



*Illustrated by LUCIEN DAVIS, R.I. ; and from Portraits.*

*The following article is an excerpt from the forthcoming volume by Prince Ranjitsinhji, the famous cricketer. It has been extracted by arrangement with the publishers, Messrs. Wm. Blackwood & Sons, but is illustrated by ourselves, and not from the special photographs which have been prepared for the book. The intense interest which has been felt by all cricketers throughout the world in the Prince's splendid performances with the bat will doubtless stimulate still greater interest in this his "first innings" in literature.*



THE subject of this article is a department of the game much neglected at the public schools, more at the universities, and more still in county cricket. As for ordinary club matches, fielding is regarded as a necessary evil which must be tolerated, because without it batting and bowling are impossible. And yet for winning matches fielding is not a jot less important than batting and bowling. Curiously enough, few cricketers guide their conduct by this fact, though no one with even an elementary knowledge of the game would think of disputing it. Times without number during the cricket season one hears it remarked that such-and-such a match was lost owing to bad ground-fielding or uncertain catching, or slovenly fielding in general; or because in the selection of the eleven insufficient attention was paid to the fielding ability of the candidates for places. And it is as a mild protest against the common and mistaken policy of giving undue prominence to the two more showy branches of the game that fielding is given the place of honour in this volume. Not that it is of much use protesting. Cricketers, being human, are not over-ready to do what is irksome or distasteful, even where they recognise their own good and the good of others. Perhaps one of the reasons why fielding is neglected is, that its results are all but disregarded on the score-sheet and

in other records of matches played. Both bowlers and batsmen see their successes fully notified. A glance at a score-sheet is enough to discover who made runs and who got wickets. The figures speak for themselves, and eloquently. Yet there is nothing to indicate how many runs were saved by fine ground-fielding or how many catches were badly muffed. But a more determining reason is, that the scope for personal gratification is so much smaller in fielding. A man bats and bowls for his side, it is true; but if he makes a large score or takes a number of wickets, he not only does his side a signal service, but affords himself an immense amount of satisfaction. There is nothing wrong in this. Cricket is a game, and should be played for pleasure. The point is, that success in batting or bowling cannot fail to combine the advantage of the whole eleven with the pleasure of the individual. A batsman or a bowler feels he is doing something by his own efforts, and that something to his own credit. A fieldsman, on the contrary, has in a certain sense no individual existence, he is a subordinate part of a whole. His "ego" is absorbed in the "cosmos" of the side. He is point or slip or mid-off, not Smith or Jones or Robinson. The conditions of the game practically make selfish fielding an impossibility. A man cannot field "on his own" as he can bat or bowl. The result is that there are many, far too many, cricketers who, being keen and ambitious to succeed in the game, give any



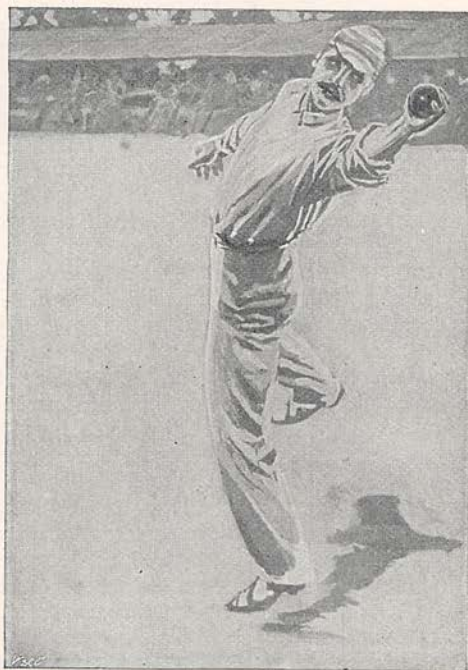
amount of time and trouble to batting or bowling, as the case may be, in order that they may excel in one or in both, but who only pay just enough attention to fielding to ensure a comfortable mediocrity. They know that unless they acquire a certain degree of skill their deficiency will be noticeable, and regarded as so much against their claims to be chosen as bats or bowlers. Further than that they do not go. Nearly everyone can without much trouble become a moderately good fielder, because fielding is far easier than batting or bowling. By the same token, excellence in fielding is within the reach of a great many more cricketers than is excellence in batting and bowling. But whereas many care to excel as bats or bowlers, few care to aim at more than average excellence as fielders. What needs to be emphasised is, that few cricketers do their very best in the field. They satisfy certain requirements, but do not give their whole soul to this branch of the game.

When I say that bad fielding is the rule rather than the exception, I refer rather to what might be than what is. Taking into consideration the amount of time devoted to cricket, and the respective difficulties of acquiring a high degree of skill in batting, bowling, and fielding, one cannot but recognise that the average results attained are not satisfactory in the case of the first two. And this is true though the actual number of really fine fielders is larger than that of tiptop batsmen or bowlers. Take a dozen village cricket-teams—there is probably no bat or bowler among them all of more than fifth or sixth class merit, but almost certainly there are at least twelve fielders who would not disgrace the champion county of the year.

