

SOME FAMOUS CRICKETERS.

By C. B. FRY.



HERE is no more definite personality among cricketers than Archie Maclaren. Were he less remarkable a batsman, his strong individuality and wise, deliberate ways would suffice

for distinction. Naturally his traits call less for criticism than for appreciation. For has he not won a pre-eminent position in the sunny world of cricket? Of course he started with advantages. A clean eye, a strong wrist, a minimum of personal error—and you have a potential champion. But equally he owes his success to serious thought, patient application, and a sound, hopeful heart. There are problems to solve, difficulties to conquer, and grey days to live through before an assured reputation can be won with all its pleasant sunshine. He is a genius, but not of the kind that finds fulfilment without hard trying. They say those who learn easily forget soon. Archie always strikes me as one who, having found just a little difficulty in learning, has mastered his lesson all the better; who, perhaps, had to take his points one by one and elaborate them severally till he established his present robust, versatile game, and stood forth a well-nigh perfect batsman. Whatever the process of development, there are no two ways about the result. That is not only solid and strong, but brilliant. Archie goes in to bat armed at all points; able and ready to meet any bowling upon any wicket.

No one was ever less a fair-weather batsman. Never is he more likely to come to the front than when runs are badly wanted or difficult to get. Who makes a century against Australia in the fourth innings of the match? Who makes thirty-two for Lancashire against Surrey on a bird-lime wicket, with seventy

to win and no one else looking like getting two? Why, Archie, and no other. And so one has confidence in him; expects big scores to his name; and understands how they are put together. The key-note of his style is fixity of purpose. He knows exactly what he means to do and does it. This applies not only to his innings as a whole, but also to each particular ball as played. He declines to be puzzled or non-plussed. If it pleases him to start with free cricket, he does so. Should he fancy to play himself in rather carefully, this too happens. On the whole he is a careful player. Even when he is scoring most severely there is nothing rash or ill-considered in his strokes. As a matter of fact no great bats, however dashing and brilliant their game, really play carelessly. They may



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A. C. MACLAREN.

give a contrary impression, but their attention is closely concentrated and their strokes quite deliberate. Ranjitsinhji appears scarcely to look at the ball or take any trouble. His electric flashes seem almost as insolently careless as they are brilliantly successful. Actually he watches the ball with feline insistence every time. Francis Ford looks

like six-foot-six of "don't care." His bat acts like an irresponsible flail; but he knows, he knows. Archie Maclaren's concentration is more easily perceived. That is the difference. Sometimes—not often—he lets himself go. Poising his bat well back and rather high, he swings it at the good-length ball with a strong swooping motion that has glorious results. As a rule he plays well within his strength.

All his strokes are good, and few batsmen have more. His off-drive is as effective, if not quite as graceful, as Lionel Palairet's.



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J. BRIGGS BOWLING.

His hitting is clean and sound as Stanley Jackson's. His cutting and hooking are second only to Ranji's. But in none of these strokes is he as frequent as the above three players respectively. He has two specialities. His back-play is magnificent; it is not only extremely safe, but has that latent scoring power, so rare and so telling. His method is uncommon. Stepping back decidedly with his right foot, his bat held rather high, he comes down plumb on the ball with a distinct though nicely modulated swing. The bat meets the ball

with no compromise. Then, again, he is very skilful at forcing good-length balls away to the on-side; this he effects with a swinging flick of the wrist helped out by a slight following turn of the whole body. Most of his runs come from this stroke.

Archie is very determined and always in earnest. Does he lack humour? Well, he has a Scotch name. He is very thorough. Even when he is clean bowled, there is no mistake about it, no half-and-half measures, no being caught in two minds; he has tried a definite, full-fledged stroke and failed, and he goes away leaving that impression and a great sense of relief behind him. We know him well; rarely does he "Stand ready to strike *once* and strike no more."

