

# Should ADULTS Play Golf?



Cartoons by Clare Briggs  
Courtesy Macmillan Co.

## *A Socratic Dialogue*

*Place: The home of Mr. Leach*

*Time: After dinner*

### **Persons of the Dialogue**

**WILLIAM BOLITHO** — A South African author who never played golf

**"CHICK" EVANS** — The only living man who has held the American amateur and open golf championships in the same year

**THOMAS GOLD FROST** — Golfer; lawyer in his spare time

**BERNARD GIMBEL** — Prominent New York merchant; occasional golfer

**NUNNALLY JOHNSON** — Journalist; the *New York Evening Post's* Rover Boy

**HENRY GODDARD LEACH** — Editor of *THE FORUM*; confesses to golf when cornered

**CHRISTOPHER MORLEY** — Dramatist; no golfer

**M. LINCOLN SCHUSTER** — Publisher; shies at a putter

**W. BÉRAN WOLFE, M.D.** — Psychoanalyst; but he plays golf just the same

**MR. LEACH.** There is a good deal of discussion nowadays as to what we should do with our leisure. Henry Ford has given us an extra day in which to do nothing, apparently, but run up mileage. The Life Extension people have added six years to our lives. Now that we have all this time on our hands, what are we going to do with it? What is the most profitable way to spend our leisure? Is golf the answer to these questions?

**MR. MORLEY.** I think it is a damned trivial question to get a lot of intelligent men together to talk about. If you are speaking of golf as golf, I say it is a useless question. If you regard it as a symbol of something else, then it may be important. It seems to me an intrusion on the life of the individual to express an opinion as to how he should spend his leisure. He should do it as he pleases. I know Chick wouldn't try to force me to play golf. I've never been

interested in it, but I may try it some time.

**MR. EVANS.** You will.

**MR. MORLEY.** Maybe after I get old and senseless.

**MR. EVANS.** When you become an adult.

**MR. MORLEY.** I don't have time to play golf. Why it takes two or three hours just to go one round.

**MR. GIMBEL.** Most people don't realize that out of those three hours, less than ten minutes are spent in actual playing.

**MR. EVANS.** I have never figured it out, but I don't suppose it is much more than ten minutes as far as the actual swinging of the club is concerned.

**MR. MORLEY.** What happens in the other 170 minutes?

**MR. JOHNSON.** That is golf. He meant ten minutes of real action.

**MR. GIMBEL.** Some of these fellows spend a lot of time addressing the ball.

**MR. JOHNSON.** In no uncertain terms. I do it myself. I've had words come into my mind, while I was digging in a bunker, that I never realized I knew.

**MR. MORLEY.** I'm concerned about those 170 minutes we haven't accounted for. Are you having a good time then? Are you getting any exciting thoughts, or is it just anæsthesia?

**DR. WOLFE.** You are a professional second-story thinker, and I venture to say that you spend a very minor fraction of your time in actual constructive thinking.

**MR. MORLEY.** Yes, the results show it. Man is a frail vessel.

**DR. WOLFE.** And a golfer is only a golfer.

**MR. MORLEY.** I am not arguing against golf. Golf doesn't need any defense. Anything people

get lots of fun out of needs no defense.

MR. SCHUSTER. Well, if it seems to be able to furnish enjoyment, why haven't you been tempted to play it?

MR. MORLEY. I think probably there are two reasons. First, because I am too busy with other things that interest me more, and second, because most of the people who play golf are not as interesting to me as others who don't. Most of the people whose ideas interest me don't play golf.

MR. EVANS. It is a good game for intellectual people.

MR. MORLEY. I don't doubt it. But I'm not intellectual; don't get me wrong.

DR. WOLFE. There are very few people whose occupations day in and day out are thrilling to them. To the business man, for instance, who has to slave in an office all day, golf offers the advantages of mental relaxation and a chance to develop social contacts.

MR. SCHUSTER. It seems to me that one of the grave difficulties about golf is the elaborate ritual it requires to get the benefit of those ten minutes of actual play. There is an expensive outfit to be bought, membership fees that would throw the average man into bankruptcy, and any amount of time wasted getting out to the club.

MR. MORLEY. A guy that works in Chambers Street, how much time does he have to play golf?

MR. EVANS. You strike a good point there. If golf had only started with the cities, there would have been golf clubs nearer where people work. The ideal arrangement is found in the Middle West, where the small towns have golf courses almost in their back yards.

MR. MORLEY. It's outrageous for a city the size of New York to have all its playgrounds so far away. But golf, of course, takes a lot of room. I'd like the idea of having people play croquet or clock golf in City Hall Park. Clock golf is something I can understand. A guy can play it in his back yard.

MR. LEACH. Why is it not possible to have golf played on smaller territory?

MR. JOHNSON. Shorter holes . . . that's my idea . . . about sixty feet.

