

PRINCE RANJIT SINHJI:

AN APPRECIATION OF THE MAN AND HIS BOOK.

By J. V. MORTON.



PRINCE RANJIT SINHJI has written a most interesting book on cricket. The readers of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE had — as doubtless will be in the recollection of most of its quality some time

— a sample before it was published. Cricket enthusiasts will find, if they have not already done so, that this fascinating volume contains “infinite riches in a little room,” as Kit Marlowe said of a library. The publishers too, Messrs. Blackwood & Sons, have done justice to the work by producing it in an attractive style suitable for all purses. The *édition de luxe* consists of 350 copies, each copy is signed by Ranji, and the price is five guineas per copy. Then there is

a fine paper edition at £1 5s. a copy, and a popular edition at 6s. each. The only difference, apart from the quality of the paper, binding, etc., between the popular edition and the more luxurious one is that in the latter many of the plates are photogravures. The letterpress and the pictures are the same in all editions.

When I heard—it seems ages ago—that Ranjit Sinhji was writing a book on the game of which he is so brilliant an exponent, I wondered whether he would find the materials for it after the manner of the German poet who said, “Some god gave me the power to paint what I have suffered.”

It is certainly the most realistic, and therefore the most effective way of writing. To convert your aches into “copy” is the most approved form of literary art; and the process is said to afford the highest moral, if not material, consolation. That Ranji has suffered, and suffered acutely in body and mind, in acquiring his remarkable proficiency in cricket may very well be taken for granted. You cannot cull that exquisite flower, superior excel-



PRINCE RANJIT SINHJI.

lence, without going through the dark valley of tribulation. But now that I have read his book, I readily admit that whatever suffering the learning of the game, and whatever trouble the writing of the book may have involved, the reading of it is a decidedly pleasant task. We get in it delightful glimpses of the author's piquant

personality. His experience creeps in and out of an interesting series of observations like a silver stream threading its way through a broad and beautiful valley.

"If a man write a book," said Goethe, "let him set down only what he knows." That is no doubt an ideal conception of an author's function. It eliminates imagination altogether, without which no book is worth reading. But if an author can, within well-defined limits, obey the principle underlying that dictum, his book will gain in quality and individuality—two very essential possessions, whether in a book or a man. Ranjit Singh's book, in its conception and general outline, answers to this requirement, and is to be treasured on that account. Few people, if any, will dispute the statement that Ranji understands cricket thoroughly, scientifically. I shall even venture to say that no one is more familiar with the weak

points of the game; no one is more conscious of its strength; and there is, probably, no prettier or more graceful bat in all England than Ranji. Certainly no Sultan Amurath ever struck off Persian heads for the anatomical education of his physician with greater goodwill and greater indifference to the magnitude of the enterprise than Ranji hits off "centuries" for the delectation of the lovers of our national game. How centuries

may be piled up—if one could but follow advice in these matters—is clearly, and sometimes eloquently, set forth in his book. And greater praise than this it is impossible to bestow on a book dealing with cricket. There are many books on cricket; there are scores of first-class cricketers in the kingdom; but there is only one book—the book itself—like that of Ranji's, as there is only one Ranjit Singh among first-class cricketers.

To be able to play so well as Ranji does must involve an amount of study and practice which, one would imagine, left him little leisure and less inclination to sit down to the difficult task of writing a book. How did he do it? What made him do it? These questions he was good enough to answer me the other day when I spent an afternoon with him.

"The book originated in this way," said Ranji. "Some time ago I had a visit from a clever journalist who is

friendly with the firm of Messrs. Blackwood, publishers. He asked me if I would write a manual on cricket for the use of school-boys. I told him that another firm of publishers had already approached me on the subject. Then he asked me to write a larger book, a kind of text-book, dealing with all phases of the game. This seemed to me at the time a rather large undertaking, especially as I had only taken notes for a



PRINCE RANJIT SINHJI IN INDIAN DRESS.

small book. However I promised him that I would consider the matter.

"Soon afterwards I fell ill; a slight congestion of the lungs compelled me to remain in bed for about ten weeks. During that time the whole scheme of the book unfolded itself to me. I there and then decided to write it, and as soon as I was able to sit up I sent for a shorthand writer and dictated my share of the book. He transcribed his notes, and I went over them, correcting and enlarging where amplification was necessary. I went through the whole game, and in the first six chapters I have dealt with training and outfit, fielding, bowling, batting, captaincy and umpiring, from my own point of view, having, of course, due regard for the history and traditions of the game. Then I added to the size and, I hope, usefulness of the book by getting Mr. W. J. Ford to write me a chapter on public-school and Cambridge University cricket, and a similar chapter dealing with Oxford University cricket is from the pen of Mr. Thomas Case. Next, with the kind assistance of the secretaries of county cricket clubs and other friends, I have been able to give, in a succinct form, the cricket history of every county. Finally, I wrote a chapter on Victorian cricket, showing the various points of the game in process of development during the sixty years of her Majesty's reign. When the whole scheme was complete I asked her Majesty the Queen if she would permit me to dedicate the book to her, and she graciously consented."

"And what do you consider the most marked feature of the book?" I asked.

