturally a nice touch and had also great courage. He was dead game and always gave the hole a chance. I have a great admiration for Taylor as a putter. He is not one of those opponents who one day hole them all over the green and the next day miss a few short ones. You always know just what he is going to do, as he is the most consistent two-per-green putter in the paid ranks. With the long ones he puts the ball a yard away from the hole, and he seldom misses the short one. Now and again he may hole a six-yarder, but it has to be an easy one and then you expect it, so that it is not such a shock. The fellow who worries you is he who gets round in thirty-six putts, but on six greens he takes three putts and on six he has only one. There is nothing more annoying than, after you have had a look at your opponent's putt and feel glad it isn't yours, to find him hole it. Your shorter one wants a bit of holing after that happens.

It is a strange thing that we know just how to do
a thing at golf and yet we cannot do it. During 1919
I putted, shall I say, moderately well on an average,
and yet I knew that, could I only do something differ-
ent, I could improve. I knew through looking at an
old photograph, taken when I was putting well, that
my stance was not just the same as in the photograph.
I practised for weeks, but I couldn't get my weight
back on my heels until the following year, 1920. Then
the knack of it suddenly came back, and I managed
to keep it as long as it was required. I have lost it
meantime through not playing, but I shall not take
twelve months to find it this time. I have found this
trick of keeping the weight back on the heels the best
thing I have ever discovered about putting. The
further back I can keep my weight the more stationary
my body is and the better I putt. I have always been
a good short putter, and the only way I can account
for this is that I generally used to leave myself so
much to do from the approach putt that something
had to be done. Now that I have made myself really
believe that I am a good approach putter, I suppose
that what I call the law of average in putting will
come into operation and I shall be missing a few
short ones.

Nearly everybody calls Vardon a bad putter, but
it would surprise a good many people if they were to
take the trouble to count how many times he hits the
ball with his putter as compared with other players.
I always rate Vardon as the best approach putter we
have, and through watching how he does it I have
improved my own long putts. He has a trick of
pressing the handle of the putter well forward just
before the back-swing. Now what this does is to ensure that the putter-head gets away first with the hands following it, and that is all that matters. It is when the hands and the club-head get in a line that there is a locking of the left wrist at impact which prevents the ball being hit truly. Ray is a good putter, we know, but he often has bouts of this locking of the left wrist because his putter-head never leads unless he is very close to the hole. With the putter the head must be—from the moment you start to make the putt until impact—behind the hands. As a matter of fact it is doubtful whether at any time during the stroke the putter-head should be in front of the hands. I believe that if I could really carry out these instructions I should putt better than I do, but it's fearfully difficult to keep the head behind the hands all the time.

There are two important factors in putting, to my way of thinking. One is to keep the body still, and the best way to ensure this is to keep the weight back on the heels. The other is not to allow the left wrist to bend or, perhaps I should say, to allow the left wrist to bend as little as possible when taking the club back. I have often found myself looking at the putter-head going back and at the same time putting the short ones well. It is when you look at the hole before or just at the moment of impact that you putt badly.

Perhaps in saying that these are the two important things I have assumed a little too much as to the actual method of taking the putter backwards and forwards. I assumed that the club should be taken
back with the left hand and the actual hitting done with the right. Perhaps a better word than take is push. The club should be pushed back with the left hand. The great danger is that of getting the left wrist too much bent in the course of this process. If you do this, the wrist seems to get paralysed and the ball cannot be hit truly. There is no patent remedy for this disease. You must just take care not to bend the wrist too much, but keep it as stiff as you reasonably can. Of course you must not make yourself feel too stiff, for that is never a good plan in any stroke; but almost anything is better than getting that left wrist too much bent, for it is the very devil.

I have talked a good deal about the shut and the open blade in other strokes, and have been generally in favour of the open. In putting the blade should be shut. I do open the blade just a shade, but it is very little. If you will try the experiment I think you will see that to open the blade to any real extent makes putting terribly difficult. Turn the face of the putter away from the ball as you take it back, and see what chance you have of bringing it back accurately. Doesn't it look a very small one? It has got to come back exactly and precisely right or the ball must be either hooked or pushed out. Look at the photographs of Jack White putting and you will see very, very little of his blade open. Of course in a long approach putt when the club is taken well away from the ball there must be rather more opening of the blade. That will come about naturally. Generally speaking, however, it is one of the secrets of putting to keep the blade shut.
I have often been told that in my approach putts the ball never looks as if it would get there, but it keeps on running and, if I have hit it right, it does get the distance. Where my putts, and for that matter a good many more players' putts are deceiving, is in the fact that the ball has been hit near its centre, which keeps it travelling. You can't talk of top spin in hitting a golf ball, but I am firmly convinced that hitting the ball near or above its centre is a better way to putt than to roll the ball or hit it with the putter-head going parallel with the ground. All good putters have the same trick of hitting the ball a slightly descending blow—in other words, putting on 'top.' A ball hit this way will hug the green better than one that has been hit below its centre, especially if it has been hit with a putter that has any loft on it. To hit below the centre with a lofted club makes the ball have a slight pitch on it, and it is more easily 'kicked' off the line. One hears of drag on a putt, but when it is necessary to make a putt slow up it can only be done by hitting the ball on the heel of the club. A ball can be hit at the bottom that will show a suspicion of drag, but a club with more loft than a putter, such as a mid-iron, has to be used. Drag cannot really be applied with a putter. It is a bad shot to try for. A sounder method is to hit as near in a line with the club-shaft as possible. This has a wonderful slowing-up effect. I have always been sorry the Royal and Ancient prohibited the Schenectady putter, as I am a great believer in hitting opposite the shaft, and here was a golf club with which any one could apply this method
DUNCAN PUTTING
Notice the grip of the right thumb straight down the shaft.

JACK WHITE PUTTING
With his head well down over the ball.
DUNCAN PUTTING
The club has been pushed back with the left hand.

JACK WHITE PUTTING
At the end of the back swing. All the work is done with the wrists. There is no movement at the elbows.
DUNCAN AT THE FINISH OF A PUTT
The actual hitting is done with the right hand.

JACK WHITE AT THE FINISH OF A PUTT
The head has been kept still and well down.
C. H. MAYO

He has his left hand decidedly under the shaft which necessitates a pronounced turning of the wrists.

C. H. MAYO

Notice the turn of the wrists at the very start of the swing, he is the only player of note who employs it.
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without any trouble. The club was so constructed that it was difficult to do anything else. When Mr. Walter Travis won at Sandwich there was a tremendous run on the American putter, but A. H. Toogood was the only player of note who got it to work. Only one of these instruments remains at Hanger Hill and, sad to relate, it has been converted by the dressing-room attendant, who by the way has never hit a golf ball in his life, into a coal-hammer.