

## Illustrated Interviews.

### XLIX. — PRINCE RANJITSINHJI.



WHEN the time arrives for cricket history to be written, the name of Prince Ranjitsinhji, the young Indian player, will be inscribed upon the roll of fame. Several things will conduce to such an event occurring. In the first place, the Prince has rapidly played himself into the hearts and favour of the British public. At the present time it would be difficult to discover a more popular player throughout the length and breadth of the Empire. The roar of welcome that goes up from the throats of the assembled thousands as "K. S." steps upon the field is equal even to the outburst of enthusiasm that greets the champion, the immortal "W. G." It may be explained that "K. S." stands for "Kumar Shri," meaning "Prince."

Another thing is that, although known to first-class county cricket for barely two seasons, Prince Ranjitsinhji, after having been most unaccountably passed over by the executive sitting at Lord's in the first of the test matches against Australia this year, attained the summit of a cricketer's ambition by being requested to play for the mother country, at Manchester, when the second of the international fixtures was decided.

His performance upon that occasion is now a matter of history, but I must be pardoned for referring to it. After the failures of such men as Mr. W. G. Grace, Mr. A. E. Stoddart, and others, with the bat, an easy victory for the Colonials appeared within measurable distance. But the Prince came to the rescue of his side. He treated the Antipodean bowlers with indifference. Jones sent down his express deliveries; Giffen, the wily, sent up full tosses for catches; Trott tempted him to hit, but every ball was met and dispatched, clean and hard, far out of the reach of the fieldsmen.

At the end of the second day's play, Prince Ranjitsinhji was not out, and it appeared as though he might even then retrieve the

fortunes of his side. Unfortunately, however, he was unable to secure a partner who could stay with him, and when the last of the English wickets fell, he was not out for a grand contribution of 154, made at a time when even the bravest heart might have been pardoned had it quailed at the stupendous task before it.

Reverting now to county cricket, the Prince qualified for Sussex last season. The batting of the county had, previous to his inclusion in the eleven, fallen considerably from its former high estate, although there were still men remaining who, upon a good wicket, might generally be relied upon to make runs. The inclusion of the young Indian, however, strengthened the side considerably, although the fact that he was qualified to play took most people by surprise.

Doubts were also expressed concerning the wisdom of the inclusion of the young Cantab, but he soon set these at rest by a remarkable performance effected upon his first appearance for the county. Playing against the M.C.C. at Lord's, he scored 77 not out in the first innings and 150 in his second.

After this brilliant display of batting against some of the best bowlers of the day, the Prince continued in a scoring vein. He rapidly accustomed himself to his new surroundings, and secured runs against all classes of bowling. His strokes were, perhaps, not quite those usually seen upon the

field, and there were those writers who referred to "patents" of his own invention. One stroke, upon the leg side, was an especial feature of his play, and bowlers, time after time, saw their best balls neatly turned aside from the wicket, and dispatched to the boundary. Still, these strokes brought runs, and early in the present season the Sussex player deposed Gunn, Abel, and "W. G.," heading the list of the first-class batting averages.

Bearing these facts in mind, I buttonholed the Prince upon the cricket field a few weeks



PRINCE RANJITSINHJI.

From a Photo. by R. H. Lord, Cambridge.



back, just as he had returned to the pavilion after another of his clean-hit and stylishly-compiled contributions.

With a hearty grasp of the hand and a pleasant smile, I found him an interesting subject. Of medium height, and apparently not powerfully built, he yet carries a considerable amount of muscle, lying beneath the skin as tense and as powerful as steel.

"Can you give me a few particulars of your cricket experiences?" I queried.

"Certainly," was his reply, as he led the way to a seat. "I suppose you want something about my early life?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was born in India on September 10, 1872, at Sarodar, in the province of Kathiaward. I was always very fond of athletics, and, I should say, commenced playing cricket when I was about ten or eleven years of age. Of course, you must understand that it was a—well—a very 'illiterate' sort of game I played then; while I was at school, of course. We students, however, had an advantage in attending a school presided over by Mr. Chester Macnaghten, an old Cambridge University man. He, of course, was very keen upon the summer game; had brought bats, wickets, and other things to his school, and gave his students many useful hints."

"And I suppose a school eleven was formed?" I queried.

