

CRICKET.

A REVIEW OF THE GAME, PAST AND PRESENT, IN AUSTRALIA,
CANADA, THE UNITED STATES, INDIA, AND ENGLAND.

By W. G. GRACE.



WONDER how many realize the remarkable hold the game of cricket has outside of England. We at home are too apt to believe it is entirely English, and think it can be seen at its best in England only; but by degrees the fact dawns upon us that an eleven of Australia has defeated more than one representative English team, and we have to admit that others can play the game nearly, if not quite, as well as we can. The time has gone past when we could look on without anxiety as to the result of a contest between England and Australia, or predict a certain win for the former. I am not going to say a word here as to the wisdom of our Australian cousins in coming to us so often: this much I know and can say, the visit of the seventh team is creating as much interest as any of those which preceded it, and before the season is over we are likely to have contests which will do honour to both countries. Before dealing with cricket in this country I propose to touch upon the growth of the game in Australia, Canada, the United States, and India, and in the order named.

IN AUSTRALIA.

I was in my fourteenth year when the first English team, under the captaincy of H. H. Stephenson, visited Australia in 1862, and can remember how my thoughts went with the players who composed it. Some of them I had seen, all of them I knew by reputation, and their doings in the past had been a part of my education. The undertaking appealed to my youthful mind, filled with enthusiasm for the game, and I was not alone in my opinion when I said what a faint chance players in Australia will have against such a combination. Results showed that even then the game was making rapid progress outside of England, but there was no doubt about the superiority of the visiting team.

Twelve matches were the total number played. The first was against Eighteen of Victoria, and resulted in an easy win for the Englishmen by an innings and ninety-six runs. The remaining matches were played against twenty-two's, and gross results showed that England had won six and lost two, while four were drawn.

Two years later a second team under the leadership of George Parr went out, when the superiority of English players was more strikingly confirmed. England on that occasion was thoroughly represented, and the results were still more decisive. Sixteen matches were played—on every occasion against twenty-two of their opponents—ten were won, *none* lost, six drawn! I very much question if a stronger team could have been found at that time, and I have only to give the names of the players to prove it, George Parr, A. Clarke, J. Jackson, R. C. Tinley: Notts; W. Caffyn, Julius Caesar, T. Lockyer: Surrey; R. Carpenter, T. Hayward, G. Tarrant: Cambridgeshire; G. Anderson: Yorkshire; Mr. E. M. Grace: Gloucestershire.

The first team consisted entirely of professionals, this it will be seen was made up of

eleven professionals, and one gentleman—the gentleman being my brother, E. M. Grace. Every one of them was a household name, and I need not say that their doings generally were eagerly and impatiently waited for at home, and the matches in which my brother played were carefully cut out, and inserted in the list of family performances. My brother's successful effort with bat and ball at Canterbury, in 1862, was now a matter of history, and we were proud that he should be considered worthy of a place in so notable a team. Tarrant and he played single wicket matches on two or three occasions against considerable odds, and showed that Australia was still far behind in the game.

Ten years elapsed before a third team decided to go out. A few gentlemen, who were much interested in cricket at Melbourne, and who were very anxious to see another English eleven over there, invited me to take out and captain a mixed team of gentlemen and professionals. I accepted this invitation, and in the summer of 1873 made the necessary arrangements. After many disappointments, I got a fairly good twelve together, but not so strong as I desired. The composition of this team showed the marked change which was creeping over English cricket. For years the professionals had stood head and shoulders above the gentlemen, and matches between them had been almost a certainty for the former. On this occasion the professionals still predominated, but only in the proportion of seven to five. We had heard from time to time of the great strides which were taking place in Australian cricket, but we were not prepared to be beaten in three out of the first five matches. However, as soon as we became accustomed to the glare and light, we began to assert our superiority, and we won nine out of the remaining ten matches played. Altogether we played fifteen matches, all of them against odds: ten were won, three lost, and two drawn. In ten of them we played against twenty-two of our opponents, three times against eighteen, and twice against fifteen. Messrs. B. B. Cooper and W. J. Pocock, who learnt their cricket in England, and had only been in the colonies a short time, did a great deal towards winning two of the three matches lost: at Melbourne Mr. Cooper scored eighty-four, and at Sydney Mr. Pocock scored sixteen not out, and twenty-seven. The Australian batting did not then appear to be very good, but the bowling greatly impressed me. I must mention Mr. Frank Allen, a left-hand bowler, who was then far and away the best in the colonies. Messrs. F. R. Spofforth and H. F. Boyle were commencing their career, and played once or twice against us.

Three years elapsed before a fourth team left our shores. This time it was under the management of James Lillywhite, and made up entirely of professionals. Before the end of the tour results proved that the desired improvement had taken place in Australian cricket. Against fifteen of New South Wales the Englishmen suffered defeat twice, and experienced a similar fate at the hands of fifteen of Victoria; but the 15th, 16th, and 17th March, 1877, was the crowning point of Australia's long and persevering efforts, for it was the first time Australia met an eleven of England on level terms, and beat them by forty-five runs, owing to the magnificent batting of C. Bannerman. True, they suffered defeat by four wickets a fortnight later, but that did not affect the precedent established that Australia was now worthy of playing England, the home of cricket, man to man, the result being uncertain. A. and C. Bannerman, Blackham, Evans, Garrett, Horan, Midwinter, Murdoch, and Spofforth were the names dear to Australia then. They have done greater things since with both bat and ball, but there is little doubt that that was the time they made their reputations and gave an impetus to rising talent in their own country.

