

WIMBLEDON AND BISLEY—PAST AND PRESENT:

A TALK WITH THE RIGHT HON. EARL WALDEGRAVE.

BY JAMES MILNE.

Illustrated from Photographs by CHARLES KNIGHT.



WITH the second week of July there comes Bisley—the old historic Wimbledon, as many still insist upon regarding it—and for a fortnight on end the marksman's bullet is heard ringing throughout the land. We may not all be volunteers, and some of us who are may, alas! not be marksmen, but surely there

are none wholly lacking in the spirit that makes both. It is just because Bisley represents a martial strain in our blood that we follow the records of the shooting there with so keen an interest. "Who is Queen's prizeman?" Whatever else may be on the boards, that is the great question one morning every year, and it is good that it should be so.

"Good, nay excellent!" That I am sure would be the comment of Earl Waldegrave and his col-

leagues who direct the affairs of the National Rifle Association. His lordship is chairman of the council of the Association, an office in which he has followed men like Lord Wantage, Lord Wharnclyffe, Lord Ducie, Lord Spencer, and Lord Wemyss, whose earlier title the Elcho challenge shield always keeps green. To mention the well-known people who have been, who are, connected with the National Rifle Association would be an endless business. Moreover the point for which I am driving, is that the head and front of the executive machinery giving us our annual wapsenshaw, is the chairman of the council. His place is one that demands many qualities—enthusiasm, knowledge, tact; one involving an amount of work which would surprise the man who doesn't know any better.

The good nature, the kindly courtesy, which



From a photo by

[Walery.]

THE RIGHT HON. EARL WALDEGRAVE.
(Chairman of the Council of the National Rifle Association.)

have helped to make Lord Waldegrave so popular a chairman, have enabled me to get a gossip with him on "Wimbledon and

hold of what has remained the most enticing feature of the volunteer's career—the inborn love of shooting, the desire to excel in it, the ambition to be a good marksman. The first Wimbledon was opened on July 2, 1860, and the Queen fired the first shot from a Whitworth rifle. Needless to say the rifle had been fixed in position for her Majesty, and so truly too that when she pulled the silken cord attached to the trigger, a centre was registered. That represented the highest score then, for the bull's-eye was still unknown—one instance of the changes which time has wrought at the meeting.

"You will remember," Lord Waldegrave remarked, "that the new ranges at



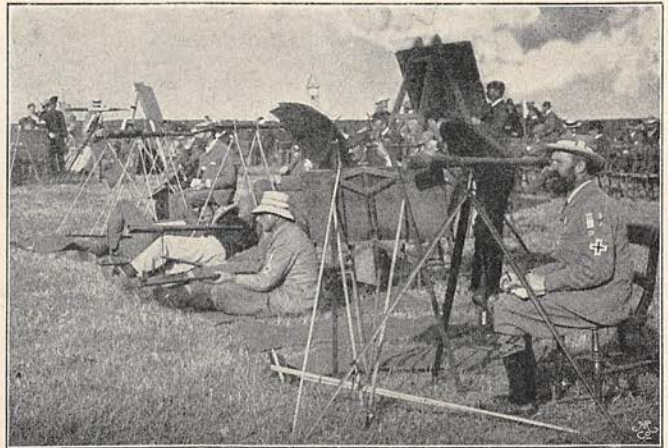
BUSY AT THE TICKET OFFICE.

Bisley—Past and Present." He shot in the Eton team at Wimbledon in 1868, and again the following year, the team, it should be said, going home with the honours on the former occasion. When he went to Cambridge he kept up his attendance at Wimbledon, and from the Cambridge University corps he passed into the London Rifle Brigade, in which he still holds his commission. He captains the English Eight and the English Twenty, and if any other qualifications were needed to make him an "efficient" in the volunteer movement, he would certainly not hesitate to meet them. A better head than of the National Rifle Association could not be found, as everybody will agree, except perhaps Lord Waldegrave himself. I found him surrounded by literature bearing upon the great rifle meeting—statistics as to the shooting from year to year, and so on.