"Yes," was Prince Ranjitsinhji's reply. "We had a school eleven, and played two other large schools every year. What sort of team did we have? Very fair indeed. The fielding was very good, although it naturally varied at different times. An eleven is never at the same pitch of excellence in the field for two matches in succession. The batting and bowling were also very fair, although I think the fielding was the best."

"How did we proceed at practice? We had batting and bowling at the nets, and we also formed a couple of rival elevens in the school itself. You see, it was like this: we

had a north side and a south side. Some of the students boarded in one, and the remainder in the other. We formed an eleven at each, and played matches between ourselves. Near the college we had a cricket ground with a very pretty pavilion, presented to the college by the late Maharajah of Bhownuggur. In front of this we used to practise regularly in native costume. The name of the school? The Rajkumar College, Rajkote. I spent eight years at it. Of course, there were only a limited number of students, about forty, the sons of princes and chiefs, at school with me, but the rivalry when we played the High School at Rajkote and the Girassia School at Wudwan was very keen indeed. Other matches? Yes, we generally played several during the season, with the other elevens near, of course."

"But had you no coaches?" was my natural question. "How were the principles of cricket taught?"

"Oh," was the Prince's laughing answer, "we had no coaches in the regular acceptance of the term as understood

in England. We had to learn the game ourselves, with Mr. Macnaghten's hints of course. That was how matters stood while I was at school."

"And when you came to England?"

"I was about sixteen when I first arrived in this country. No, I did not proceed to Cambridge at once. I remained in London for about six months under the care of a private tutor, preparing for my exams. During that time I played a great deal of lawn tennis, a game I am very fond of, and a little cricket with a private club."

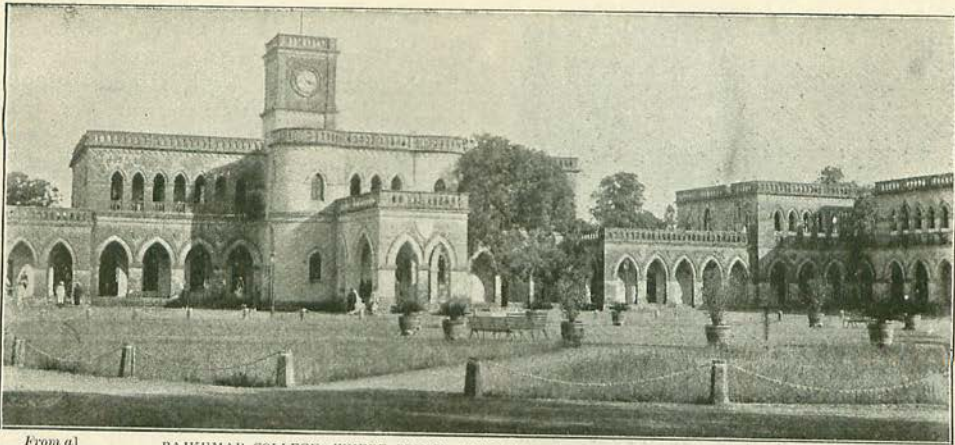
"When I went to Cambridge, however, I was very keen upon the game, and practised assiduously. Naturally, I found a great difference in the Indian and English styles, and I had, if I may say so, to 'unlearn' the former before I could do much with the latter."

"I found English cricket very different from what I had been accustomed to,



THE LATE MR. CHESTER MACNAGHTEN.  
(Who first taught the Prince cricket.)  
From a Photo. by Johnston & Hofmann, Calcutta.





From a

RAJKUMAR COLLEGE, WHERE PRINCE RANJITSINHJI STUDIED FOR EIGHT YEARS.

[Photograph.]

although I had the advantage of being coached by some of the Surrey professionals, such as Sharpe, Richardson, Lockwood, Watts, and others. They come down to Cambridge every year, I may explain, to coach the undergraduates.

“Did I not find the new game hard to learn? Yes, I did, for it was almost two years before I was capable of doing much with it. I should say that I was not able to play it properly until 1891. Of course, I did not go into the University eleven until 1893. That was, in fact, my first and last year, as I came down at the end of the season.”

