

Illustrated Interviews.

LXIV.—MR. A. C. MACLAREN.

BY FRED. W. WARD.



It is a generally accepted fact that, like a poet, a cricketer is born, not made. The art of batting, or of bowling, generally runs in the family: "like father, like son." If this should not be the case, the schoolboy gives promise of the man. The lad who scores freely, or performs the hat trick with the ball, passes on to his county eleven. Sometimes he comes off, as they remark in cricket parlance; more frequently, however, he fails to do himself justice, and is, perhaps, relegated to the second eleven before he is permitted to again pit his strength against his competitors.

There are exceptions to every rule, however. Mr. W. G. Grace never looked back after he had once secured county honours. Mr. A. C. MacLaren may fairly say he has done likewise. He played a great innings for his county when he was first included in the team, and beyond a doubt Lancashire is weakened by more than I care to say when the Old Harrovian is missing from her ranks.

Mr. MacLaren, although he has visited the Antipodes twice, is yet under thirty. To be exact, he was born on December 1st, 1871, so that at the present time he is but twenty-eight years of age. As a schoolboy he displayed remarkable aptitude for the game, but did not come before the public prominently until the Eton *v.* Harrow match of 1887. Even at that early date Mr. MacLaren displayed all the finish of an experienced batsman: possibly he possessed even more polish then

than now, but he lacked generalship and hitting power. Be that as it may, he was the top scorer for his side in either innings with 55 and 67, but despite these individual efforts, Harrow lost by five wickets.

In 1888, however, his school defeated Eton by 156 runs. Curiously enough, Mr. MacLaren had very little to do with this result, for he made but 0 (that dreaded duck!) and 4, while his ill-fortune pursued him a twelve-month later, Harrow gaining an easy victory, while he scored but 17 and 16.

Still, every cloud has its silver lining, and this form was far too bad to be true. In 1890 Mr. MacLaren captained the Harrow eleven against Eton. He was the first to go to the wickets, but he was also the seventh to leave.

He hit the bowling to all parts of the field; the spectators of this ultra fashionable fixture were never provided with better value for their time spent round the ring; the young batsman had made 76 before he returned to the pavilion.

This performance naturally placed the seal of excellence upon his play, and he was asked to represent Lancashire in her county fixtures. Mr. MacLaren came, saw, and conquered, for against Sussex at Brighton on August 14th he hit up what was practically a faultless 108. How many players are there who have effected a similar performance, coming into county cricket from a public school style of play? I can recollect no other.

Following Mr. Hornby and Mr. Crosfield, Mr. MacLaren was elected captain of the Lancashire



MR. MACLAREN, AGED 6 MONTHS.
From a Photo. by Arthur Reston, Manchester.



MR. MACLAREN, AGED 18 MONTHS.
From a Photo. by Arthur Reston, Manchester.

team, and in 1895 scored the highest individual innings yet made in first-class cricket. Playing against Somerset, at Taunton, in July, he compiled 424 runs, thus beating the 344 standing to the credit of Mr. W. G. Grace by a no uncertain margin.

Prior to this, however, Mr. MacLaren had toured through Australia as one of Mr. A. E. Stoddart's eleven. He was a success, for he secured the second place upon the batting averages: 47.4 for twenty innings in eleven a-side matches, and 40.9 for thirty-three innings, all matches played being considered. More than that, he was also busy amongst the "centurions"—if I may be pardoned for the use of the word. Against Victoria, on November 16th, he placed 228—his highest total for the tour—against his name, this being followed by 106 *v.* Queensland and New South Wales on February 15th, and 120 against Australia, at Melbourne, on March 1st.

Mr. MacLaren's performances for his country need no comment from me, but I may just touch briefly upon his last Australian tour. He wooed and won his bride "down under," and he never played better cricket in his life than when last at the Antipodes. We were fairly and squarely beaten in the test matches, I am ready to admit that; but Mr. MacLaren can look back upon the visit with feelings of unalloyed satisfaction.

In the five test matches he was at the head of the batting averages with 54.22 runs for ten innings, 124 being his highest contribution. In the eleven a-side matches his average was 54.57 for twenty innings, and in all matches 54.34 for twenty-eight innings.

