## CHAPTER XX

## SCIENTIFIC GOLF

People are continually writing to the papers--or it may be one solitary enthusiast who writes under a number of pseudonyms--on the subject of sport, and the over-doing of the same by the modern young man. I recall one letter in which "Efficiency" gave it as his opinion that if the Young Man played less golf and did more drill, he would be all the better for it. I propose to report my doings with the professor on the links at some length, in order to refute this absurd view. Everybody ought to play golf, and nobody can begin it too soon. There ought not to be a single able-bodied infant in the British Isles who has not foozled a drive. To take my case. Suppose I had employed in drilling the hours I had spent in learning to handle my clubs. I might have drilled before the professor by the week without softening his heart. I might have ported arms and grounded arms and presented arms, and generally behaved in the manner advocated by "Efficiency," and what would have been the result? Indifference on his part, or--and if I overdid the thing--irritation. Whereas, by devoting a reasonable portion of my youth to learning the intricacies of golf I was enabled...

It happened in this way.

To me, as I stood with Ukridge in the fowl-run in the morning following my maritime conversation with the professor, regarding a hen that had

posed before us, obviously with a view to inspection, there appeared a man carrying an envelope. Ukridge, who by this time saw, as Calverley almost said, "under every hat a dun," and imagined that no envelope could contain anything but a small account, softly and silently vanished away, leaving me to interview the enemy.

"Mr. Garnet, sir?" said the foe.

I recognised him. He was Professor Derrick's gardener.

I opened the envelope. No. Father's blessings were absent. The letter was in the third person. Professor Derrick begged to inform Mr. Garnet that, by defeating Mr. Saul Potter, he had qualified for the final round of the Combe Regis Golf Tournament, in which, he understood, Mr. Garnet was to be his opponent. If it would be convenient for Mr. Garnet to play off the match on the present afternoon, Professor Derrick would be obliged if he would be at the Club House at half-past two. If this hour and day were unsuitable, would he kindly arrange others. The bearer would wait.

The bearer did wait. He waited for half-an-hour, as I found it impossible to shift him, not caring to use violence on a man well stricken in years, without first plying him with drink. He absorbed more of our diminishing cask of beer than we could conveniently spare, and then trudged off with a note, beautifully written in the third person, in which Mr. Garnet, after numerous compliments and thanks,

begged to inform Professor Derrick that he would be at the Club House at the hour mentioned.

"And," I added--to myself, not in the note--"I will give him such a licking that he'll brain himself with a cleek."

For I was not pleased with the professor. I was conscious of a malicious joy at the prospect of snatching the prize from him. I knew he had set his heart on winning the tournament this year. To be runner-up two years in succession stimulates the desire for first place. It would be doubly bitter to him to be beaten by a newcomer, after the absence of his rival, the colonel, had awakened hope in him. And I knew I could do it. Even allowing for bad luck--and I am never a very unlucky golfer--I could rely almost with certainty on crushing the man.

"And I'll do it," I said to Bob, who had trotted up. I often make Bob the recipient of my confidences. He listens appreciatively, and never interrupts. And he never has grievances of his own. If there is one person I dislike, it is the man who tries to air his grievances when I wish to air mine.

"Bob," I said, running his tail through my fingers, "listen to me, my old University chum, for I have matured a dark scheme. Don't run away. You know you don't really want to go and look at that chicken. Listen to me. If I am in form this afternoon, and I feel in my bones that I

shall be, I shall nurse the professor. I shall play with him. Do you understand the principles of Match play at Golf, Robert? You score by holes, not strokes. There are eighteen holes. All right, how was I to know that you knew that without my telling you? Well, if you understand so much about the game, you will appreciate my dark scheme. I shall toy with the professor, Bob. I shall let him get ahead, and then catch him up. I shall go ahead myself, and let him catch me up. I shall race him neck and neck till the very end. Then, when his hair has turned white with the strain, and he's lost a couple of stone in weight, and his eyes are starting out of his head, and he's praying--if he ever does pray--to the Gods of Golf that he may be allowed to win, I shall go ahead and beat him by a hole. I'll teach him, Robert. He shall taste of my despair, and learn by proof in some wild hour how much the wretched dare. And when it's all over, and he's torn all his hair out and smashed all his clubs, I shall go and commit suicide off the Cob. Because, you see, if I can't marry Phyllis, I shan't have any use for life."

