



BY OUR BRITISH CORRESPONDENT.

LONDON, June 10, 1914.

I write on the eve of the Open Championship meeting at Prestwick, which does not appear now as if it will have the same international interest as at one time looked likely to be the case, and indeed the general interest in it is smaller this year than it has been for several seasons past. Mr. Francis Ouimet and Mr. Harold Weber are to play, and the name of J. J. McDermott of Atlantic City is among the entrants (he is paired with A. Seymour of Molesey Hurst for the qualifying round on the first day and with Claude Gray on the second day), but this entry seems to have been made in a provisional sort of way, nothing has been heard of McDermott being here and it is assumed that he will not play. The other Americans besides those named, who competed in the amateur championship at Sandwich, have gone home again. There are 194 entries for the championship, which is more than at one time seemed likely, and it is evident that the new qualifying process, bad and unpopular as it is, has not frightened off as many players as it was believed it would do. The amateurs, however, are appreciably reduced in numbers, and Mr. John Ball, Mr. John Graham, Mr. H. D. Gillies and others of celebrity are missing from the list. The process of the championship this year is as

follows—On Thursday, the 11th inst., half the entrants will play a qualifying round on the Troon course and the other half on the Troon No. 2 Municipal course, both these being three or four miles from Prestwick. On the following day those who played on the municipal course will play a round on the other and vice versa. When all this has been done, the top hundred in the aggregates will be qualified to play in the championship which will take place on Thursday and Friday, June 18 and 19, two rounds each day, on the old championship course at Prestwick. It is a clumsy and tedious process and it is extremely unlikely that it will be tried another year.

As the championship will be over before these lines are printed, no good purpose would be served by discussing the prospects here and now. It is enough to say that probably at this moment James Braid is favorite, but that Harry Vardon, Taylor, Duncan and various others of eminence are all playing well and anything may happen. There are some people who think that Abe Mitchell, the ex-amateur has a chance of winning. However there has been less discussion upon such topics this year than for many seasons past, and it is clear that the amateur championship meeting

at Sandwich has rather exhausted public interest in the leading golf competitions for the time being.

Some important changes have been made on the Prestwick course lately. Besides those which have previously been mentioned in these notes, such as the removal of the old wall which stood at the back of the third green and figured elsewhere in the round, a new green has been made to the sixth hole farther along than the old one and on lower ground, while the length of the seventh hole has been extended.

BRITISH PLAYERS AND THE U. S. OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP.

And now, when mentioning the Open Championship even in only this incidental way, a note must be made upon the prospects of British players appearing in the U. S. Open Championship at Midlothian. I am afraid at the present moment those prospects are slighter than they were a few weeks ago. I have previously mentioned that a movement was on foot with the object of getting James Braid and George Duncan to play in that event, and at one time it appeared very likely that it would succeed. Both players were offered financial encouragement by a gentleman on this side, and both signified their appreciation and their willingness to undertake the expedition, without entering into any definite plans for it. Since then, however, Duncan has been offered and has accepted a very lucrative engagement in Germany for the late summer and has withdrawn from the American scheme. Braid was never very keen on this enterprise, and his eyesight, from which he suffered most anxiously last year, still worries him a little so that he is

not much inclined to apply any severe test to it, such as he fears he might have to do in America. That, however, is not the governing consideration in his case. He is certainly not willing to go on an expedition of this kind alone, and naturally also he is not willing to go with anybody who is not one of his own friends. The question, therefore, is whether anyone who is in that class and is good enough for the expedition is willing to go with him. There are very few indeed who have the qualifications, and the number might almost be narrowed down to one. There is, when I write, a bare possibility that a partnership may be fixed up in this direction, and that two of the best British golfers that this country has ever produced may set forth at the end of July for America. That is as much as anybody here knows at present, and, knowing all the circumstances and judging upon them, I am obliged to say that I think there is grave doubt as to whether there will be any British players at Midlothian.

PROFESSIONAL DOINGS.

During the last few weeks there have been very many professional exhibition matches and competitions in different parts of the country. There has been something of the kind going on practically every day, and often two or three in a day, so that the number is far too large to permit of even brief mention of them here, and they must be neglected. They have, however, produced no very sensational features. Vardon, Braid, Duncan, Taylor and Herd have all been showing good but often variable form, and have given little indication as to what is likely to happen in the Open Championship. C. W. Pope has won

the Irish Professional Championship, which was played for at Newcastle, County Down and D. P. Watt has captured the Scottish professional championship which took place at North Berwick.

