

THE PAVILION AT LORD'S CRICKET GROUND.

CRICKETERS I HAVE MET.

By C. B. FRY.

Illustrated by G. C. HOME ; and from Photographs by R. THIELE and E. HAWKINS.



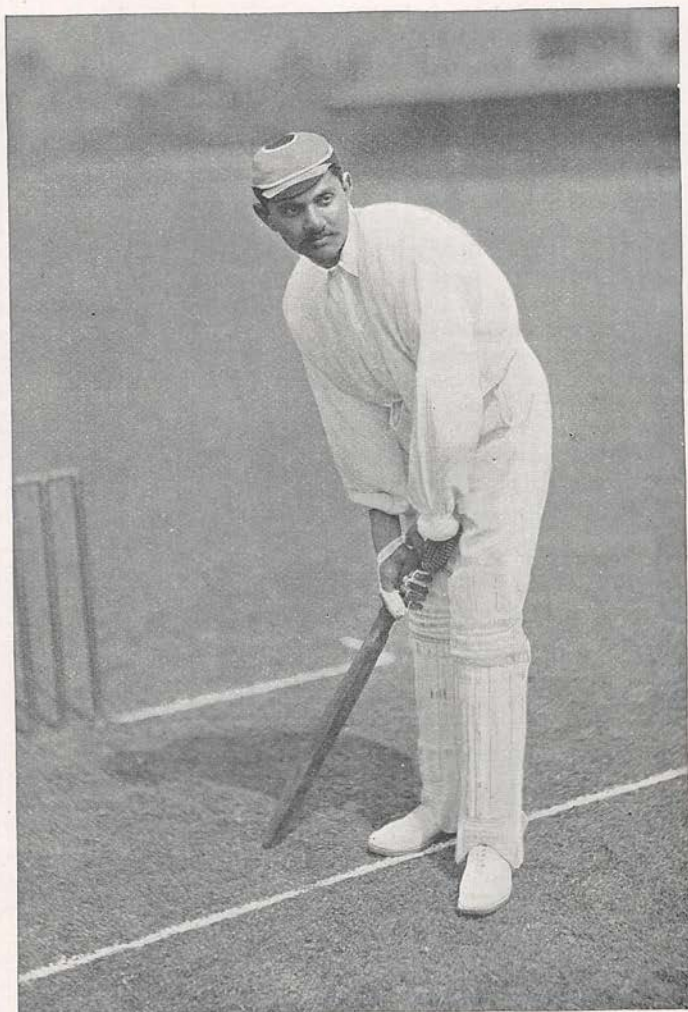
HALF the charm of playing cricket is that you knock up against men as they really are. There is something in the game that smothers pretence and affectation, and gives air to character. You cannot be a cricketer and stay in your shell, your inwardness must come out in your play. Most people devoted to the game have quite forgotten the use of their shells, if they ever had them. Cricket finds the truth even more surely than wine does ; so it speaks well for human kind that no pleasanter fellow is to be met than the typical cricketer. Perhaps the game and its conditions give small scope for what is ungracious in man, or one may see the rosy side only of individuals in this connection. A nicer belief is that by playing cricket

people save themselves from becoming what by nature they are not. An optimistic view ? Well, optimism goes well with cricket. No one who can hit a fourer, bowl a yorker, or hold a swinging drive at long-on has any right to regard life otherwise than as desirable. Skill in cricket may not be the greatest good, but possessed even in a moderate degree, it can help more than many other possessions towards happiness. The game is full of fresh air and sunshine, internal as well as external. There is generous life in it, simplicity and strength, freedom and enthusiasm, such as prevailed before things in general became quite as complex and conventional as nowadays. One gets from cricket a dim glimpse of the youth of the world. And cricket hurts nobody—it has even sufficient intrinsic nobility not to hurt

itself. There is nothing in it that makes for what is mean or narrow. To have become deeply mixed up with money without deteriorating in the process is test enough of soundness and merit. A form of recreation free from all tendency to degrade either those who play or those who pay must have much to recommend it, if one may judge from what has happened elsewhere. There is no need to sigh for the good old days of cricket. Times are not so bad. People bat and bowl a bit better and know more of the game than they used. Huge crowds congregate to amuse themselves looking on. There is money in the game and hosts of professionals—good luck to them! But the same old game is with us yet awhile to foster skill of hand and eye, suggest pleasant acquaintances, breed strong friendships and coin striking personalities.