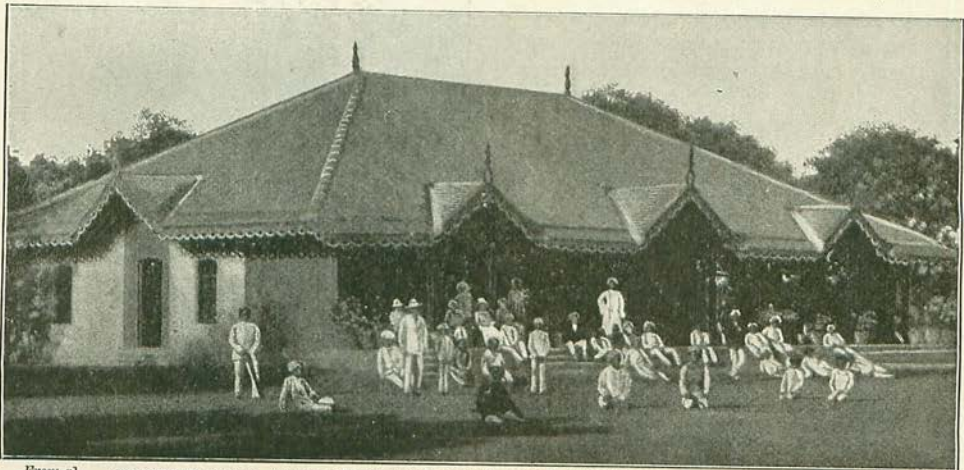
These remarks brought the conversation round to the subject of University cricket generally.

“Cricket at both Oxford and Cambridge,” Prince Ranjitsinhji explained, “is generally very good. County cricketers, I am aware, do not invariably look upon the play as first-class; yet when we are pitted against them

we generally give them a good game—often as not beat them. Judged by that test I think, myself, a more serious view should be taken of the play. The batting of a University team, however, is invariably better than the bowling, although we have brought out some very good men. Why such is the case, however, may be readily explained. A man takes his place at the nets with the bat, and as he finds he can get a professional to bowl to him, he does not worry himself about the matter.

“The fielding of a University team is also invariably good, although I am afraid there has been a tendency of late years to overlook, in a measure, this department of the game. The reason for this, perhaps, is that there is too much practice at the nets, and, as a result, there is no opportunity of fielding the ball.

“What about a player securing his Blue? Of course, the first trial means everything to a man. If he should not come off, there is



From a

CRICKET PAVILION, RAJKUMAR COLLEGE, WHERE PRINCE RANJITSINHJI LEARNED CRICKET.

[Photograph.]





GROUP OF STUDENTS AT RAJKUMAR COLLEGE, PRINCE  
RANJITSINHJI (AGED 14) IN WHITE.  
*From a Photograph.*

not much chance for his being included in the team, for that year at least. Yes, he is afforded another chance in the trial matches, but he is generally so anxious then that he is unable to do himself full justice. A player 'funks' it, if I may so express myself. Then the captain remarks: 'What use would it be to play that man? He's too nervous.' The result is he has to wait for another year.

"No, I cannot say there is much to choose between Oxford and Cambridge as regards the play generally. The batting, however, is very different, although, personally, I prefer that shown by the Light Blues. It appears to me to possess more taking style. Why is that? Well, I really cannot say, unless it is in consequence of there being less coaching at Oxford than at Cambridge.

"There are better bowlers produced at Oxford. Why is that? I suppose the ground at Fenner's is better adapted, and is easier than the Parks at Cambridge. The bowlers meet with greater success at practice, and consequently do not lose heart, and persevere. That is the only explanation I can give of the matter.

"County cricket? Oh, I think that is very good indeed, as a rule; although there is a proviso to be added. That is, that I consider it is beginning to be looked upon in a too serious manner, and is being made too much of a business character.

"The counties? On their season's all-round form, I think that Surrey is the best team. Here, also, I might add—upon a good wicket. Yorkshire, on the other hand, are the best team upon a bad wicket. Another thing is, that I consider if Richardson were taken out of the Surrey team, they would drop back considerably. Richardson is a grand bowler, and in his absence the county eleven would suffer an almost irretrievable loss. Of course, the same may be said of others beyond Surrey. For instance, if you were to take Mold out of the Lancashire team, the result would be the same. No, I do not think Yorkshire would be affected in the same manner if any one particular bowler were withdrawn. They have a first-class reserve to fall back upon, and are in fact a fine, all-round batting, bowling, and fielding side."

Australian cricket was then touched upon by the Prince.