The Lancashire captain has in his eleven an important member who could and would supply any deficiency in humour. He has enough for ten, and need not fear to part with some of it. This is just Johnny Briggs, the inimitable and undefeated. Why was he not given a place among the Bad Boy's Beasts? "This little animal is round and smiles. It bowls and bowls and bowls, and always gets wickets." Of course, no one would call Johnny a beast; not even a disappointed batsman. Why, he beams upon you before and after your innings. The shorter your innings, the happier he is towards you. He passes you a cheery time of day. He inquires with feeling after your health and form. He rubs the ball in the dust, takes two steps, and serves you a fast yorker, instead of the high-tossed slow you expected. You retire. He smiles. What could be pleasanter? Play the yorker, lap the next three slows from outside the off stump to somewhere near square leg, he still smiles. You can perhaps exhaust his expansive appreciation. But beware! Johnny is a professor of diddling considered as one of the exact sciences. Diddling, we know, is compounded of minuteness, interest, perseverance, ingenuity, audacity, nonchalance, originality and grin. So Johnny Briggs may be accepted as a past master. As to the grin—Edgar Allan Poe's diddler only grins at night under the bed-clothes, when safe from observation; Johnny both diddles and grins in the pleasant light of day. He is some inches above concealment. The other ingredients he possesses in an equal degree. Minuteness? Well, look at him. Interest? Talk to him. Perseverance, ingenuity, audacity and the rest? Play against Lancashire. He loses patience sometimes—nearly—when the wicket is perfect and

frequent catches are dropped. The signs are: chest thrown well forward, head held high, stiff knees, far-flung tragic gait and general jerky dignity. This never lasts more than one over. In sum, Johnny is one of the best, if not the very best, of slow left-hand bowlers who ever hit a wicket. Without being as steady as Bobby Peel, he has greater resource and more devil. No bowler has a larger *répertoire* of tricks, yet he seldom sends down a loose ball. He has a marvellous command of pace, length, and break. His nervous fingers give a fizz and spin to the ball that make it seem almost alive after pitching. On a sticky wicket he is unplayable; on a good one, though liable to be expensive, he is always likely to get men out. In less sedate days, his quickness and agility at cover-point were miraculous. When he made his *début* he used to be a recognised bat; in fact, he played for England as an all-round cricketer. He made a century for Lancashire on his wedding-day. His style, always racy and dashing, is now almost deliberately rash. He has a whizzing upper-cut that travels over third-man's head. In fact, he slashes for all he is worth, and looks mightily surprised at missing the ball. His frolicsome, mercurial temperament and genial ways have always secured the generous laughter and applause of cricket-going crowds. Yes; Johnny Briggs has an active sense of humour at odd moments.

Talking of humorous cricketers, there is one, William Lloyd Murdoch, known to fame for divers reasons, but chiefly as the ablest and most successful captain, the most successful and ablest batsman Australia has given herself—Australia a land rich in triumphs. To avoid becoming epic about Murdoch is not easy; slow-footed prose hardly meets the case. But about his humour—which will give a chance of calling him Billy or Bill or William Lloyd—well, his humour differs signally from that of Johnny Briggs, being contemplative and social rather than public and active. Indeed, though not quite literary, it is of the very first rank. He does not commit puns, of course, nor sputter epigrams; he is simply, genuinely and unaffectedly amusing. Instead of "It will rain hard to-day," he says, "Boys, the sparrows will be washed out"; instead of "I'm in good form," he asks in a concentrated voice, "Where's Surrey?" But it's the way, not the words. Mark him even now as he leads his adopted sons of Sussex into the field. He has lost the toss easily; he has suggested to

ten sad pals that "Now, boys, the white-coats are out." How well they know the sound of that cheerful well-fed voice making that remark! And three or four of them were waiting, padded and gloved, silently jostling to go in first. "Not again, Billy?" Splendid sunshine, too, and a real Brighton wicket! Well, it's all in the game; but you would have expected so experienced a captain to have more command over a silly shilling. But mark him. A square, round—the double term applies—powerful, well-knit figure, as active as most men half his age and every



