

CHAPTER III

The Golfer Who Cannot Keep his Eyes on the Ball

Let us suppose that a golfer who does not make a success of his golf consults a professional with a view to improving his play. After watching him play, the professional tells him among other things that he is taking his eyes off the ball, and impresses on him that if he wishes to improve his stroke, he *must* keep his eyes on the ball. The golfer starts to play with every intention of following out his teacher's instructions, but finds that in spite of all his efforts, he still takes his eyes off the ball.

There are several points in this situation that could be discussed, but I wish, in this chapter, to confine my consideration to the principle which underlies not only the teacher's diagnosis and instructions, but also the procedure of the pupil when he decides to carry out the instructions.

Certain questions at once suggest themselves.

Why does the golfer take his eyes off the ball in the first place, when according to the experts he should not do so?

Why does he *continue* to take his eyes off the ball after he has decided to keep them *on* the ball? why does his "will to do" fail him at the critical moment?

What is the stimulus that constitutes an apparently irresistible temptation to him to take his eyes off the ball, in spite of his desire to follow his teacher's instructions and in spite of his "will to do"?

To answer these questions we shall have to take them in their connexion with each other, for the answers are as closely related to one another as are the questions themselves.

To take the first question.

When the golfer starts to make his stroke, he brings to the act the same habitual use of his mechanisms that he brings to all his activities, and since for such an essential part of the recognized golfing technique as "keeping his eyes on the ball" the mechanisms concerned with the control of his eyes fail to function as he desires, we are justified in concluding that this habitual use is misdirected. This fact is practically admitted

by the instructor when he attributes his pupil's failure to make a good stroke to his failure to keep his eyes on the ball.¹⁸

To the question why he continues to take his eyes off the ball, in spite of his intention to follow his teacher's instructions and in spite of his "will to do", the answer is that in everything he does he is a confirmed "end-gainer". His habit is to work directly for his ends on the "trial and error" plan without giving due consideration to the means whereby those ends should be gained. In the present instance there can be no doubt that the particular end he has in view is to make a good stroke, which means that the moment he begins to play he starts to work for that end directly, without considering what manner of use of his mechanisms generally would be the best for the making of a good stroke. The result is that he makes the stroke according to his habitual use, and as this habitual use is misdirected and includes the wrong use of his eyes, he takes his eyes off the ball and makes a bad stroke. It is clear that as long as he is dominated by his habit of end-gaining, he will react to the stimulus to "make a good stroke" by the same misdirected use of himself, and will continue to take his eyes off the ball.

This process is repeated every time he tries to make a good stroke, with the result that his failures far outnumber his successes, and he becomes more or less disturbed emotionally,¹⁹ as always happens when people find themselves more often wrong than not, without knowing the reason why. And the more he finds himself unable to carry out his teacher's instructions with anything like the necessary degree of certainty for him to get any pleasure out of the game, the worse this emotional condition becomes. The immediate effect is that he tries harder than ever to make a good stroke, falls into

¹⁸ [33] I admit, of course, that a wrong use of other parts might have a more direct bearing upon the golfer's problem, but for the purpose of illustration I have chosen the wrong use of the eyes, because the experts are unanimously agreed (as unanimously as experts ever are) that failure to keep the eyes on the ball is one of the most common and persistent hindrances to the making of a good stroke.

¹⁹ [33] Unsuccessful effort in any sphere of activity tends to produce emotional disturbance which is not conducive to healthy recreation. For this reason alone the golfer whose efforts to carry out his teacher's instructions are mostly unsuccessful should reconsider his plan of campaign.

the old wrong way of using his mechanisms, and again takes his eyes off the ball.

Now one would suppose that repeated experience of failure would of itself lead him to set to work on a different principle, but my teaching experience goes to show that in this respect the golfer's method of procedure is in no way different from that of other people who use themselves wrongly, and who are trying, without success, to correct a defect. Strange as it may seem, I have always found that a pupil who uses himself wrongly will continue to do so in all his activities, even after the wrong use has been pointed out to him, and he has learned by experience that persistence in this wrong use is the cause of his failure.

