

THE "YOUNG IDEA" AND BILLIARDS.

It has been stated constantly of late that billiards is essentially a young man's game, and yet the history of the Amateur Championship seems to prove exactly the contrary. It was instituted in 1888, and won by Mr. H. A. O. Lonsdale, who won it again in 1910, exactly

twenty-two years later, and he was distinctly a better player at the time of his second victory than when he first secured the title. Mr. A. P. Gaskell carried off the cup on five occasions between 1888 and 1891, and, though he must now be nearly sixty years of age, was playing almost as well as ever prior to a severe illness, from which, I fear, he is still suffering. Mr. S. H. Fry first became champion in 1893, won the title again in 1896 and 1900, gave up the game altogether for twelve years, and in 1916 eclipsed all his previous performances by carrying off the championships of England and of the United Kingdom. Then there is Mr. J. R. Hooper—the present champion of Australasia, and a very great player—and Messrs. H. C. Virr, A. W. T. Good, and G. A. Heginbottom. All the men I have mentioned must be well on the wrong side of forty, yet none of them give the young ones much chance when they happen to meet, whilst Mr. R. H. New, now sixty-five, is still good enough to win a heat or two in an amateur championship.

If we turn to the ranks of the professionals, the adage that "Youth will be served" is far better illustrated. When John Roberts, sen., and William Cook, sen., met in February, 1870, in the first match ever played for the championship, the former must have been rather over than under fifty years of age, and yet, in spite of the size of the pockets having been altered expressly to suit him, he was beaten by a lad who was still six months short of attaining his majority. On



GRAY OPPOSING INMAN AT THE NATIONAL SPORTING CLUB IN 1911

the other hand, John Roberts, jun., was probably playing better at fifty than he had ever done previously, but then that marvellous man has always been a "law unto himself," so it seems scarcely fair to put him forward as an example. Our recent champions, Charles Dawson, H. W. Stevenson, and Melbourne Inman, all

gained the highest honours of their profession comparatively early in life. The first-named has dropped out of the game, and time slips by so quickly that it will surprise a good many to learn that Stevenson is now in his forty-second year, whilst Inman is four years younger to the day. I do not think that either of them is showing any falling off in his play, but there has been a general "levelling up" in the leading rank of professionals during the last season or two, and some of the younger generation are knocking so imperatively at the gate of the road which leads to the championship that, on the next occasion that this is opened, it will be impossible to refuse them admission.

This being the case, the portraits of the four most prominent members of the "Young Turk" party, together with a few comments upon their different styles of play, may prove interesting, and to avoid any possible feeling of jealousy I will take them in order of seniority. Pride of place must, therefore, be given to Claud Falkiner, who was born on July 11th, 1885, and will, therefore, be thirty-one in another three months. During the early portion of his career he was always known as the "West Countryman," but, so soon as he became famous, it was discovered that he was born in Yorkshire, the county which claims both Dawson and Stevenson. Falkiner's chance of eventually gaining the championship would be distinctly better if he was a few years younger, though he has "come on" in such remarkable fashion, even in the last few months,



GEORGE GRAY IN PLAY

that there is no knowing where that improvement will stop. With the exception of the late F. Bateman, he plays the masse stroke better than any Englishman I have ever seen, and his nursery cannons are made with a delicacy of touch that has possibly never been equalled except by Reece and Cook, jun., for Stevenson does not lay himself out much for them. He is essentially a "player of moods." At one session you will find him in the depths of despair, and he will tell you that he can't play at all, that he shall have to give up the game altogether, &c. The next day, when you are about to condole with him on the eclipse of all his hopes, you will encounter a different man altogether. Everything is coming his way, he is rolling off one big break after another, and the only question in his mind is whether it will take him two years or three to become champion. All this is merely a matter of temperament, and it is quite certain that no gamer player has ever handled a cue, as he has proved in many a hard-fought finish.