The importance of good fielding is very easy to demonstrate. Each catch that is missed simply adds another batsman to the

opposing side. If five catches are dropped, the side that drops them has to all intents and purposes fifteen men to dispose of instead of ten; and each man who thus receives a second innings starts with the advantage of having more or less got used to the light and the state of the wicket. Again, let us suppose that each man on a side gives away in each innings 3 runs which he might have saved by a little more dash and keenness. Not only has the opposite side 33 more runs added to its score without the trouble of making them by their own efforts, but the side which gave

the runs away has 33 more runs to get than they need have had, and consequently has given itself so much the greater chance of meeting with bad luck. A run saved is more than a run gained; it is a run that need not be got. Runs vary in value. It is infinitely more than three times harder for a side to get 150 runs than it is to get 50. It is infinitely easier for an individual to save 20 runs by good fielding than it is for him to make 20 by good batting. In a particular match the best batsman in the world may twice fail to score. Suppose he is a bad fielder, and gives away, as he well might if fielding in



A DIFFICULT CATCH IN THE LONG FIELD.

the country, 25 runs each innings. Not only has he made no runs himself, but has burdened the rest of his side with the necessity of making 50 runs more than they otherwise would have required. He has practically deducted 50 runs from the score of his side. Let us imagine that but for his bad fielding there would have been only 100 runs to get to win. As it is, there are 150. Clearly, as far as concerns him, 50 runs must be scored before one is counted. In a way, the strength of a fielding side must be measured by its weakest member, as that of a chain by its weakest link. Whenever there is a really bad fielder on a side, more



balls seem to go to him than to anyone else. Put him where you will, he seems to attract the ball. If there is a catch to be caught that would win the match, it seems always to seek the hands of the weaker brother. If he misses it, the efforts of the side are all spoilt and rendered futile. Mistakes cannot always be avoided, but with proper measures taken their frequency may be astonishingly diminished.

Good fielding is as helpful as bad fielding is noxious. To a certain extent it turns bad bowling into good, and makes good bowling better. Backed by strong ground-fielding and sure catching, quite moderate bowling can, as a rule, be relied upon to dispose of any side for a not unreasonably large score. Besides, bowlers who can trust their fielders to hold catches bowl with more confidence and keenness. Nothing demoralises a bowler more than to see run after run that might have been saved scored off his deliveries. As for missed catches, it is weary work for a bowler to besiege a batsman's weak stroke for half an hour, to succeed in getting him into a carefully planned trap, to see the catch—such a baby one—muffed ridiculously, and to have all his trouble all over again. Besides, once bitten, twice shy. The bowler has shown his hand, and the batsman is now on the look-out. Many a bowler has tempted Bobby Abel to try, before well set, his placing stroke through the slips; has seen slip fail to hold an easy catch, and has had to bowl and field for the Surrey giant's benefit a whole day or perhaps two. It is too much to expect every catch to be caught, but without doubt, if more trouble were taken over fielding, far fewer would be missed.

Even from the spectator's point of view it is a pity that skill in fielding is not developed to the highest degree of which it is capable. There is no finer sight in cricket than that of a really good fielding side trying its level best to win or save a match. It is marvellous what can be done, and is done, in such circumstances. Even the uninitiated can appreciate a magnificent catch or a dashing save on the boundary. And the impression given by the splendid unity of the eleven men, by their individual and collective energy, all concentrated on one end, can arouse as intense enthusiasm in a crowd of onlookers as the best batting imaginable. The finest exhibition of fielding it has been my good fortune to see was that given at Lord's by the Oxford University eleven of 1892. They won a sensational victory partly by good batting and good bowling, but

principally by their extraordinary dash, brilliancy and accuracy in the field. Their fielding was superb. Had it been merely good, they would have had very nearly double the number of runs to make in the fourth innings of the match. There was no particular reason that this eleven should have been superior to other 'Varsity elevens. Mr. M. R. Jardine was perhaps the best of the lot. He was perfect. The standard of excellence they reached, high as it was compared with what one usually sees, is not beyond the capacity of any eleven composed of men who have not lost speed of foot and elasticity of limb. With one or two brilliant exceptions the county elevens do not field nearly so well as they ought. There are fine fielders in most of them, but it is fine fielding all through a team that is so desirable, so possible of attainment, and yet so rare. Perhaps Yorkshire of late years has shown the best fielding in county fixtures. On the whole, the northern counties field better than the southern; probably because the spectators in the northern towns are such remorseless critics of anything like slovenliness in the field. They come not only to cheer but to jeer, and they do both with a will.

It is surprising that the famous nurseries of amateur cricketers, the great English public schools, with all their advantages, do not produce fielders of more than average ability. In order to show that boys can be taught to take a zealous interest in this department of the game and be brought to a high state of proficiency without professional aid or good coaching, I may refer to the school at which I myself was educated. It is difficult to see why our fielding at the Raj Kumar College should have been so infinitely superior to the batting and bowling, unless it was due to the prevailing idea there that fielding was just as important as batting or bowling, and to the fact that a high degree of skill is most easily attained in fielding. I am quite sure that the fielding of this school from the years 1882 to 1888 was superior to that of an average English public school eleven. Yet there was no one to teach us much, and no fine fielders to excite in us a desire to excel. Perhaps one reason was that we had no net practice. Whenever we played it was in a game. Very often there were fifteen boys on each side; so if the fielding side wanted an innings the same day, they had to hold every catch and save all the runs they could. Still it seems to me that we had a higher ideal of fielding than most



English schools. Without doubt, fielding in school, university, and county matches could be improved enormously by the expenditure of a little more trouble. And the trouble would be amply repaid. Even from the point of view of personal pleasure, it is worth while to cultivate an interest in fielding, and to take means to become good at it. What a man can do well he likes doing. Batting and bowling occasionally cause a cricketer some disappointment. Fielding is a certainty. Once make yourself a good field, once learn to take a pleasure in fielding for its own sake, and every match must provide you with plenty of enjoyment independently of whether or not you get runs or wickets. If people would only recognise the importance of fielding, the standard would soon be raised all round. The truth is that fielding can be scamped to a certain point without retribution falling upon the sinner. From every point of view it is a pity that a higher standard is not somehow established and exacted.