We at home put little value on the defeat of Lillywhite's team, and did not fully realize the wonderful improvement our cousins had made. They thought differently; for hardly had the news of it died out when the startling information came that an eleven of Australia had decided to visit England and beard the lion in his den, and on the 14th May, 1878, the first Australian team stepped hopefully on British soil. After a day or two's practice, they made their bow before an English public against Nottingham, only to be beaten by an innings and fourteen runs. "That is about their form," said thousands; "not quite up to English county cricket."

May 20th, at Lord's, caused quite a revolution in public opinion. I had the honour of being one of the eleven of the M.C.C. on that day—an eleven considered the equal of any batting eleven in the world, and including two of the best bowlers of the day—Alfred Shaw and Morley. Cricketers in general looked upon the match as a crucial one, the result of which would make or mar the rest of the tour. Unfortunately the wicket was a bad one, owing to rain and then a drying sun, and it was impossible to

arrive at an idea of their true form. We lost the match by nine wickets. This much was clear to us: Australian cricket had wonderfully improved, and henceforth England *v.* Australia, both playing their full strength, would be full of interest wherever it was played. The match, it will be remembered, was finished in one day, and was the first victory of an Australian eleven on English ground.

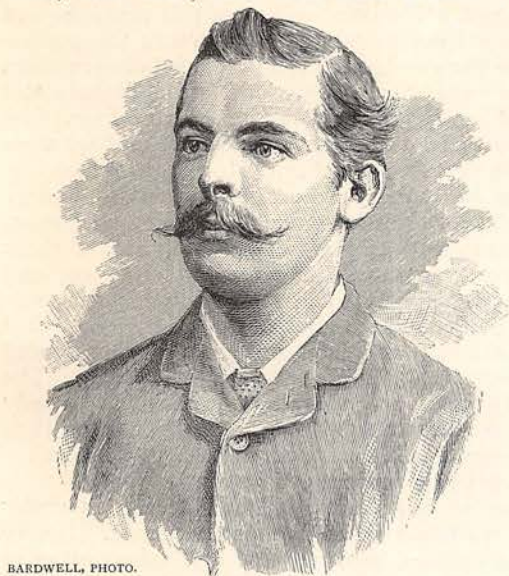
The total scores were: M.C.C., first innings, thirty-three; second innings, nineteen. Australia, first innings, forty-one; second innings, twelve (for one wicket). There were thirteen ducks on the M.C.C. side, and the bowling of Spofforth, Boyle, and A. Shaw was decidedly sensational.¹

The rest of the trip was a great success, and the gross results showed that of the thirty-seven matches played, eighteen were won, seven lost, and twelve were drawn, seventeen of them were eleven-a-side matches, of which the Australians won nine, lost four, and four were drawn. Their best wins were against M.C.C. and

Ground, Yorkshire, Surrey, Middlesex, Gloucestershire, and Eleven Players; their heaviest defeats by Cambridge University, Nottinghamshire, Gentlemen of England, and the return against Yorkshire.

Altogether six Australian teams have visited England, and eleven English teams gone out to Australia; and results show that England has still more than one eleven capable of defeating the combined strength of Australia. The teams which visited us in 1886 and 1888 did not materially add to the reputation of Australia, but it must be remembered that on both occasions several players who were chosen to represent Australia were unable to join the team owing to business and other engagements.

When we make comparisons of play we have undoubted evidence that England has still a strong lead in batting, but that in bowling and fielding there is little to choose between the two countries. Murdoch, G. Giffen, McDonnell, the Banners and Moses have been a tower of strength in batting, but one does not require to search far in England to find a



BARDWELL, PHOTO.

ALLAN GIBSON STEEL. BORN AT LIVERPOOL, SEPT. 24, 1858. FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN 1882.

One of the best all-round cricketers it has been my lot to meet during my long career.

large number of players who have performed as great things as they. Spofforth, Garrett, Palmer, Evans, Boyle, Turner, and Ferris are bowling names to compare with ours, but we have only to place opposite them the names of Alfred Shaw, Morley, Lohmann, Peate, Attewell, Briggs, and Barnes to make the scales hang evenly. In fielding there is little to choose between us, although I must in fairness say that at the present time the Australians can throw in better than we can.

IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES.

American cricketers can boast of an earlier visit by English cricketers than Australia, but the game has not progressed at the same rate in both countries. As long ago as 1859 an English twelve under George Parr visited Canada and the United States, and had little difficulty in winning all their matches. The team was made up of six players from the United All England Eleven and six from the All England Eleven, so that cricketers in Canada and the States got a thorough insight into first-class play. The first match was played against twenty-two of Lower Canada, and resulted in an easy win for the English eleven. A similar fate befel twenty-two of Hamilton

	O.	M.	R.	Wks.		O.	M.	R.	Wks.
Spofforth . .	5'3	3	4	6	...	9	2	16	5
Boyle . . .	14	7	14	3	...	8'1	6	3	5
A. Shaw . .	33'2	25	10	5	...	8	6	4	1

and district; and later, on October 21st, at Rochester, Upper Canada, twenty of United States and Canada were defeated by an innings and sixty-eight runs.