Bob wagged his tail cheerfully.

"I mean it," I said, rolling him on his back and punching him on the chest till his breathing became stertorous. "You don't see the sense of it, I know. But then you've got none of the finer feelings. You're a jolly good dog, Robert, but you're a rank materialist. Bones and cheese and potatoes with gravy over them make you happy. You don't know what it is to be in love. You'd better get right side up now, or you'll have

apoplexy."

It has been my aim in the course of this narrative to extenuate nothing, nor set down aught in malice. Like the gentleman who played euchre with the Heathen Chinee, I state but facts. I do not, therefore, slur over my scheme for disturbing the professor's peace of mind. I am not always good and noble. I am the hero of this story, but I have my off moments.

I felt ruthless towards the professor. I cannot plead ignorance of the golfer's point of view as an excuse for my plottings. I knew that to one whose soul is in the game as the professor's was, the agony of being just beaten in an important match exceeds in bitterness all other agonies. I knew that, if I scraped through by the smallest possible margin, his appetite would be destroyed, his sleep o' nights broken. He would wake from fitful slumber moaning that if he had only used his iron instead of his mashie at the tenth, all would have been well; that, if he had putted more carefully on the seventh green, life would not be drear and blank; that a more judicious manipulation of his brassey throughout might have given him something to live for. All these things I knew.

And they did not touch me. I was adamant. The professor was waiting for me at the Club House, and greeted me with a cold and stately inclination of the head.

"Beautiful day for golf," I observed in my gay, chatty manner. He bowed in silence.

"Very well," I thought. "Wait. Just wait."

"Miss Derrick is well, I hope?" I added, aloud.

That drew him. He started. His aspect became doubly forbidding.

"Miss Derrick is perfectly well, sir, I thank you."

"And you? No bad effect, I hope, from your dip yesterday?"

"Mr. Garnet, I came here for golf, not conversation," he said.

We made it so. I drove off from the first tee. It was a splendid drive. I should not say so if there were any one else to say so for me. Modesty would forbid. But, as there is no one, I must repeat the statement. It was one of the best drives of my experience. The ball flashed through the air, took the bunker with a dozen feet to spare, and rolled on to the green. I had felt all along that I should be in form. Unless my opponent was equally above himself, he was a lost man. I could toy with him.

The excellence of my drive had not been without its effect on the professor. I could see that he was not confident. He addressed his ball

more strangely and at greater length than any one I had ever seen. He waggled his club over it as if he were going to perform a conjuring trick. Then he struck, and topped it.

The ball rolled two yards.

He looked at it in silence. Then he looked at me--also in silence.

I was gazing seawards.

When I looked round he was getting to work with a brassey.

This time he hit the bunker, and rolled back. He repeated this manoeuvre twice.

"Hard luck!" I murmured sympathetically on the third occasion, thereby going as near to being slain with a niblick as it has ever been my lot to go. Your true golfer is easily roused in times of misfortune; and there was a red gleam in the eye of the professor turned to me.

"I shall pick my ball up," he growled.

We walked on in silence to the second tee. He did the second hole in four, which was good. I did it in three, which--unfortunately for himy--was better.

I won the third hole.

I won the fourth hole.

I won the fifth hole.

I glanced at my opponent out of the corner of my eyes. The man was suffering. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

His play had become wilder and wilder at each hole in arithmetical progression. If he had been a plough he could hardly have turned up more soil. The imagination recoiled from the thought of what he could be doing in another half-hour if he deteriorated at his present speed.

A feeling of calm and content stole over me. I was not sorry for him. All the viciousness of my nature was uppermost in me. Once, when he missed the ball clean at the fifth tee, his eye met mine, and we stood staring at each other for a full half-minute without moving. I believe, if I had smiled then, he would have attacked me without hesitation. There is a type of golfer who really almost ceases to be human under stress of the wild agony of a series of foozles.

The sixth hole involves the player in a somewhat tricky piece of cross-country work, owing to the fact that there is a nasty ditch to be negotiated some fifty yards from the green. It is a beast of a ditch, which, if you are out of luck, just catches your second shot. "All hope

abandon ye who enter here" might be written on a notice board over it.