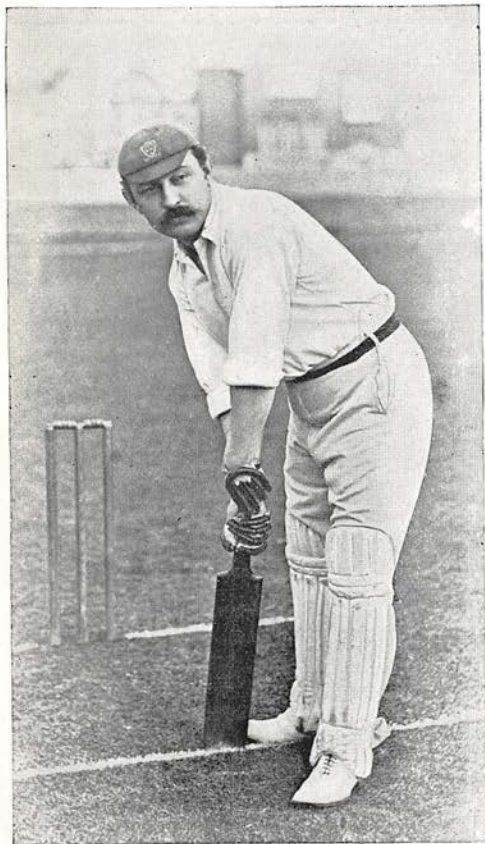
From a photo by

[Hawkins, Brighton.]

W. L. MURDOCH.

bit as keen; his head of the cut that fits caps; his kind, cheery face tanned and determined; his neat black moustache bristling with vitality; his gait and gestures full of the direct, hard-bitten energy that distinguishes Colonials—a man who would enjoy Klondyke or a Mansion House dinner. His company would help a digger down on his luck no less than an alderman without an appetite. His spirit would refuse to be unfortunate, his body scorn incapacity for meat and drink. No wonder he led the Australians well in the old days—a fit Odysseus to meet our mighty bearded Ajax. And yet those days cannot

be so very long ago. True, we do not often see that brilliant half-cut, half-drive, that marvellous crack past cover-point; but all the other strokes are there, all the watchfulness and patience which at the Oval in the early eighties compiled that famous 211 against England's picked bowling. Not only in batting, but in all else, our Bill carries a style of his own; you will not find his like in a month of Sundays. He walks, talks, drinks, eats, smokes, and wears a hat dis-



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W. NEWHAM.

[Hawkins.

tinctively; he does nothing by formula. He has written an excellent practical guide to the game, the best except— But modesty forbids. Here's luck to you, Bill, for a "good boy" yourself, for a great cricketer, and for the best possible pal before, during, and after a match, weather wet or fine, sparrows or no sparrows.

Perhaps Billy Murdoch, by peculiar augury, connects those little birds with thunderstorms. He looks askance at birds. The magpies that haunt the rail-side meadows

down in the West trouble him much. And he regards with suspicion the six innocent martlets embroidered on the Sussex caps. "Martlets? Nonsense, they are crows. How can things go right when every man on the side sports six birds of that sort?" There may be something in this. Dickie Newham can tell a long tale of untoward fortune. They call us "silly Sussex," those alliterative critics; perhaps we are. The gods are often against us, and they are said to demet before destroying. But you must always except Dick Newham from this wholesale charge. Is he not the father of the side? He has played for many years; was captain, is secretary, and has been both at once. Times have been good, bad, and indifferent; good lately, though we put our trust in princes; but, on the whole, indifferent. That the club has weathered so much heavy water is largely due to Dick Newham's sound head and skilful arm. Good as he is at letters, accounts, and what not, he is equally excellent as a batsman. Few, if any, amateurs have done as much for their county. For the last ten years and more he has been a wonderfully consistent run-getter. His first-class average has nearly always been well over thirty—a remarkable record when one remembers how weak a side Sussex has been sometimes, and how often their lot has been to wrestle along in up-hill games. And, indeed, he is and has always been one of the very best bats in the country. Had his merits been rewarded, he would have played once or twice for England and frequently for the Gentlemen against the Players. For he is a great batsman who, though well known, has scarcely the fame he deserves; an exceptionally sound and dangerous and a very plucky batsman to boot. His style is not showy, but commends itself at once to a good judge of the game. He does not play by heart; he watches the ball. He is cool and pertinacious. Selected to play on a side representing the world, he would be no passenger, but would very likely make top score. He might well have played for England. Lately he has lost his pace, but a year or two ago he was a fine deep-field with as safe a pair of hands as needs be. His experience naturally makes his opinion well worth having. His advice is as sound as his play. No one is better acquainted with all the thises and thats of first-class cricket. He never wastes words, but he can be both pithy and to the point. He smokes what he calls "man's" tobacco.