Nine years rolled by before a second team, under Willsher, paid Canada and the States another visit, and results were still more disastrous. Twenty-two of Canada could only score twenty-eight to England's 310 for nine wickets. Canadian bowling did not come out favourably in this match, for forty wides appear in the English score. The Philadelphians then, as now, seemed to be the strongest club in either country, and twenty-two of them lost by two wickets only. Of the six matches played, five were won, and one drawn; and Canada and the United States were, as they still are, far behind the English standard of play.

The third team, in 1872, was under the leadership of Mr. R. A. Fitzgerald, secretary of the M.C.C., and was made up entirely of gentlemen cricketers, who were quite as successful as their predecessors. I was one of the team, and have very pleasant recollections of the hospitality and great kindness shown to us throughout the trip. Undoubtedly we were a strong batting team, and that seemed to attract the American public; but, with the exception of the Philadelphian club, we met with little opposition, and won seven out of the eight matches played, while the eighth was drawn. A reference to a note which I made at the time gives my opinion formed at the conclusion of our visit. "The bowling was better than the batting; the fielding generally not very good; but here and there we met with brilliant exceptions."

The fourth team, in 1879, was a combination of Notts and Yorkshire, captained by R. Daft, and was just as successful. Twelve matches were played: nine won, none lost, three drawn. Seven of them were against twenty-two, the others against varying odds, but every match was won very easily. Quite evidently the Americans considered they had improved, for one of the engagements was:—Eleven of Young America *v.* The English Eleven.

The result was not encouraging, for A. Shaw, Morley, and Bates created sad havoc among the American batsmen, and England won by an innings and sixty runs, and so maintained the unbroken record of wins for England in America. Up to this date thirty-six matches had been played in Canada and the States, of which English teams had won twenty-eight; the other eight were drawn.

It was natural that sooner or later a team from Canada or the United States should pay a visit to the home of cricket, and no one was surprised when it was announced early in 1884 that the Philadelphians, undoubtedly the strongest club in either country, had made up their minds to come here. They did not come believing they could hold their own with a representative team, or even the best of our county teams: they came hoping to see the best players in England, and anxious to improve their own cricket. I need not say they were as cordially welcomed as the Australians, who were making their fourth visit that year. Every club, every player in England, extended the hand of welcome; and from their first match against Dublin University on the 2nd and 3rd of June, at Dublin, until their last match against the United Services Club, on the 1st and 2nd of August, at Portsmouth, their doings were closely watched. Eighteen matches were played: eight won, five lost, five drawn.

The matches played were mostly against eleven gentlemen of the first and second class counties. They did not measure their strength against our professional or first-class bowling. Their great match was against the Gentlemen of the M.C.C., a most disastrous one for them. The M.C.C. won by an innings and 171 runs, scoring 406 to the Philadelphians' 174 and sixty-one. I had the pleasure of meeting them only once when playing for the Gentlemen of Gloucestershire, but had to bear with defeat. My friend, Lord Harris, had rather the laugh over me at the result, and said, somewhere, in Lillywhite, I believe, "If there is magic in a name it should certainly be found in the Gentlemen of Gloucestershire and the brothers Grace; but in this match the Philadelphians did not allow apprehension to neutralize their efforts. Surely this victory went far to compensate for the disappointment at Lord's. One thing, at least, is certain, that the disappointment was lifted on to other shoulders, for so great was the wrath of the Gloucestershire captain at the result that we believe he dismissed his eleven with a parting injunction, 'not to let him see them for a month.'"

Twelve English amateurs visited America in 1885, not a first-class team by any means, but good enough to win every match but one; and that one, as was expected, was against the Gentlemen of Philadelphia, on September 17th, 18th, and 19th. This was the first match ever won against an English team in America. A week later the

English Amateurs had their revenge, defeating the Philadelphians by 243 runs. The year after a slightly stronger team of English amateurs went out, and carried everything before them, not losing a match. The Philadelphians were still considered the strongest fixture, but the first match the Englishmen won by an innings, and the second by six wickets. Altogether they played nine matches: won eight, lost none, and one was drawn.

The Gentlemen of Canada came to us in 1887, had a very enjoyable time, but met with moderate success. I played against them at Yatton for Mr. Tankerville Chamberlayne's Eleven, which was chiefly composed of the Gentlemen of Gloucestershire.

The doings of the Philadelphians in England, Ireland, and Scotland in 1889 will

be fresh in the memories of most players—a strong batting team, but moderate in bowling; the fielding at times very good on hard, good grounds, but on slow grounds not so good as one would have expected. One or two of their best bowlers did not come, or they certainly would have given a better account of themselves: as it was, they were a far better team than that of 1884. They played in all twelve matches. Three of them were lost against strong amateur elevens of Gloucestershire, Kent, and the M.C.C.; four were won against the Gentlemen of Scotland, Gentlemen of Liverpool, and Gentlemen of Hampshire, and Cambridge University Long Vacation Club. The other five were drawn; these being against the Trinity College Long Vacation Club, the Gentlemen of Ireland, the Gentlemen of Surrey, the Gentlemen of Sussex, and the United Services. I can assure my readers that if the Gentlemen of Philadelphia go on improving as



E. HAWKINS & CO., PHOTO.

WALTER WILLIAM READ. BORN AT REIGATE, NOV. 23, 1855.