Before taking the various parts of fielding in detail, it may be well to say a few words about the system of cricket management in English schools. It is not necessary for the present purpose to enter deeply into the question. At nearly all the larger schools the actual and immediate management of all the cricket is nominally in the hands of the boys. The headmaster, of course, reserves for himself the right of interfering in any way he may think proper. In most cases, however, the moving force in the school cricket is either one of the assistant masters or an old boy who takes interest in his former school, or the professional engaged as bowler and coach. The authority and influence of the adviser, whether amateur or professional, depend almost entirely upon his prowess, his reputation, or his personality in general. That boys require an adviser is obvious, for no schoolboy can, in the nature of things, be a really good judge of cricket or know much about the game. And usually those boys who know most understand best that without an experience more extensive than their own it is impossible to be a good judge of cricket. Perhaps a combination of amateur and professional coaching is the best. Most of the best coaches have been amateurs, for the simple reason that amateurs are usually better educated than professionals. The teaching of cricket requires an educated mind. In cricket, as in other things, it is necessary to observe and reflect upon observations. There are many good bats, bowlers

and fielders, but very few of them can explain how they bat, bowl, or field, and fewer still can teach another what they can do themselves. The essential point in a good coach is a sound knowledge of the game, and there is no reason why a very moderate player should not make an excellent coach; except that, as things go, a bad player is unlikely to have had much experience of cricket—real cricket as it should be played. But it is impossible for an amateur coach to be always on the ground, if indeed he is available in the first instance. So the professional can by no means be dispensed with. The professional is always on the spot, and should be able to give necessary instructions in the various branches of the game. The superintendence of the amateur gives the boys an incentive to work with zeal and keenness, and prevents humbug or loafing. Some people think it unwise to give the professional too much power, no matter how good a coach he may be. They mistrust his influence from an educational and social point of view. Such ideas, however, are not in accordance with facts. The leading professionals nowadays are for the most part excellent fellows. On the whole, boys benefit by having absolute faith in the teaching of a good coach. For nothing tends to improve a budding cricketer more than a belief in the infallibility of someone or other. Hero-worship is good in cricket. This does not mean that boys should not think for themselves and try to see the why and wherefore of what their coach tells them. Perhaps they may differ from him in their opinions on some point. If they do, they should tell him what they think, and ask him to show them why he thinks otherwise. If he is a good coach he will be able to give the reason at once. There are reasons for everything in cricket, and the longer a man plays the more chance has he of perceiving them.

It is admitted on all hands that a tradition of good fielding in a school rarely fails to work on with good effects from year to year. Certain schools in some way or other gain a reputation for fielding better than their rivals and contemporaries, and this reputation continues to be efficacious in producing a high degree of proficiency in the field, however wanting in batting and bowling power the eleven of a particular year may be. The great thing is to start a tradition, should one not already exist. This can only be done by keeping the school eleven up to or above the mark for several years, and encouraging

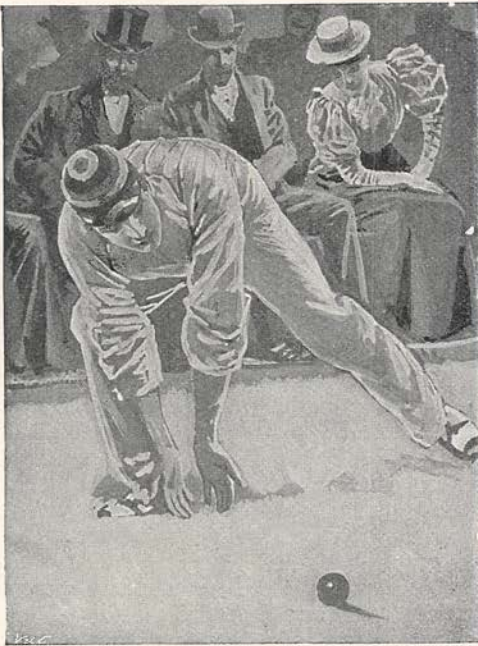


the feeling that bad fielding is a thorough disgrace. It is a disgrace. It shows an execrable attitude of mind. A slack, careless fielder needs the stick; he cannot possibly have a right and proper spirit.

Just as one good fielding eleven breeds another, so does one good individual fielder cause improvement in the rest of his side. Nothing promotes good fielding more than does the influence of example, and the same may be said of bad fielding. One really keen, enthusiastic fielder may regenerate, one slack loafer may demoralise, a whole eleven. There is no doubt that, so far as it

