and as he could not be put away in a cupboard or hung on a peg until his rightful owners should come along, he necessarily became part of the family circle for the time being.

Very slowly the old gentleman grew strong enough to leave his bed and crawl down to the chair of honour, and there he would sit and watch Jennie nursing the Importation, which had visibly augmented in bulk since its arrival. "Didn't I tell 'ee he'd come back?" he would repeat now and again, at first with an occasional secret application to the unabsorbent comforter; then, for a period, with a slow and reflective nod; and again, after a time, with a grin of content. And the search for the Importation's rightful owners, having no result, gradually died a natural death, until it was almost forgotten that he had ever had any rightful owners; and one day, when Jennie got down her bonnet to go out, it was observed that the yellow daisies were back again in it.

It was hopeless to ask Grandfather for any solution of the mystery as to how he had obtained possession of that baby; the moment the subject was broached he became as blank and devoid of intelligence as a post, blandly shaking his head and grinning as if he were totally unconscious of the existence of any baby; but when the Importation was beginning to get about quite skilfully on his own feet, the vicar was having a pipe all alone with Grandfather one evening, and the latter seemed to be debating some very knotty point within himself. He appeared to be dragged two ways by acute indecision, and kept scratching his head, and rubbing his chin, and glancing furtively at the vicar. At length he reached over, and touched the vicar's knee with a knobbly finger.

"I'm a-getting pritty old, and I shan't be 'ere wery long now, and—theer, bless me if I don't tell yer! I'll trust yer not to mention it to nobody, sir; for it'll do no good, but on'y worrit her," he said. "W'ere I got 'im—that's wot's on my mind to tell yer. Well, it's jest this—I stole 'im: *that's* what I done! Like this it happened. I dunno 'zackly, but I'd gotten a kind o' notion that I'd find 'im if I started off for to do it; so I jest sneaks out and 'obbles off through Chumford an' Churlford, an' acrost the common, and along and along till I gits to the Portsmouth Road. Mighty slow I went, for I hadn't done much on my legs these twenty year, though they was tough 'uns onst. Well, I was a-settin' on a pile o' stones be the side of the Portsmouth Road, when along came a man and a woman, and the woman was a-carryin' a babby; and the moment I set eyes on that babby, ses I, 'That there's 'im as I'm a-lookin fur!'

"Well, the woman was a-carryin' that babby careless like, as yer might ha' said she didn't care for the bother of it; and wen they come up I passed 'em the time o' day, and ses I, 'That there babby o' yourn do seem to be a worrit to yer.' And she ses, 'It ain't no babby o' mine; it's my sister's as died last week at Guildford,' she ses. 'And I promised as I'd take it with me; and maybe there'll be plenty for it to eat in Dakota, if we ever gits there; but it's the worrit o' my life on the road, and a puzzler to know 'ow to feed it, not knowing much about babbies myself.'

"Well, sir, I ses to myself as I meant 'aving that there babby; so I trudges along with the woman and her 'usband till we comes to a farm, and they asked for to be allowed to sleep in an outhouse for the night.

"Then I pretends to say good-bye to 'em; but I 'ung about behind the hedges till I thought it was all right; then I sneaks into the barn without my boots, and they was both a-snorin' like good 'uns, and the babby a-laying in the woman's shawl aside of her; and so I nips him up quiet and his bottle o' milk, and sneaked out and put on my boots, and trudges to'rds home 'ere. I was pritty well done up, that I was; but I managed to scramble along somehow (for, you see, I didn't want to go to sleep, for fear of the blessed babby freezin', or somethink), till I didn't know no more about ennythink, and they found me in that theer field.

"I stole 'im, sir—that's wot I done; and I'll trust you not to tell *her* nor nobody."

J. F. SULLIVAN.

MODERN CRICKET.

A TALK WITH MR. C. W. ALCOCK, SECRETARY OF THE SURREY COUNTY CRICKET CLUB.

BY RAYMOND BLATHWAYT.

"I sing not of the tented field, but of the grassy sward,
Where England's champions, flannel-clad, brown-browed, of shoulders broad,
Meet in fair fray."—*Punch.*

THIS is one of the most serious of the many serious conversations that I have held in my life. Cricket—to the cricket enthusiast—is a religion, it is not a mere game. And the popular secretary of the Surrey County Cricket Club, Mr. C. W. Alcock, is above all things an enthusiast where cricket is concerned. He was at Harrow just when Harrow was at its best, leaving the school when Dr. Vaughan resigned the Headmastership in 1859.