Though singularly little of a Gascon, he reminds one of d'Artagnan. He has the

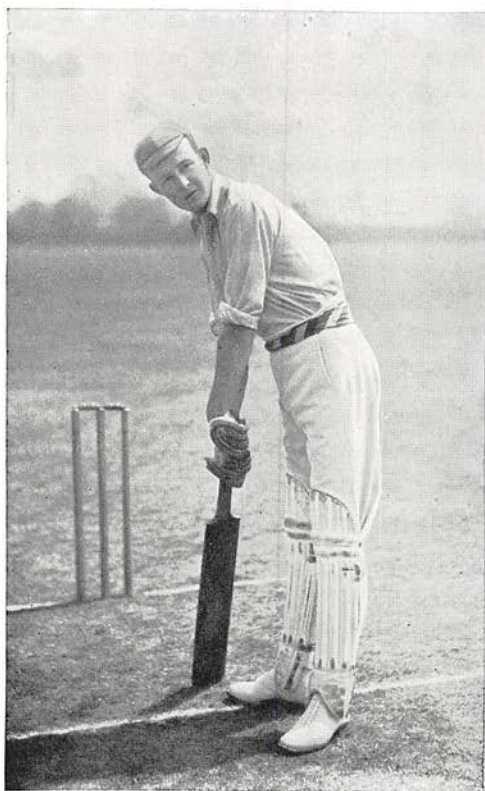
hard-fighting, cavalier cast of feature, and like Dumas's hero, *c'est la forte tête d'entre nous*, with his faculty for saving situations. As a player his style is distinctly original, neither orthodox nor the reverse. He has many of the strokes others use, but his own way of making them. He drives to the off and straight with effect, but it is in his on-side play that you see the master. His placing and forcing between mid-on and fine-leg is marvellously skilful. Few captains fail to put an extra mid-on for him. It is the straight balls that he persuades to go to leg. The faster the bowling the better he likes it. No batsman plays Arthur Mold, when the Lancashire fast bowler is at his deadly best, with quite the same confidence and skill as Newham. By means of his extraordinary "glide," the dreadful ball, which pitches to the off and whips back on to the leg stump, is converted into an easy "fourer"—a curious and notable stroke. The only other player who has it, or something like it, is M. R. Jardine, the scorer of a celebrated century in the inter-Varsity match of 1892. But, schoolboys, please don't copy this stroke; you will get leg before. Dickie Newham, though he himself has made innumerable centuries chiefly by his "glide," would be the first to endorse this warning, "unless," he would add, "it's your natural stroke; everyone must use his own methods." Well, Dickie, you follow yours to excellent purpose. You are a master craftsman, and you are a philosopher.

Much cricket induces a philosophical turn of mind. At any rate it teaches you to be contented in adversity, and to theorise at all times. The value of the former lesson is indisputable; the latter is a matter of some uncertainty. However, theorising gives a lot of pleasure and need not preclude capacity

for action. Why should it? Surely every practical man must be a theorist. The best example of a practical theorist among cricketers is Pelham F. Warner, commonly known as "Plum," who takes teams to America, and goes in first for Middlesex. He was born old, and with a straight bat in his hand. He is a barrister and will be a judge some day; that is, if he finds his way as readily about the laws of the land as he does in those of the game. His memory is something prodigious; he can tell you the

result of any first-class match ever played, how many runs anyone who ever batted made on any occasion, how he got out and who the bowler was—he can. He has studied cricket as most men study golf, and is equally competent to converse, write a paper, or deliver a lecture upon his subject; chapter and verse, rhyme and reason, every aspect of every point are at his fingers' ends. You cannot stump him—at least, not theoretically. His theory is beyond dispute; like umpires' decisions—in theory. His practice is almost as good; at any rate, he makes his centuries at Lords, and his thousand runs a season, all in particularly excellent style—right foot rooted to the ground, left well