in cricket, decent health, and ordinary natural qualifications of eye and hand, can, if he likes, become a very useful field. By this I mean that although he possibly may not acquire first-class form, he may nevertheless become quite good enough for all ordinary purposes. Moderate success in fielding is within almost every cricketer's grasp. This opinion is contrary to that of many authorities on the game, but it seems to me it is sound. Catching, picking up and throwing are quite natural actions apart from the requirements of cricket. It is difficult to believe that anyone who really tries to learn how to field can fail to become at any rate "a safe field." The term signifies that the fielder, when in his usual form, may be relied upon to stop hits that come within reasonable distance of him, and to hold practically all catches—in a word, not to disgrace himself in any way. It implies also, however, a certain degree of slowness, inasmuch as the fieldsmen is supposed to be wanting in that dash and brilliancy which render possible feats which until performed seemed absolutely impossible. The safe fieldsmen does what can reasonably be expected of a fielder and no more—not because he does not care to exceed that limitation, but because he cannot. Such "safe" fields can, however, be made of considerable use to a side if they assiduously practise catching, picking up and throwing, and, above all, during actual matches remain always on the alert. In fielding, just as much as in the other parts of the game, great success is the result of experience and practice in addition to various gifts of nature. Brilliant fieldsmen are born, not made, and this in the same sense as are brilliant batsmen and bowlers. It is a case of great capacity highly cultivated. Suppleness of limb, speed of foot, and quickness of eye are trained on special lines to suit the particular end in view. The same qualities and much the same applications of them are requisite in all games of handball. The various actions required are primitive and almost instinctive, so there is little room and no need for any elaborate theorising on the subject.

The whole art of fielding consists of three parts: ground-fielding, throwing, and catching. It is necessary to be able with the utmost possible certainty and rapidity to gather in the hands a ball hit along or on to the ground, and to return it equally surely and swiftly to either wicket, in order that as



A SAFE FIELD.

(Showing the system of awaiting the ball and picking it up, as advocated in this article.)

is possible to do so, extreme praise and honour should be given to boys who do care to field hard and well. Most of the larger and more important schools are lucky enough to have on their staff of masters prominent all-round athletes from the universities. Such men have merely to take enough trouble, and they cannot fail to supply the boys with a very suitable example of what fielding should be. Unfortunately, even the universities do not devote proper attention to fielding. Proficiency in this respect is often woefully absent in the case of those men who are otherwise excellent cricketers. However, anyone, boy or man, with a genuine interest



few runs as possible be scored and the batsman be run out should a chance occur. Should the ball be hit into the air without touching the ground, every imaginable attempt should be made to bring it to hand and keep it there, in order that the batsman may be dismissed by being caught out. Every man in the field, without exception, should be able to carry out these requirements. The methods of picking up, throwing and catching differ slightly, according to the position of the fielder and the way the ball is hit towards him. But the main outlines are the same in every case. And perhaps it will be best, for the sake of clearness, to suppose complete ignorance on the part of the reader.

Let us consider the case of ground-fielding first. Strictly speaking, the term applies to the gathering up of a ball so hit that it rolls along the ground till the fielder intercepts its course. But it is also used to denote the fielding of any ball not a catch. The action of fielding the ball, whether bounding or on the ground, is much the same, except that the hands in the former case do not touch the ground when the ball is received into them. The way a ball should be fielded depends entirely upon how it comes. It would be impossible to give instructions to suit every minute contingency, but perhaps a few broad hints may be of some use.

Suppose the fielder be at long-on or long-off and a ball is hit straight towards him. There are three things to be done: first, to stop it; second, to pick it up; and third, to throw it in to wicket-keeper or bowler. The first point saves a boundary, the second and third should prevent more than one run being scored off the stroke. With regard to stopping the ball clean and true so that it remains enclosed in the hands. To begin with, the point should be studied and practised independently of anything else. The fielder is advised to face the ball fair and square with closed feet, and to pick it up with both his hands.

Nearer the wicket the ball naturally travels with more pace. But mid-on, mid-off, and all other fielders should gather, as described above, a ball hit straight or nearly straight at them. Mark well that two hands whenever possible should be used to receive the ball. The hands should not be held stiff, but in such a way that they give with the impact of the ball, and thus lessen the resistance. After having made sure of being able to pick the ball up properly in this manner, the fielder should practise throwing

the ball in to the wicket with the least possible waste of time. Any time that is lost between the receipt of the ball and the return of it to the wicket is so much in favour of the batsman. The amount of runs that can be saved or given away during two long innings by a fielder in the country, or indeed anywhere, is astonishing. Everyone agrees on this point, but few act upon it. It would do no one any harm to write up a memorandum of the fact above their beds.

Now the quickest and therefore the best way to return a ball after picking it up is different in various persons. Some throw above, some below the shoulder, and no two have quite the same action in throwing. But all who excel in this point have two characteristics in common—they pick up the ball in such a way that the action of picking up seems to be part of the subsequent action of throwing, and they throw the ball in without any winding up or preliminary hesitation. A wicket-keeper was once remonstrating with a fielder for not having run a man out.

"Why, I threw it in like a book," retorted the latter.

"Yes, you did," was the reply; "but the preface and introduction were too long."

Really smart throwers are very uncommon. The value of a run out is sometimes enormous. If fielders took these two facts to mind, and acted accordingly, runs would be harder to get than ever. It requires an immense amount of practice to get the knack of a quick return; and it must not be forgotten that quickness is of no use without accuracy. The most important point, after all, is to throw in such a manner that the man at the wicket can take the ball easily and near the stumps. The three things to avoid, apart from errors of direction, are sending in the ball so that it must be taken as a yorker or a half-volley, or what one may call a good-length ball—that is, good length in that it is difficult for the recipient to see and judge it. A return should come to the man at the wicket either on the long-hop or full-pitch, and that about a foot above the bails. Fielders near the wicket—in fact, unless they are in the long country—should return the ball full-pitch. Long-fielders should aim at making the ball arrive first bounce, and long-hop at its destination. With regard to throwing in from the country, the great fault fielders make is to throw the ball too high in the air. Clearly the lower its trajectory the sooner will the ball reach the wicket.



