

Cricket and Cricketers.

THEIR OPINIONS ON PLAYERS AND PITCHES.



WITH the tide of cricket enthusiasm sweeping over the land, with a heavy fixture list to be gone through, excitement will this season run high. Discussion will, no doubt, wax hot in athletic circles upon the respective merits of players individually, county teams, and even the different grounds patronized. Such has been the case, year after year, in the past; such will be the case in seasons to come. From the opinions we append, however, a fair estimate of the various phases of the game may be obtained. Mr. W. G. Grace, it will be observed, is not included in the series of those who have been interviewed. He, in the issue of THE STRAND MAGAZINE of August last, gave his opinions so fully that a reiteration is unnecessary.

MR. A. C. MACLAREN.

Mr. A. C. MacLaren was induced to spare a few minutes from his scholastic duties at Harrow.

"Who are the best amateur batsmen?" he queried, in part reply to a question. "I should say Mr. W. G. Grace, Mr. A. E. Stoddart, Mr. K. S. Ranjitsinhji, Mr. L. C. H. Palaret, and Mr. F. S. Jackson amongst the amateurs. The professionals? Oh, Abel and Ward. Both are blessed with the necessary patience, and their defence is very strong. I have, however, a great opinion of J. T. Brown as a batsman on any wicket, and his inability to add to his reputation last season I put down to his want of a rest. Brockwell, too, is sure to come to the front again. Gunn I should leave out of my list, also Shrewsbury. The former, although by no means done with, I reckon as having passed his prime, and the latter has practically finished his first-class cricket. Hayward,

however, should not be overlooked. He has played himself into quite the front rank.

"Bowlers? Mr. C. L. Townsend and Mr. F. S. Jackson I consider to be the two best of the amateurs. The former is very tricky and can disguise his break, and I have always thought the Yorkshire amateur a much better bowler than most people imagine. Mr. C. J. Kortright, too, appears to be more reliable than Mr. S. M. J. Woods, although he does not get exactly the same class of batsmen to contend against. Then there is Captain Hedley. He is very difficult to play upon a sticky wicket. Of the professionals, I look upon Richardson as little short of a marvel. For dogged determination he is not to be

beaten. I should say Peel comes next to the Surrey man. He has lost none of his old cunning, and upon a nasty wicket there is not a bowler who can make better use of it or find out the batsman's weak points quicker than he does. Briggs on a soft wicket is as clever as ever, but if he has a fault it is displayed in a tendency to feed the batsman too much. On a hard wicket Mold is one of our finest bowlers; Pougher is quite in the front rank; Hirst has improved considerably, and Davidson is most persevering. Lohmann I thought was just as difficult when I played against him last August, and I have the highest opinion of Mead.



MR. A. C. MACLAREN.
From a Photo. by R. W. Thomas.

"Who should I class as the hardest hitters? Mr. E. Smith and Mr. H. T. Hewett, and F. H. Sugg and Bean. Baker also possesses a fine free style. An All England eleven? Well, that is a difficult thing to suggest, but on last season's form, I should take Mr. W. G. Grace, Mr. A. E. Stoddart, Mr. F. S. Jackson, Mr. K. S. Ranjitsinhji, Mr. C. L. Townsend, with Ward, Abel, Lilley, Richardson, Peel, and Pougher.

Mead has perhaps a better claim than the latter, but Pougher has always proved very successful against the Australians. Cricket of late years has greatly improved. Indeed, there appear to be more fine cricketers to-day than there ever were before. University cricket, however, appears to have deteriorated somewhat lately, judging from the small number of University men who play cricket in the vacation. County cricket, however, is very different to playing almost the whole of your matches upon your own ground and amongst your own friends."

Then in conclusion Mr. MacLaren gave his opinion upon that much-debatable question, the choice of innings.

"When the wicket is at its worst," was his remark, "and the glass is high, with no prospect of rain, I should always make a point of putting the other side in. It is generally admitted, however, that it is a risky proceeding to put your opponents in first. A wet wicket, of course, is an easy wicket, the ball coming along straight and true, but keeping a trifle low. On an occasion like this, no captain would think twice about going in to bat."

MR. C. W. ALCOCK.

