

THE HEART OF A GOOF

By
P. G. Wodehouse



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TO
MY DAUGHTER
LEONORA

WITHOUT WHOSE NEVER-FAILING
SYMPATHY AND ENCOURAGEMENT
THIS BOOK
WOULD HAVE BEEN FINISHED
IN
HALF THE TIME

PREFACE

Before leading the reader out on to this little nine-hole course, I should like to say a few words on the club-house steps with regard to the criticisms of my earlier book of Golf stories, *The Clicking of Cuthbert*. In the first place, I noticed with regret a disposition on the part of certain writers to speak of Golf as a trivial theme, unworthy of the pen of a thinker. In connection with this, I can only say that right through the ages the mightiest brains have occupied themselves with this noble sport, and that I err, therefore, if I do err, in excellent company.

Apart from the works of such men as James Braid, John Henry Taylor and Horace Hutchinson, we find Publius Syrius not disdaining to give advice on the back-swing ("He gets through too late who goes too fast"); Diogenes describing the emotions of a cheery player at the water-hole ("Be of good cheer. I see land"); and Doctor Watts, who, watching one of his drives from

the tee, jotted down the following couplet on the back of his score-card:

*Fly, like a youthful hart or roe,
Over the hills where spices grow.*

And, when we consider that Chaucer, the father of English poetry, inserted in his Squiere's Tale the line

Therefore behoveth him a ful long spoone

(though, of course, with the modern rubber-cored ball an iron would have got the same distance) and that Shakespeare himself, speaking querulously in the character of a weak player who held up an impatient foursome, said:

Four rogues in buckram let drive at me

we may, I think, consider these objections answered.

A far more serious grievance which I have against my critics is that many of them confessed to the possession of but the slightest knowledge of the game, and one actually stated in cold print that he did not know what a niblick was. A writer on golf is certainly entitled to be judged by his peers—which, in my own case, means men who do one good drive in six, four reasonable approaches in an eighteen-hole round, and

average three putts per green: and I think I am justified in asking of editors that they instruct critics of this book to append their handicaps in brackets at the end of their remarks. By this means the public will be enabled to form a fair estimate of the worth of the volume, and the sting in such critiques as "We laughed heartily while reading these stories—once—at a misprint" will be sensibly diminished by the figures (36) at the bottom of the paragraph. While my elation will be all the greater should the words "A genuine masterpiece" be followed by a simple (scr.).

One final word. The thoughtful reader, comparing this book with *The Clicking of Cuthbert*, will, no doubt, be struck by the poignant depth of feeling which pervades the present volume like the scent of muddy shoes in a locker-room: and it may be that he will conclude that, like so many English writers, I have fallen under the spell of the great Russians.

This is not the case. While it is, of course, true that my style owes much to Dostoievsky, the heart-wringing qualities of such stories as "The Awakening of Rollo Podmarsh" and "Keeping in with Vosper" is due entirely to the fact that I have spent much time recently playing on the National Links at Southampton, Long Island, U.S.A. These links were constructed by an exiled Scot who conceived the dreadful idea of assembling

on one course all the really foul holes in Great Britain. It cannot but leave its mark on a man when, after struggling through the Sahara at Sandwich and the Alps at Prestwick, he finds himself faced by the Station-Master's Garden hole at St. Andrew's and knows that the Redan and the Eden are just round the corner. When you turn in a medal score of a hundred and eight on two successive days, you get to know something about Life.

And yet it may be that there are a few gleams of sunshine in the book. If so, it is attributable to the fact that some of it was written before I went to Southampton and immediately after I had won my first and only trophy—an umbrella in a hotel tournament at Aiken, South Carolina, where, playing to a handicap of sixteen, I went through a field consisting of some of the fattest retired business-men in America like a devouring flame. If we lose the Walker Cup this year, let England remember that.

P. G. WODEHOUSE

The Sixth Bunker
Addington

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THE HEART OF A GOOF

CHAPTER I

THE HEART OF A GOOF

IT was a morning when all nature shouted "Fore!" The breeze, as it blew gently up from the valley, seemed to bring a message of hope and cheer, whispering of chip-shots holed and brassies landing squarely on the meat. The fairway, as yet unscarred by the irons of a hundred dubs, smiled greenly up at the azure sky; and the sun, peeping above the trees, looked like a giant golf-ball perfectly lofted by the mashie of some unseen god and about to drop dead by the pin of the eighteenth. It was the day of the opening of the course after the long winter, and a crowd of considerable dimensions had collected at the first tee. Plus fours gleamed in the sunshine, and the air was charged with happy anticipation.

In all that gay throng there was but one sad face. It belonged to the man who was waggling his driver over the new ball perched

on its little hill of sand. This man seemed careworn, hopeless. He gazed down the fairway, shifted his feet, waggled, gazed down the fairway again, shifted the dogs once more, and waggled afresh. He waggled as Hamlet might have waggled, moodily, irresolutely. Then, at last, he swung, and, taking from his caddie the niblick which the intelligent lad had been holding in readiness from the moment when he had walked on to the tee, trudged wearily off to play his second.