There is an exact height at which the ball should travel in order to combine rapidity in flight with accuracy of length. One reason why the throw-in requires so much practice is, that unless the muscles used be drilled to the point of mechanical accuracy—that is, till they almost act of themselves—the thrower has to stop to think what he is going to do, and thus loses time. A really good returner does not waste time in thinking what he is going to do or which wicket he had better aim at. All that is done while the ball is coming to him. His action in picking it up and throwing it in conforms with what he has already judged to be the best and quickest way of returning it. Sometimes the stroke and return are so quick that a spectator has scarcely time to perceive what has happened.

Having learnt to stop the ball clean and to return it quickly and accurately, a fielder should learn to dash in to meet the ball, so that the time it would have taken to reach him if he stayed where he was is knocked off. The slower the ball is travelling the more necessary it is to run in to meet it. A fielder should be continually on his toes ready to start forwards, or indeed in any direction. After a certain amount of practice a fielder when on the move can be as accurate in his picking up as if standing still. The actual method of gathering the ball is the same as when the fielder stands where he is and waits for the ball.

There are many ways of practising fielding. Even two men can manage to do a good deal together if they take it in turn to hit and to field. It is an excellent arrangement for a number of men or boys to scatter in a rough semicircle while another is hitting catches and ground balls to them. And it is excellent exercise for the hitter. But apart from matches, scratch games afford the best fielding practice, because the fielders have the ball hit to them in their various positions just as it is in real matches, and they can also practise returning the ball to the wicket. School elevens should take the trouble to drill in this way with some competent adviser looking on and coaching them. It is a commonplace that all school elevens, whatever their batting and bowling are like, should field almost if not quite as well as a first-class team. Certainly this is true of the larger schools. Much improvement can be brought about in an individual boy's fielding if he is taken separately, fed with various kinds of catches and ground balls and told each time whether he has

fielded the ball properly or not. Boys, and I am afraid men too, are in the habit of missing in matches catches they would hold with perfect ease in practice. This is no doubt due to nervousness. Here, again, nothing but practice can do much good. Nervousness often disappears as experience grows. After all, courage and nerve are largely matters of habit. A sailor would fear to tackle a herd of unruly cattle just as much as a stockman would fear to run up a high rigging. But both may be brave and steady enough in circumstances to which they are accustomed. So with cricket. A steeple-high catch in the country begins to lose its terrors when one has caught a dozen such the evening before at fielding practice.

With regard to catching, it is impossible to lay down any hard and fast rules as to the best methods. My own short experience has shown me that catches may be well caught with the hands in all sorts of positions. Of these some are clearly better than others theoretically. But theories have a way of not meeting particular cases, so one can hardly afford to dogmatise.

One point worth remembering in catching, and in a less degree in fielding, any ball, is to let the hands give as the ball enters them, so that the resistance is less. It is a mistake to hold the arms and hands stiff. It only encourages the ball to bounce out. Besides, if the ball is hit hard and meets with a pair of unrelenting hands, it usually hurts them. Some misguided fielders go one better than fixity. They seem to grab at the ball as one would catch flies, or hit at it as one would at a fives-ball. Neither of these methods is conducive to good catching. Fielders should accustom themselves to catch balls, both when running and standing still, with both hands and with either. If possible it is best to get to a catch in time, and take it standing still with both hands. But sometimes, of course, this is impossible, and a really brilliant catch may be made by a fine fielder running hard and using only one hand. Unfortunately one often sees catches attempted in this brilliant manner which ought to have been made safe in the other and safer way. There is far more merit in making a catch easy by good judgment than in bringing off a very difficult catch, rendered such by lateness in starting.

A man can hardly be considered a really first-rate fielder until he can field well in every position in the field, except perhaps at the wicket. Most fielders have a favourite



position in which they can do better than anywhere else. But it is a pity not to learn the requirements of all the positions. A general education is good even for a specialist. One often has to go to four or five different places in a match to save another fielder a long walk every change of over, or to suit the other members of the side. I do not for one moment mean to suggest that fielders should be or are placed indiscriminately, without any reference to their special inclinations and capabilities. Quite the contrary. The arrangement to aim at is "every man in his right place." A man may be a magnificent fielder at mid-off, but quite moderate at short-slip. Clearly, if you have on your side an equally good slip but not an equally good mid-off, it is false economy to put the brilliant mid-off at slip because he happens to be a noted fielder and slip a difficult position. It is strange, but true, that the moment a wrong man is put in a wrong place a catch goes to him and he misses it. A thorough attention to detail pays at cricket, and besides paying, is right and proper. The longer one plays the more does it come home to one that matters which seem trifling in themselves are liable to make or mar a match. I once saw a man put short-slip in a university match who had never fielded there before, though elsewhere he was, if anything, above the average. He was only there one over, but he missed an easy catch given by a good bat, who took advantage of his escape to the tune of a century. There were four or five men on the side who would have caught that catch for a certainty. But "it didn't matter for one over." No; but it mattered for a considerable number of overs afterwards. Everything matters in cricket, as in all other games worth playing.