Among the more interesting professional competitions of the pre-championship period was one to which I have made occasional reference before, and which has come to be known in this country as the "Sphere and Tatler Foursomes," as the consequence of leading journals with such names having put up the prize money, which amounts to the good sum of \$1,750. The professionals all over the country have stroke play qualifying competitions for it, and when sixty-four have qualified in this way they are paired together by lot, and then in ordinary foursome form they finish off the competition by match play. The result is a very entertaining tournament with much scope for surprise. A pair of whom little was expected, but who worked together very well as a couple throughout the competition, came through victorious on the occasion, being J. B. Batley of Bushey Hall and L. Holland of Northampton, who beat C. McIntosh of Preston and G. E. Smith of Bielside by five up and four to play in the final. Batley, of course, is a well-known golfer and highly respected for his achievements and capabilities, but the others who were concerned with him in the final had much smaller reputations. In the course of the tournament a good pair in Harry Vardon and Joshua Taylor went down in the second round, while in the third the couple who on paper were certainly strongest of all, being Ray and Duncan were beaten by Sandy Herd and J. Cheal of Seaford.

POOR PUTTING.

One of the features of this competition, as it has been of most others of the season, was the bad putting that took place. It really seems to me that an average of about two putts and a half on every green is becoming something like a settled thing with the best players, and great men seem to look for admiration when they can get down in two putts. When one has merely remembrances to deal with comparisons are very difficult; but I really cannot recall any season in which the putting has been poorer than it has been this time. In past years it has been common enough to say that championships have been won on the putting, but this has not meant so much that the winners avoided three putts as that they never took more than two, and continually got down in one. Of course there have, no doubt, been many fine performances on the green, but in only one case has the putting of any man thrust itself upon my attention, as it were, and demanded that notice should be taken of it for its first-class quality and that was the putting of Mr. Jenkins in the amateur championship. It was done in good style, was firm, bold and most marvellously true. Mr. Jenkins was the only man I saw at Sandwich who putted at the hole as if he, so far from being afraid of it, felt he could not miss it.

I do not think it is altogether my own imagination that the putting is worse this season than ever before. If it is the fact, how is it so? Some people will at once jump to what seems to them the easiest excuse of all to offer, and say that the balls have become more difficult to putt with. That will not do. I believe, and am in fact sure, that golf balls

are easier to putt with now than they have ever been since the game was established as a serious pastime. In recent times great attention has been given by the manufacturers to improving the putting qualities of balls, and a marked advance has certainly been made. Balls that putt well and those that do not are far more readily distinguishable from each other than they used to be. It might have been urged that, anyhow, putting in modern times is far more difficult than it was in the old days of the gutty, and we should have believed it if there had not been that gutty "test match," as it was called, in the early part of the season which did seem to show conclusively that the rubber-cored ball had a far better liking for the hole than its predecessor had, and that, capricious as it might be when in the neighborhood of the cup, it was less so than the gutty. All the four great professionals who took part in that rather stupid match putted better with the modern ball than with the old one, and that was about the only thing of consequence that we did learn from that match. No, I think the old excuse that putting with a ball that has got India rubber inside it is so very difficult, and that no golfer ought to be expected to surmount its difficulties, is played out. (By the way, in passing, there is a rumor in circulation, to which there appears to be a good basis of foundation, that the aforesaid gutty test match was rather more of a farce than most people understood at the time, and that at least one of the professionals concerned, not liking the plain solid gutty balls that were provided for him, asked the makers of the same to supply him with something special for the occasion in the shape of a ball that was

loaded, which they did accordingly, the eminent player in question, after trying the new kind, expressing his satisfaction and declaring that they they were much better than the other and plainer kind!)

I almost believe that the truth is that despite the enormous amount of talk that there is in these days about the difficulties of putting, and the appalling number of new inventions in the way of putters, people practice and study putting far less than they used to do. The most necessary principles of good putting are shamelessly disregarded; in fact one finds an enormous proportion of players in these days who are actually ignorant of them. How many players have it in their minds all the time that the absolutely still body is about the most important thing in all putting? Or that it does not do to strike the ball with one part of the putter one time and with another part the next for no special reason? I am looking forward with much curiosity to the putting that will take place in the Open Championship at Prestwick.

STEEL SHAFTS.