But long as Lord Waldegrave has been identified with the national wapenshaw, it was yet, as he reminded me, in existence before he was old enough to handle a rifle. Its foundation is bound up with the early history of volunteering, the idea of the founders, of course, being to encourage rifle shooting. That was taking

Bisley were opened by the Princess of Wales, and that her shot was not less auspicious than the Queen's had been. It was a bull's-eye, the distance being five hundred yards; and I can recall very well the interest with which the opening ceremony was watched." The conjunction of these two events enabled me to ask his lordship how the fitting from Wimbledon to Bisley had borne upon the meeting, for obviously it involved certain new conditions.

"Oh yes," he agreed, "it was a very



LORDS *v.* COMMONS, AT NINE HUNDRED YARDS.

ticklish moment, for Bisley being so much farther from London, we could not hope to draw the same money. People would not

go to Bisley as they went to Wimbledon, and the same social side of the meeting was not possible. We don't therefore have the bright company we had at Wimbledon; our attractions have fallen away in that respect. No doubt the question of distance has affected us generally; but I hope we may get over all these things."

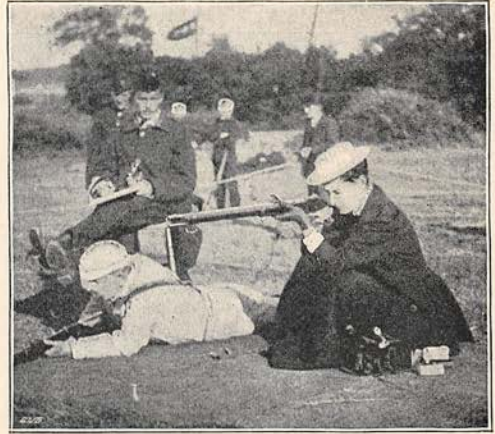
"You have better ranges at Bisley though, I believe; more room in which to turn about?"

"Certainly. Still last year was really our first prosperous year at Bisley; but as I say we hope to progress all right now. You see at Wimbledon we existed practically for a fortnight only, by which I mean that the whole apparatus of the meeting was dismantled after the meeting. At Bisley our ranges are open all the year round; matches take place continually; a volunteer corps can always go and practise there. Also the regular forces use the place, so that the Bisley ranges are active more or less all the year round. Provincial volunteers sometimes point out that the ability to practise at Bisley must be a great advantage to metropolitan marksmen when the latter come to shoot at the annual meeting. Broadly speaking, country volunteers, I should judge, have better opportunities for target practice than those resident in London or in the large cities."

"Is any comparison possible, taking a period of years, between the shooting of urban and the shooting of rural volunteers?"

"You mean is it the countryman or the townsman who does best at Bisley from year to year? I'm afraid one's general impres-

sions on such a point would be of little value; the only thing would be to go into the records for each meeting. But as to



MISS LEALE, OF GUERNSEY.

the improvement which has taken place in rifle shooting all round, there can be no doubt whatever. That is entirely apart from the splendid influence Wimbledon has been in consolidating the volunteer force as such—in making it popular, what it has become. Continuous improvement in shooting, as a result of Wimbledon, might be traced as easily as the succession always of a better and better type of rifle. When I went to Wimbledon first the Enfield muzzle-loader was in use, then came the Snider, next the Martini-Henry, and another change will bring us to the magazine rifle."

"Do you take it that the adoption of the magazine rifle will mean a still further



"ALL-COMERS"—OPEN COMPETITION.

advance in the marksmanship of our volunteers?"