William Smith was born on January 25th, 1886, and is, therefore, six months the junior of Falkiner. As was the case with the latter, he was comparatively unknown until three or four seasons ago, when he came right into the limelight by making a break of between seven and eight hundred in a remarkable match with Newman at Burroughes Hall, Soho Square. This was unfortunately played late in May, so that the talented young professionals did not receive anything like the patronage that they deserved. Smith's strongest point is his red-ball play. He makes his hazards into the middle pockets almost as perfectly as does Gray, and even Lindrum does not make his long losers with more certainty. Higher praise than this could not possibly be given to any man. In every other department of the game, with the exception of the masse stroke, he is considerably the superior of Gray, and he "mixes" his game so cleverly that his use of the red ball never becomes monotonous. Like Falkiner, he is improving very rapidly, and this is the more remarkable because, during the present season, he has frequently been engaged in exploiting a composition ball, and all players know what a terrible handicap it usually is to be constantly changing from composition balls to ivory, and vice versa. By his recent defeat of James Harris, Smith has proved himself to be an exceptionally fine Snooker's Pool player, for Harris held the record for the highest break at that game for a long time.

Perhaps no one ever created a greater sensation in the billiard world than did George Gray, during his first season in this country, about six years

ago. He was born in Australia on March 28th, 1891, and, under the tuition of his father, devoted several years solely to scoring off the red ball. For the first few months after he landed in England he toured the country in company with George Nelson, and played exhibition games. Everything was in his favour. He used the same set of composition balls, and two tables, the cushions of which were exactly similar, were built for him, so that whilst he was playing on one of them the other could be erected in the town where he was engaged for the following week. He made good use of these advantages, for breaks of 1,000 became quite common, and on some occasions he exceeded 2,000. When, however, he changed on to ivory balls, and began to try to improve himself in other departments of the game, in which he was singularly weak, a very great change was noticeable. He still makes very big breaks occasionally, but has naturally given a good many moderate shows. There are two distinct opinions with regard to his present status amongst the professionals. One party—and some good judges amongst them—maintain that, when the next competition for the championship takes place, he is sure to win it, whilst others do not place him even amongst the first four or five of the leading players of the day. On this point I prefer to suspend judgment for the present, but one thing is quite certain, and that is that amateurs owe a deep debt of gratitude to Gray, who has done more to raise their standard of play than any professional that has ever lived.

The "baby" of the party of four is Tom Newman, who was born March 23rd, 1894, and is therefore only twenty-two years of age. Just fourteen years ago he was an "infant phenomenon," and his father brought him to me and asked my advice as to bringing him out in public. We took him up to Thurston's Hall, where he played 100 up with Mr. George D. Stevens, who was then managing director of the firm, and another game of the same length with me. The child had, of course, to stand on a stool to reach the table, and, remarkable as was his performance, we both beat him, and advised his father not to allow him to make his debut for another couple of years. This advice was followed, and I can safely write that no young fellow of his age has ever played the game that he does at present. In writing this, I am not belittling men like John Roberts, jun., and William Cook, sen. Each was a genius at the game even before reaching Newman's present age; but he has had the enormous advantage of beginning where they left off, and of reaping the full benefit of all the modern improvements in tables and some of the accessories of the game. Possibly Newman has never shown to more advantage

than in his match with Gray, which was begun at Thurston's Hall on April 3rd. The young Australian essayed the very big task of giving him 2,000 in 18,000, and, knowing that his opponent is always liable to make a four-figure break when he has thoroughly gauged the pace of the cushions and the weight of the balls, the younger player made every post a winning one for the first four or five days. He compiled a couple of breaks of upwards of 500, and at three different sessions was

responsible for the splendid averages of 111, 167, and 60. Except for a slight weakness in his forcing strokes, Newman is equally good in every department of the game. His imperturbable temperament is the ideal one for a champion, and he seems the most likely of the younger generation to ultimately gain that position.

SYDENHAM DIXON.

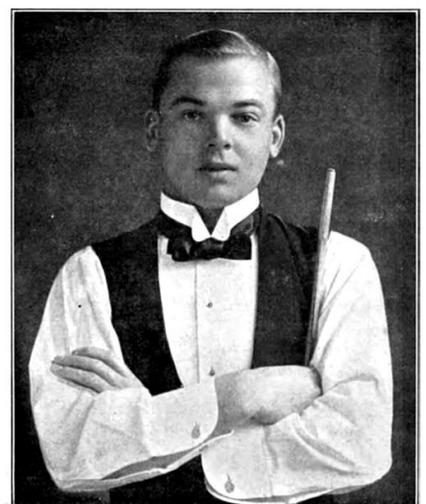
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TOM NEWMAN



WILLIE SMITH



CLAUDE FALKINER