MR. MORLEY. In my opinion, all the ideal sports are on or in the water.

MR. EVANS. There's plenty of water in a water hazard.

MR. FROST. It seems to me the chief advantage of golf is that it teaches so many men how to play who don't know the meaning of play, men whose lives have been entirely taken up with business. It shows them that there is something in life besides amassing wealth. I firmly believe that any man of middle age, by taking up golf, can add ten years at least to his life. I know that I would not be alive to-day if it had not been for golf. I devoted six months of my life to doing nothing but play golf, when the doctors had practically given me up. I brought myself back to as good health as I ever had.

MR. EVANS. It has added a great deal to the health and happiness of the country.

MR. JOHNSON. It made me happy when I gave it up. I played once with a guy who played in par. He made the first three holes in three, four, and three, or something like that; I played them in six, seven, and twelve. That was the last time I played. I have never felt better than since I gave up that game.

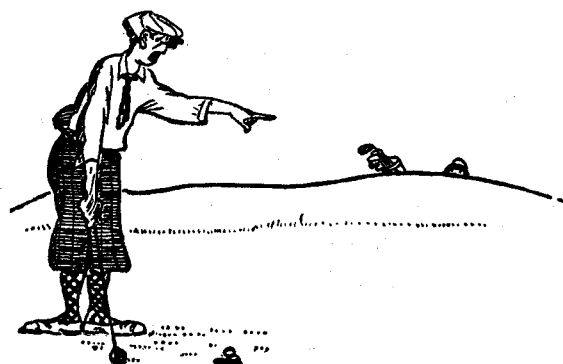
MR. MORLEY. There's another drawback. Isn't it very difficult for a good player and a beginner to play together with any happiness for either?

MR. EVANS. No. I can have just as much fun playing with a person who takes over a hundred. In fact, most of the people I have played with, outside of tournaments, have taken over a hundred.

DR. WOLFE. If you play a bad hand of bridge, people will snap at you and call you names and never invite you to their homes again. But if you dub around at golf, you only arouse a storm of friendly laughter.

MR. JOHNSON. *Friendly?* Huh, that's good!

MR. SCHUSTER. Another objection to golf is that people make a religion of it. They talk about it all the time and get to be awful bores. They think golf and talk golf and carry their business to the golf links. . . .



DR. WOLFE. Isn't it one of the frailties of human flesh to confuse means with ends? People do the same thing with eating and drinking, but that is no argument against eating and drinking. I know of no better cure for illusions of grandeur than a game of golf.

MR. SCHUSTER. Why cure them?

MR. MORLEY. For God's sake, let's encourage them!

MR. GIMBEL. Golf does a lot of good in just getting people out of doors.

MR. SCHUSTER. People can go outdoors without playing golf.

MR. GIMBEL. But they probably wouldn't unless they had some reason to. A lot of people who know what is good for them won't do it if they have to stop and think about it. Golf makes people eager to get out in the open. Perhaps you might write better plays, Mr. Morley, if you played golf.

MR. MORLEY. It is quite possible.

DR. WOLFE. Certainly Schopenhauer could have written a better system of philosophy if he had had a couple of sixes under his belt.

MR. SCHUSTER. Do you want to bet on that?

MR. JOHNSON. What if he'd had a couple of *twelves* under his belt?

DR. WOLFE. I don't think anybody champions golf as a panacea for all human ills.

MR. SCHUSTER. It has been held up here as a great humanitarian activity, a character builder, a disciplinarian of the soul, and all that sort of thing.

MR. EVANS. I used to think it taught self-control, but after seeing some of these golfers play, I have my doubts.



MR. LEACH. That's a question. Is golf good for a man of high tension?

MR. EVANS. I think so. It takes his mind off of what has made the tension.

MR. JOHNSON. What does it put his mind on?

MR. SCHUSTER. It gives him another cause for high tension.

MR. FROST. One of the elements that has brought that tension into golf is the universal habit of betting on the game — "just a little something to make it interesting."

But that isn't the fault of golf.

MR. EVANS. It is true of any game.

MR. FROST. Anyway, golf is a great boon to the business man who has to do a lot of traveling. It transforms a trip that used to be a burden into a continual pleasure jaunt.

MR. EVANS. And you can play it all over the world.

MR. MORLEY. In other words, wherever you go, all around the world, you would be doing pretty much the same thing. I think that is a hideous prospect.

MR. EVANS. If you had experienced the good feeling that comes from a round of golf, you would think it fine.

MR. MORLEY. I think you ought to have a different kind of good feeling in different places. For instance, if I should go to Cleveland or Detroit, I would want to see what Cleveland or Detroit look like. I would want to see what the buildings look like, and the people going up and down the streets. It is a terrible thought that you could play golf in Syria, or Palestine, or Germany, or Sweden. Great God! It is terrible!