“Without doubt, as good a batsman as we have at the present time.”

they have done since their first visit, when they come again they will hold their own against county amateur teams, if they do not beat them. What I have said will show that while cricket has progressed in America since the visit of the first English team, the progress is not to be compared with that made in Australia.

CRICKET AND BASEBALL.

Cricket in Australia, as in England, is considered the national game; in America it has to contend against baseball. To realize the hold baseball has upon Americans we have only to watch one of the great matches. At every important match played the attendance is as large as, if not larger than at any first-class cricket-match in England; and the fact is forced upon us that baseball, not cricket, is the national game there. Cricket clubs of importance are few in number in America: baseball clubs have a hold in every large town and city, and the doings of the professional players are followed with as much interest as the doings of every first-class professional cricketer in England.

I have been asked to account for the remarkable hold baseball has upon its followers, and to compare the two games of baseball and cricket. Frankly, I cannot. It would be presumption on my part to express an opinion on the merits of a game of which I have seen, and know so little. My experience might be summed up in a visit to the Oval, and a visit to the County Ground, Ashley Hill, Bristol, when Mr. Spalding's team gave their exhibitions. I was much impressed with the smartness of the fieldsmen, their catching and throwing being almost perfection. But the batting,

to a cricketer, seemed rather a weak spot ; and with the crowd I was disappointed that hitting the ball was the exception instead of the rule. Of course I am perfectly well aware that the pitcher is the most important member of the team, and that what I thought was a weakness in the hitting was really a tribute to his skill.

Our American friends say that a first-class match can be played in the course of a single afternoon, and that being a busy working nation, therein lies half the charm of the game to them. They are certainly enthusiastic over it, and I know that but few Englishmen have yet realized the science and aptitude required to play it well ; but I do not think it will ever take hold to any extent in England or Australia, where cricket is played to such perfection. And I hope its thousands of followers will pardon me when I say that I have too strong a love for the game with which I have been so closely associated for the last twenty-five years to wish that it should.

IN INDIA.

But if we want further confirmation as to the growth of cricket outside of England, we have only to turn to the progress it is making in India. It has been said that wherever you find a dozen Englishmen you are sure to find the national game played. That it should be played in India by Englishmen under the disadvantages of a climate more calculated to make one physically indolent than active is a tribute in its favour, but that it should be taken up and played vigorously by the native races, is praise indeed.

The Parsees came to us in 1886. Of them it can be said that their motive was the purely disinterested one of seeing the best exponents of the game. Their display was anything but first-class ; and financially, the promoters of the trip had reason to be dissatisfied and discouraged from making a second trip : but 1888 saw them back again, and, what was most gratifying, playing in improved form.

Thirty-one matches were played on the second visit against very fair elevens, and in two or three of the most important they showed up very creditably. Their last engagement, against the Gentlemen of Surrey, was only lost by nine runs, and they could show at the finish of the trip a record of eight won, eleven lost, and twelve drawn. Their enthusiasm and pluck in playing up, whether winning or losing, was the marked feature of their play, and good judges of the game predicted good results from it.

The results of Mr. Vernon's team in India have been read everywhere : thirteen matches played, of which ten were won, two drawn, and one lost. The eleven could not be considered first-class, or even representative of the Gentlemen of England, but there were in it two or three batsmen who more than once have scored heavily against the best of our professional bowling, so we need not wonder they had matters pretty much their own way. Six times they won in a single innings, and the clubs played against were the strongest in India. That makes their defeat by the Parsee Eleven at Bombay on the 30th and 31st of January all the more remarkable. It was said when the team left England that the Parsees would give them the most trouble, but after the triumphal march of the English Eleven in more than half of the matches, we at home, not unreasonably, concluded that the Parsees would have to submit to defeat also. And yet they won by four wickets.

We have no occasion to go far to find the reason. With one exception Mr. Vernon's Eleven never scored less than a hundred runs in an innings, and oftener the total was nearer three hundred. The Parsees got them out for ninety-seven and sixty-one ; and the opinion of Mr. Vernon and every one who played was that their bowling was the best they had played against in the whole tour.

IN ENGLAND.

It has given me pleasure to speak of Australia, Canada, the United States, and India in the way I have done, but it gives me greater pleasure to say that the game has a stronger hold in England to-day than at any time in its history. For one eleven that could draw a crowd in the past we can show half a dozen or more who can do so at the present time : and we have only to look at the averages of individual players with bat and ball to find that the deeds of twenty and thirty years ago have been surpassed.

