

## THE PASTIMES OF PUBLIC MEN.

BY MAX PEMBERTON.



THE great man in the playing-fields has ever afforded a spectacle dear to gods and men, and to the society reporter who makes unnecessary paragraphs about unnecessary people. Unfortunately, the great man loves, as a rule, to take his physical exercise secretly, and somewhat by stealth; but the newer publicity climbs upon the railings of his park, and

his athletic weaknesses are ours paragraphically, whenever the subject is really worthy that oftentimes troublesome honour. In some instances, truly, there is scarce anything left to learn either of the sporting history or the present sporting practice of the greater lights among us.

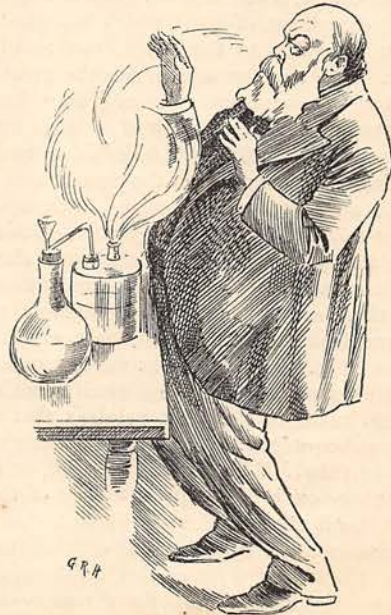
Even Mr. Gladstone himself is not allowed to forget that at Eton his reputation was not only that begotten of a fine Greek prose and a consummate knowledge of Horace, but was also to be set down to some proficiency in rowing and sculling, the latter art having an especial fascination for him. To-day his recreation is so widely known that it does not any longer tempt even the facile draughtsman, to whom the felling of trees was a decade or two ago the very breath of humour; his axes lie unmocked at Hawarden; the first of living statesmen is thrown back upon the common-places of mere pedestrianism. And what a walker he is! Those who have followed him across the park at Hawarden in one of those tramps in the crisp bracing air of morning tell me that the going to matins is a penance in comparison with which the rigours of the ascetics read but as recreations. Others who have tramped in New York with that masterly walker, Cardinal Gibbons, avow that a race between politician and ecclesiastic would be a sight of the century. Alas! that the Pan-Anglican conference cannot help us to a speedy sight of it.

It is curious that while so much has been written from time to time of the ex-Premier's walking, so little has been said of Lord Salisbury's ability at the same exercise, or of the large part pedestrianism plays in his recreation. At Hatfield, when out of office, the Unionist Prime Minister divides his time almost equally between his laboratory and his walks. The great park affords him that seclusion he loves so well, and supplies him with that invigorating air which is the best antidote to the noxious fumes his laboratory engenders. At Dieppe, they will tell you that no tourist "doing it" can stride along the cliffs at such a lusty pace, or

know the pleasures of a long march across the downs, as the master of the Châlet Cecil knows them. In fact, the appearance of loving ease which the Tory Premier assumes so often in the Lords is the veriest pretence—there are few more active men, *ceteris paribus*, in the Upper House, or, for the matter of that, amongst the whole of the politicians.

But I find that these personal deductions are leading me, as it were, into a catalogue-like exposition of the athletic merits of public men; and any such list should be fitly headed by a glance at the accomplishments of the first of English sportsmen, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. He, perhaps, has a more ardent love for nearly every form of sport and pastime than any other man of his age. He was never a great cricketer, I have never heard that he played football; yet he is often an interested spectator of both games, and there are those at Sandringham who will tell you with hushed voices of those occasions when he has chased a tennis-ball over the net, and has even played out a whole set with surprising perseverance. Years ago he had a loose but good seat on horseback; and although he rarely rides to hounds now, there are few men who look better when mounted or who know more about horses. With a gun in his hand, he is unapproachable by the average shooting man; his love for yachting and the *Britannia* is known in all kingdoms; and he plays a game of billiards which, from the amateur's standard, is by no means mediocre.

From his earliest years Prince George has followed this excellent example, and while he seems often to



LORD SALISBURY.

prefer the tennis-court to the covert-side, there are yet few forms of athletics which have not taken some hold of him, or in which he would not excel by a moderate



MR. A. J. BALFOUR.

course of specialising. And this statement holds true of most of the princes, the son of Prince Christian having taken no mean place as a cricketer; while the three sons of the Duke of Teck are given to nearly all those games which are the athletic fashion of the moment.