The Oldest Member, who had been observing the scene with a benevolent eye from his favourite chair on the terrace, sighed.

"Poor Jenkinson," he said, "does not improve."

"No," agreed his companion, a young man with open features and a handicap of six. "And yet I happen to know that he has been taking lessons all the winter at one of those indoor places."

"Futile, quite futile," said the Sage with a shake of his snowy head. "There is no wizard living who could make that man go round in an average of sevens. I keep advising him to give up the game."

"You!" cried the young man, raising a shocked and startled face from the driver with which he was toying. "*You* told him to give up golf! Why I thought——"

"I understand and approve of your horror," said the Oldest Member, gently. "But you must bear in mind that Jenkinson's is not an

ordinary case. You know and I know scores of men who have never broken a hundred and twenty in their lives, and yet contrive to be happy, useful members of society. However badly they may play, they are able to forget. But with Jenkinson it is different. He is not one of those who can take it or leave it alone. His only chance of happiness lies in complete abstinence. Jenkinson is a goof."

"A what?"

"A goof," repeated the Sage. "One of those unfortunate beings who have allowed this noblest of sports to get too great a grip upon them, who have permitted it to eat into their souls, like some malignant growth. The goof, you must understand, is not like you and me. He broods. He becomes morbid. His goofery unfits him for the battles of life. Jenkinson, for example, was once a man with a glowing future in the hay, corn, and feed business, but a constant stream of hooks, tops, and slices gradually made him so diffident and mistrustful of himself, that he let opportunity after opportunity slip, with the result that other, sterner, hay, corn, and feed merchants passed him in the race. Every time he had the chance to carry through some big deal in hay, or to execute some flashing *coup* in corn and feed, the fatal diffidence generated by a hundred rotten rounds would undo him. I understand his bankruptcy may be expected at any moment."

"My golly!" said the young man, deeply impressed. "I hope I never become a goof. Do you mean to say there is really no cure except giving up the game?"

The Oldest Member was silent for a while.

"It is curious that you should have asked that question," he said at last, "for only this morning I was thinking of the one case in my experience where a goof was enabled to overcome his deplorable malady. It was owing to a girl, of course. The longer I live, the more I come to see that most things are. But you will, no doubt, wish to hear the story from the beginning."

The young man rose with the startled haste of some wild creature, which, wandering through the undergrowth, perceives the trap in his path.

"I should love to," he mumbled, "only I shall be losing my place at the tee."

"The goof in question," said the Sage, attaching himself with quiet firmness to the youth's coat-button, "was a man of about your age, by name Ferdinand Dibble. I knew him well. In fact, it was to me——"

"Some other time, eh?"

"It was to me," proceeded the Sage, placidly, "that he came for sympathy in the great crisis of his life, and I am not ashamed to say that when he had finished laying bare his soul to me there were tears in my eyes. My heart bled for the boy."

"I bet it did. But——"

The Oldest Member pushed him gently back into his seat.

"Golf," he said, "is the Great Mystery. Like some capricious goddess——"

The young man, who had been exhibiting symptoms of feverishness, appeared to become resigned. He sighed softly.

"Did you ever read 'The Ancient Mariner'?" he said.

"Many years ago," said the Oldest Member. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the young man. "It just occurred to me."

Golf (resumed the Oldest Member) is the Great Mystery. Like some capricious goddess, it bestows its favours with what would appear an almost fat-headed lack of method and discrimination. On every side we see big two-fisted he-men floundering round in three figures, stopping every few minutes to let through little shrimps with knock knees and hollow cheeks, who are tearing off snappy seventy-fours. Giants of finance have to accept a stroke per from their junior clerks. Men capable of governing empires fail to control a small, white ball, which presents no difficulties whatever to others with one ounce more brain than a cuckoo-clock. Mysterious, but there it is. There was no apparent reason why Ferdinand Dibble should not have been a competent golfer. He had strong wrists and a good eye. Nevertheless, the fact remains

that he was a dub. And on a certain evening in June I realised that he was also a goof. I found it out quite suddenly as the result of a conversation which we had on this very terrace.

I was sitting here that evening thinking of this and that, when by the corner of the clubhouse I observed young Dibble in conversation with a girl in white. I could not see who she was, for her back was turned. Presently they parted and Ferdinand came slowly across to where I sat. His air was dejected. He had had the boots licked off him earlier in the afternoon by Jimmy Fothergill, and it was to this that I attributed his gloom. I was to find out in a few moments that I was partly but not entirely correct in this surmise. He took the next chair to mine, and for several minutes sat staring moodily down into the valley.

"I've just been talking to Barbara Medway," he said, suddenly breaking the silence.

"Indeed?" I said. "A delightful girl."

"She's going away for the summer to Marvis Bay."

"She will take the sunshine with her."

"You bet she will!" said Ferdinand Dibble, with extraordinary warmth, and there was another long silence.

Presently Ferdinand uttered a hollow groan.

"I love her, dammit!" he muttered brokenly. "Oh, golly, how I love her!"