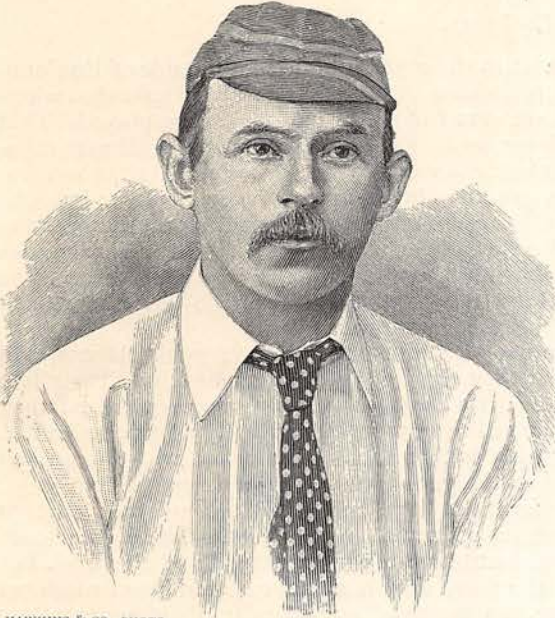
In batting the number of players, both amateur and professional, with an average of twenty runs and over is far ahead of the number in 1860 or 1870. Scoring an aggregate of 1000 runs in first-class matches during the season was thought a remarkable

feat twenty years ago ; we do not think so much of it now. Nine players accomplished it in 1886, and though 1889 was one of the wettest seasons we have had for years, there were five players who exceeded that total. Scoring a hundred runs in one innings is another important feature of the play to-day. It was done by more than twenty players last year, and by some of them twice or thrice. And if we only remember how general is the improvement in bowling, the performance becomes even more remarkable. County cricket is a very fair test of a batsman's powers. Well, in first-class county cricket last year the century was scored forty times. That is surely evidence enough of the great strides we have made in batting.

Take our bowling averages. Capturing a hundred wickets in first-class matches twenty or thirty years ago was another exceptional and remarkable feat. We are not surprised at it to-day. G. Lohmann captured over 200 in 1888, and repeated the

performance in 1889, and six others had considerably over a hundred to their credit the same year.

Batting improvement is to be expected when we consider the change for the better that has taken place in the grounds played on. A wicket that was considered good enough ten or twenty years ago would not be tolerated to-day ; and I can mention two or three of our present county grounds where in favourable weather every ball can be relied on to come true, and where the batsman plays back and forward with the utmost confidence. Twenty or thirty years ago the selection of the wicket was too often left until the morning of the match, and that was considered time enough to begin preparing it. Go to any of the principal grounds to-day, and you will find that the roller is in use every day, and all day, in the season when there is no match on : and that not one, but half-a-dozen good pitches can be obtained even if the selection be deferred until the morning of the match. Now that, while it has made large batting averages



HAWKINS & CO., PHOTO.

ARTHUR SHREWSBURY. BORN AT NEW LENTON, NEAR NOTTINGHAM, APRIL 11, 1856.

The finest professional batsman of the present time.

ages easy nowadays, has made it more difficult for the bowler to get the batsman out.

Reference to some of the principal grounds in England and the Colonies will be appropriate here. The captain of the county eleven, or of any eleven travelling from home, is lacking in his duty if he does not find out something about the characteristics of a ground before a match begins. It is of little use to win the toss if he be careless about that. Judgment before a match shows the thoughtful captain : and while I have an immense respect for the man who "rises to the occasion," I have often found that a little forethought in examining the pitch before tossing might have prevented the occasion arising at all. It used to be said, "What is the use of winning the toss if you do not take first innings?" You do not hear that said now : anyhow, not until a thoughtful leader has carefully examined the pitch and considered the weather, light, and other circumstances, and thinks it advantageous to take first innings.

Lord's Ground has a right to the first place. In dry weather the wicket is one of the fastest and truest anywhere : in a very wet condition, one of the easiest for scoring. In a sticky condition it is almost unplayable, and about the worst I know. The soil is clayey, and that explains it. It was on a wicket of the latter kind that the Australians played their first match there in May 1878, and Spofforth, Boyle, and A. Shaw worked wonders with the ball. A strong batting eleven was all abroad and could do nothing on it. Playing forward was out of the question, playing back dangerous, and following

the ball a failure. I can recall two or three occasions when it was nearly as bad. When Yorkshire County played for the first time at Lord's in 1870 the ground was hard and rough. Freeman and Emmett for Yorkshire, and A. Shaw and Wooton for the M.C.C., had a high time of it with the ball, tattooing the bodies of every batsman who had the pluck to face them. Neither practice wickets nor football is allowed on the centre of Lord's Ground, so that the pitch can be trusted unless when, as I have said, the ground is in a sticky condition.

At the Oval you get some of the very best wickets in the world, and some batsmen prefer it to Lord's. It is not so fast for one reason, although, for myself, I still prefer a fast wicket as long as the ball comes true. The soil is undoubtedly different to that at Lord's, for very rarely do you get the sticky and unplayable wicket I have just mentioned.

Trent Bridge is a greatly improved ground, one of the finest county grounds in England, and entirely owing to the great care now given to the preparation of the wickets. Losing the toss there does not make such a difference now as it used to.

The wicket wears fairly well from start to finish of a match, and rarely do you now find it in a crumbling condition.

Old Trafford has the reputation of being one of the best-kept grounds anywhere, but of late the pitches have not worn well. However, we hope this year will see a vast improvement. At the end of last season the Committee set about remedying the defects, and a good coat of top dressing was put down, which should in time restore it to its former and excellent condition. The out-fielding has always been good and easy there. Liverpool, in the number of matches played, is not so much favoured by the Lancashire C.C., but it is a very fine and improving ground.

Bramall Lane, Sheffield, is not quite so good as the grounds I have already mentioned, but that too has improved considerably. The Yorkshire C.C. play all over the county—Bradford, Halifax, Dewsbury, and Huddersfield all being visited by them; and while that is to be commended, it sometimes affects the quality of particular wickets. The acknowledged head-quarters of a county club is always well looked after, the ground in particular being carefully watched and prepared.