Here, of course, is all the leisure and the opportunity for a full enjoyment of sport, which is denied to the politician in office, to the artist, the novelist, the musician. The moment a man has the great burden of the State in some measure resting upon his shoulders, the practice of that branch of athletics which has been kept up "for old sake's sake" is no longer possible. Searching the ranks of the present and the late Cabinet, it appears that in the main a little equestrianism is the *ultima thule* of its physical ambition. Nor are such sturdy disciples of the cleek and the bat as Mr. Balfour and Lord George Hamilton of any service as exceptions, save for the demonstration of the rule. The former leader of the Commons, who would hold his own even at St. Andrews had he the leisure for better practice, must perforce confine himself to such rounds as he can make in the short holidays that the new Parliament begrudges; and has done nothing of recent months to refurbish his undoubted skill, or to enrol his name gloriously in the great annals of the Royal golfers. Lord George Hamilton is in no better case. With indescribable recklessness of life, being an untameable enthusiast for cricket, he shuns the clean leg-hit or the forward drive for the petty details of mere shipbuilding; or, being out of office, wastes

precious hours of the summer chasing these phantoms of speech, which are not really of any concern to any man, nor worth the loss of a single drive. Truly office, or lack of office, binds with chains of steel, so that the sportsman weeps, and is not consoled to see such a master of hounds as Lord Spencer bound to the block of Whitehall; or that other lover of great horses, Lord Rosebery, shuffling the cards of municipalities and haggling upon truce and treaty. To-day, although the Durdans is upon the border of Epsom Downs, the Premier enjoys but little recreation in the breeding of horses, nor does he find time to make those yachting cruises which once were his delight. Amongst his colleagues, the mere canter in Hyde Park must for the most part suffice for all exercise. I doubt if in the whole ranks of the Liberals there is such a sturdy sportsman as Lord Charles Beresford, who always hated cricket, but who loves football, and every sport which has strength, skill, and courage as its essentials. And one cannot forget that the late Administration boasts such a horseman as the Hon. George Nathaniel Curzon, or such a son of Coræbus as the last Attorney-General, a grand miler, yet in that respect *passé*; so that even if Sir William Harcourt were to meet him in a "hundred," there might be those who would not consider the result a certainty.

But enough of politicians. The chain of office clanks for them, as a whole, so incessantly that they must come to think the hasty canter from the Achilles statue to the Serpentine a veritable triumph of recreation. The novelist, the painter, the diplomatist, the divine—none of these are bound so unremittingly to the block: none has the ghost of Westminster drawing the curtains of his ill-used couch at every slumber, or haunting him in the "between-whiles" of labour. Study Sir John Millais throwing, not physic to the dogs, but flies to the salmon of Perth on many a day



LORD ROSEBERY.

when the heather is full of life, and the north wind blows keen over the hills and dales of bonny Scotland. Or track down Mr. Rider Haggard to his den in Norfolk, where the scarabæus and the hot-pot jostle each other in generous recklessness, and learn how little the hum of towns or the tramping of publishing squadrons affect him. For him the winter of discontent is made glorious by the invigorating pursuit of partridge and of pheasant, by the stirring gallop across the British veldt, by all those sports which are associated with the fine old English gentleman of tradition—the squire whose manorial rights do not follow the pursuit of bottle-making or the smart speculation in republican securities. Truly, the novelists and the painters would seem to be blessed substantially in recreation above all those to whom brains begrudge a livelihood. Here is Mr. Conan Doyle, in fair weather or in foul, skimming the roads about Norwood on a tricycle, unabashed, and with locks unharmed, because the mighty Sherlock is dead, but deep in thought of past glories whence come historical romance, the glories of white companies, or the paths of refugees. His own regard—which is more than a sneaking one—for boxers and the noble art he made public at no distant date in a daily paper; but cricket has not lost its charm for him, nor any pastime which leads to physical exaltation, and that mental vigour which breeds conspiracies—and an unlimited number of guineas per thousand words.

The father of Sherlock Holmes is, perhaps, the very first amongst the literary athletes, in so far as athletics have for him to-day the charms they ever had. Others,



SIR JOHN MILLAIS.

however, marching in the same fictional companies, prefer less exacting pastimes. There is the veteran Mr. James Payn, to wit, going daily for exercise to the Reform Club in a "growler," a journey of three miles

from Maida Vale, and one to which he owes, on his own confession, many a plot and many a "germ." Or Mr. Walter Besant, again; how simple is his recreation,



MR. GEORGE GROSSMITH.

found in the quiet exploration of Hampstead or in the tramp from Froggnal to the Savile Club, where the wits gather at lunch to discuss anything which is not literature. Mr. Blackmore, on the other hand, draws inspiration from a war on slugs, and in the hobby of market-gardening finds preserves for the nurturing of word-pictures—and potatoes. His demi-namesake, Mr. Black, is cast much in the same mould, but the nomadic life gripped him early in its clutches, sending him many a long cruise in his excellent yacht, and even amongst the Zingari the master of a caravan, and a wanderer through the lanes and woodlands of our loveliest landscapes, there to commune with Nature, and to ensnare her in the net of three volumes, or the two-shilling edition which lures the wary passengers to the bookstalls of the termini. And no man can have greater perfection of solitude than this: the ideal dream of the novelist who lacks the energy of Dickens, and sees no ultimate joy in the round with the boxing-gloves as Mr. Tom Hughes saw it in his youth—and perhaps to this day.