A noticeable characteristic of a high-class field is his consistent alertness. He gives one the idea that he expects every ball to come to him. When the ball is hit he seems to get by instinct into the exact place to field it. Indeed he starts sometimes before the stroke is fully made. Dr. E. M. Grace has often caught a man out from point literally off his bat, within a couple of feet of it. He could see by the way the batsman shaped that he was going to let the ball hit and drop off his bat. Quick starting is half the secret of covering a lot of ground. Even without much pace an attentive fielder can be here, there and everywhere if he watches bowler and batsman with all his might. Whenever a fielder seems surprised that

a ball has been hit near him, it may be inferred he is thinking of something else—race-horses, stocks and shares, or lunch. It is sound to advise fielders to so watch every ball bowled as if it were to be hit to them. The value of a quick start cannot be over-estimated. Often an apparently impossible catch is easily secured because the fielder was ready to start. Surely it is not much to ask of a fielder always to be ready. Yet how few really are. The difference in the behaviour of a side during the first innings of their opponents, and during the second, when matters are approaching a crisis, is extraordinary. In the former case things are allowed to drift and arrange themselves; in the latter, matters have to be forced into one definite result—a win. Nothing shows the real grit of a side more than what is called "dash." Dash is difficult to define,



From a photo by

[E. Hawkins, Brighton.]

DR. E. M. GRACE.

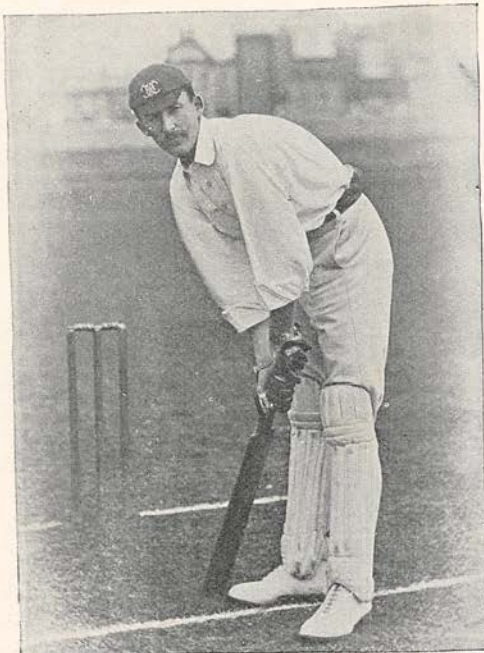
but it is the characteristic of some individuals and some sides. Dash wins matches. It is unmistakable. Watch a fielder. You can tell in a moment whether or not he has this invaluable quality. His expectant look, his eager watching of the bowler, indicate a determination to start at once. The very poise of his body shows readiness. He seems asking for work—catches for choice. But every hit means for him a chance of helping his own side by stopping the ball at all hazards. Nothing is more desirable in a fielder than an earnest intention to do his best and no less. It is so easy to "skulk" in the field. Only the keen judge and the fielder himself know that the last four might have been saved by a trifle more alertness. It is a good cricketer who fields to win whether fortune frowns or smiles.

It is sometimes very difficult to sustain a spirit of keenness and emulation among boys.



They are liable to be very slack about fielding. Perhaps the best preventive is to make the games interesting by arranging matches between dormitories, houses, against masters or past members—anything, in fact, for the sake of a match. "Pick-ups" rarely succeed. Slackness in the field is an abomination, for it is absolutely unnecessary. Boys are sure to be slack unless their interest is aroused. So the more matches, such as those mentioned above, are played, the better for the school. Practice in actual games and matches does much more good than any other—partly because the exact conditions required are present, partly because more keenness and

would have played in any case are not touched, while those who would have shirked or loafed are forced to take exercise and become energetic members of school society. There may be much reason in this. But somehow compulsory cricket seems almost a contradiction in terms. Like every other thing worth doing, cricket entails a certain amount of drudgery during the earlier stages of learning the game. But the pleasures inseparable from the use of bat and ball are surely a good enough set-off against this drudgery, especially as the reward of hard work is so apparent in the fine performances of those who have had patience and endurance to go through with the preliminary toils and troubles. One can sympathise with the man who has had no opportunity of learning cricket, and with the man who has done his best to become a cricketer but has failed; but to condemn him who has never cared for the game when he could have played, or has refused to regard it as worth any trouble, words are scarcely expressive enough. There never was a genuine Englishman but played cricket or wished he did. Something must be very wrong with a boy, or with the game of cricket offered him, if he does not care for the game. Decadence is bad enough in Bohemia, but at school—well, how does it get there? It always seems to me that boys require to be educated in cricket on lines rather different from those usually followed. There are many good coaches who teach them excellently and conscientiously the grammar of the game, but who entirely fail to imbue them with its true spirit. This point is rather difficult to explain. The mistake is somewhat like that of making a lesson in Virgil nothing but a means whereby syntax and grammar may be raked into the youthful brain. Of course grammar and syntax are necessary and proper as a training for the mind. And the corresponding dry bones of cricket are equally important as a framework round which a knowledge of the game may be built. But would it not be possible to find means of bringing home to the youthful mind some of the intrinsic beauty of cricket? All good things done well are beautiful. There is much more in a fine off-drive or a well-bowled ball than the resulting fourer or wicket. I am far from regarding cricket as the most important thing in life; but it is the best game, and games are a very valuable part of life. If a boy were taken to a match in which Mr. Lionel PalaiRET was making runs, and were shown the difference between that player's



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[E. Hawkins, Brighton.