What, then, has come out of cricket lately? The brightest figure is Kumar Shri Ranjit Sinhji, whom we all love for his supple wrist, silk shirt, and genial ways. A volume might be written about him, for he contains much besides runs. Viewed as a cricketer, he is decidedly a subject for appreciation—except to bowlers. He makes enormous scores with the consistency so dear to the British heart, and makes them by such original methods. There is little of the old school about Ranji. But then he is a genius, and none the worse for it. There is that in his strokes which baffles the most confident analyst. One feels inclined to say with a certain profane cricketer, "Come, Ranji, this isn't cricket, it's infernal juggling!" But fortunately it is cricket, and the very best. No one ever wants him to stop getting runs. It is so exciting to wonder what is coming next, and there is no waiting. Even bowlers find a sneaking pleasure in seeing him spoil their analyses. They want to discover how he

does it. Fielders do not mind scouting-out, as W. G. calls it, for hours when Ranji is in. He provides fun and new sensations. As for the man in the crowd, he has come many miles for this, and is proportionately pleased. From the average batsman's point of view Ranji is a marvel and a despair. "Yes, he



From a photo by]

[Thiele.

KUMAR SHRI RANJIT SINHIJI.

(Sussex.)

can play," said some one once; "but he must have a lot of Satan in him." Certainly one would not be surprised sometimes to see a brown curve burnt in the grass where one of his cuts has travelled, or blue flame shiver round his bat in the making of one of those leg-strokes. Yet there is nothing satanic about Ranji except his skill. He is mellow

and kind and single-hearted, and has no spark of jealousy in his composition. No one has a keener eye for what is good in other people; the better they play the more he likes it. He is a cricketer to the tips of his slim fingers, an artist with an artist's eye for the game. With the stroke that scores four to leg when the ball was meant to go over the bowler's head he has no sympathy. He is very amusing on the subject of what he calls "cuts-to-leg." Apart from their value to his side, Ranji's big innings please him in proportion as each stroke approaches perfection. He tries to make every stroke a thing of beauty in itself, and he does mean so well by the ball while he is in. His great success is partly due to this attitude of mind; but there are other reasons why he is, on all but the stickiest of wickets, the best bat now playing. He starts with one or two enormous advantages, which he has pressed home. He has a wonderful power of sight which enables him to judge the flight of a ball in the air an appreciable fraction of a second sooner than any other batsman, and probably a trifle more accurately. He can therefore decide in better time what stroke is wanted, and can make sure of getting into the right position to make it. So he is rarely caught, as most of us are, doing two things at once—moving into an attitude and playing at the ball simultaneously. Even in cases where body movement is part of the stroke he is the gainer, for besides quickness of judgment he has an extraordinary quickness of execution. Practically he has no personal error. His desire to act and his action seem to coincide. This enables him to make safely strokes that for others to dream of attempting would be folly. But with far less natural quickness Ranji would have been a great cricketer for the simple reason that he is a great observer, with the faculty for digesting observations and acting upon them. He takes nothing on trust. He sees a thing, makes it his own and develops it. Many of his innumerable strokes were originally learnt from other players, but in the process of being thought out and practised, have improved past recognition. This is due partly to his natural powers—eye, quickness and elasticity—and partly to his hatred of leaving anything he takes up before bringing it to the highest pitch of which he is capable. At present he is engaged upon a new stroke that makes his friends' hair stand on end. Before the season is over he will have scored many a hundred