He is a thorough, good, all-round sportsman, an adept at most English games; a tall, broad-shouldered man with iron-grey hair, a thick grey moustache, and keen, kindly eyes, a typical Englishman in short, with all an Englishman's enthusiasms, and perhaps many of an Englishman's prejudices. He is a believer in

THE DOCTOR "CAUGHT" (READING).
(A sketch from life.)

cricket not merely as a simple game, a recreation, but as a great educational principle. He sees in the devoted cricketer a sound and able-bodied man, a patriot, a clean-living, straight-going specimen of manhood; he regards cricket as a means whereby England and her Colonies can be knitted and welded together as they could not be by all the policy and all the theories of Imperial Federation put together, and he is not far wrong.

Cricket is essentially a manly, healthy game, and the cricket field a place where all classes of the community can meet with but one subject in common between them. The ethical intent of cricket, therefore, is by no means overlooked by this enthusiastic upholder of the great national game.

The room in which we sat formed one of a handsome *suite* in the pavilion at the Oval. Great open windows admitted a flood of summer sunshine, and the pleasant sound of the batting was heard now and again, and the old familiar cry came floating in—

"Well hit, sir; well hit, indeed. Run it out," the cry we all know so well; and every now and again as he talked to me Mr. Alcock would start up from his seat to watch the progress of the game, with a pleasant apology for doing so.

"You really must forgive me," he would say, "but long as I have played cricket, I never can sit and watch a game in silence," and he would applaud as vigorously as the rest of those who were seated round the sunny field looking on at the game.

A big photograph of the ground on the day of the Australian match in 1888 very specially attracted my attention.

"What a tremendous crowd," I said, "surely that is the biggest you ever had?"

"No," he said, "I don't think so. The biggest crowd we ever had was on Bank Holiday last year, when we passed in 30,760 people. The total for the three days—Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday—was 63,763. The popularity of the game is growing tremendously, and especially amongst the working classes. Take, for instance, the attendance yesterday —Whit Monday. It was our second eleven against Bedfordshire, quite a minor match, and yet we had no less than 2,000 people present; we would not have had more at the great Surrey and Notts match fifteen years ago. Nowadays, for a big match like that, we expect at least 25,000."

"And do you think that the working-classes are as fond of the game itself as they are of looking at it?"

"Emphatically I do," was Mr. Alcock's reply. "The game is becoming very popular amongst them. I judge from my own district in Richmond, where we have a very good working men's cricket club. There is a tendency to play far more than there used to be, and I consider it is a great education for them in every possible way."

Whilst he was speaking I was wandering round the room, looking at the pictures, one of which, representing a number of men in the costume of the last century, specially attracted my attention. Underneath it was the date 1785, and the legend, "Laws of the Noble Game of Cricket, as established at the Star and Garter, Pall Mall, by a committee of Noblemen and Gentlemen."

It would be an attractive exhibition indeed that could be formed from a collection of all the pictures which are devoted to the illustration of cricket. The

"E. M."
(A sketch from life.)

old-time pictures are numerous and deeply interesting, and nothing would so well illustrate the progress the game has made and the curious developments it has undergone since the very early day when the bat was little more than a policeman's bâton, or the later days when it resembled the bat that is used by the American base-ball player of to-day.

A picture of a match at the Oval in 1848 represented the batter with a tall hat upon his head, reminding one of the old-fashioned engraving of James Lillywhite with the ball in his hand and a white, carefully-brushed "topper" on his head. There also was an engraving of the Great Jubilee Match played at Lord's between the North and the South on Monday, July 10, 1837.

A portrait of an old man much pleased me ; "for," said Mr. Alcock, "that is a portrait of old Absolon, who is seventy-six years of age, and who got ten wickets only last week in a match in which he was playing."

Two interesting trophies stood upon the mantelpiece—two cricket-balls silver-mounted, and upon one was engraved—

