

# DEVIL'S ADVOCATE 6

by  
Goblin

*Goblin in the last article of his winter series declares all out war on weeds with frontal assaults, commandos and sudden death in the dark.*

## WHY IS A WEED?

**I**T was inevitable, I suppose. With men and their time and labour becoming progressively more and more valuable and expensive, the easy way out for Committees, Secretaries and Greenkeepers is to turn to mass methods to deal with details which used to be done by hand. So much so that it is heresy nowadays even to suggest that the best way to deal with weeds is other than by the use of sprayed weedkillers.

### Dangerous

Yet close acquaintance with one's own course suggests emphatically that the old way of dealing with them was best; and the new way dangerous. Weeds for one thing, seem to have a habit of coming back with greater and greater enthusiasm after a period of apparent extinction by chemical treatment. The suspicion begins to arise that there may be a parallel here between D.D.T. on insects and the post-war weedkillers on greens. When insects began to develop strains resistant to D.D.T., the knowledge of this was at first something of a curiosity amongst research men, enshrouded in cautious phrases in learned periodicals. Then the race to produce new compounds to deal with D.D.T.-resistant insects began; and the chain of new resistances and then new chemicals to meet it got really under way, and now seems to be the accepted progressive pattern. This might be beginning to happen with weeds and weedkillers. But what is certain is that very little is known about the long-term effects on old turf of weedkiller treatment. If it seems to the man who has known the same ground for a long time that the standard, health, and quality of turf has

steadily deteriorated since weedkillers of the modern type came in, this may be illusion. But it may be—as it appears to be—fact.

Who is to say what a weed is, anyway? The best definition—to a golfer at least—is simply a plant that gives a bad lie or interferes with the smoothness of the putting surface: and nothing else. On any course that had been well-tended in pre-war days, the invasion of weeds of this kind was negligible. The ones that did come in were dealt with in the simplest and most effective manner: on the greens, the greenkeeper just bent down with a pocket knife and cut the offending plant out as soon as it began to show itself. The time spent on removing weeds of this sort cannot have added up to anything worth reckoning even over a whole year.

### Fairway drill

The fairways, on the other hand, did take time. The drill at my club was for the ground staff of five to take each fairway in turn once a year and go down it in a line across, each with a bucket in one hand and a weeding tool in the other. In this way, each weed stood a good chance of getting removed before it was a year old, and the slow developers never lasted more than two. The work could go fairly fast, too, since the number of weeds to be removed remained small, and they stood out to the eye.

Now that this system has been abandoned, most of our fairways are thoroughly invaded by broad-leaved weeds, especially where trolleys have worn the grass: and the only con-

ceivable way to deal with them—old style—would be by parties of members, twenty strong, on each fairway in turn: followed by a subsequent annual assault on the same scale. And why not? There are enough members in the club for each fairway to be covered, on average, by each man sparing one afternoon a year: not much, to preserve the quality of the course, and the impeccability of a brassie lie when you most need it, so simply and safely.

### Chemical treatment

The alternative of chemical weeding of the fairways might have an effect that could never be foreseen. Heath turf, especially on sour ground on chalk country, could—one cannot help fearing—be badly damaged by them. There is a lot more in it than just grass; and it depends on its springiness and wearing qualities on the whole compound of vegetation co-existing and inter-complementing itself.

The risk in chemical treatment might be great—and there is no real need for it!

But if the fairways do present an undoubted problem in labour and time, now that they have been allowed to lapse so far from their old impeccable freedom from weeds, the greens surely are a different matter. If the greenkeepers and the Secretary have their eyes about them, and walk them regularly with a careful and judicious eye and a knife in hand, then there just should be no weeds in them: and no problem. If an ordinary member can itch to carry a pocket-knife (for greens) and a weeding tool (for fairways) in his bag every time he goes round, then surely the situation is beginning to get plain silly. I'm not saying it applies to all courses by any means; and many are still beautifully tailored in this respect. But others aren't, show no signs of being—and mine, which I love quite unreasonably, is one of them!

Perhaps if I went out after dark with a torch, I might get away with it. Perhaps not. It shouldn't take more than a couple of years to complete the job single-handed. How desperate can one get?

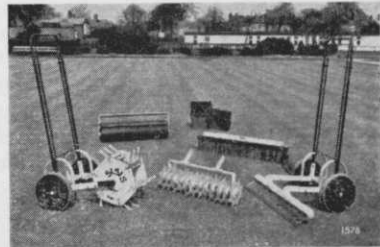
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