Mr. C. W. Alcock, as secretary of the Surrey C.C., has been brought into personal contact with the leading players for years past. Asked his opinions upon the leading batsmen, he hesitated not a moment in mentioning the names of Mr. W. G. Grace, Mr. A. E. Stoddart, Mr. A. C. MacLaren, Mr. K. S. Ranjitsinhji, and Mr. L. C. H. Palairet as being in the front rank of the amateurs, and Shrewsbury, Abel, and A. Ward amongst the professionals.

"And who should you class as the best wicket-keeper?" was asked Mr. Alcock.

"Of the amateurs, I should say Mr. McGregor," was his reply. "That is,

of course, when he is fit and well. Last season he injured his hand, and was, consequently, not seen at his best. Of the professionals," he continued, "Lilley or Storer, with Wood, are about the best. And bowlers? Richardson, of course, and Mold, of the fast bowlers; and Lohmann, Mead, Briggs, Peel, and Tyler, of the slows. Messrs. Kortright and F. S. Jackson and Captain Hedley are, in my opinion, the best of the amateur fast bowlers, and Mr. Townsend of the slows. The latter varies his pace considerably, and is able to make the ball break back in either direction."

"Which bowler would be the best, from a wicket-keeper's point of view?"

"Well, personally, I should prefer Richardson to Mold of the fasts. He is not so bumpy, and there is a greater certainty in knowing where the ball is coming. Of the slow bowlers, a wicket-keeper has only to learn their peculiarities. Some are naturally easier to take than others, but every wearer of the pads and gloves has his favourite.

"No, I cannot say I think the 'class' of the game has gone back. I think we are equally as good, taken all round, as we ever were, and our best eleven should defeat the Australians on almost every occasion. We have, however, profited considerably from

the lessons taught us by the Colonials. Blackham standing up to such a bowler as Spofforth, for instance, without a long-stop, was a revelation. University cricket I don't think will vary much, but I do not see there is any difference in the class of player turned out by either. Of the various grounds in the country, I should say Brighton is the easiest. It is a very fast wicket, dry and open, and the bowling of the county has not been quite so good as might have been desired of late years."



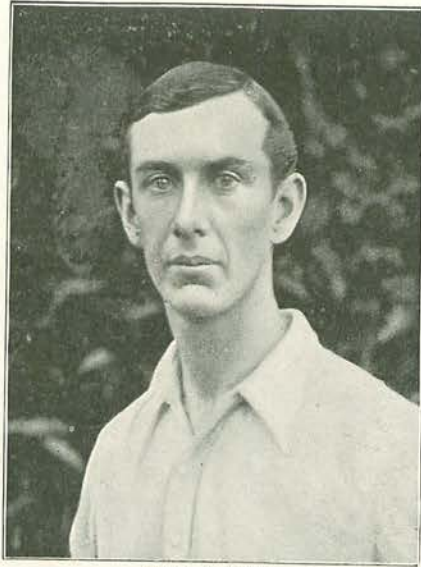
MR. C. W. ALCOCK, J.P.
From a Photo. by R. W. Thomas.

MR. G. O. SMITH.

Mr. G. O. Smith is of opinion the University cricket begins and ends too soon. "Of course," was his remark, "this cannot be helped, as the season must take place at the same time as the term. Yet this must always be a drawback to the game at the Universities. Many men do not get into form until the term is nearly, if not quite, over. Besides this, the 'Varsity Eleven has to be chosen chiefly from the first few practice matches in the Parks, such as the Eleven v. Sixteen, etc. If a man has not got into form by then, or does not happen to come off, he has practically lost all chance of distinguishing himself. A player is very rarely tried because of consistent form in college matches; he must, therefore, do well in the Parks at the beginning of the season, if he is to get his 'Blue.' The college cricket matches are always keenly fought out and enjoyed by both sides. Their restriction, however, to two afternoons very often necessitates a drawn match. This is perhaps a pity, although it would be difficult to make a different arrangement."

Upon the subject of winning the toss, Mr. Smith says: "Take first innings, whether on a dry or a wet wicket. It is very seldom we find this rule departed from, and then not always with success. If, however, the wicket is damp, but not very wet, and there is a strong, drying sun and every prospect of fine weather, then to put one's opponents in may be the right thing. Under all other circumstances, take the first innings."

In a comparison of players, the old Oxford "Blue" would select Messrs. W. G. Grace,



MR. G. O. SMITH.
From a Photo. by Symmons & Thiele.

