

# FORE!

SOME thoughts on golf, up which I have just taken again. A fondness for it was part of the set of instructions fed into my soul-computer by parents; though I keep giving it up I'm always coming back to it.

At one time after the war I followed the tournaments for a newspaper, the only golf writer never to refer to Dai Rees as "the little Welshman"; a modest distinction, but I claim it.

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## PETER BLACK has taken up that game again

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I switched to television because vacancies for golf correspondents among the top papers are as rare as total eclipses. The job is so healthy that they are invariably still at it in their 80's.

### The feuds

The fascination of golf is, of course, a very mysterious thing. It has so many unattractive aspects; other golfers, noticeably.

All clubs are by definition discriminatory, but golf club discrimination is nastier than most, frozen in a kind of adolescence.

Male golfers hate female golfers. They write "Jew boy" on each other's lockers. They tell dirty stories in the changing rooms, in whispers as guilty and conspiratorial as though they were back in the school lavatories.

Golf clubs seethe with secret feuds, adulterous intrigues, poisoned-pen campaigns.

The game is absurdly difficult. Really, one might as well never begin.

But here I come to a discovery about golf. It isn't a game, it's an art.

A game would be played with one club. An art needs 14, each designed

for a special job and as important to it as a painter's brushes.

### The art

That golf is a work of art is seen clearly by the best players, who are not necessarily the most skilful. They have the correct prophetic vision of a round of golf while they are walking to the first tee; it's already achieved, finished, perfect.

The picture is traced in the mind, and the faltering hand sets out to fill it in, as alone and beyond outside help as any writer or composer.

Every bad stroke is like a blot, but no round is without some stroke that corresponded to the pre-shot vision of it.

It's because it's an art and not a game that it is so difficult to keep calm about it. The afterglow of a good round lives for weeks. A bad shot seems like a deliberate act of wickedness.

My soul is still scarred a bit by a finish I put up in a competition when I was about 19. I badly wanted to win, because I needed the money, and knew that two fours and a five on the last three holes would put me beyond reach on handicap.

I finished like a yellow dog with two sixes and a seven. It was years before I could pass the 16th tee without sweating like a horse at a crossroads where someone was murdered.

And though it must be getting on for 100 years since it happened, I can't recall it without burning. I've often wondered how much this wound contributes to the diffidence and anxiety that get into my pieces about television.

### The zeal

But one unchallengeably good thing about golf is that it is still, in 1962, a fortress of privilege.

One hears stories about chaps who play with their trousers rolled into their socks and call each other mister; but they have far from taken over golf.

Quite right, too. I believe down to the very roots of conviction that divisions of people according to primitive conventions are the curse of this country.

But that doesn't mean that everything should be adjusted to a common level of cheap and nasty taste, a fish-and-chips culture that everyone can have and nobody really enjoys.

A good golf club preserves its idea of amenities with the zeal of monasteries in the Dark Ages. One day this week I went to a rich and famous club in the James Bond part of Surrey: pine trees, sand, heather, two courses, American cars, electric trolleys, Spanish chef, Scottish professional.

"May I have a green fee, please?"

"Are you playing with a member?" asked the nice girl in the secretary's office.

"I'm afraid not."

"May I see your letter of introduction?"

"I'm afraid I haven't got one."

"Oh, dear. Do you know anyone

who's a member?"

"I once bought Henry Longhurst a Tio Pepe."

"I see."

"I have a set of Peter Thompson's, and a convertible with whitewall tyres."

"Oh, well, it doesn't really matter on a weekday," said this girl, deliciously snooty to the last. "But we do like to have a letter."

I felt that here the defences were lying oiled, wrapped and ready for the day when the fruit gums brigade, the corned-beef eaters who can't tell marga from butter, should come charging up the drive under the flag of Masstopia.

Here were the smells of money, luxury, privilege, and I sniffed them up with gusto. Why not? Civilisation must consist in part of selling things worth buying.

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*With grateful acknowledgments to  
The Daily Mail.*

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