This apparent anomaly can be explained, and in explaining it I hope to show not only what is at the bottom of the golfer's difficulty, but also of the difficulty which so many people experience when, with the best "will" in the world, they find themselves unable to put right something which they know to be wrong with themselves.

The habitual use of his mechanisms which the golfer brings to all his activities, including golf, has always been accompanied by certain sensory experiences (feelings) which, from their lifelong association with this habitual use, have become familiar to him. Further, from their very familiarity, they have come to "*feel right*", and so he derives considerable satisfaction from repeating them. When, therefore, he attempts to "make a good stroke", he brings to the act of swinging his club his faulty habitual use, including the taking of his eyes off the ball, because the sensory experiences associated with this use are familiar and "*feel right*".

On the other hand, the use of his mechanisms which would involve his keeping his eyes *on* the ball during the act of making a stroke would be a use entirely contrary to his habitual use and associated with *sensory experiences which, being unfamiliar, would "feel wrong" to him*; it may therefore be said that he receives no sensory stimulus in that direction. Any sensory stimulus he receives is in the direction of repeating the familiar sensory experiences which accompany his faulty use, and this carries the day over any so-called "mental" stimulus arising from his "will to do". In other words, the lure of the familiar proves too strong for him and keeps him tied down to the habitual use of himself which *feels right*.

This is not surprising, seeing that the golfer's desire to employ his habitual use at all costs in gaining his end, on account of the familiar sensory experiences that go with it, is an instinctive desire which mankind has inherited and continued to develop all through the ages *The desire to feel right in the gaining of his end* is therefore his primary desire, in comparison with which his desire to make a good stroke is new and undeveloped, and exerts only a secondary influence. This is proved by the fact that although he starts out with the desire to make a good stroke, his desire to repeat sensory experiences that "feel right" acts as a stimulus to him to use himself in the habitual way which is associated with these experiences, although it is this very manner of use that prevents him from satisfying his newer desire to make a good stroke.

The desire to carry out his teacher's instructions to keep his eyes on the ball is a still newer desire, and consequently suffers in intensity as compared with the other two. Moreover, it stands even less chance of being carried out: firstly, because the stimulus which gives rise to it does not come from within, like the others, but from without -- i.e., from the teacher, and secondly, because the instruction is framed with the purpose of correcting something wrong with the pupil's use -- i.e., the use of the eyes -- and so is bound to come at once into conflict with the pupil's desire to employ his faulty habitual use which, as we have just explained, is the dominating influence in whatever he tries to do. The conflict between these two desires is therefore bound to be an unequal one, and his desire to carry out his teacher's instructions goes by the board.²⁰

It is the dominating influence of his desire to gain his end by means of a use of his mechanisms which *feels* right, but is in fact wrong for the purpose, that explains not only why he *continues* to take his eyes off the ball and so to fail in his stroke, but also why, in spite of this repeated experience of failure, he does not give up "end-gaining" and set to work in a different way.

²⁰ [35] It must be remembered that the greater his desire to obey his teacher, the greater will be his incentive to increase the intensity of his efforts, and it is practically certain that in his attempts to translate this desire into action, he will automatically increase the already undue muscle tension which he habitually employs for the act, thus lessening still further his chances of making a successful stroke. Cf. note, page 37.

Now that we have seen the faulty principle which underlies the golfer's efforts to obey his teacher's instructions, we will go on to examine the principle on which these instructions are based.

The instruction to the pupil to "keep his eyes on the ball" shows that the teacher recognizes that the mechanisms concerned with the control of the pupil's eyes do not function as they should, but when, in order to meet this difficulty, he simply tells his pupil to "keep his eyes on the ball", he also shows that he does not connect the faulty functioning of the eyes with misdirection of the use of the mechanisms throughout the organism. This means that in his diagnosis and treatment he is not considering his pupil's organism as a working unity in which the working of any of the parts is affected by the working of the whole. To this extent, therefore, his diagnosis may be said to be incomplete and his scope of usefulness as adviser to his pupil limited.

Evidence of misdirection of use in human activity is to be found on all sides, and our real interest in the golfer's difficulty is that it is a difficulty not confined to golf, but experienced by all who are trying, without success, to correct defects which hamper them in their various activities, or to perform a certain act satisfactorily.

