

VARDON'S VIEWS UPON THE
AMERICAN INVASION

(From the *London Daily Mail*)

VIVID recollections of a truly engrossing round at Brookline, Mass., last September, a round which, for at least two people, ended in an atmosphere of something akin to tragedy, come rushing into my mind with the news of the arrival of Mr. Francis Ouimet in England. I am free to confess that neither Ray nor I expected Mr. Ouimet to beat us in the replay for the United States Open Championship. Still, he did it, and we can only express our gratitude to him for coming over this year and affording us an opportunity to square the account. His first mission, however, is to win the British Amateur Championship at Sandwich next month. Other Americans are bent on a similar purpose, and as Mr. J. D. Travers and Mr. F. Herreshoff are already here, while Mr. Charles Evans, Jr., and several less distinguished though none the less excellent transatlantic players are understood to be almost certain starters, it is clear that the American onslaught will be formidable.

In a sense, the attack has caught us at a bad time. So far as I am able to judge, the standard of amateur golf in this country is not nearly so high as it was ten or fifteen years ago. It may be only a delusion, but personally I am convinced that the young amateurs of to-day do not think about the game or apply themselves so assiduously to the task of mastering the advanced shots as their predecessors were wont to do. That may seem an unreasonable remark, considering how extensively golf strokes and the ways of executing them are discussed among all grades of players. Where the young men of a decade or two ago laid the foundation of their strength was in the fact that they practised diligently and regularly instead of playing matches and medal rounds all the time. I suppose that our habits are molded by the circumstances in which we live. With the gutta-percha ball there was simply no enjoyment to be derived from golf unless one learnt how to swing properly and hit the object with complete accuracy. With the rubber-cored ball a satisfactory result is often obtained from an indifferently struck shot. Consequently the old incentive to make time for an hour's practice, even at the expense of giving up a match which one would like dearly to play, no longer exists, and the quality of the golf is suffering.

However, it takes only one man to win a championship, and there can be no blinking the fact that Mr. Ouimet, Mr. Travers, and Mr. Evans, to mention three, have very good chances at Sandwich in May. Mr. Ouimet is unquestionably a golfer of great possibilities. If I may plead length of experience as justification for offering advice to the young champion who beat me, I would remark to Mr. Ouimet that all that he now needs to do is

to effect a slight alteration in the way in which he executes his iron shots. His wooden-club play is admirable; he swings the right length in the right way, for he has not fallen a victim to the American habit of swinging flat so as to try for a long run—a hazardous procedure anywhere and especially risky on the much-bunkered British courses. His drive flies at about medium height, and is nearly all carry, which, I submit, is the best and safest kind of tee-shot. His short approaches are very fine, and he appears to be a born putter. As to his iron shots, I would venture the criticism that he strikes the ball with just a suspicion of "flabbiness" (that is the best word of which I can think in order to convey my meaning), as distinct from the incisive crispness which counts for so much. Possibly he swings the veriest trifle too far; the smallest excess in the up-swing makes a big difference in the use of the iron, because, as a rule, it involves a loss of control. Still, I must say that nothing wrong came of Mr. Ouimet's iron shots in the replayed tie at Brookline; the only question is as to whether in their present mode of accomplishment they would always meet with success.

Mr. Evans impressed me very much as an iron player. One has little fancies in these matters, and with the possible exception of the four professionals, J. J. McDermott, Alec Smith, Macdonald Smith, and J. M. Barnes (the last two are very young and are going to be champions) I saw nobody in the States who made half-iron shots quite so well as Mr. Evans. He played a kind of "push," striking the ball with splendid nip and precision and compelling it to stop within a yard or so of where it alighted. He has the reputation of being a bad putter, but when I played with him at Ravisloe, Chicago, he could not make a mistake on the greens. Still, he declared that that was an exceptional day that came to him just once in a way.

I saw Mr. Travers play only about eight shots, and to judge him on those would be absurd. Four of them were indifferent, and of the two wooden club shots that I watched, one was sliced and the other pulled. Mr. Travers undoubtedly has an inborn genius for golf, and that he is a born match-winner he has proved on many occasions. The personality that produces the latter condition is hard to describe, but certain it is that there are some golfers who can play below form and still win. Possessing priceless gifts, I cannot help thinking that it is a pity that Mr. Travers shows a slight penchant for the pull-and-run shot. I believe that is the cause of his uncertainty with wooden clubs which has been so much discussed; if he would alter his swing a little so as to make it the least degree more upright he might be a world-beater. That, at least, was the impression which I formed after a very brief study of his methods. Now that he is in this country I shall be able to form a better judgment of his play.