These few and all-insufficient facts convince one that the playing-fields of genius would have to be large indeed if they could conveniently accommodate the armies marching to-day under the banners of the arts to the seats of fees and reputations and the strongholds of progress. And who could imagine a field whereon might march even half of those who are rightly entitled to place in such a catalogue as this? In what corner away from the madding crowd should we place Sir Arthur Sullivan, given to the love of river scenes, to the quiet of Weybridge in the summer and the music of the Riviera in the winter?

Where should we put Lord Dufferin and his safety bicycle, or his clay-pigeon trap; the Rev. H. R. Haweis in his red shirt, fighting for Garibaldi; Mr. Justice Chitty judging a 'Varsity crew; Dr. Welldon, of Harrow, remembering his football days, and thirsting for a "free kick"; Mr. Hamo Thorneycroft loving the spell of quiet reaches and river inns; Mr. Burnand sighing for the cliffs at Ramsgate; Mr. Andrew Lang anxious to cry "Well-lit!" or "Run it out!"; Mr. W. S. Penley playing his organ or feeding his fowls; Mr. George Grossmith anxious to ape the engine-driver, and running his toy-

engine to the accompaniment of puffs; Mr. Edmund Yates dreaming of Pangbourne's reaches; Mr. Grenfell working lustily in his racing punt; Mr. Pinero hard put to it in a 'vantage set of lawn-tennis; and lastly, but not least, the liver brigade—judges, lawyers, and the well-briefed finding soothing relief in the dignified canter and the trot which goes not more merrily than the quickest case for Chancery?

A wonderful pageant, a strange *mêlée*, yet not more wonderful nor more strange than the diversity of pastime, which gives mind and strength for the burden of place, and is often doubly bound up with profit.



## CECIL CHANTING.

BY ALBERT E. HOOPER, AUTHOR OF "UP THE MOONSTAIR," "IN THE FAR COUNTRY," ETC.



I. HE was a Minor Poet, but he could not help it; for his was a greatness—a "minor" greatness—which had been thrust upon him. Circumstances over which he had no control hedged him into a literary career; and, as is usual in such cases, his initiation into the gentle craft of letters had been marked by a costly sacrifice of copyrights. Small things—but his own—in prose and verse, thrown off rapidly under the pressure of want, had been parted with for a few necessary guineas; and amid his dreamings about The Great Work which haunts the mind of every literary beginner, he ceased to remember their existence.

They were recalled to his memory in a somewhat startling manner. On the strength of a larger cheque than usual, he had been taking a trip on the Continent, and he returned to his London lodging at the height of the publishing season. Various letters and parcels were awaiting him; but instead of opening any of them, he sat down to his lonely chop, with the latest number of a literary journal propped against the cruet-stand before him.

Lazily he glanced down the column of criticism, headed "Minor Verse." He was weary, and wanted something funny to jog his flagging spirits; and his experience of reviewers told him that he would surely find it here. It is strange, by the way, that the first trials of these songsters, who would keep England "a nest of singing birds," should provoke such laughter from the wise!

He was not disappointed. The merciless and witty "slating" of many a young rook, who had mistaken

himself for a nightingale, added zest to his meal; and having finished eating, he was just on the point of tossing the paper aside when his eyes fell upon a single line of type, which struck a galvanic shock through his whole system, stopping the beating of his heart, and sending a cold shiver down his backbone.

"THE FOOT-HILLS OF PARNASSUS: A VOLUME OF VERSE. BY CECIL CHANTING."

Then his heart gave a great throb: the warm blood flowed on through his veins, and filled his head with a delightful dizziness; and he went on reading. "We do not remember to have noticed Mr. Chanting's name before," wrote the amiable reviewer, "and we presume that this little book of verse is his first effort. The title he has chosen would lead us to this conclusion; but we shall be surprised if he is long satisfied to remain upon the 'foot-hills'; indeed, we should not fear to risk our reputation for true prophecy by the confident assertion that before very long we shall hear his voice singing from the sacred mount itself"; and so on, and so on, for the space of half a column. He read it all, scarcely taking in its full significance; but his ears rang with the music of many detached phrases. Could it be possible that this wise and witty reviewer, fresh from the war-path, could be telling the world to take notice that he, Cecil Chanting, possessed "the true lyric lilt," that his thoughts were "highly conceived" and "chastely expressed," that he had written "many a verse whose subtle sweetness would linger long in the reader's memory"?

What could it all mean?

He sprang to his feet, seized the pile of letters that awaited his attention on the mantelpiece, and with trembling hands dealt them out upon the table one by one, till—ah! yes, there was one from the publisher of the magazine in which most of his verses had first seen the light.

He tore off the envelope, and discovered a letter