Misdirection of use is to be found in the person who takes up a pen to write and proceeds at once to stiffen the fingers unduly, to make movements of the arm which should be made by the fingers, and even to make facial contortions; in the physical culturist whose performance of certain movements of the arms or legs, or of both, is associated with harmful and unnecessary depression of the larynx and with undue tension of the musculature of the thorax; in the person who in reading or singing or talking "sucks" a breath in through the mouth at the beginning of each sentence, though in the ordinary way, in walking or standing, he would breathe through the nostrils; in the athlete, amateur or professional, who, whenever he makes a special effort, employs excessive tension in the muscles of the neck and pulls the head back unduly.

In all these cases, which might be elaborated indefinitely, it will be found that the use of the mechanisms concerned with the movement required is often far removed from that which would best serve the purpose.

This all goes to show that in every form of activity the use of the mechanisms which comes into operation will be satisfactory or

unsatisfactory according to whether our direction of that use is satisfactory or otherwise. Where the direction is satisfactory, satisfactory use of the mechanisms of the organism as a working unity will be ensured, involving a satisfactory use of the different parts, such as the arms, wrists, hands, legs, feet and eyes. It follows that where there is misdirection, this satisfactory use of the mechanisms is not at our command. This is exactly the position of the golfer who cannot keep his eyes on the ball when he desires.

Let us now see how the golfer's difficulty would be dealt with by a teacher who adhered to the idea of the unity of the organism, and so based his teaching practice on what I call the "means-whereby" principle -- i.e., the principle of a reasoning consideration of the causes of the conditions present, and an indirect instead of a direct procedure on the part of the person endeavouring to gain the desired end.²¹

First he would diagnose the golfer's failure to make a good stroke as due to misdirection of the habitual use of the mechanisms, and not primarily to any specific defect such as an inability to keep the eyes on the ball. He would recognize that the inability to keep the eyes on the ball was merely a symptom of this misdirection, and could not by any stretch of imagination be said to be the cause of his failure to make a good stroke. He would observe that immediately his pupil started to make his stroke, he brought into play the same faulty use which he habitually employed for all his activities, and so himself brought about the very thing he wanted to prevent -- the taking of his eyes off the ball. He would see that his pupil's difficulty was to a great extent caused by his own "wrong-doing".

A teacher who made a diagnosis on these lines would understand that the difficulty could not be met by any such purely specific instruction as telling his pupil to keep his eyes on the ball, for he would recognize that any "will-power" exerted by a pupil whose use of himself was misdirected would be exerted in the wrong direction,²² so that the harder he tried to carry out

²¹ [37] Compare *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p.5, note.

²² [37] Not long ago a professor brought a friend to watch a lesson given to one of his students in whose progress they were both interested on account of her attainments. "You should have no difficulty with this pupil," he said, "because she is so willing and anxious to help you". "Yes," I replied, "that is one of the curses of the "will to do"." His companion held up her hands in horror at this, exclaiming, "Surely, even if it's wrong, it's better to exert the 'will to do' than not." This gave me the chance to point out that the "something wrong" meant that there was a wrong direction somewhere, so that what she was really urging was that the addition of the stimulus of the "will to do" would be beneficial, even though it involved an increased projection of energy in the wrong direction. It is not the degree of "willing" or "trying", but the way in which the energy is directed, that is going to make the "willing" or "trying" effective.

such an instruction and the more he "willed" himself to succeed, the more his use would be misdirected and the more likely he would be to take his eyes off the ball. From this he would conclude that he must find some way of teaching his pupil to stop the misdirection of his use, and as he observed that the misdirection began the moment the pupil tried to gain his end and make a good stroke, obviously his first step would be to get the pupil to stop "trying to make a good stroke". He would explain that any immediate reaction to the stimulus to make a good stroke would always be by means of his wrong habitual use, but that if he prevented this immediate reaction, he would at the same time be preventing the misdirection of his use that went with it and was *the* obstacle to the gaining of his end. He would impress upon him that of all the activities that go to the making of a good stroke, *this act of prevention was the primary activity*, since by the inhibition of the misdirected habitual use the way would be left clear for the teacher to build up in his pupil that new direction of the use of his mechanisms, which would constitute the means whereby he would in time be able to keep his eyes on the ball, and thus make a good stroke.

