

James Braid, a Scot from Earlsferry, is one of Britain's great triumvirate of professional golfers. Braid has won the British Open Championship five times, winning it four times within a period of six years



T H E O L D M A S T E R S

Number 2— J. H. Taylor and James Braid—A Series of Sketches of Golf's Greatest Players

By BERNARD DARWIN

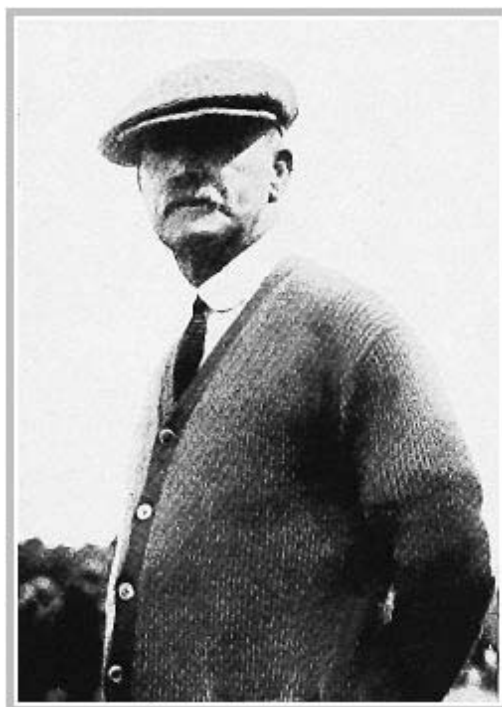
IN THIS series of the champions of old times Harry Vardon had an article all to himself. The other two members of the Triumvirate, J. H. Taylor and James Braid, I will put together, partly because they come just, but still quite distinctly, below the incomparable Vardon, partly because they seem to me to make an entertainingly vivid contrast, the one to the other.

Taylor is an Englishman, from Westward Ho! in Devon; Braid a Scotsman, from Earlsferry in Fife. Braid was and is of all the great golfers perhaps the most calm, long-headed and philosophical; Taylor the most enthusiastic, bubbling and temperamental. Yet by some curious perversity Nature, which made Braid so calm made of him a slashing and dashing golfer while of Taylor the excitable she made just about the steadiest, safest, most accurate golfer that ever lived.

There could hardly be imagined in point of temperament two players more widely divergent, and yet they attained the same result in both being magnificent men at a pinch. Braid did it by endless patience, by accepting the rough with the smooth as being all in a day's work, by taking a cool detached view of his troubles and hoping for the best. Taylor did it by wrestling with himself and all the devils of golf in a kind of pent up white hot fever, emerging successful from the struggle and becoming, by dint of his conquest, a creature radiant and inspired.

You would imagine from those words that it was Taylor who had the more disastrous holes and recovered from them the more

brilliantly, and Braid who kept more evenly on the tenor of his way with just now and then a stroke dropping and a four turning into a live. Yet by that strange perversity before mentioned, exactly the opposite was the case. Braid was and could not help being a slasher. Do not run away with the impression that he was a wild player. Of



John Henry Taylor, known familiarly to golfers everywhere as "J. H. ", is the third of Britain's great triumvirate, Braid and Vardon being the others. With Braid he shares the record of five British Opens

course he was not or he never could have come near to doing what he did, but he did lash at the ball as somebody described it, with a divine fury, that tremendous wrench round of his body, that right knee sinking almost to the ground at the finish as he gave the shot "just a little bit extra", that something more than a suspicion of the shut face, that habitual "draw" with which he played—all these things made for just a very occasional big hook that took his ball into very funny places. With his great strength and his great power of "sizing up" a situation he recovered from those places wonderfully, but still he did get into them and sometimes inevitably they cost him dear.

Taylor on the other hand had no vast length and did not attempt to gain it. He had not in his bag any terrific shot, any twenty or thirty additional yards up his sleeve to be produced at a crisis. What he had was the most peerless accuracy and a supreme command over the ball, especially when the wind roared and the rain came down in torrents, so that he pulled his cap still further down over his nose and set his jaw still more firmly. He had an enormous and well deserved reputation as a mashie player, but I think that in estimating the causes of his victory full justice was often not done to his wooden club play.