The Kent Eleven have had a similar experience. They, too, play all over the county. One day it is at Blackheath, the next at Mote Park, then Beckenham is visited, and we have the Canterbury week in August. Beckenham has been relaid during the winter, and ought to play well if carefully looked after, and thoroughly rolled. Blackheath is a large and good ground, but does not play so well, owing, I think, in some measure to the amount of football played over it. Canterbury is a good ground, although on a slope. The wicket in dry weather is very hard and fast. Apart from the happy associations connected with it, it is a great favourite of mine.

The Sussex Eleven have occasion to be proud of their County Ground at Brighton, in the past and to-day. The old ground at Hove and the present ground have always been good, and in my estimation about the best and easiest for scoring in England.

Gloucestershire in the past may be said to have divided their favours between Clifton and Cheltenham Colleges. Both are fine grounds, Clifton, if anything, the better. Clifton has the reputation of being the easiest in all kinds of weather, in England, and it well deserves it. A difficult wicket has always been the exception



E. HAWKINS & CO., PHOTO.

GEORGE ALFRED LOHMANN. BORN AT KENSINGTON (MIDDLESEX), JUNE 5, 1865.

One of the best all-round cricketers of the present day. His bowling on a sticky wicket is simply unplayable, as he breaks both ways, and alters his pace and pitch continually.

there, and it is owing entirely to the care and preparation bestowed on it. The out-fielding is rough, but I do not see how that can be remedied much. In the season the boys are playing, and have a right to play, all over it, and it is almost impossible to preserve that part in the condition one associates with a County Ground pure and simple. The new ground at Ashley Hill puts Gloucestershire in a more favourable position. It is certainly an excellent one, one of the finest in the world for good wickets and out-fielding. As at Lord's, all practice wickets are outside the enclosure, and football is only played outside the cricket enclosure.

There are other grounds all over England, Scotland and Ireland about which I could speak favourably, but in an article of this length those I have touched upon will show how managers of important clubs realize the need of a good ground if improvement is to be made by their players. They cannot influence the weather, but they can and have made up their minds to see that, given favourable conditions, the wickets shall be carefully prepared and as true as human hands can make them. That, I believe, is the spirit actuating the committee of every county club.

However, my remarks upon grounds would not be complete without an allusion to those in the Colonies and America. I can only speak of the time when I played on them, and as that is a good many years ago, it is possible—certain I ought to say—that changes for the better have taken place. I will just mention the leading grounds—Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Ballarat, Hobart Town, and Launceston were all good when I played on them in 1873-4. There was lack of knowledge at the time of making, want of judgment in deferring the selection and preparing the wicket until the day of, or the day before, the match. I know all that is changed. We should not have had the great results which players in Australia have produced had the wickets been anything but good.

Pretty much what I have said about Australia may be applied to Canada and America. Toronto, Philadelphia, and the St. George's Club, New York, have good grounds, which are carefully looked after, and as good wickets can be obtained there as at most of the clubs in England. I can say very little about India. I have not been there: but my heart is there, as it is wherever cricket is played. I know they have several good grounds, and take the greatest interest in the noble game, and although the climate is too hot at times, I believe the only reason an English team has not visited India, before is that the grounds are open and free, and that no gate-money could be taken to pay the expenses.

It may now be asked: Has the improvement in the grounds everywhere in any way affected the batting, bowling, and fielding? Undoubtedly it has, and in more ways than some players think. The batsman knows that he can trust the wicket in most cases now, consequently he plays with greater confidence and hits many a ball that he would not have dared to hit in the days when the wickets were not so good. At the time I began to make my big scores writers on the game were pretty unanimous about playing the ball with a certain force when compelled to play back to it. "Do not let it hit the bat, but play firm enough to get it away from the legs, or it may roll on to the wicket," said a very good authority. Carpenter, Daft, Jupp, and Humphrey were the players given by the same authority as being strong in that kind of play. Back play no stronger than that would not be considered first-class form to-day, and the batsman who could not hit the ball more than a yard or two beyond his legs, would take a very long time to compile a century against the best of our bowlers.

Playing it forcibly and yards away from the wicket is now expected of the majority of first-class players, and I could name a dozen who are not content unless they play it away from the fieldsmen and hard enough to score two runs. That is due in most part to the skill of the player, and, I think, partly to the improvement of the grounds. Twenty years ago, or even ten years ago, a ball bounding breast-high was not an uncommon experience on most wickets, but if it were to occur to-day with half the frequency, the reputation of the groundsman would suffer considerably.

And so it may be safely said that the batting all round is better to-day than in the past. I do not mean to say that the giants of the past would not be giants to-day; but I do say that were those players with us now they too would play in improved form, and that for one good batsman then we have a dozen now. The public have a clear knowledge of that fact. We have only to take a stroll round the ground while a great match is being played to learn what they consider good play. I have an immense respect for the barn-door or stone-wall style, but must confess to siding with

the crowd when they praise the player who times the straight good-length ball, and plays it hard and clean away from the wicket. With my brother, E. M., at his best at point, good old Jupp, in his later days, had a lively time of it when playing at Clifton for his county. Ball after ball I bowled to him which he kept playing back quietly; then the particular ball came, and E. M. rushed in and caught him almost off the bat. The disgust that crept over Jupp's face as point, slip, and short-leg crowded round him, and his helplessness under the circumstances come up before me now. And yet Jupp was considered a good back-player.