"So I should anticipate; the better the rifle the better the shooting must be. We



MR. WINANS' PISTOL SHOOTING.

have made as few changes as possible in connection with the coming Bisley, because next year a good many may have to be made. I am alluding to the possible introduction of the magazine rifle, since it appears likely that it will by then be in the hands of the volunteers. The innovation will be one likely to affect the volunteers as a

body in a general measure. I mean that not a few of the ranges now in use throughout the country will probably be certified as unsafe for the magazine rifle, and so others will have to be found. Leaving aside the question of improved weapons, it would be strange if an observer did not recognise the work which the National Rifle Association has done for shooting among all our defence forces. Wimbledon and Bisley have not influenced the volunteers only, but also shooting in the army, and more, they have much heightened the value placed on marksmanship by the mass of the people. I don't know about the musketry course in the army, but I think the influence of Wimbledon may for one thing be fairly traced in the frequent matches in which the military now take part. We have soldiers shooting at our meeting, and the army team has been accustomed to hold its own very well. If you ask me however to compare the shooting of the regulars with the shooting of the auxiliaries at Bisley, then I must point out that they at present use different weapons."

Next year then, should the magazine rifle be generally in the hands of the volunteers, Bisley will be uncommonly interesting. It has been a necessary evolution all along at the tournament, provided it was to march with the times—even evolution in



SHOOTING AT FIVE HUNDRED YARDS FOR THE "IMPERIAL."

the matter of the number of days it occupies. Originally the meeting covered a week only, but now it takes a fortnight, and the double period is quite needed for the competitions. Again, at the first Wimbledon there were three hundred volunteer marksmen, and about £2200 was given in prize money. Now the competitions and the competitors are alike a multitude, and last summer close upon £12,000 was given away in prizes, not counting the challenge cups. Yet once more, the old metal targets are gone, and the canvas targets have taken their place. "You may be aware," Lord Waldegrave mentioned, "that the metal target at which the Queen shot when she opened Wimbledon is strictly preserved among the heirlooms of the Association, and every season is to be seen at headquarters at Bisley. Years back," he

die to be cast in the final stage. But as the conditions are, a volunteer goes into the final stage, having behind him the aggregate he has made in the two previous stages—he starts from that basis. When, too, Wimbledon was still the infant prodigy, it was a case of forty survivors firing for the Queen's prize; then the number was raised to sixty; and finally to a hundred—the Queen's hundred. Haven't we all read in the newspapers every July of the Queen's prizemen being "chaired," and of the air of resignation with which they habitually accept the operation? Could Lord Waldegrave tell me how this practice had originated, and what it amounted to?

"No," he declared with a laugh, "I really am not aware what was the origin of it, but I know it has been observed at the annual



HAYHURST, THE QUEEN'S PRIZEMAN OF 1895, HAVING HIS LAST SHOT.

went on, "the Queen's prize was decided several days before the meeting closed—really about the middle of it. No doubt the main purpose of this was to allow men from the country to finish up and go home, but the result was that the latter part of the meeting lost in interest. More recently the Queen's prize has not been decided until the last day of the meeting, the interest being thus maintained. Moreover there have been various radical changes from year to year in reference to the conditions governing the shooting for the great trophy."

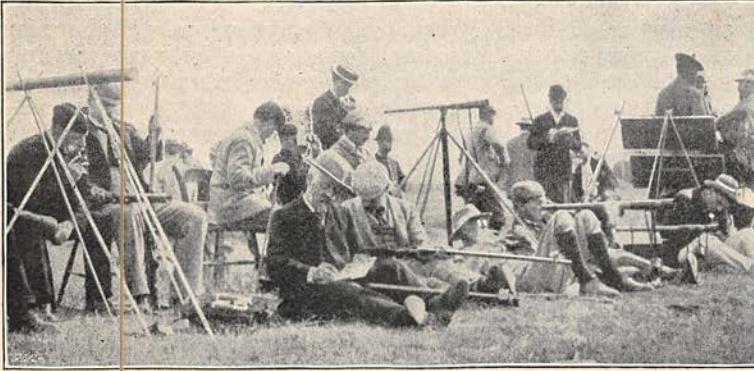
He was alluding to the manner in which a man's score is now reckoned—and a volunteer hardly needs to be enlightened on that point. The old system laid itself open to the chances of luck more than the later system does, because it practically left the

shooting competition ever since I have attended it. The winner of the prize is carried shoulder high, by the members of his corps, to the staff headquarters, where the badge is pinned on his arm when the score has been certified, and round the regimental camps—which have become fewer than they once were; the gold medal is presented to him at the presentation of prizes later in the day, and he draws his prize of £250 through the Association in due season. Every member of the hundred gets a badge to mark the fact, but the first man in the first stage has a bronze one, the first man in the second stage a silver one, and that of the final winner is gold."