MR. LIONEL C. H. PALAIRET.

interest are attached to the play. Excellence in cricket cannot be reached except through a strong love for the game. Anything in the shape of compulsory cricket at schools seems to me inimical to the best interests of cricket. Boys who go into the field against their own desires will make but little progress in the game. It ought not to be necessary to have to force cricket down boys' throats. It seems hard to believe that any boy who was once shown what a splendid game it is should have the least desire not to play on all possible, and sometimes impossible, occasions. Perhaps it is argued that by making the game compulsory those who



strokes and those of the more ordinary performers, he would, I think, go home with something in his mind that would tend to improve his cricket and increase his love of it. There is an element of the heroic in cricket which is not found in other games; at least, so it strikes me. I can imagine Agamemnon, Achilles, and their peers, not unbecomingly engaged in a cricket-match. There is nothing small, or mean, or undignified in the game itself, though it must be confessed that such straits are sometimes imported into it by its less high-minded exponents. Boys should try too of themselves to find out what there is in cricket besides runs and wickets. There is a lot. There is a charm that is too subtle to be thought out and expressed but which can be felt and enjoyed.

But to return to fielding and its difficulties. There is nearly always trouble at school over the wicket-keeper. Wicket-keeping requires an immense amount of practice, and properly conducted practice. This will be explained when the position is criticised in detail. It may be mentioned here that it is difficult to get proper wicket-keeping practice except in matches, and matches are sometimes few and far between. Perhaps it is a good thing to practise for a short time almost daily at a net while someone is batting. It is not much use practising wicket-keeping without a batsman at the wicket. Though this may be done in the very early stage of learning the art, care must be taken not to overdo practice. Boys should never practise wicket-keeping to fast bowlers on rough wickets. Hard knocks received during practice without the compensating feeling that they are being incurred in the service of his side, as in a match, are very liable to bruise any capacity he may possess out of the beginner. It is always advisable in a school to put several boys to keep wicket. At the worst their fielding will be much improved by it. Indeed there is no better medicine for a really bad fielder than being made to keep wicket. The instinct of self-preservation will do much to make him use his hands better than is his wont. Besides, he will learn a good deal he did not know about batting and bowling from a fielder's point of view, for he will find out that certain things happen when certain balls are bowled or certain strokes attempted. He will learn the habit of constant attention, and the desirability of making hand and eye work closely together. Wicket-keepers are always good catchers, because they have learnt the

knack of letting the ball come well into their hands.

In arranging fielding practice great care should be taken not to overwork boys. Nothing is more apt than fatigue to take a boy's keenness out of the game. One often sees boys giving up through sheer exhaustion in matches. Now the way to gain stamina is not to get tired five days a week with a view to being able to last on the sixth. The proper way is to have keen practices for very short spells.

There are certain rules which apply to all fieldsmen, viz. :—

1. Keep the legs together when the ball is hit straight to you and while you are picking it up.
2. Always back up the man who is receiving the ball at the wicket, when it is thrown in; but not too close.
3. Do not fail to try for a catch, however impossible it may seem.
4. Always be on the look-out and ready to start.
5. Run at top speed, but not rashly, the moment the ball is hit.
6. Use both hands whenever possible.
7. Do not get nervous if you make a mistake.
8. Obey your captain cheerfully and promptly.
9. Never be slack about taking up the exact position assigned to you; never move about in an aimless, fidgety manner.

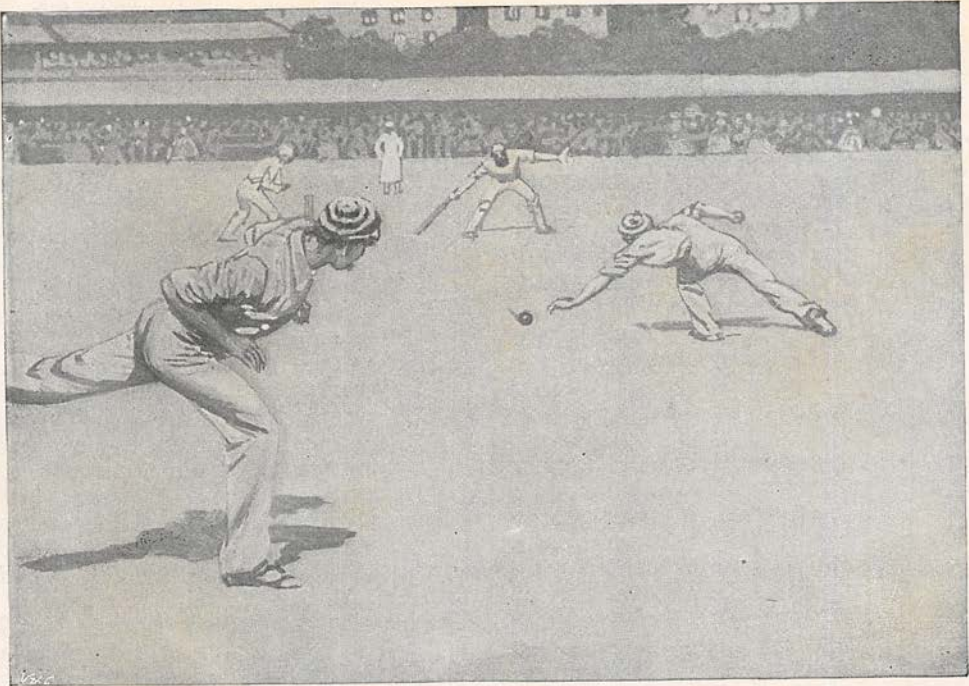
On one point there is a difference of opinion among the authorities. Where should the fieldsmen look until the ball is played? At the bowler or at the batsman? The question cannot be answered off-hand. It depends very much upon the position of the fielder, and also to a certain extent upon the pace of the bowler. My own opinion is that the ball should be followed with the eye all the way from the bowler's hand to the fielder's. But many cricketers have told me that they have no time to do this when fielding near the wicket—at short-slip, for instance—especially when a fast bowler is on. Some look at the bowler until he is on the point of delivering the ball and then transfer their attention to the batsman. Others glue their eyes on the bat until the stroke is made. Both these methods are open to the objection that the eye is taken off the ball, which is the real object that it ought to follow, because by some process the body, hands, legs, and every limb have a tendency to act closely with the eye when



it follows a moving object uninterruptedly, and it is just this close co-operation of body and eye which is so necessary in fielding. Everyone must work out this point for himself. If his heart is in the work, if he is fielding really keenly, the best method will come to him naturally.