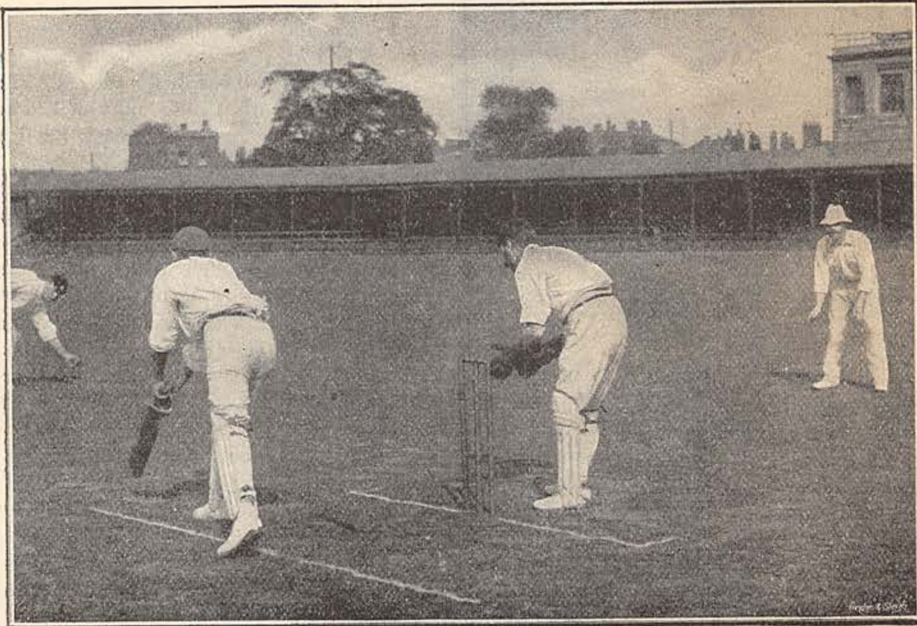
Surrey *v.* Sussex, 1885. Surrey scored 631 off this ball.

And upon the other—

Surrey *v.* Yorkshire. May, 1886. Surrey won by twenty-seven runs.
The first time Surrey beat Yorks since 1865.

Knowing that Mr. Alcock was a Harrow man I asked him what he thought of the present condition of Public School cricket and of the influence of the Public Schools upon cricket generally.

"Well," he replied, "it is rather difficult to say off-hand. I don't see much of the Public Schools on the cricket field, but of this I am quite certain, that the Public Schools very materially influence the cricket of the day. For instance, the Gentlemen of England come mostly from the public schools ; they were almost all in the University elevens. Of late years, too, the second-class public schools, having masters who are specially interested in cricket, have furnished some wonderfully good players. The teaching of H. H. Stephenson at Uppingham brought out D. Q. Steel, Lucas, Patterson—an extraordinary combination of fine players. Undoubtedly, therefore, though they are not supreme, the Public Schools affect the cricket of the country generally very much indeed."

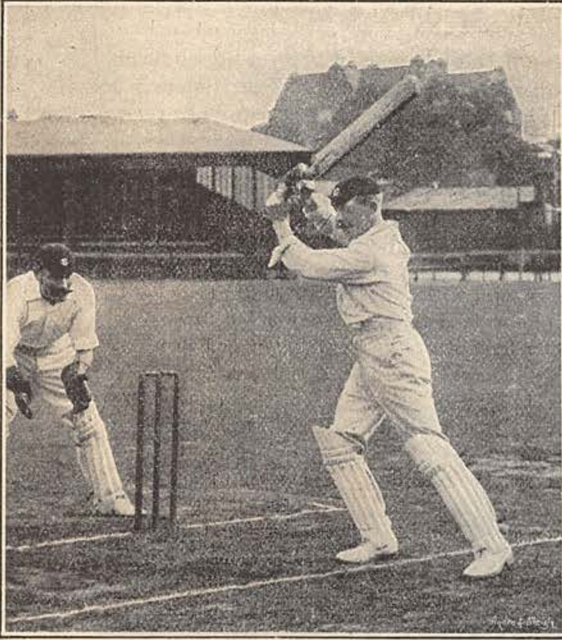


WELL FIELDED AT POINT.

(From a photograph by R. W. Thomas, Cheapside.)

"And with regard to County Cricket, Mr. Alcock, how far should the importation of professionals from other counties be allowed?"

"Well," he replied, "the rules of cricket allow of the qualification of men by residence after a probationary period of two years. The principle is less objectionable than the elasticity which exists with regard to amateurs. Anyone, for instance, can play for Middlesex ; a man with rooms in town is considered quite qualified. This is far more objectionable than acclimatising professionals. I think that a professional who is regularly identified with a county, who has played five or six matches for Yorkshire, say—ought to be considered as belonging to Yorkshire



A GOOD CUT (BY ABEL).

(From a photograph by R. W. Thomas, Cheapside, E.C.)

entirely, and ought not to be subjected to temptation to play for any other county. I hold strong opinions on this matter, but as long as a man is merely a probationer he has a right to make his own market and to go to the club that pays him best. The whole question of professionalism in modern cricket is a difficult one," went on Mr. Alcock, discussing the matter as seriously and earnestly as Mr. Gladstone would discuss Home Rule with his Cabinet, "and for this reason: "there is always great risk of a man's form deteriorating, or indeed, of his whole play altering in two years. I mean this: a man mayn't be so good a catch as, when you engaged him, you thought him to be. Sometimes, and I have a special case in my mind at this moment, a club engages a man as a bat and he turns out to be a bowler in the end. Cricket is a very uncertain quantity indeed. But as a whole, professionalism works thoroughly well, and the whole tone of it has improved immensely in the last twenty years. Even ten years ago the professionals were socially of a very different class from what they are to-day. Now they are smart, well set-up, well-behaved young fellows. I can remember the time when they were of altogether a rougher type. Take Kent, Surrey, Yorkshire, and indeed the Counties generally—what capital all-round players they are now."