MacLaren, Ranjitsinhji, Abel, Ward, and Shrewsbury as the best batsmen, with Messrs. C. L. Townsend and S. M. J. Woods, and Richardson and Mead as the bowlers. Sir T. C. O'Brien and Messrs. S. M. J. Woods and E. Smith, and Sugg and Maurice Read he considers to be the hardest hitters. Brighton and Lord's he particularizes as his favourite grounds, and Messrs. W. G. Grace, Stoddart, MacLaren, McGregor, Jackson, with Richardson, Mead, Briggs, Abel, and Mold would be some of his selections for an All England Eleven.

MR. K. J. KEY.

"University cricket is the backbone of the amateur cricket world." So said Mr. K. J. Key, the Surrey captain, when questioned upon the subject. "If matches with the Universities were not to be considered first-class, then county cricket as a game for amateurs would receive its death-blow. It would become, as Association football now is, at the mercy of professionals only. University cricket has certainly shown a revival during the past two or three seasons, although the bowling is still weak. Personally,

I do not think the class of the game has gone back in the least during the last twenty years, but other teams have improved all round.

"The 'Varsity Elevens have therefore to compete each year with more complete and organized opponents, instead of the scratch teams they opposed ten years ago. Then take cricket in general. It has improved enormously. The class of professional has also become much better, as the pay is better, and as so many more matches



MR. K. J. KEY.
From a Photo. by J. Chaffin & Son, Taunton.

are played in the season. This means they are enabled to earn much more, and consequently competition is much keener. The grounds are better, and the bowling has to be much more accurate, and as a result of this the general public take much more interest in the game. Australian cricket? I consider it is perfectly marvellous, considering the small population, the absence of professionals, who devote the whole of their time to the game, and the small number of matches played. As a matter of fact, they average two days a week at the most there, while here every first-class cricketer would be playing five days a week. African cricket, I should say, is not very good. How should I proceed upon winning the toss? If the wicket was sticky and the glass was rising, and if there was little fear of more rain, I should put the other side in. In any other case whatever I should go in first."

In conclusion, Mr. Key remarked that Messrs. F. S. Jackson (captain), Stoddart, W. G. Grace, Townsend, and Ranjitsinhji, with Richardson, Abel, Peel, Storer, Mold, and A. Ward, would be his choice for an All England team. Mr. A. E. Stoddart and Abel he considered the best amateur and professional batsmen; Mr. F. S. Jackson and Richardson the best amateur and professional bowlers; and Brighton the easiest ground, although it was run closely by Gravesend, if the state of the wicket was not considered.

MR. G. L. JESSOP.

The play of Mr. Gilbert L. Jessop for the Gloucestershire County Eleven last season was a revelation to many of the most sanguine supporters of the "county of the

Graces," as it has been aptly named. For free, fearless hitting it would be hard to surpass the young Anglo-Australian. He is equally as good in the field, and, taken all round, formed last year one of the most reliable members of the team. Chatting upon the subject of cricket a few weeks ago at Cheltenham, Mr. Jessop expressed an opinion that Mr. W. G. Grace was still the best of our amateur batsmen.



MR. G. L. JESSOP.

From a Photo. by Hauckins, Brighton.

"And who would you class as the leading professional?" was asked him.

"Albert Ward, certainly," was the reply; "he is equally as good in offensive or defensive play. Of the amateur bowlers," continued Mr. Jessop, "I should say Mr. C. L. Townsend would occupy the premier position. Richardson would do the same amongst the professionals."

"And who are the hardest hitters?"

"Amateurs or professionals?"

"Both."

"Well, Mr. S. M. J. Woods" (this with a smile) "and Tunnicliffe. Of the various grounds I have played upon, I should say Brighton was the

best and easiest upon which to score runs."

"And now for an All England Eleven, Mr. Jessop?"

"Mr. W. G. Grace first. Then Mr. A. E. Stoddart, Mr. A. C. MacLaren, Mr. K. S. Ranjitsinhji, and Mr. C. L. Townsend, with Ward, Lilley, Richardson, Davidson, Pougher, and Brown. In conclusion, I may say that as regards the choice of innings, supposing I were fortunate enough, as captain, to be successful in the spin of the coin, if the wicket was wet, and there was no chance of its drying under the influence of the sun, I should go in. If there was any probability, however, of the wicket getting

caked, I should put my opponents in. On a dry wicket, I should invariably go in first if I was afforded the opportunity."

MR. A. P. LUCAS.