runs with it. "As if you hadn't enough strokes already!" sighs William Murdoch. Ranji has made a science of taking liberties. One may fairly suspect him of regarding Tom Richardson's best ball as bowled in the interest of cutting and driving rather than with a view to hitting the sticks. Not that he ever despises bowling, however cavalierly he may seem to treat it. While at the wickets he takes it entirely under his own management. It is a musical instrument upon which he plays, often improvising; a block of stone which he carves into shape to his taste, not with vague smashing blows, but with swift, firm, skilful strokes. His work has a fine finish; there is nothing crude or amateurish about it. And such a touch! It may be of interest to know that Ranji has worked very hard indeed at cricket. Some of his strokes have cost months of careful net-practice. He does nothing blindly. He thinks about the game, starts a theory, and proceeds to find out what use it is. Some of his strokes again were discovered by accident. For instance, his inimitable leg-play began thus: When a boy he started with the usual fault of running away from every fast ball that threatened to hit him. But instead of edging off towards square-leg, as most boys do, he used, with characteristic originality, to slip across the wicket towards point. Suddenly he found out that by moving the left leg across towards the off, keeping his bat on the leg side of it and facing the ball quite squarely with his body, he could watch the ball on to the bat and play it away to leg with a twist of the wrist. Nowadays he can place to leg within a foot of where he wishes almost any ball that pitches between wicket and wicket. His back play is as safe as a castle, and he scores with it repeatedly. His idea is that to be a good bat a mastery of both back and forward play is necessary, but that of the two the former is the more important. He has a slight prejudice against forward play for forcing strokes. There is a moment in a forward stroke when the ball is out of sight and the stroke is being played on faith, so that if the ball does anything unexpected, or the judgment is at all at fault, it is mere chance whether the stroke be good or bad. This opinion is amply borne out by the fact that players who depend entirely upon forward strokes cannot make runs consistently except on true wickets. Why does he ever get out? Perhaps he knows himself. There may be reasons, but they are not apparent.

Perhaps Stanley Jackson would be a good authority to consult on the point. He knows most things about cricket, and would



From a photo by

MR. F. S. JACKSON.

(Yorkshire.)

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certainly not be at a loss for an answer. "Jacker" is never at a loss in any circumstances. He and Lionel Palairet, two rival University captains of a year or two ago, stand out a head and shoulders above the younger generation of batsmen, with the exception of Ranjit Sinhji and Archie McLaren. Perhaps Ranjit Sinhji is best left in a class by himself. Archie McLaren is not able to play much till August, so he is somewhat handicapped. Jackson is undoubtedly the best all round cricketer of the day, and is probably the very best batsman on a sticky wicket, now that Arthur Shrewsbury has given up playing regularly. Some people might offer Hayward as a serious rival in all-round-man excellence, but the Surrey professional is not quite as good a bat, and no better a bowler. Like Ranjit Sinhji, Jackson is very safe in his back play, and can use it as a means of scoring as well as of defence. He is clever in placing the ball away to the on-side both with drives and wrist strokes. He does not use the ordinary forward style much, though he stops many difficult balls with a "half-cock" stroke—something between back and forward. His driving is exceptionally clean and fine. Few players score more rapidly than he,

though his style is very safe. He always gives an impression of being all there, and having a very definite idea what ought to be done and how to do it. Nothing excites him much; nothing can put him off his guard. Yet there is much enthusiasm for cricket behind those somewhat cold blue eyes and that unruffled brow. By-the-bye, Jacker's eyes always look as if they must see clear and straight. He has many interests and much ambition—chiefly political. What is more, he is sure to succeed. The old story of his having replied to congratulations on a fine innings for Harrow with the remark, "Yes, I'm glad I made some runs; it will give my governor a leg-up," bears repetition, though Jacker denies its authenticity. There is no need to. A run-getting son is worth a lot—nearly as much as a Derby winner.

Talking of race-horses suggests Lionel Palairet, who is without exception the most thorough-bred batsman now playing. His strokes are all "blood." As a pure stylist he is unsurpassed and few are more effective. He has not Ranjit Sinhji's extraordinary versatility or inexpressible electric quality, nor does he watch the ball quite as closely and safely as Jackson, but there is infinite beauty and charm in all his movements. The only thing I have seen in athletics to equal his gracefulness was Reggie Rowe's rowing. It is as impossible for Lionel Palairet to make an ugly

stroke as it is for a silver birch tree to swing in unharmonious curves. No one could watch him batting without catching the meaning of the poetry of motion. He seems to attain the maximum of power with the minimum of exertion.



From a photo by

MR. S. M. J. WOODS.

[Thiele

All his strokes are easy and unforced. Most of his runs come from off-drives. His treatment of good length balls on or outside the off-stump is masterly. The left leg goes well across, body, arms and bat swing easily to meet the ball close by the leg, and extra-

his style was formed in early boyhood by home practice with such accurate bowlers as Attewell and Martin. Much of his perfection of style is the result of a very careful education. His methods were irreproachable before he went to school, and he has improved every year he has played. At one time he showed an inclination to go in for pure hitting, but he gave it up in favour of a forward style. He is nevertheless an exceptionally fine hitter, and plants as many balls as anyone into the churchyard that adjoins the Taunton ground. His hits fly like good golf drives. Nothing in cricket could be finer than some of his partnerships with H. T. Hewett. Pure style at one end, sheer force at the other, and a century or two on the board with no figures beneath. No wonder the West-countrymen like the cricket at Taunton. For even if Palairt fails to give them their money's worth, there is Sammy Woods coming in later on to upset all apple-carts.