"Still," said I, "it was the professionals who introduced the great leg-before-wicket theory and acted up to it, many of them deliberately putting their legs in the way instead of the bat. The Notts professionals were great at this, and I can imagine nothing more unsportsmanlike."

"Ah," replied my host, "that was true enough at one time, but its unpopularity with the crowd thoroughly discredited it. There is no need to alter the law—public opinion has been too strong on this point. In Notts they played such slow cricket that people began to lose interest in the game by comparison with quick football. They began to fear for the popularity of cricket in Notts, but this year they are playing so much quicker that it is picking up. This leg-play was grossly unfair, and very hard on the bowler whose ball was deliberately pushed away. When a ball did not pitch quite straight, they would play this trick, block the whole wicket, and spoil the game."

I remarked on the curious fact that the old-fashioned underhand bowling seemed to have died out altogether.

"Well, yes," replied Mr. Alcock, "the ground is so true nowadays that you have a bias on the ball which the fastest underhand bowlers could never get. An underhand ball in no case ever comes down from a height; the whole secret of bowling is to get well over arm and make the ground help the ball as much as possible."

"And as to batting, Mr. Alcock, does it compare favourably with the past?"

"My opinion," he replied at once, "is that, taken generally, it is far better. There are many more good bats than there used to be; good batting is widely diffused and the level is much higher. You could to-day

MILLS BOWLING.

(From a photograph by R. W. Thomas, Cheapside, E.C.)

CAUGHT IN THE SLIPS.

(From a photograph by R. W. Thomas, Cheapside, E.C.)

get a second All England which would be nearly as good as the original eleven. The African team, for instance, was just as good as the one that went to Australia, if, indeed, it was not better, so far as bowling was concerned. Fred Burbidge, who was captain of the Surrey in its palmy days, told me that our present eleven would knock that of '65 into a cocked hat. The eleven of last year was, in his opinion, better than the famous one in the days of Julius Cæsar, Griffith, Jupp, Caffyn, Mortlock, etc."

"As to fielding," he went on in answer to a remark I had made, "it is rather difficult to say. Wicket-keeping generally is decidedly better. In fielding there are so many different places that it is difficult to judge quite accurately and fairly. You can't nowadays afford to have anyone in a team who fields badly. It goes against a man terribly if he is not a safe field. On the whole, therefore, to answer your question, I would say that fielding is better than it used to be, although I don't think Lord Bessborough would agree with me," he added, with a smiling reference to the old gentleman to whom, in conjunction with "Bob Grimston," as he is affectionately known, Harrow cricketers owe a debt they cannot easily repay.

"And to what do you think we owe this happy state of things?" I asked.

"Well, I fancy that the Australians have brushed us up wonderfully. Their keenness and combination when they first came over here in 1878 struck our men very forcibly."

"And what do you think of army cricket to-day, Mr. Alcock?"

"Ah, I should like to get army cricket on an improved basis, but it is hardly possible, for soldiers shift about so much, although such men as Renny Tailyour, Captain Fellowes, L. A. Hamilton, and A. P. Douglas were hard to beat."

"It is astonishing," Mr. Alcock remarked, "how boys are coming forward in modern cricket. We lay great stress in this club on the coaching of our young fellows. The cricket of the future depends on them. In the old days our colts used to be twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age—now the average would be nearer sixteen. Boys — unless they are at a first-rate public school—are never taught properly, and they get into ineradicable bad habits of play, but by the system here of placing promising boys under a regular instructor and showing them the proper style, they learn to play splendidly. In the old days, for want of such a nursery, all our eleven got old at once, and we could not replace it. Now we make the Oval a nursery for the young and promising, and keep our eleven always up to par by continual drafts from this reserve."

"And you consider that, on the whole, cricket is on the upward path?"

"Most emphatically I do," was the cheery reply. "I am an optimist where cricket is concerned. I believe in progression and I am sure we get better every year. Some years ago there was an idea that lawn tennis would oust it from the field, but that fear experience showed to be quite unfounded. I am much more afraid of golf. I play golf myself and I know how fascinating a game it is. If the public schools took up golf seriously the outlook would be a bad one for cricket. But there is not much fear of that, and in my opinion cricket is better than ever it was and it is improving every year. I cannot say more than that."