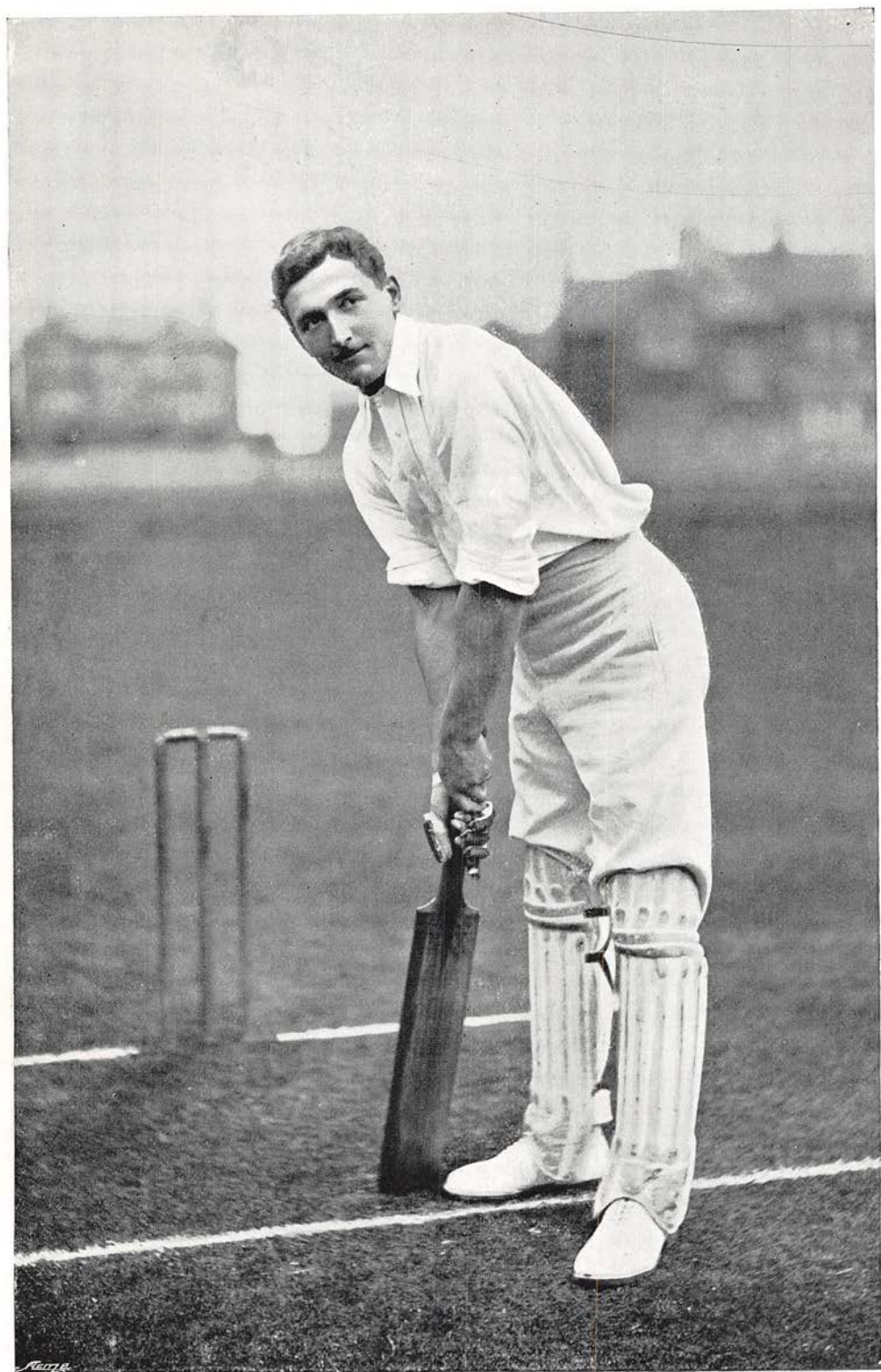
pendicular bat, and the ball gone boundary-wards as merrily as you will. Correct, orthodox, but very attractive. Schoolboys, you may copy; especially, if you can, the bit of wrist work that gives sting and finish to every stroke. As Plum would say, "The young player must pay strict attention to the position of his left leg and to keeping his bat straight; he must also watch the ball, and, as Tom Emmett used to tell us, the ball was meant to hit." Plum Warner, if a less skilful bowler, is a better bat than the grand old Tyke who taught him cricket.



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P. F. WARNER.

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C. B. FRY BATTING FOR SUSSEX.

[E. Hawkins, Brighton.]