And writing about putters and new clubs, I am reminded of a new invention that has attracted much attention in this country, and of certain action that is reported to be taken with a view to suppressing it, the case being an interesting one. In the early spring a new form of putter made its appearance and attracted some notice. Instead of having a wooden shaft as all other putters have, the shaft was made of hollow steel, and was about a quarter of the usual thickness. At the end of this steel shaft the putter seemed to be balanced very much like a pendulum. When I picked up one of these instruments the balance and

the player's control of the head did indeed seem to be very fine indeed. One of them was used by a player in the London Amateur Foursome Tournament and with very good results. The idea occurred to me that a danger of such a putter was that the hollow steel shaft would be rather susceptible to being bent, and a bend to a slight extent by pressure upon it while in the bag, which might pass unnoticed but would make a difference in practice, would be worse than a much more prominent bend that would be noticed. I was assured however, that the putter was not in the least susceptible to being put out of shape in this way. It began to attract great attention, and large numbers of them were being sold, when it occurred to those responsible that there were other possibilities for hollow steel shaft beside this, and forthwith they were applied to drivers, brassies and iron clubs—to the whole golfer's kit that is. Here again they felt very nice in the hands, and the balance did seem to be exquisite, while apparently they had fine capabilities. Here indeed the idea of the "steely shaft" had its full meaning. The inventor and marketer had a set of them with him at Sandwich, and when I handled them there it seemed that they were very powerful clubs, and that the player had a delightful sense of control over them. Whether all these ideas worked out as well in practice as it seemed they might do I cannot say. The said inventor and marketer put it forward with some good reason that whatever special properties these clubs might or might not have, a step in some such direction as that he was taking was absolutely necessary if the scarcity of hickory remained what it is at present, and not only does it seem likely to remain

so but even to get worse. I think that that fairly represents the case, for there can be no doubt that at the present time good hickory shafts are extremely scarce in this country. The other day the rumor was circulated that the professional attached to a certain large club to which I belong had just received an importation of such shafts that were specially good, and forthwith his place was besieged. Men rang each other up on the telephone to tell each other of what there was to be had, and telegrams were sent with the same important tidings. A man of championship rank hurried to the professional's shop in his automobile and bought several of these shafts for which he had no particular use at the time. Such occurrences show the feeling and the probabilities. There ought to be enough trees in the world to supply all the golfers, or, if there are not, it ought to be possible by making new plantations to guarantee the supply in the near future. However, there appears to be a genuine dearth of the proper wood at present, and it is not likely to be overcome in the near future, so that the question may arise as to whether it were better to overcome any latent prejudice in the matter and use a steel shaft or abide with a wooden one of inferior quality.

There are indications that others who are higher than the individual golfer may settle this question for him, to wit the Rules of Golf Committee. No official announcement was made upon the subject but there was a rumor very prevalent to the effect that the members of the Committee who were present at the amateur championship meeting had been sounded upon the subject, and that they had given an unofficial pronouncement to the effect that the

steel-shafted clubs would not be permitted to gain any considerable vogue. It seemed that the Committee were doubtful as to whether, in spite of whatever merits they possessed, these shafts would really become popular, feeling that appearances and prejudices, which are fairly strong sometimes even in the newest golfers, would settle the matter. I think that since the Schenectady business the Committee has been less keen than it was before on interfering and barring. But it came to be understood at Sandwich that the free use of these steel-shafted clubs would not be favoured by the authorities, and that, if necessary, some legislation on the subject was likely to be made, but that for the meantime the said authorities consider that such shafts are already illegal and improper in that they come under the general condemnation made in the term "any substantial departure from the traditional and accepted form and make of golf clubs," as it is used in the notification in the Rules about what the Committee will permit and what it will not. If there should appear to be any tendency for the use of these clubs to spread, it is possible that the Committee will make a definite pronouncement on the subject at the autumn meeting of the Club. In the meantime it must not be understood that in these remarks I am expressing any view of my own one way or the other.

LEGISLATIVE MATTERS.

Another important matter was considered by the authorities when they were assembled at Sandwich, and that was a recommendation made by a foreign association (nothing to do with America, I may say) to the effect that a process for the whitewashing of

professionals might be established, that is to say if an amateur turned professional and then, either regretted it or in after years came to the conclusion that he would like to retire from professionaldom and become an amateur again, he might be able to do it on certain conditions and qualifications being fulfilled. The proposal was however turned down.

It was also decided at Sandwich that an Irish representative should be admitted to the amateur championship council, and the representative of the Royal Dublin Club was forthwith admitted. This is a recognition that Ireland thoroughly well deserves, and for which she has been vainly striving for several years past.

Also it was determined that a special meeting of the delegates should be held during the Open Championship week at Prestwick to consider the system of deciding the amateur championship, which, in view of the increasing number of entries, will certainly have to be changed. One suggestion put forward is that the qualification shall be increased from scratch to plus one, and it is supposed that this would have the effect of greatly diminishing the number of entries. Its success, however, would be doubtful, and an alternative proposal, which meets with more favour is that there should be a qualifying round in competition by stroke play instituted, thirty-six holes, the top sixty-four to qualify and play thirty-six holes matches throughout. There is some prejudice against introducing stroke play into the competition in any way whatever, but it is now clear that some change will have to be made, and this scheme is regarded as the best in the circumstances.

HENRY LEACH.