DR. WOLFE. That is no objection at all.

MR. MORLEY. It may be fine if that is what you want to do: I am merely speaking for myself.

MR. EVANS. You get the life of a country you are visiting through the people who play golf better than you do through Cook's tours.

MR. MORLEY. I think you would get a good deal more out of it by going to some little tavern and drinking local drinks.

MR. EVANS. Every golf course has its nineteenth hole. You could still have your drinks.



MR. MORLEY. Even so, I maintain that golf is about as unimaginative a way for an intelligent man to spend his leisure as you could devise. Suppose it does leave you healthy and relaxed and all that. Does it ever give you some thrilling vision of human possibilities such as you can get by walking up Eighth Avenue where they are building a subway, or something like that? To me, that is infinitely more thrilling than any game of golf could be.

DR. WOLFE. As far as thrills are concerned, there are some golf courses in America situated in the most beautiful parts of the country. There is a course at Mackinac Island, way up high, with a view of Lake Superior and . . .

MR. MORLEY. How much time do those fellows spend looking at the view?

DR. WOLFE. It thrills you, nevertheless. It thrills you as much as the sight of the Taj Mahal.

MR. MORLEY. I would rather see a fellow go out on that course with a microscope and look for four-leaf clovers. It seems to me that it would be a more intelligent way of getting to the secrets of life and getting fresh air.

DR. WOLFE. I think you confuse the issue, Mr. Morley. Golf is not a substitute for intellectual pastimes.

MR. MORLEY. I don't think there *is* any issue. If I have confused it, I didn't know it was there.

MR. EVANS. What could a man do with his spare time that would be better for him than golf?

MR. SCHUSTER (*despairingly*). He might loaf or walk or plant trees, or, in a dire emergency, he might even read. . . .

MR. MORLEY. I don't care what a guy does as long as he does it because he wants to, and not because everybody else is doing it. I would rather see a man go make maps of spider webs, or anything that represented some mania of his own.

MR. EVANS. I would like to know what Mr. Leach does with his spare time.

MR. LEACH. I play golf occasionally, but I



do it questioningly. Half the time I wonder if I ought not to be doing something else. I find I can get as much exercise and relaxation in forty minutes of tennis as I can in four hours of golf. That makes me wonder if I haven't spent too much of my life playing golf.

MR. MORLEY. There is something rather deplorable to me — a sort of ethical infusion — in the way Henry Leach takes up sport. He admits he worries, when he is playing, about whether he ought not to be doing something else. I think that is a hideous way to approach sport.

MR. EVANS. Golf ought to be played for the fun in it, like any other game.

MR. MORLEY. There is a question I sometimes put to myself, and I suppose everyone does in his secret moments: When, if ever, am I actually happy? There are two situations in which I have unexpectedly found myself thinking, "Observe, I am perfectly happy." One of

them is when I am reading a good detective story and feel I am about to go to sleep. The other happiness is sitting on a gravel path and pulling up weeds.

MR. EVANS. You are going to make a good golfer.

DR. WOLFE. You get the same satisfaction when you have just made a nice drive or a good putt.

MR. MORLEY. But why deliberately elect a game in which these moments of happiness are necessarily so few?

(*Mr. Bolitho enters the room.*)

MR. BOLITHO. So sorry to be late, gentlemen. Don't let me





interrupt the even flow of your conversation.

MR. LEACH. We were talking about golf.

MR. BOLITHO. Golf?

DR. WOLFE. Yes.

MR. EVANS. It's a game.

MR. SCHUSTER. Is it? I was beginning to think it was a religion, or a health-cure, or a business, or something of the sort.

MR. BOLITHO. Why don't sports stand on their own feet? I have never seen a golf game, but it is always advertised like a pill — good for your health. Isn't there anything in it except that it is good for your health?

MR. EVANS. I think it is damned good fun.

MR. SCHUSTER. Mr. Evans, is it your observation that the average golfer — otherwise known as the dub — gets any of this ecstasy from golf?

MR. EVANS. He gets just as much thrill from good shots as the champion player does.

MR. SCHUSTER. But does he get the good shots?

DR. WOLFE. The beauty of golf is that you remember your good shots and forget the bad ones. I never shot under 95 in my life, yet all my memories of golf are pleasant ones.

MR. BOLITHO. That is a pessimistic view of life, if you say the beauty of golf is a small thing like that. I don't want to pass my life in anything so mild as forgetting bad shots. In fact, I don't know whether it is mild or vicious. It is one of the two.

MR. SCHUSTER. Mr. Bolitho, you are an expert in mass social phenomena. Why do you think people in America play so much golf?

MR. BOLITHO. I should like to see it played first, but from what I have heard about golf I

should say it was a pleasure allied to that of dancing.