Playing forward is also more general, and that, too, owing to improved wickets. Good players know that in playing forward they are now less likely to meet with a kicking ball which would hit them on the fingers, and so play forward with the greatest confidence to balls which they used to watch carefully and in many cases play back to. And short-pitched balls which were blocked then are now pulled across the wicket owing to the same cause.

But bowling more than batting has been affected by the improvement of the grounds. How rarely do we see a real good fast bowler now? The time has gone past when pace alone could obtain a wicket. It was not an uncommon plan for a fast bowler to send in a fast short one, knowing that the half-prepared wicket would cause it to bound very high and make it dangerous for the batsman to hit. When that is done now, the bowler is not surprised to see it hit to the boundary. And so we have more head-work in the bowling, a better length, more break, but less pace. The important point the bowler must bear in mind is not to exceed his strength, or he will very soon go to pieces, and get hit all over the field. No ball can be punished so easily as the short fast one on a good wicket. All good bowlers indulge in an occasional fast one; but that is a different thing to the express pace some bowlers used to keep up for an over or two. Messrs. Spofforth, Steel and Turner, among the gentlemen, Alfred Shaw, Lohmann and Briggs among the professionals, have been the most prominent bowlers for years past. Spofforth's wonderful power lies in his variety. Whether he breaks six inches or twelve he takes good care that the ball will hit the wicket, should it beat the batsman: and he keeps varying his pace till he gets the batsman in two minds, and then treats him to a fast yorker. He has been more effective with fast yorkers than any bowler I know. A. G. Steel is another of the tantalizing bowlers. Rarely do you get two balls in succession the same pace from him; and if there is a weak spot in your defence he keeps hammering at that until you make a mistake. The same may be said of Turner. He is always well within his strength, and ever varying his pace. Lohmann and Briggs work on the same lines. Alfred Shaw had the least break of the lot except on sticky wickets, but his wonderful command of length more than compensated for it.

All of them bowled with their head. They saw that the improved wickets were adding to the batsman's chances, and that simple fast bowling would not meet the case: so they cultivated variety of pace-breaking from both sides, and only departing from a good length when the batsman had mastered them. Southerton was one of that school, and a proficient at it too: but the wickets were not so good in his days and helped him considerably. He used to tell with great glee how, after trying me with dodgy breaks for an hour or two, he in despair sent up a simple, harmless straight one, with no break at all, and beat me. There was nothing in the ball, but it was unexpected, and it came off. I have seen Lohmann bowl batsman after batsman with a similar ball. The



E. HAWKINS & CO., PHOTO.

JOHN BRIGGS. BORN AT SUTTON-IN ASHFIELD,
OCT. 3, 1862.

First played for Lancashire in 1879. One of the most difficult bowlers of the day. As a field he is as quick as lightning, and is no doubt the best cover-point of the present time.

batsmen admitted it was as simple a ball as any bowler could bowl, but they expected something different from him.

I am beginning to hope that very shortly we shall have an increase of good fast bowlers. The success of Mr. S. M. J. Woods and Mold last year warrants me in saying that good fast bowlers would baffle a great many batsmen who are now at home with medium-paced breaks. The day of terrific pace and careless length is at an end, but a fast bowler who could bowl a good length for a dozen overs would be invaluable to any of our county elevens to-day.

Out-fielding has also benefited by the improvement in the grounds. Years ago, the pitch was rolled carefully by some clubs, but very rarely anything outside it. As long as the grass was kept short most clubs were content; and cover-point, long-leg, and the out-fieldsmen generally, had to be very quick of eye and hand to stop the ball with certainty even when it was travelling straight to them. To-day the roller is in use all over the ground, and he would not be considered a first-class fielder who failed to pick up the ball correctly and smartly on the run.

The wicket-keeper is another who has benefited. He dispenses with a long-stop to bowlers who are not a bit slower than some to whom it was thought necessary to have a long-stop placed years ago, and this, in a great degree, may be ascribed to the improvement of the ground. There is no need to compare the wicket-keepers of the present with those of the past, but I cannot help saying that the doings of Messrs. Philipson, McGregor, Pilling and Sherwin in 1889, without long-stops, are worthy of the highest praise. I have no need to mention Blackham; he was not here in 1889, but he is still at the top of the tree in that part of the game.