Sammy could upset anything, and looks the part. To begin with he is a giant. He seems big and strong in his clothes, but stripped his physique is even more striking. The power in his huge thighs, long back and knotted shoulders is colossal. He does not bowl as fast as he used, nor quite as well. "I have to pretend I'm bowling now," he says. But he is a pretty good bowler still for all that, and will help the Gentlemen to get the Players out at Lord's for many years to come. If his bowling has deteriorated a bit his batting has improved to a corresponding extent. He maintains he was always as good a bat as now but did not have a chance. "They condemned me to be a bowler," he complains. Who "they" may be is a mystery, for he has been captain of his own side



From a photo by]

RICHARDSON.
(Surrey.)

[Thiele.

cover scarcely sees the ball as it shoots to the boundary between himself and cover. The value of these off-strokes, now that the off-theory is universally adopted by bowlers, can readily be appreciated. Palairt has not cultivated strokes on the leg side to the same extent as those on the off, probably because

much more often than not, and would certainly have persuaded anyone else to let him go in where he wanted. Sammy has wonderfully persuasive ways, with his soft voice, confiding smile and decisive chin. On foreign tours with Lord Hawke's team his innocent inquiry, "Who's coming in first with me, Martin?" is as much an institution as the toss for choice of innings. And he is a rare good man to go in first, for if he stays an over or two he makes complete hay of the bowling. Not that he mows

often. He keeps his bat very straight and hits with several horse-power from his heavy shoulders. He is the Ajax of the cricket field and would defy any lightning. He has not much wrist but makes up for the deficiency by forearm. Most of his strokes are drives, and genuine drives. He has a particular liking for the Surrey bowlers, generally managing to carve about eighty runs out of Lockwood's and Richardson's best stuff. It is always a solemn moment at the Oval when "Greatheart," swelling with courage and pursing his lips into that child-like smile, comes from the pavilion to set right the failure of half his side. There is no better man than he to go in when the wicket is bad or things

are going wrong, though he does sometimes play forward to a straight ball with his eyes turned full upon the square-leg umpire—a stroke he repudiates and never fails to use successfully once or twice an innings. As a man and a brother he is undefeated, and he is the best captain imaginable. No captain knows more of the game or uses his knowledge better. He has boundless enthusiasm, and the power of infusing a strong solution of it into others. What is more he tries every ounce and makes others try also. He thoroughly deserves his enormous

popularity. It will be a shame if he ever goes back to Australia.

Woods' bowling mantle has fallen on a worthy successor, that is if it really has fallen, which is not certain. A fast bowler has risen among us who can bowl all day with consummate pleasure to himself and profit to his side—Tom Richardson. Tom may not have Woods' knowledge of the art of bowling nor his finished command of the ball, but he has a bigger break and more sheer pace, and he has equal energy and as

large a heart, which is saying a good deal. There is a difference in their methods. Woods at his best used to get most of his wickets by his clever variations of pace and that deadly yorker. Richardson pegs away with the same good length ball, trusting his natural break to beat the bat. On the whole the latter has met with more success than the former ever did. But it must be remembered that the one has always had some strong bowlers to back him up, whereas the other has, times out of mind, had to do all the bowling for his side both in Varsity and county cricket. Some people consider Richardson to be the best fast bowler ever seen, and certainly his performances are enough to

justify such an opinion. Personally I think Lockwood in his best form is rather more difficult, and Arthur Mold bowls a most unplayable ball at times. One is quite content to be fired out by any of the three. But Richardson is the most consistent and has the greater lasting power. And herein is his great merit and the secret of his success. He can bowl for hours without tiring or losing sting, and seems never to have an off-day. This is marvellous when the immense amount of work he has to get through during a season is taken into