Within his limits—and if he was not long he was not short—Taylor was just about the best driver I ever saw with a beautifully true swing, rather flat and "round the corner" according to modern notions perhaps, but to my thinking a joy to watch. And how

(Continued on page 52)

T H E O L D M A S T E R S

(Continued from page 15)

firm on his feet! As he struck the ball and more often than not when he had finished and come through, he was like a rock with his two feet planted on the ground as if they had taken root there. Possibly with a rather freer swing he might have got a little further for, though not tall, he was big and strong. But he was not to be tempted into any such experiments by the will o' the wisp of length. "Flat footed golf, sir, flat footed golf, there's nothing like it," I have often heard him exclaim with that formidable shake of the head which is so characteristic, and no man in the world can give greater emphasis to statements than can J. H.

Both were great iron players, Braid with a little more power of the two and an astonishing capacity for hitting with a cleek, a club to which he

has always remained faithful. I do not think there was anything to choose between them as regards results, but they differed in their methods of getting them. Taylor has always been a confirmed, almost an obstinate pitcher. It is one of his most cherished maxims that there are no hazards in the air, and, though of course he can play a running up shot well enough, he regards it as a "dirty scuffling shot". It used to be an old joke against him that he would insist upon pitching up to that deadly little seventeenth green at St. Andrews, perched between the devil of the bunker and the deep sea of the road, when even his skill could not make the ball stop there. The best of the joke was with him as he won two of his five championships at St. Andrews and his pitching has been

THE OLD MASTERS

(Continued from page 52)

his strongest asset. So if now and again he pitched away a stroke in deference to his great principle he could afford it.

Braid could pitch as well as need be, admirably well indeed, but his natural instinct was to play a running shot or a pitch-and-run when he could. No doubt his early training at St. Andrews where he went from his native Earlsferry to work as a joiner, had something to do with it; certainly there has been no greater master of this shot in all its forms. Being the more phlegmatic and having no principles on behalf of which to die, he was perhaps rather more open minded than Taylor and simply played the shot which he thought would pay him best at the time.

In the matter of putting Braid has had the more erratic and Taylor the steadier career. It used to be said of Taylor that he was the best two putts per green putter in the world. He varied very little; he was not a Willie Park or a Jack White; he did not overwhelm an enemy by the holing of long putts, but day in and day out he laid the approach putt near the hole and he popped the next one in. He was naturally a sound putter with a sound style and did not have to agonize over much, as I fancy, about his method.

Braid's case was just the opposite. When he first appeared he was a magnificent player up to the green and a pretty poor one when he got there. He missed far too many short putts. The long ones did not trouble him, but near the hole he was inclined to knuckle his right knee, move his body and push the ball out to the right of

the hole. I remember many years ago having a day's golf with him when he described himself as putting "like an auld sweetie wife" and the description was just. However he thought and he practiced and he toiled and gradually he turned himself into a very good putter indeed.

He never looked entirely natural and at ease, his noticeably slow take-back of the club had a laborious air, he always had to take infinite pains, but handsome is as handsome does and for some years, when he was unquestionably at the top of the tree, his putting had much to do with his success. He taught himself by sheer determination to stand still and hit the ball truly.

Taylor won his first championship in 1894, Vardon in 1896. Braid, who is the same age, did not win his first until 1901. When once he had won he went on winning—in 1905, 1906, 1908 and 1910. Four times in six years was a great feat. During those years he was the dominating figure and nobody holed more putts than he.

Well I could write about these two heroic figures forever, for not only are both great golfers, but each has as well at least some of the qualities of a great man. However, I must stop. I remember some years ago as I and a friend were just taking our candlesticks with many yawns to go to bed he propounded the problem, "Would you rather play golf like Braid or like Taylor?" We talked for another hour and came to no conclusion, nor will I give any answer to his question now. They occupy in golf twin pinnacles of exactly equal height.