Mr. A. P. Lucas, the Essex cricketer, expressed an opinion that Mr. W. G. Grace



MR. A. P. LUCAS.
From a Photo. by R. W. Thomas.

still continues to be the best amateur batsman, and Abel the leading wielder of the willow amongst the professionals. Questioned respecting the bowling abilities of several of the leading players, he, taking the form displayed through last season as a guide, awarded the palm to Mr. C. L. Townsend and Tom Richardson respectively. Mr. Lucas was then taken through several other phases of the summer pastime.

"When in form," was his remark, "Mr. H. T. Hewett is the most powerful hitter, and, I should say, next to him would come Mr. C. E. De Trafford. Which do I consider the best county ground? I should say Brighton is the best wicket and the easiest upon which to secure runs. As regards an All England team, it is a difficult matter to select such an eleven, but Messrs. W. G. Grace, A. C. MacLaren, A. E. Stoddart, F. S. Jackson, K. S. Ranjitsinhji, C. L. Townsend, with Abel, Ward, Richardson,

Lilley, and Peel, would constitute a formidable side. With respect of the game itself, I certainly consider cricket has greatly improved of late. There are several reasons why this should be so. Two are that players take a keener interest in the game from a county point of view, while the grounds are much better than was the case in former years. I have little to say about how I should proceed in the event of my winning the toss. I should almost invariably go in first, whether the wicket was dry or very wet. If, however, the wicket was drying slowly after a lot of rain and under a hot sun, then I *might* put the other side in, but it would only be under exceptional circumstances."

J. BRIGGS.

"Johnny" Briggs, as he is familiarly named, the Lancashire County, All England, Anglo-African, and Anglo-Australian cricketer, considers that with so many first-class players, amateur and professional, it would be a matter of the greatest difficulty to say definitely who was the best. There is not the slightest doubt, however, that the game is improving season by season. "The reason for this," says Briggs, "is there are so many



J. BRIGGS.
From a Photo. by Hawkins, Brighton.

at the public schools and Universities who are anxious to secure their 'Blues,' that a high standard is reached and maintained. Speaking of an All England Eleven," he remarked, in answer to further questions, "it would be quite possible to select one side, and then, perhaps, you might be able to find another team that would possess an equal chance of winning a match. Of course, when it comes to All England *v.* Australia, the eleven should be selected upon their form alone, and without any prejudice or bias being imported into the matter. The easiest scoring-ground in England, I should say, would be found at Brighton—that is, speaking of first-class cricket alone. The choice of innings? Well, you must consider the spin of the coin often wins or loses a match. The general rule is to go in if you win the toss. There are times, naturally, when you may put your opponents in first with good results. A good, true, dry wicket is certainly better to bat on than any other.

You have only to ask slow bowlers if I am not correct in my assertion. We have, at the present time, so many good pitches, that it would be invidious to mention any particular ground."

MR. H. D. G. LEVESON-GOWER.

"The leading amateur and professional batsmen," replied Mr. H. D. G. Leveson-Gower, in reply to a query, "are, in my opinion, Messrs. W. G. Grace, A. E. Stoddart, K. S. Ranjitsinhji, A. C. MacLaren, L. C. H. Palaliret, F. S. Jackson, H. T. Hewett, J. R. Mason, and H. W. Bainbridge, with Abel, Gunn, Hayward, Albert Ward, Shrewsbury, Davidson, Brown, Brockwell, and Tunnicliffe. I should say the leading amateur and professional bowlers are: Messrs. C. L.

Townsend, S. M. J. Woods, C. J. Kortright, F. S. Jackson, C. B. Fry, Captain W. C. Hedley, and Richardson, Peel, Mead, Lohmann, Briggs, and Mold. The best ground for run-getting? Either Taunton or Brighton. In an attempt to select an All England team I should say Messrs. W. G. Grace, A. E. Stoddart, F. S. Jackson, A. C. MacLaren, K. S. Ranjitsinhji, C. L. Townsend, with A. Ward or Abel, Richardson, Peel, Lilley, and Davidson.