"Well," was the reply, "the novel feature of the book is that it gives a photograph of each great player in the act of making his particular stroke. Almost every first-class cricketer has cultivated to perfection a particular stroke; he consequently excels in it as no one else does; and I have endeavoured to get accurate photographs showing these strokes. There are over a hundred of these photographs in the book, and the 'portrait gallery,' as you journalists are wont to call it, includes A. N. Hornby, Lord Hawke, Shrewsbury, Gunn, J. T. Brown, C. L. Townsend, F. S. Jackson, Abel, L. C. H. Palaret, G. H. S. Trott, George Giffen, A. E. Stoddart, Richardson, Mold, Storer, Gregor McGregor, N. F. Druce, Lilley, G. J. Mordaunt, J. R. Mason, K. J. Key, Albert Ward, W. Newham, W. L. Murdoch, Hayward, Chatterton, George Brann, J. A. Dixon, Attewell, S. M. J. Woods, W. Rashleigh, J. T. Hearne, Peel, Davidson, Martin,

Briggs and Marlow. And now you know as much about the book as I do myself."

"Scarcely. There is, at all events, one important item which I fancy you have overlooked."

"And that is?"

"The strange story from Blackwood's—about composers turning grey, and about the expletive and explosive humour of the management concerning your treatment of the proofs."

Dame Rumour had not played me false. There was something in the story, for the Prince laughed heartily, but deftly turned the incident aside. I could not get him to talk about it. But I have learned since that the story has a rather amusing side to it. It appears that Ranji asked a Professor of Cambridge—I dare not mention his name—to glance over his proofs, and, where necessary, give a classical polish to the sentences. The Professor had more regard for classical English than for cricket, and he ornamented the margins of the proofs profusely. These went direct to the printers, and created no small amount of consternation. I believe it took a wonderful amount of tact and diplomatic skill to unravel the situation and lighten the margins.

"No," said the Prince in reply to a query, "I had no difficulty in dictating the book; and as you have probably found out, I have not written comical stories for the entertainment of my readers. I have endeavoured to make the subject itself interesting, and I hope I have succeeded."

So ended our conversation about the book. Now a word about the man himself.

Ranjit Sinhji is gifted with many attractive qualities. Mr. C. B. Fry, in the July number of the WINDSOR, spoke of the marvellous quality of his cricket, and I should like here to dwell for a moment on the individuality of the man. When I think of who and what Ranjit Sinhji is, I am disposed to become an arrogant hero-worshipper. He has accomplished so much—crowded so much into the narrow compass of his five-and-twenty years—that I cannot help but admire him. Nobody who has not lived in India and mingled with the people of the country can adequately understand Ranjit Sinhji's most significant achievement. Indian ways, manners and modes of thought are not ours. There is a fundamental difference between the oriental and the occidental mind. Even to this day native culture is, in many ways, but a thin veneer, and time was—not so very long ago

—when the evolution of a Ranjit Singhji would have been regarded by most Anglo-Indians as an impossibility. Born and bred a Rajput Prince—a race that are sticklers in matters of caste—Ranjit Singhji has given the intellectual wheel a full turn, as it were, and has thus brought the East and the West into closer proximity and deeper sympathy than they have ever been. How has he done it? Talent alone will not enable an Indian to accomplish such a feat. Even English influence early in life, intermittently exercised, cannot produce such a result. The man who can do it must have character, individuality, capacity to assimilate new ideas, and courage not to ignore old ones. Ranjit Singhji is such a man; he has all those qualities.

The personal note is no less distinctive. A typical Oriental in appearance, he has in repose grace, and in action the agility and rapidity of movement so characteristic of an elemental race. But whether at rest or in action he has an air of self-restraint, an appearance of conscious reserve force. It endows him with the personal magnetism, or whatever else you please, which rivets people's attention. No wonder, then, that such a man, having become a first-class cricketer, should, like a dusky Hercules, travel from one triumph to another.

In the cricket field the crowd knows his skill, admires his style, his individuality, and gets occasional glimpses of his real character, with the result that he is a popular hero on every greensward. It is perfectly true, here as elsewhere, as Lord Macaulay pointed out in his brilliant essay on Addison, that "the world generally gives its admiration, not to the man who does what nobody else even attempts to do, but to the man who does best

what multitudes do well"—always excepting, of course, Ranji in the act of playing that famous leg-stroke of his. By that stroke (and one or two others) Ranji has rendered necessary a new classification of the genus *homo*.

Schoolboys—and boys of older growth—will be interested to know that in the series of eight books on athletics which Mr. Fry is editing for another firm of publishers, is included a small handbook on cricket by Ranjit Singhji.

"By the way, Prince," I said before leaving him, "what is the new stroke you are practising which, according to Mr. Fry in the WINDSOR MAGAZINE, will whiz like blue lightning, burn up the grass as it travels, and make our hair stand on end if it doesn't actually curl it?"

"Provided you are not bald," laughed the Prince. "But, joking aside, it is a capital stroke indeed. You must know that when a bowler wants to keep down runs he gives you a number of balls off the wicket, but not far enough off to be a wide. They puzzle most batsmen. The stroke to which Mr. Fry refers is an effort to kill

that practice. I maintain that those balls can be played successfully. They are, moreover, safe hits. You either miss them altogether, which does not matter, or you send them to the boundary, which does matter very much—to your side."

"Now one more favour," I asked. "Give me a few lines as a message from you to the boys of England, and I shall ask the editor of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE to give a facsimile reproduction of it."

After a moment's hesitation he sat down and penned the lines reproduced on the following page.



From a photo by

[Stearn, Cambridge.]

PRINCE RANJIT SINHJI AS AN ANGLER.

My dear Boys

Keep yourselves
in good condition at all
times. Cultivate patience and
perseverance; both qualities
are necessary for doing things
which are well worth the trouble.

Do not be despondent at your
failures and be modest in the
hour of your success

Wishing you all
good luck

Believe me
Your Well-wisher

Ranjit Singh