These figures speak for themselves, but I may add Mr. MacLaren was also responsible for exactly half-a-dozen centuries during the tour: 181 *v.* Thirteen of Queensland and New South Wales; 142 *v.* New South Wales;

140 *v.* New South Wales (the return match); 124 *v.* Australia, at Adelaide; 109 *v.* Australia, at Sydney; and 100 *v.* New South Wales, also at Sydney.

Returning home, the Lancashire captain could only take part in six of the county fixtures. In these he secured an average of 23.30, with 76 as his highest contribution. But he was as dashing as of old while at the wicket, and even smarter in the field. At slip or at cover-slip he appears to judge the flight of the ball unerringly, while boundary after boundary is saved by the manner in which he picks up the fastest cut, snick, or drive with either hand. I was ruminating over these things as the South-Western express whirled me away over the gleaming metals to Wokingham, where, in a delightful old countryside mansion, Mr. MacLaren has established himself in

the heart of as delightful scenery as may well be met with within a hundred miles of London.

There, in his study, he sat and chatted over cricket matters. The Lancashire eleven, the great scene at the Oval after the finish of the last test match there—these and kindred pictures reflected the ruddy fireglow from the walls. Outside, the sun was throwing its rays athwart the gravelled drive; there was the indefinite hum inseparable from the country, the missel thrushes and the black-birds disported themselves among the trees, just budding into life; while, stranger still, the red coat and bushy tail of a squirrel could be seen just at the edge of the copse that ran down to the lawn.

But this is not cricket. I must drag myself away. The memory of the Harrow *v.* Eton match I have already referred to was crossing my mind. I lost no time, but, plunging directly into my subject, wondered what the Lancashire captain thought of public school cricket of these days. Did it compare favourably with days that are past



MR. MACLAREN, AGED 6.
From a Photo. by Lafosse, Manchester.

and gone? Mr. MacLaren hesitated slightly ere he replied. But there were no signs of hesitation when he was once induced to talk.

"No," he remarked; "I really do not think public school cricket, as cricket, has advanced since a few years back. I can naturally only speak of Harrow personally; yet what do we find? That year by year these public school matches remain drawn; they are not finished in the time allowed for their decision.

"And why? That is a difficult question to answer. My own opinion is, gained by watching the boys at the game, that their batting is as good as, or maybe better than, ever, but there is a marked falling off in the class of bowling. Bowling is very moderate, to say the least of it.

"Of course, it is much easier to teach a boy how to bat than to teach him how to become a successful bowler. It is quite possible to make a batsman, provided the boy is willing to listen to the hints, and possesses some idea of the game; but the best coach cannot make a successful bowler.

"In saying this, I may explain that you can give a boy hints in bowling, but he must be born, not made. He may be told a few things, how to place his feet as he delivers the ball, and what length of run is best to take; but he cannot be made a real bowler under these conditions unless he has an inclination for that kind of work. Unfortunately, too, a school-boy does not, as a rule, take so kindly to bowling as to batting. There is not the same pleasure in bowling from his point of view: he has not the same inducement in attempting to secure wickets, and as a natural consequence, public school bowling, I am sorry to say, is becoming worse, instead of better, every year. I am sorry to say this is the case, but it is a fact.

"As regards University cricket, I am a little diffident in touching this, seeing that I have only played about twice against Cambridge. But I think the same criticism will apply as in the public schools: that batting is advancing, while the bowling is at least standing still, if not falling off in quality.

"We get very few real bowlers from the

'Varsities now. Yes, we have had Mr. C. L. Townsend, Mr. F. S. Jackson, Mr. S. M. J. Woods, and Mr. Kortright, men who are worth their places in a county team for this department alone; but what I complain of is, that we get no new blood.

"As a matter of fact, I cannot say who is their best real bowler. No, I fear they cannot produce anyone approaching the stamp of the late Mr. A. G. Steele. Of course, Mr. C. M. Wells is a good bowler, but he has left his University for a long time now. He was the last of the bowlers to come from either Oxford or Cambridge; since he left, they have produced none that might be termed really first-class."