"Cricket at the Universities? Well, the season there is so short that many players who may come up from their various public schools with big reputations frequently have no chance of showing their real form. They may be unable to do themselves justice during the first three weeks or so, the result being that the term is over and the team selected before they have an opportunity of recovering themselves. Consequently, it is by no means a certainty that the best cricketers secure their 'Blues.' The number of first-class



MR. H. D. G. LEVESON-GOWER.
From a Photo. by Hills & Saunders, Oxford.

cricketers who have been to Oxford and Cambridge and have never secured their 'Blues' is a proof of my assertion. Cricket, however, in my opinion has improved considerably of late. More money and trouble are expended on making good grounds, and almost every club has a professional attached, by whose means a young player who has shown signs of aptitude is coached up in the game. At public schools, too, there is always one master who takes a keen interest in the cricket of the school, and who spends his leisure time in coaching the boys. All this has a beneficial effect on cricket, and assists in the improvement of the game."

Then, to a concluding question respecting the most powerful hitters of the day, Mr.

Leveson-Gower, without the slightest hesitation, remarked he should form a quartette of Messrs. S. M. J. Woods and J. J. Lyons, with Frank Sugg and Tunncliffe as the professionals.

ALEC HEARNE.

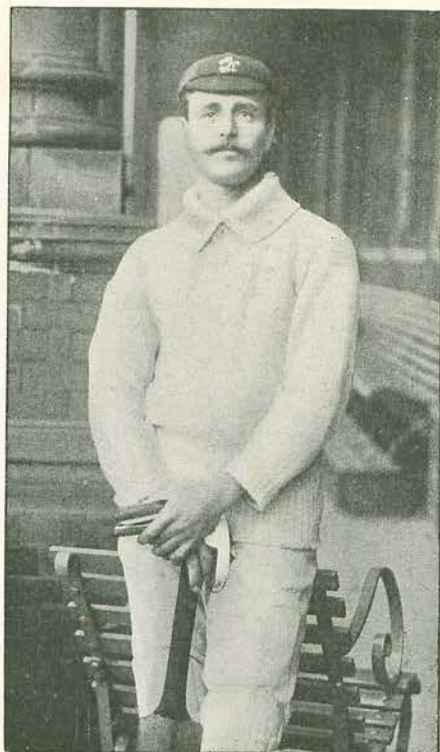
Mr. W. G. Grace, in Alec Hearne's opinion, is undoubtedly the best of the amateur batsmen, and A. Ward of the professionals. Of the bowlers he is inclined to consider Mr. C. J. Kortright and Mr. C. L. Townsend as the leaders, fast and slow, with Richardson (fast) and Mead (medium) as representatives of the "professors." Upon the subject of hard hitters, Hearne has no hesitation in classing Mr. C. I. Thornton as the most powerful wielder of the willow ever seen. These opinions paved the way to further conversation upon cricket generally. "The best ground?" remarked the popular professional. "That is a very difficult question to answer. There are so many; but I think the Birmingham, Trent Bridge, Taunton, and Brighton are the best pitches I have played upon, with Gravesend as the easiest upon which to score runs. University cricket? That is, of course, first-class, with the exception of their bowling, which is often very tame. If the latter were but up to the standard of their batting and fielding, they would lose very few matches. Cricket all round, however, has greatly improved of late. Some of the reasons for this are because we have better wickets, keener play, and greater competition.

"Australian cricket, I think, should rank next to English. Their best teams were the 1880, 1882, and 1884 elevens. African and American cricket is improving rapidly. My opinion is that in about a couple of years' time they will be enabled to send across elevens good enough to compete with any of our first-class counties. Choice of innings? If you win the toss, of course you inspect the wicket, and if it is wet you should put your opponents in but seldom. When the wicket is caking, however, and on a fine, fast-drying day, then you might put them in to bat first. Upon a dry wicket always put your opponents in the field—and keep them there as long as you can."

In answer to a closing question, Hearne suggested, as some of the members of an All England team, the names of Messrs. W. G. Grace, A. E. Stoddart, L. C. H. Palaret, K. S. Ranjitsinhji, A. C. MacLaren, with Ward, Abel, Richardson, Lohmann, and Lilley.

From these opinions it appears that Mr.

W. G. Grace maintains his position as the premier amateur batsman of the day. Honours are easy with one or two of the amateur bowlers, although there is a preponderance of opinion in favour of Mr. C. L. Townsend. Brighton is admittedly the easiest ground for run-getting, while, upon the whole, the class of cricket has, and is, improved. Not the least significant of the opinions are those respecting the opportunities of University players who may desire to secure the much-coveted "Blue."



ALEC HEARNE.

From a Photo. by R. W. Thomas.