The professor entered there. The unhappy man sent his second, as nice and clean a brassey shot as he had made all day, into its very jaws. And then madness seized him. A merciful local rule, framed by kindly men who have been in that ditch themselves, enacts that in such a case the player may take his ball and throw it over his shoulder, losing a stroke. But once, so the legend runs, a scratch man who found himself trapped, scorning to avail himself of this rule at the expense of its accompanying penalty, wrought so shrewdly with his niblick that he not only got out but actually laid his ball dead: and now optimists sometimes imitate his gallantry, though no one yet has been able to imitate his success.

The professor decided to take a chance: and he failed miserably. As I was on the green with my third, and, unless I putted extremely poorly, was morally certain to be down in five, which is bogey for the hole, there was not much practical use in his continuing to struggle. But he did in a spirit of pure vindictiveness, as if he were trying to take it out of the ball. It was a grisly sight to see him, head and shoulders above the ditch, hewing at his obstinate colonel. It was a similar spectacle that once induced a lay spectator of a golf match to observe that he considered hockey a silly game.

"Sixteen!" said the professor between his teeth. Then he picked up his ball.

I won the seventh hole.

I won the eighth hole.

The ninth we halved, for in the black depths of my soul I had formed a plan of fiendish subtlety. I intended to allow him to win--with extreme labour--eight holes in succession.

Then, when hope was once more strong in him, I would win the last, and he would go mad.

I watched him carefully as we trudged on. Emotions chased one another across his face. When he won the tenth hole he merely refrained from oaths. When he won the eleventh a sort of sullen pleasure showed in his face. It was at the thirteenth that I detected the first dawning of hope. From then onward it grew.

When, with a sequence of shocking shots, he took the seventeenth hole in seven, he was in a parlous condition. His run of success had engendered within him a desire for conversation. He wanted, as it were, to flap his wings and crow. I could see Dignity wrestling with Talkativeness. I gave him the lead.

"You have got your form now," I said.

Talkativeness had it. Dignity retired hurt. Speech came from him in a rush. When he brought off an excellent drive from the eighteenth tee, he seemed to forget everything.

"Me dear boy,"--he began; and stopped abruptly in some confusion. Silence once more brooded over us as we played ourselves up the fairway and on to the green.

He was on the green in four. I reached it in three. His sixth stroke took him out.

I putted carefully to the very mouth of the hole.

I walked up to my ball and paused. I looked at the professor. He looked at me.

"Go on," he said hoarsely.

Suddenly a wave of compassion flooded over me. What right had I to torture the man like this?

"Professor," I said.

"Go on," he repeated.

"That looks a simple shot," I said, eyeing him steadily, "but I might

miss it."

He started.

"And then you would win the Championship."

He dabbed at his forehead with a wet ball of a handkerchief.

"It would be very pleasant for you after getting so near it the last two years."

"Go on," he said for the third time. But there was a note of hesitation in his voice.

"Sudden joy," I said, "would almost certainly make me miss it."

We looked at each other. He had the golf fever in his eyes.

"If," I said slowly, lifting my putter, "you were to give your consent to my marriage with Phyllis----"

He looked from me to the ball, from the ball to me, and back to the ball. It was very, very near the hole.

"Why not?" I said.

He looked up, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"You young devil," said he, smiting his thigh, "you young devil, you've beaten me."

"On the contrary," I said, "you have beaten me."

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I left the professor at the Club House and raced back to the farm. I wanted to pour my joys into a sympathetic ear. Ukridge, I knew, would offer that same sympathetic ear. A good fellow, Ukridge. Always interested in what you had to tell him; never bored.

"Ukridge!" I shouted.

No answer.

I flung open the dining-room door. Nobody.

I went into the drawing-room. It was empty. I drew the garden, and his bedroom. He was not in either.

"He must have gone for a stroll," I said.

I rang the bell.

The Hired Retainer appeared, calm and imperturbable as ever.

"Sir?"

"Oh, where is Mr. Ukridge, Beale?"

"Mr. Ukridge, sir," said the Hired Retainer nonchalantly, "has gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Ukridge and Mrs. Ukridge went away together by the three o'clock train."