Another question which requires the attention of fielders is that of backing-up. When ought a fielder to back-up, and why is it necessary to do so? Let us suppose that a three has been hit, and that the fieldsman in the country has thrown the ball in towards either the wicket-keeper or the bowler. Granted that the throw be accurate, many

the ball not be stopped at the wicket. Where possible, two or even three fielders should back up, because the one nearest the wicket may also fail to stop the ball. The knowledge that someone will be absolutely sure to back-up gives confidence both to the thrower and to the man at the wicket, and this confidence will help them to do their part better. Care must be taken not to get too close to the man you are backing-up or your purpose may be rendered futile. From 10 to 12 yards away is the nearest distance that is of any use. The point is to be far enough away to be able to stop a wild throw, but near enough to make sure that



BACKING-UP.

things may happen. The ball may bump or shoot so as to beat the man at the wicket, in which case, if no one is behind him backing him up, the ball will travel to the boundary on the opposite side to that towards which it was originally hit. In other words, an overthrow for four would result. Again, the ball sometimes twists away from the intended recipient, or the latter may make a blunder and miss it. Finally, the throw may be too wide or too high to reach, or difficult to take because of its length—i.e., it may come to the wicket a half-volley or a yorker. In all these cases runs are saved by backing-up should

the batsman cannot run another run after the ball has passed the wicket. As to when it is necessary to back-up, the answer is, Always. Whenever the ball is hit on one side of the wicket, someone ought to be backing-up on the other, in order to be ready in good time. The general rule is, that whenever a throw-in is being made, the two or three fielders who are in the most convenient position to back-up should do so without fail. Proper backing-up saves innumerable runs. Scarcely a match passes without some runs being lost for the want of it.

The value of good throwing has already



been mentioned. Throwing is a gift of nature capable of improvement by practice. It is absolutely essential for every fielder to cultivate his throwing powers. Some men cannot throw far, but all can learn to throw accurately. Some are much slower in returning the ball than others, but the slowest can improve considerably by continually trying to throw more smartly. After all, it is rarely necessary to make the ball pitch more than 60 yards from you in order to get it to the wicket first bounce. It is very easy to practise throwing. If a stump be placed in the middle of the ground, and one man stands about 60 yards

on one side and another a corresponding distance on the other, there is no difficulty in the matter. Each fields and throws in turn, and whether the throw be good or bad can easily be seen. It is most important to learn to throw without the slightest hesitation, for hesitation on the part of the thrower is exactly what decides the batsmen to attempt a second run; and it is a safe run nine cases out of ten, at any rate when the ball is in the long-field. Any fumbling or mishandling of the ball is fatal. Stopping to consider to which end to throw means a safe run. There is no harm in

repeating that in throwing from the country your object should be to let the ball arrive on the long-hop just above the bails, but that from a position nearer the wicket a full-pitch in the same spot is the more rapid and convenient. Above all, avoid sending in half-volleys or yorkers.

One of the most senseless things a fielder can do is to throw the ball hard when there is no need. The wicket-keeper has quite enough knocking about from the bowlers without having to stop such throws. As for the bowler, his hands should be regarded as sacred. Some people think that a fielder ought never to throw at the wicket itself

with the object of running a man out without the help of the man at the wicket. I cannot agree with this. If there is a chance of running a man out thus, but none of doing so by co-operation, it is worth while trying to knock the wicket down with a throw. If by chance no one is at the wicket, it is worth while having a shot at the stumps, even at the risk of a boundary, because every wicket is worth more than four runs. George Bean has got a wonderful number of wickets for Sussex by throwing men out from cover-point.

Among other miscellaneous points, one is worth noticing. When the ball is travelling

towards the boundary, and the fieldsman is running in the same direction, it is customary for him to get within reach of it and then dive forward for it as one would try to catch a rabbit. The ball is in front of the fielder when he tries to gather it. Now, unless the exact distance be accurately judged, the ball is very liable to be missed by this method, and once missed delay is inevitable. It is far better to catch the ball up, and when level with it, or slightly past it, drop the hand a foot or so in front of it. By this method the ball runs into the hand, and there is a slighter margin for error. In the other the hand follows after the ball, and obviously

cannot go farther than the length of the arm after it; consequently if the hand be even an eighth of an inch behind the ball when the dive is made, there is no chance of picking it up. If the method I suggest—not that it is original—be followed, the fieldsman is in a much better position from which to rise into an attitude convenient for throwing. He is in a compact position at the time of picking up the ball instead of being spread-eagled forwards. It requires some agility to gather the ball and throw it in with almost one action, even by using the method suggested; but it is possible to do so; whereas by using the other method it is impossible.



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[E. Hawkins, Brighton.

GEORGE BEAN.

(Sussex.)