"The Antipodean eleven playing in England are a very good side," he remarked. "They are very good all round, but their



PRINCE RANJITSINHJI IN NATIVE COSTUME, 1888.  
*From a Photo. by William Whiteley.*



batting, as a whole, is superior to their bowling. Still, they have been very successful in their engagements, haven't they? Yes, I should say they are a better team than any other I have seen with one exception, in the bowling of the 1888 eleven. At that time C. T. B. Turner and Ferris were at their best."

"Let me see, I think G. H. S. Trott coached you a little when you first came to England?" I remarked.

"No," was the smiling reply, "there's not an atom of truth in that report. Yes, I see it has been stated as a fact in certain quarters, but you may deny it *in toto*. What really happened was this: When I came across from India, I visited the Oval in company with my tutor. The match then being played was Surrey *v.* the Australians. We were invited into the pavilion, and Mr. Alcock very kindly introduced several members of the Colonial eleven to me. Percy McDonnell, C. T. B. Turner, and G. H. S. Trott were amongst the number. They chatted to me upon cricket matters for a few moments, but I received no hints whatever. How the idea first gained ground I am unable to say; but it is utter nonsense to imagine for a moment that I was then assisted in any way by Trott."

So a very pretty romance woven round the appearance of the young Prince against his former mentor at Manchester was exploded in a moment. No doubt a chance remark first started the story, and other



PRINCE RANJITSINHJI AS UNDERGRADUATE, CAMBRIDGE.  
From a Photo. by Stearn, Cambridge.

details were supplied as it went the round.

Then, as a recollection of the incident at the University match crossed my mind, I questioned the Prince upon the subject; whether he thought the tactics of the Cambridge captain were justified under the conditions governing the play, and so on.

"No," he opined, "I cannot say that I think it was necessary to pursue such a course. They did not require to prevent the follow on, and, I think, would have done better had they allowed the Oxonians to continue batting. It was, however, simply an error of judgment,

for no doubt the Cambridge captain was of opinion that the wicket would crumble as play went on, and the side having the fourth innings would be at a disadvantage.

"Instead of that, however, I believe the wicket improved, and was better on the third day than the second. So you see their only excuse for sending down wides and no balls was gone. No, I cannot say I think a larger number of runs to render a 'follow on'



PRINCE RANJITSINHJI'S COLLEGE-ROOM, CAMBRIDGE.  
From a Photo. by R. H. Lord, Cambridge.





"DRIVING."

From a Photo. specially taken for "The Strand Magazine."

necessary is required. The present number (120) I think is quite sufficient for all practical purposes, and I would not recommend its increase to 150, 180, or 200.

"Public school cricket? Yes, I think it pretty fair when taken upon the average. Of course, I only know of Dulwich, Harrow, and Uppingham. Harrow is, undoubtedly, the superior school out of the three I have named. Why? Because they are well coached there, and many of the masters are very fine players. Take Mr. A. C. MacLaren for instance. He is a master at Harrow, and no doubt his example and style exercise a good effect upon the boys.

"What style of batting should I recommend? I should advise any young player to follow up the style, under capable coaching, that comes to him naturally. I cannot say I am an advocate for stone-walling, but every player finds it necessary to exhibit a certain degree of caution at times. There is no reason why a batsman, however, should try to score at the expense of getting out, and simply to earn the applause of a certain section of the public.

"The showy player may be cheered by those who simply visit a match for the express

purpose of witnessing rapid scoring, and who do not care or know anything about the more delicate side of the game. I certainly do not believe in 'playing for the gallery,' neither do I believe in making the game unnecessarily slow. A player should endeavour to strike the happy medium.

"The method of the county championship? I think it was a right and generous recognition of merit when the new counties were included in the running, and it has made the struggle keener. Oh, yes, I have heard that several advocate some of the older counties being dropped, but I do not favour such a suggestion.

"Sussex, for instance, has a very dangerous side. For one thing, we never know when we are beaten, and we have this season accomplished some very fine performances—some that other counties would find difficult to surpass. In the Whit-week we were set over 200 when we followed on against Gloucester and Hampshire. Yet, at the finish, we were only robbed of victory by the call of time.

"Again, when we met Oxford University we had over 380 runs to get, and only about three hours and three-quarters to do it in. Still, we were within 18 of the required



"CUTTING."