After this expression of opinion upon what are generally looked upon as the training grounds for county cricket, it was difficult to

muster up courage sufficient to enable me to suggest amateur cricket as a whole.

But Mr. MacLaren reassured me at once.

"Amateur cricket," he opined, "is improving, and in this way there are more good cricketers now than there were in the past. But" (and here he qualified it) "the players of the present day are no better than they were twenty years ago. There are more of them, that is all. There are more good batsmen to-day than there were at the time I have mentioned, but that may be explained by the growth of the game. The bowling, I think, must have

been better then than now, and when the best elevens are contrasted, there is very little difference to be discovered, the improvements in the grounds also being taken into consideration.

"Briefly, our batsmen now are as good as the old ones, but there are more of them; the class of cricket is just about the same, but the All England eleven of 1879 was about as good as we could place in the field now, possibly better.

"Yes, I feel constrained to admit that the class of all-round bowling in county cricket is to-day much below the average. Indeed, there are not so many good bowlers now as there were five years ago. It is impossible, or it appears to be, to discover new bowlers of any degree of excellence, Rhodes, of



MR. MACLAREN, AGED 12.
From a Photo. by F. Bawn, Manchester.

Yorkshire, being the exception. Of late years, what have we found? That a young bowler of more than average form is a *rara avis*. Look at Lancashire, for instance. She hasn't discovered one really good bowler during the past five years.

"Yet what a contrast we find in Australia. They *have* got some bowlers; it will take our very best All England side to beat them this coming summer. They will, of course, be without poor Harry Trott, the finest captain and one of the best fellows I have ever met. But it will be found, I think, the best eleven Australia has ever sent across to this country, and one that will require considerable beating."

"That is consoling," I remarked; "but cannot we expect something from our professional players?"

"Well," was Mr. MacLaren's rejoinder, "we are certainly getting more professionals every year. My idea is that the amateurs are steadily decreasing in numbers, while the professionals are becoming much finer players. Yes, it is very difficult to say whether they are better in bowling or in batting.

"It is more like an all-round improvement, but I will say this, there are more professionals capable of getting a hundred runs against the best bowling than was formerly the case.

"Certainly; the professional bowlers are far in advance of the amateurs. Why? I suppose it must be that they take more trouble over it. A large number know that their livelihood depends upon their ability to get wickets, so they try their hardest to reach the highest standard of excellence. That is how I judge matters, my opinion being formed from the men I play against.

"Bowlers are of two classes; head bowlers,

men who bowl with their heads; and mechanical bowlers. Which is best? The former, without a doubt.

"This is where the Australians are so much ahead of us in their own country. Their wickets are dry and hard, and it is useless for a man to keep on bowling dead on the wicket. He must perforce use his judgment, and as a natural consequence the bowler at Sydney, or Adelaide, or any other of the Australian grounds, is obliged to try experiments in the attempt to secure a wicket. They try far more of these experiments and dodges than our bowlers here—they must do so in order to justify their reputation.

"When a batsman goes in, the bowler is continually trying some device in order to get him out, or to tempt him in some fashion. This style of play is strange to a new-comer, and he falls into the trap laid for him. Then he wonders why he could not have seen what was likely to happen. But a new man possesses very little chance of be-

coming a success upon Australian wickets: he has too much to learn to be able to crowd all his experience into the beginning of one tour.

"English bowlers are also at a considerable disadvantage upon an Australian wicket. The condition of the ground does not assist them, and then there is the difference in the game to be considered. The English batsman plays in a free and dashing style; the Australian will not be tempted. He knows the game will be played to a finish, he need not hurry himself; so he is cautious in every stroke he plays. Visiting bowlers would be far more successful were the home batsmen to play the game to which they had been accustomed, *but they won't*.

"The conditions of bowling are altogether different in the two countries, and a strange



MR. MACLAREN, AGED 19.
From a Photo. by E. Hawkins & Co., Brighton.

team will discover the change in either. Here in England the climatic conditions, the wet weather, frequently assists the bowlers to a no uncertain extent. They are enabled to get far more work upon the ball—McKibbin discovered that, when he was last here, he broke back far too much. It is a dangerous thing to prophesy about Australian bowlers, I am aware, but I fully expect them to show their real form.