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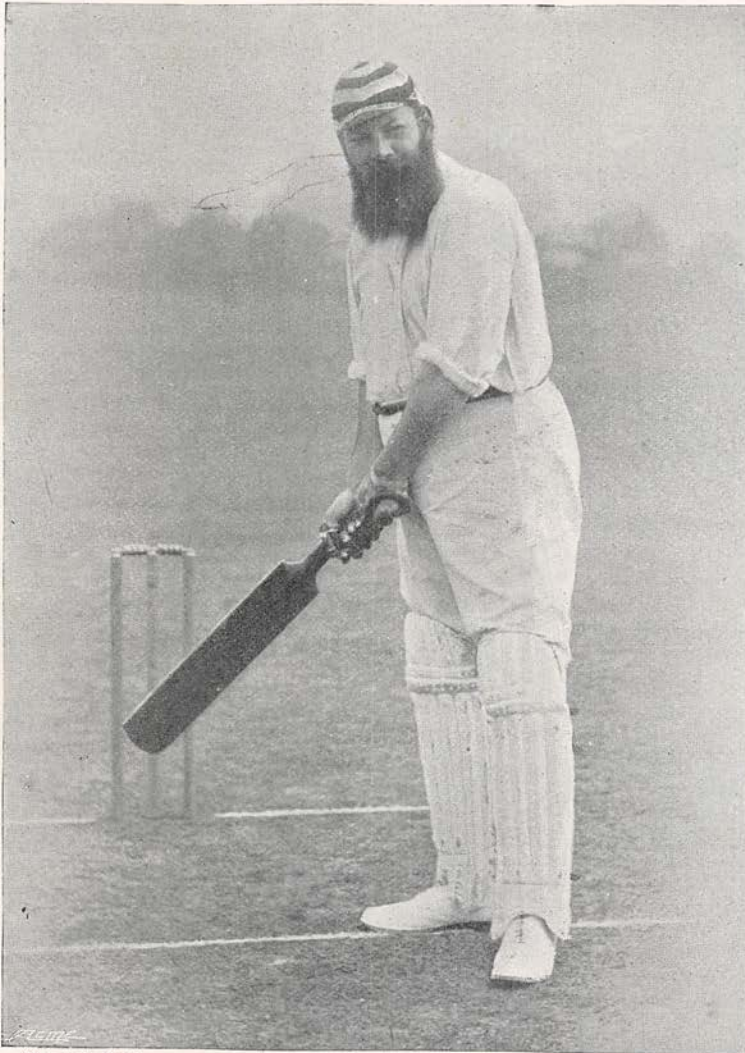
ABEL.
(Surrey.)

[Thiele.

consideration. Of course he has magnificent physique and keeps himself in perfect condition. His arm is like the thong of a stock-whip and his leg as hard as oak. Most of his pace comes from the small of his back, which must have double-action Damascus-steel fittings. He is the cheeriest and

“Governor” is usually batting or sitting still thinking how he is going to bat. The bowler is nearly seven feet high, with black hair and eyes and a southern complexion, something between a Pyrenean brigand and a smiling Neapolitan, brimful of fire and nervous strength. The batsman stands

scarcely five feet in his buckskins. His face is ruddy and wrinkled, and suggests premature age or many cares. He has the peculiar serious expression common to grooms and music-hall artists; one is never quite certain whether he has just lost a dear relative or is on the point of saying something very funny. He never smiles even after he has passed his second century. But he has the reputation of being a jester of the first water. There are no two ways about his batting. He gathers runs like blackberries everywhere he goes, and is very popular on that account, and on the principle of “go it, little un!” The average Cockney at the Oval suspects him of a wealth of cunning—“ikey” little dodges for outwitting the bowlers—and chuckles over all his strokes. As a matter of fact he is a conscientious player, with wonderful patience



From a photo by]

DR. W. G. GRACE.

[E. Hawkins & Co., Brighton.

and perseverance, and a very good eye. heartiest of mortals and has a splendid appetite. They keep special steaks for him at the Oval. He needs them.

A greater contrast than between Tom Richardson and Bobby Abel it would be difficult to imagine. Look at them as they walk round outside the ropes together—a rare occurrence to begin with, because the

K. S. Ranjit Sinhji, F. S. Jackson, L. C. H. Palaret, S. M. J. Woods, Richardson and Abel, form the nucleus of a grand side. Would W. G. be there? I hope so, for he is indispensable, an integral part of the game. When one writes on cricket W. G. is taken for granted.