From a Photo. specially taken for "The Strand Magazine."



number when stumps were drawn. Unfortunately, we have been afflicted this year by an epidemic of bad fielding, easy catches being missed time after time. I am unable to say why this has been the case; a team cannot maintain one standard of excellence in each of their engagements; but when you find the best men offenders in this respect, you can put it down to sheer bad luck for the side."

From county cricket we then passed to play generally, in India.

"There was not much good cricket there while I was at home," said the Prince. "It has, however, greatly advanced of late, judging by the statements of Lord Hawke and Lord Harris. The Parsees have improved considerably in particular. Naturally, the visits of English elevens have given in the past, and will give in the future, a great impetus to the game. But there is a great disadvantage which the native players have to contend against—that is the absence of professional bowlers or coaches. J. T. Hearne, I believe, is the only player who visits India at the present time, although I think a Surrey man went out a few years back to coach the Parsees.

"Why are there no professionals there? One reason is that the whole of the grounds there are more or less public. Then there is a little coaching obtainable from any amateur player of English nationality near, although I am afraid that is not worth much in the majority of instances.

"Another matter that retards cricket in India is that it is impossible to play much during the rainy season, and not at all during the height of the summer. During the season I first mentioned it is impossible to know when heavy rain may fall, and although we, as schoolboys, played at any time, adults do not take the same view of the situation.

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"Cricket is played, as a rule, during the winter. It is just comfortable then, something like a warm English spring day. It is, however, chilly in the morning up till about ten o'clock, when the sun commences to make itself felt, then hot up to six o'clock. At night it is really quite frosty. So you may judge from that that cricket in India has to be played under considerable disadvantages."

A recollection of seeing the Prince in football costume while at Cambridge next provoked a question from me upon the subject.

"Yes," he replied, "I played football at Cambridge until I hurt my knee, then I thought it time to give it up. Association at first, and Rugby afterwards, as I cared for it much more than the dribbling game; my knee gave way, however, at Association.

"Which do I consider the best game? Rugby, certainly. It is possible to get up your interest in even a bad game under that code; but under the other, the play must be very good indeed to repay watching it.

"Another thing is, I consider Rugby far safer from a player's point of view. You may get a scratch or a bruise, but in Association, if you are

kicked or thrown, the injury is of a far more lasting character."

"Do I go in for athletics? Not much now, but I am very fond of shooting. Cycling? Yes, I cycle a little, and I have two American bicycles in the pavilion now. I am very fond of tennis and racquets. In fact, at one time I played the former very much better than I did cricket. Yes" (in reply to an incredulous smile on my part), "I assure you it is a fact."

"And I believe you bowl a little?" I remarked, as I rose to leave the Prince.

"Yes, I can bowl a little. In fact, I was



"LEG HITTING."

From a Photo. specially taken for "The Strand Magazine."





THE PRINCE WITH HIS  
BICYCLE.

From a Photo. specially taken for  
"The Strand Magazine."

very successful when I first commenced playing for Sussex. Now, however, Mr. Murdoch does not care to put me on, as he is afraid I should spoil my batting. Mr. Stoddart, of Middlesex, is not put on to bowl, I believe from the same cause, so we sympathize with each other for the harsh treatment of our re-

spective captains. My style? I should describe it as being a slow medium, with a break from the off."

Then, as a final question, I asked the Prince if he could tell me how he had been so successful at such an early period of his career.

"Luck," was his laughing response. "I commence my practice very early. I am shooting through the winter, and so keep myself fit, and in April I am at the nets. But luck is everything with a cricketer. If he has that—and a little skill—he has little to fear."

The following interesting letter from Prince Ranjitsinhji will bring this interview to an appropriate conclusion:—

August 1st, 1896.

To the Editor of THE STRAND MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR,—I think it only right to inform you that my late principal and friend, Mr. Chester Macnaghten, was the first and chief agent in making me fond of English outdoor sports—cricket and racquet principally. I have always been grateful to him for it, and I take this the first opportunity of correcting statements in several papers of my having commenced playing these games in England in 1888. I was much pained to hear of his untimely death some months ago, or else I should have been able to get much interesting information about the Rajkumar College and my early school-days. I take this opportunity also of thanking the British public for the very kind way in which they have always received me on all grounds, and that has in no small measure conduced to my success in Cricket. Trusting that I have not encroached too much on your valuable space, I remain, yours truly,

RANJITSINHJI.

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REDUCED FACSIMILE OF PART OF PRINCE RANJITSINHJI'S LETTER.

W.