Now if we are to understand the "means-whereby" principle on which the teacher who adheres to the idea of unity in the working of the human organism will base his teaching method, we must recognize that the attainment of any desired end, or the performance of any act such as the making of a golf stroke, involves the direction and performance of a connected series of preliminary acts by means of the mechanisms of the organism, and that therefore, if the use of the mechanisms is to be directed so as to result in the satisfactory attainment of the desired end, the directions for this use must be projected in a connected series to correspond with the connected series of preliminary acts. If at any point in the series the chain of directions is broken and use misdirected, all the succeeding acts of the series will go wrong, and the end will not be

*attained in the way desired (for instance, the golfer will not make a good stroke). In most people today the direction of the use of their mechanisms is not reasoned out, but instinctive, and in cases where this instinctive direction leads to faulty use, the connected series of acts preliminary to the gaining of any end will be brought about by a series of instinctive directions operating through faulty use of the mechanisms, so that a series of faulty acts will be the result.*²³

These facts must be taken into account by the teacher who is using the "means-whereby" principle to build up a new direction of the pupil's use. He will recognize in his practice that these preliminary acts, though means, are also ends but not isolated ends, inasmuch as they form a co-ordinated series of acts to be carried out "all together, one after the other".²⁴ He will impress upon his pupil that to maintain the unity that is involved in this connected series of acts, he will have to continue to project the directions necessary to the performance of the first act of the series *concurrently* with projecting the directions necessary to the performance of the second, and so on throughout the series until all the preliminary acts have been performed in their connected sequence and the ultimate end in this way secured.

It may be asked what, exactly, is the technique for putting the "means-whereby" principle into practice in building up a new and satisfactory direction of use?

It is impossible to put down here more than a bare outline of this technique, because the sensory experiences which come to the pupil in the process of acquiring a new direction of his use cannot be conveyed by the written or spoken word, any more than the most detailed account that a professional golfer can give of his own sensory experiences when making a drive will enable his pupil to reproduce those experiences. But I would refer my readers back to Chapter I where I described the experiments which led to my discovering that there is a primary control of the use of the self, which governs the working of all the mechanisms and so renders the control of the complex human organism comparatively simple.

²³ [39] See *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, pp. 164 et seq (1946).

²⁴ [39] This process is analogous to the firing of a machine gun from an aeroplane, where the machinery is so co-ordinated that each individual shot of the series is timed to pass between the blades of a propeller making 1,500 or more revolutions to the minute.

This primary control, called by the late Professor Magnus of Utrecht the "central control", depends upon a certain use of the head and neck in relation to the use of the rest of the body, and once the pupil has inhibited the instinctive misdirection leading to his faulty habitual use, the teacher must begin the process of building up the new use by giving the pupil the primary direction towards the establishment of this primary control. The pupil will then project this direction whilst the teacher with his hands brings about the corresponding activity, *the combined procedure securing for the pupil the new experience of use which is desired*. This experience, though unfamiliar at first, will become familiar with repetition.

The teacher then gives the secondary direction to the pupil who *must keep the primary direction going*, whilst he projects the secondary direction and whilst the teacher brings about the corresponding activity. This combined procedure again secures for the pupil the new experience of use that is desired, and again this new experience, though unfamiliar at first, will become familiar with repetition.

By this method of procedure the two directions and their corresponding activities become linked together and will remain linked, and if still further directions are required to bring about the desired change in use, the same combined procedure must apply.

As long as teacher and pupil continue to work together on these lines, never deviating in their procedure from the "means-whereby" principle, they will in time establish in the pupil the desired direction of the use of his mechanisms, and this procedure has only to be repeated until the experiences associated with it have become familiar for the new and satisfactory use to become established in all his activity.

When this stage is reached, it will be found that the improvement in the pupil's manner of use is associated with an improvement in his standard of functioning, and that undesirable specific symptoms, such as unsatisfactory use of the eyes, have disappeared *in the process*. This means that the golfer will be able to keep his eyes on the ball when he wishes to do so, for new and reliable "lines of communication" will have been laid down, which ensures that what he "wills" to do he ultimately does; his "will-to-do", in short, will be effective.