Observation and Comment

By Walter J. Travis

Terminology of Golf

There are certain terms appertaining to the game which have been handed down to us as sacred traditions, but which we are doing our best to bring into contempt by erroneous usage, born of an imperfect knowledge of their true meaning.

This is to be regretted, the more so as there is danger of their becoming permanently fixed.

Some of the more common are: Greens committee, instead of green committee; foursome, instead of four-ball match; partner, instead of opponent or competitor, and finals instead of final.

The term "green" is very ancient and connotes the entire course, or links. A "greens" committee implies a committee having charge of the putting-greens only.

A "foursome" is made up of four players, two on one side playing alternate strokes with one ball, against two players on the other side playing likewise—only two balls, one for each side, being used.

A "four-ball match" consists of four players, each playing his own ball—four balls being used. Sometimes one hears the expression "a four-ball foursome." This is a contradiction of terms.

"Partners" can only be on the same side—in a foursome, a best ball match (when one player plays his ball against the best ball of two or more players—the latter being partners) and in a four-ball match. In match play, the player opposed to one is one's "opponent" and in medal play one's "competitor."

When the last round of a tournament is reached it is the final round, and the proper term is "final," not "finals." Similarly with the semi-final round.

Frequently the word "links" is erroneously employed. The real meaning indicates a sea-side course only, not an inland one.

Occasionally one hears a man say "I had him 2 up at the ninth," instead of two down.

There is no excuse for these "Americanisms."

The term "twosome" is gradually creeping in, in lieu of "single." A "single" match is one player playing against another. I am free to confess I prefer the word twosome. It is richer, more comprehensive in meaning, conveying as it does the idea of two players—a couple—whereas a "single" match is not altogether free from confusion with a single player, colloquially known as "a lonesome."

The only conceivable objection to twosome is on account of etymological grounds, but that might be ignored in favor of the far more expressive modern word. The slang of one generation frequently becomes part of the language of the next.

Inequalities of Penalties

In all the discussion of amendment of the rules, it is somewhat singular that not a voice has been raised concerning the severe penalty which attaches to playing a ball into a water hazard—especially from the tee.

Added to stroke and distance, a penalty of one stroke is imposed for the privilege of playing the next shot, and, at that, the ball has to be dropped, even from the tee.

Whereas, with a ball played out of bounds there is a loss of distance only, and, in the case of a tee-shot, the second ball may be teed.

In the first case one is playing 3, and in the second 2, with the very decided advantage of teeing, instead of dropping.

Suppose the first ball went into a part of the water hazard extending out of bounds. In such event one would be playing 2 on the second shot, with the teeing privilege thrown in, against 3 with enforced dropping.

Who is the Greatest All-Time Golfer?

Hugh S. Fullerton has selected Ty Cobb as the Greatest Ball Player of all time.

In next week's issue of The American Golfer, J. S. Worthington, in collaboration with Walter J. Travis, will name the Greatest Golfer that ever lived.

Mr. Worthington has played with many of the greatest golfers of Great Britain and the United States back through more than two decades. He isn't writing about someone he has heard of, and accordingly, with whom he has played many rounds—someone whom he has watched in championship tests.

When he named his selection Walter J. Travis immediately concurred in the opinion, so he, too, will give his reasons as to why the golfer named stands out above the field as the Champion of all Champions in this sport.

This will be the second of a series that will embrace every major sport. These features will be run every other week, or at intervals that approximate this time.

"Let's Talk of Graves, of Worms, and Epitaphs"

The mole is regarded almost universally as a pest, and, indeed, efforts are constantly made to exterminate him, usually by trapping. Instead of being a pest he is in reality the greenkeeper's best friend.

The bane of most courses are worms. However valuable they may be for agriculture, they are an unmitigated nuisance on a golf course . . . without a single redeeming virtue.

It is popularly supposed they are of value in aerating the soil. This is not so, for the simple reason that the hole or burrow does not add to the soil, being practically water-tight except at the orifice. The sides are lined with the native slime or mucous of the vermin, impermeable to air or moisture. The sole good feature of their operations, agriculturally considered, lies in bringing to the surface soil particles, known as "casts," which are eventually distributed and act as a sort of top-dressing . . . a fruitful source of trouble on a golf course in the propagation of weeds of all kinds, particularly dandelion and plantain.

Their baleful effects, more especially on putting-greens, are too well known to need any extended reference here. Suffice it to say that wherever they are allowed to go unchecked there inevitably ensues a more or less pronounced deterioration in the turf.

Worms are vermin . . . so are fleas. It might just as well be argued that if worms are of benefit golf courses, fleas are of benefit to dogs.

What was it, by the way, David Harum said of fleas? Something to the effect that a reasonable number of fleas is good for a dog because they keep him from forgetting he is nothing but a dog.

So, in a way, a reasonable number of worms is good for a golf course, because they help the green committee not to forget that worms are bad for a course.

Now, moles are one of nature's best corrective agencies against the undue spread of the pest, as worms form their staple article of food.

The only objection to them is the "tracks" they throw up in burrowing, but these are not so very serious except on a green. One thing it is certain—the disease is infinitely worse than the remedy.

I know of one leading course that has deteriorated sadly the last few years since moles have been completely exterminated. Now worms have spread all over, in countless thousands, and the fairways and putting-greens have suffered terribly.

A Dreadful Accident

JONES is one of those fortunate, far-sighted club owners who, prior to the Great Thirst era, laid in a supply of the real stuff used in playing the "Alcohole."

Now and then, for the delectation of his numerous friends, he slips into his hip pocket a "container," just enough for four. Playing recently, he lagged behind the rest of the bunch—he hates to lose a ball—and was struck violently by a ball from the match following.

Feeling something gently tickling down, a dreadful realization of the worst almost paralyzed the band he reached around with a forlorn hope as he prayerfully muttered "I hope it's blood!"

The Honly 'Ole 'E' Alved 'E' Lost

When Vardon and Ray were last on this side, in 1913, they played many matches throughout the country. At one of the California courses Ray had as his partner the leading local amateur, who had a chance to figure at a hole where Ray was out of it, but after his ball, which had been lifted, was replaced, he was so flustered that he unwittingly brushed the line of the putt with his hand, thereby of course losing the hole, instead of securing a half. Which meant the loss of the match, as Vardon and his partner won by a hole.

Ray, in referring to the incident afterward, remarked in accents of mingled sorrow and chagrin. "The honly 'ole 'e alved 'e lost."