"Their best performer with the ball? Hugh Trumble, without a doubt. He knows our wickets well; he is remarkably good upon his own wickets, and he uses his judgment to the best advantage. Upon a wicket that suits him he is practically unplayable, while he is a man who can be always relied upon. MacLeod, again, is another man who may be a very good bowler for them, while his performances with the bat are well-known features in his play."

It was evident Mr. MacLaren possessed a high opinion of the calibre of our visitors. No doubt he recollected the last of the English tours. To test him, however, I brought the conversation round to the subject of Australian cricket, and asked him what he thought of the all-round conditions at the Antipodes.

"We were beaten, fairly and squarely," he admitted; "but after all, we had a far more formidable task than that faced by any of the earlier elevens. On the former occasions cricket had not secured such a hold upon the Australian public. They had not been educated up to it—the game was in a transitory stage, so to speak.

"Now the case is vastly different. Cricket has been improved all round in Australia, while, as I have said before, a new man must almost entirely alter his style of play if he wishes to be a success. And some men cannot do that, consequently they fail.

"Even when he does make this alteration, it takes a very long time before he can feel

at all at home under the different conditions. It is always the same, and it by no means follows that because a man is a great player here in England he will prove an equal success in Australia.

"Far from it. First-class batsmen might prove harmless; it would take time to conform to the new order of things, and it is only natural that a player should be a greater success upon a second visit than during his first. The Australian bowling was a great factor in their success against us in the test matches. You may recollect only three centuries were scored against them, yet there are men here in England, not in the front rank, who I feel confident would get any amount of runs off their bowlers.

"But it does not follow that, because the Australians have scored hundred after hundred upon their own wickets, they will be equally successful here. They, under altered conditions, last time they were here, were dismissed cheaply on occasions, and I should like to see them get thirty runs apiece, instead of the centuries, should the pitch prove suitable for our bowlers.

"Australian cricket, taking it right through, is not on a par with county cricket here, but it is good enough, and

they will be a very great side this year. If they get fair luck, we shall need to be at our best to beat them; but should they get soft wickets, they may not be able to play upon them.

"In speaking of Australian cricket at home, it must not be forgotten that four years ago they were a very young eleven, and almost inexperienced. That is quite different now. There is twice the number of players, and they have gained a greater knowledge of the game, and how to play it to the best advantage.

"Up-country cricket during the tour of an English eleven is not looked upon in a serious light at all, I can assure you. These matches are simply considered in the nature of a picnic. The names of the players are



MR. MACLAREN, AGE 25.

From a Photo. by E. Hawkins & Co., Brighton.

placed in a hat, and every man determines upon having a day out.

"Still, there is this to be said of the matches we played in the country during our last tour in Australia: the matting wickets put many of our batsmen right off their game. They had, perhaps, almost recovered from the effects of the long voyage. They would practise upon turf and then go upon matting. That would upset their form at once, and entirely.

"It is a fearful drawback to any visiting team, this playing first on turf and then on matting. If I have anything to say about the arrangements of another team and its tour in Australia, I shall most strongly deprecate the custom of playing under these conditions. We should never play upon matting at all.

"Upon the average, during our last tour, we played three of these matches in a fortnight. We found the ball came in at a lightning pace, and regulated our style accordingly.

"Then we would play another match upon the turf. That is fast enough, but not nearly so fast as matting. The Australians may smile when they read this, but I am absolutely certain several of our batsmen's failures were caused by the exchange of surface. Yes, I hope when England plays Australia again, on their own ground, it will be stipulated that turf wickets must be provided for all the fixtures entered upon, both test matches and up-country contests.

"These matches, played far away from the usual grounds, of course do a great deal of

good from a cricket point of view; that is to say, locally. But our batsmen did not attempt to do their best. Many of them got out as soon as they could. When they had made thirty or forty runs they would become reckless, simply because they did not like, playing against odds, to make too big a score. The curious thing, though, is that we met many good bowlers in these

matches. That and the wicket-keeping were their strongest points. There were one or two of these up-country bowlers whom I should like to see playing for Lancashire. Their batting, on the other hand, was not of a very high-class order. But these matches were very enjoyable, after all."