Sir William Walrond, M.P., came near to winning the Queen's prize one year at Wimbledon—he was I believe second. This

circumstance led me to ask Lord Waldegrave something, from the point of view of marksmanship, of the Lords and Commons

"Speaking from my own observation and experience," his lordship put it, "the mornings and the evenings are preferred for shooting. The light is generally more suitable than—at all events on my principle of desiring rather a dull light; and the wind, if there is any, is steadier. A bright sun during the height of the day is apt to create a mirage, which deceives the marksman, and matters are made worse if he has to contend with an unequal



VOLUNTEERS *v.* REGULARS, AT NINE HUNDRED YARDS.

wind. A fish-tail wind is worst of all, meaning one that blows now from one quarter now from another. With a steady wind one knows what to do—how much to allow for the deflection of the bullet—but with a fish-tail wind the utmost skill may be wasted. As to the qualities which make a good marksman, excellent eyesight is of the

match which used to take place. He was fain to say that he feared it was more a gallery match than anything else—a match which was important rather to the crowd than to high marksmanship. Like the review with which the Wimbledon of years back was wont to wind up, the Lords *v.* Commons competition is only a memory, still a picturesque memory. One readily sees how the historic gathering, under the auspices of the National Rifle Association, has touched the life of the English-speaking people at many different points. Canada sends a team every year, Australia and South Africa have sent representatives, and so has India; and to go wider, America, Switzerland, Belgium and other countries have been represented on occasion.

"We should be very glad," said Lord Waldegrave, touching upon this subject, "to see teams from all parts of the British empire; but I suppose the great drawback is the cost which men coming a long way have to incur. If all parts of the empire were to send marksmen, the result could only be good, and I need hardly tell you that it is the spirit of riflemen always to give a hearty welcome to comrades, especially those coming from a distance." That is very true; and indeed the portals of Bisley are even open to ladies—witness the competitions for "all comers"—a description which obviously includes women.

We had a wide scope for conversation in the subject of the conditions which marksmen find most favourable for shooting, and the qualities which tend to make accomplished marksmen.

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DUKE OF CONNAUGHT VISITING THE CAMP.

first importance. Again, a good nerve is very essential, for it is no joke to shoot with a number of people looking on, and with

the knowledge that others as well as yourself depend upon how straight you shoot. I am thinking of team shooting, where the result of the whole match may even hang upon the last shot of the last man to fire. Accordingly I think that team shooting is even more trying than individual shooting, for you are conscious in the latter case that if you happen to do badly you at all events involve nobody else in your failure. Then I need not dwell on the value of practice to a marksman because the value of that is self-evident." Outside his official position and his wide experience of volunteering, Lord Waldegrave is well entitled to speak a word on marksmanship as an art. He was once in the list of those who shot finally for the Queen's prize, and none get there who are bad shots.

When the National Rifle Association founded its meeting the plan was that it should be movable—now taking place in one part of the country, now in another. It was soon seen however that this would not

work, and similarly there have been proposals that the wapenshaw should be held at a date other than July. "But these proposals," Lord Waldegrave commented, "have come to nothing, and I imagine we are always likely to begin operations on the second Monday of July. If we were to meet earlier we should interfere with the hay harvest, and if we were to meet later we should come into conflict with the wheat harvest and the moors."

The effect of the public schools match at Bisley in encouraging a love of the volunteer movement among boys; the coming and going of various forms of competition—the running deer for instance; all these things I had the opportunity of talking over with Lord Waldegrave. But what I have written—a gossip wandering here, there and anywhere, as a real gossip should—indicates fully enough the links which bind our interest to Bisley, and to the good fellows who go there to shoot.



A CAUTIOUS SCOT.