MR. MORLEY. How much more magnificent if thousands and thousands of people should burst out of the office buildings in the middle of the afternoon and go into City Hall Park or the Battery and dance folk dances. Marvelous! That would be real sport.

DR. WOLFE. I agree with you. But our Puritan ancestors have precluded that.

MR. MORLEY. I started folk dancing in the offices of the *Evening Post* years ago. I very nearly lost my job because they thought I was crazy. That was my idea of real fun — to get the office staff out in St. Paul's graveyard and do a little folk dance. That is perfect.

MR. SCHUSTER. Where the green begins . . .

MR. MORLEY. No caddies, no sticks, no memberships. Just go dance in the streets.

DR. WOLFE. It should appeal to our motor civilization.

MR. BOLITHO. I like that word "motor" civilization. That is a swell word.

MR. GIMBEL. That is a seven-dollar word.

MR. JOHNSON. Gimbel's quotes it at seven dollars. And a bargain at the price.

MR. BOLITHO. I am interested in the American millionaire and what he gets out of life. It seems to me it boils down to comfortable transport and golf.

MR. SCHUSTER. Usually comfortable transport to golf.

DR. WOLFE. I think Mr. Gimbel ought to answer that question.

MR. GIMBEL. Probably I play less golf than anyone here in the room. But there are more people playing now than there used to be, and there will be more playing next year, whether we hold this discussion or not.

MR. MORLEY. Don't you think it is largely because golf has been whooped up so unparadoxably by the newspapers?

MR. GIMBEL. You can't analyze it. But if golf persuades people who live in steam-heated buildings to get out one or two days a week, and makes them think they are having a good time, I say it has served its purpose.

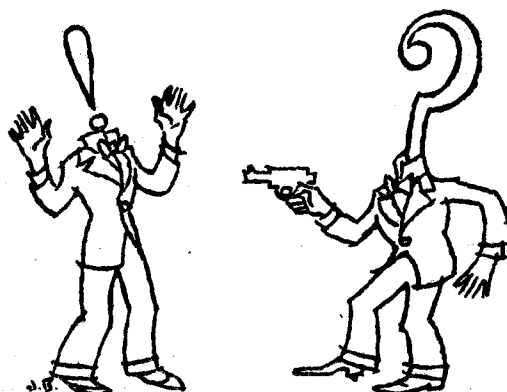
MR. EVANS. And a darned good purpose!

MR. SCHUSTER. Then the hope of civilization is on the golf links?

MR. MORLEY. If it is, there is about as much hope for civilization as there is of my making a hole in one.



# May I Ask . . . ?



*Drawings by Johan Bull*

by **JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS**

OUR CRITICS have often assured us that the dollar sign is the symbol of America. I am coming to the conclusion that our more characteristic symbol is the question mark. I have just typed them side by side on my Corona and have been looking at them. — \$ and ? We may read the dollar sign as two parallel lines with a swirl trying to bring them together. One of these lines, as I see it, is expense and the other income. Parallel lines never meet in a Euclidean world. The S imposed on them represents the frantic effort of the individual to refute this geometrical finance. In this respect my present wanderings over a postwar world show me that there is nothing typically American about this symbol. The striving, the manifold tragedy, the wrung soul of an era concealed in this new swastika are universal. In England, France, Italy, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Belgium — I find it wherever I have lately been, even when the expense line does not, as at home, insist upon describing a hopeless tangential curve away from its parallel. However, when one has once finally escaped from the smoking room of the liner, landed at Southampton or Havre, Hamburg or Genoa, and lost oneself among the foreigners, one does escape from the question mark in its typical American repetitive usage.

One does not, it is true, escape entirely. The mails still function, and a good part of this long sunny afternoon which should have been devoted to work on my book, a stroll in the sunshine, or letters to old friends has been spent

in my study typing answers to letters from strangers asking questions which any local librarian or even a little intelligent thought and work on the part of the questioners should have been able to answer. "Where can I find such-and-such a quotation?" "Ought I to encourage my son to become a teacher?" "What would be a good list of books to read?" "How can I make my boy take an interest in history?" As I respond as courteously as I can to this constant questioning from my native land — a usual part of my week's chores — I wonder what sort of minds ask all these and innumerable other questions. (One thing I know, and that is: I shall never be thanked; for it is a sad statistical fact that in ten years of answering questions from American strangers I have never but twice had even the courtesy of an acknowledgment of my reply. But that is beside the present point.)

That I am not alone in my pondering over this American question mark is indicated by another letter, lately received, from a man with a very different type of mind from those of the correspondents just noted. "A six weeks' lecture tour," he writes, "including Texas, California, and Colorado, brings me back to New York with the major impression that all America is asking questions. Healthy mental curiosity is not a thing to be condemned in children, but it is a healthier sign in adults when they occasionally take the trouble to think out the answers for themselves. My limited experience in France has convinced me that the average