After this I was somewhat chary in suggesting "spectators" as a subject for discussion, but Mr. MacLaren plunged into the matter at once.

"I regret to say the spectators behaved very badly on occasions," he admitted. "There was a great deal too much of the 'barracking' humour about them, especially at Sydney, on the occasion of our last test match there. At Melbourne, however, the crowd behaved much fairer to us. There

is a great difference between an Australian and an English crowd. The former are not nearly so generous: they do not like to see you winning. As long as they are on top they are satisfied; but if there is a prospect of their being beaten, then they commence to 'boo' and yell at the visiting players.

"There are too many critics in Australia, and, as is generally the case, those who know



MR. MACLAREN "BATTING."
From a Photo. by E. Hawkins & Co., Brighton.

least have the most to say. As regards the umpiring while we were there I have nothing at all to complain of. It was perfectly fair."

"But what about the number of players taken out?" I hazarded. "There was something said about too small a reserve. Was that the case?"

"No, certainly not," was Mr. MacLaren's rejoinder; "when you are forming a cricket team to tour abroad you cannot take more than thirteen. When you play your first match upon Australian soil, let us suppose the side makes a total of 400 or 500 runs. That is not at all improbable, seeing the scoring that has occurred during the progress of the recent inter-Colonial fixtures. Every man of the side makes from 55 to 56 runs apiece.

"Who are you to leave out? Why, you cannot take a batsman out of the team who can score to the extent I have mentioned, and the result is that you have about four men looking on, match after match, with but a very slight chance of their being given a trial.

"Very frequently a man may be in Australia, under these circumstances, for four or five weeks before he is asked to get into his flannels. Look at Mr. Philipson when he was taken out as a reserve wicket-keeper. How frequently were his services required? No, a side comprising thirteen members is quite large enough for all practical purposes.

"It was not the paucity of our numbers that upset us in Australia. It was the heat. During the day we would be beneath a broiling sun; then at night, up would come the hot wind, and we could not sleep. That in itself was enough to put a man off his form. However, the Australians will be at a disadvantage should they experience any cold weather during their visit here, so we must not complain upon that score."

The winter payment of professionals proved a good subject, and Mr. MacLaren spoke up decidedly in the matter of rendering the closing days of a good old servant a little easier than is sometimes the case.

"I think," he sug-

gested, "that winter payments to professional cricketers should be made the general rule. But in this connection there should be a universal law: one man should be paid as well as another. It is hard that one man should be paid £2 or £1 a week and that another should get nothing.

"Professionals are underpaid at the best of times, for it must not be forgotten they soon get old. After they have reached the age of thirty-five, they are not much good for county work. The great cricketers, the idols of the public, are all right—they may depend upon a rousing benefit; but what of the smaller men?"

"They have wives and families, and they are put to the same expense as a more successful member of the team. Yet what have they to look forward to in their old age? A few secure posts as coaches at the public schools, but they are exceptionally fortunate. Time after time I have seen professionals upon the cricket-field looking as miserable as possible. Wondering where their next sovereign was coming from, very likely. Is this fair? Can a man show his real form when he is over-burdened with responsibilities?"

"Certainly not. The professional player is a sober, honest, hardworking servant of the club or county, and he deserves better all-round treatment. The big man can go to the secretary or treasurer and say, 'Oh, if you won't pay me at a certain rate, another county will,' and he gains his point. What

chance has a little man of making a similar bargain? None at all.

"A fast bowler? No; why should it make a greater difference to him? The public must not forget that he does not generally last as long as a medium pace or slow bowler. That fact explains more than one failure on previous form."

Then Mr. MacLaren cried "enough," and refused to be drawn farther. But I may add he is equally at home with his gun as with his cricket bat, and that if he has a weakness it runs in the direction of greyhounds.



MRS. MACLAREN.

From a Photo. by Vandyck, Melbourne.