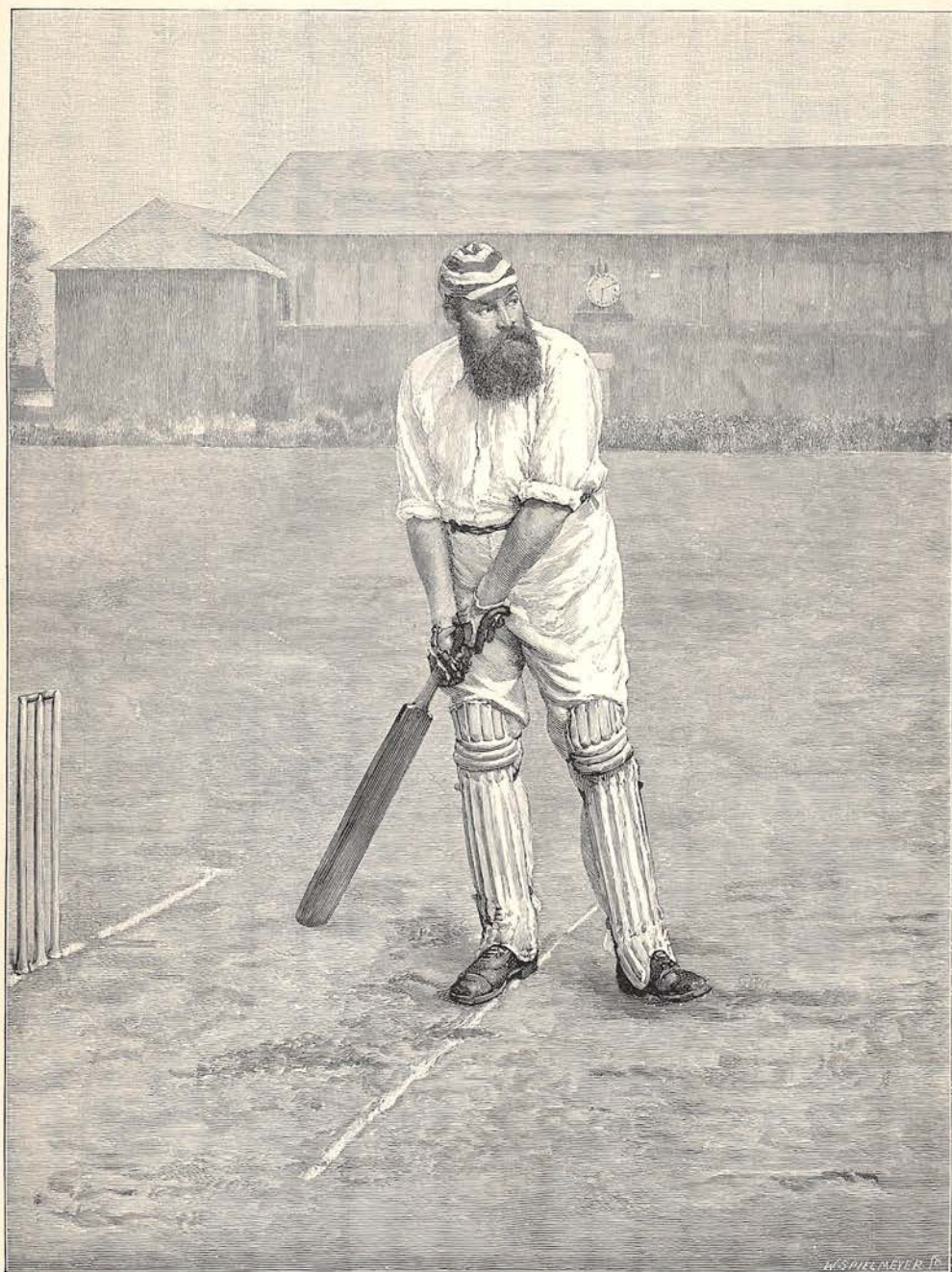
I should be less than human were I to abstain from saying something about the future of the game. I do not lay claim to the gift of prophecy, and have too much respect for the bare and simple truth to think that my opinion will be considered of exceptional value there. What I desire to say is based on my past experience, and may be said in very few words.

There is more cricket played to-day than at any time previously, and good cricket too. We have only to look at the growth of county cricket and observe the crowds that turn out to look at the play, whether the match be between first or second-class counties, to realize that the game is played more than ever. There are counties enough to form three classes, and the classification of them is a question for the immediate future. Eight is the number of the first-class counties at present, and I do not see how that can be increased. Playing home and home matches with each other means forty-two days or seven weeks of actual play, and that is as much as cricketers can manage to play, as they have so many other first-class matches to take part in out of a season which from beginning to end lasts about sixteen weeks. Second-class counties might be limited to six in number, third-class to four; and these might fulfil engagements with each other without interfering much with other important fixtures.

The hardest nut to crack will be the promotion of the second-class to the first, and the third to the second; not an easy matter, I admit; still, in the interests of the game, it will have to be cracked. The point has been under consideration, and a sub-committee of the Cricket Council was appointed in December last; and I have no doubt it will be thoroughly and impartially weighed and some decision arrived at before the end of this season.

I cannot predict that, outside of the Australian matches, there will be more exciting contests in 1890 than there were in 1889. The weather cannot be worse for one thing, and it is not unlikely that individual and club scores may be larger. It will be a very exceptional display that will outshine the Gentlemen *v.* Players' match at the Oval last year. There will be plenty of good batsmen this season, but I do not know of any rising phenomenon who will surpass the achievements of the best players of the last six years in any part of the game. There is a fine opening for good fast bowlers. I could count on the fingers of one hand the batsmen who can play a fast first-class bowler with confidence. Mr. S. M. J. Woods, Mold, Beaumont and Bowley are sure to do good work in the coming season, but after you have named these there are not many fast bowlers left.

The last word to my friend and comrade of many years, Lord Harris, who is giving up the game for the sterner duties of life. He will be a great loss to his county, a greater loss to the cricket world generally. He is one of the few who has contributed with both hands and head to the history of the game, and carries the heartiest wishes of every cricketer to his new sphere of work.



W. G. GRACE.

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