

A. E. STODDART'S LEFT HAND.

WHAT are the qualities that go to make up a great cricketer, and are they natural or acquired? As to a batsman authorities differ. Prince Ranjitsinhji is of opinion that, given a certain natural aptitude, batting can be learned by anyone who devotes the necessary time and trouble to the art. Other equally good judges consider that the great batsman must be born, not made. But, however much authorities may differ as to the batsman, there is no divergence of opinion about the bowler. It is universally agreed that great bowlers cannot be manufactured. They are essentially a product of Nature.

However, putting aside the question as to whether great cricketers are born or made, it is quite certain that they possess some quality or qualities which differentiate them from "duffers" with the bat and ball, and it would be an interesting study if one could place all the first-rate cricketers in the country under a microscope to try to discover whether they possess any outward and visible signs of their high calling. Every successful batsman must, of course, have a good eye. That goes without saying. Anyone not gifted with good eyesight who should trust to assiduous practice to learn

SOME FAMOUS CRICKETERS' HANDS.

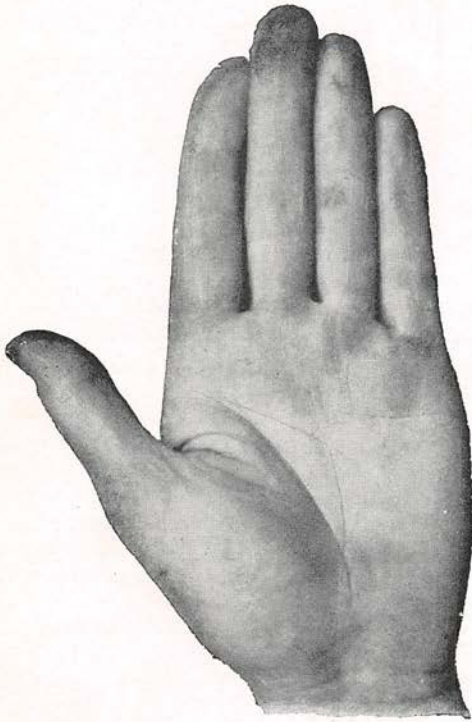
By M. RANDAL ROBERTS.

how to play Lockwood or Mr. Kortright on a bumpy wicket would probably have his error brought home to him by becoming a subject for a coroner's inquest. But good eyesight is a somewhat intangible possession. You can't tell by looking at a man whether he has a good eye or not. The ordeal of the microscope would probably reveal that all great cricketers have in common some gift besides a keenness of eye.

Palmistry as applied to cricketers is as yet an undeveloped art, though it seems obvious enough that, as the hand and wrist play such an important part in cricket, the hands of



A WELL-KNOWN PROFESSIONAL BATSMAN'S RIGHT HAND.



G. MCGREGOR'S LEFT HAND.



G. MCGREGOR'S RIGHT HAND.

great batsmen and bowlers must differ in some way from those of mere ordinary mortals. The writer is not a palmist, but it occurred to him lately that a comparison of the hands of famous cricketers might reveal some interesting facts, and with this object in view he sought the aid of what may be called typical players—that is to say, bowlers, wicket-keepers, and batsmen, both hard hitting and of the steady order. Most of the cricketers to whom he applied entered so readily into his project that his task was an easy one.

In a subject of this sort it is, of course, possible to make only a very rough and ready classification, but judging from the number of hands which came under my inspection I should be inclined to think that, speaking generally, there is a family resemblance in point of formation between the hands of most great batsmen. The likeness, I admit, is not striking, but it is sufficiently strong to indicate that, provided you know the owner is a cricketer, he is a batsman and not a bowler.

Mr. Stoddart's hand, a photograph of which is reproduced here, may be taken as the typical hand of a batsman. I am aware, of course, that Mr. Stoddart is an

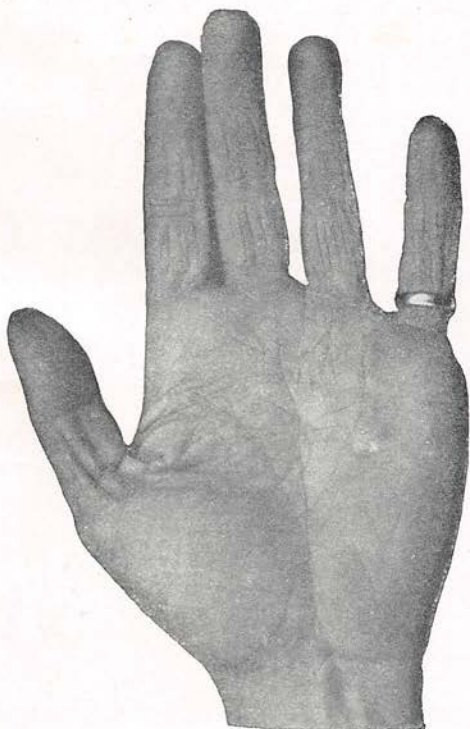
exceedingly useful bowler, but it is his batting and not his bowling that has won him his great name. It will be noticed that the great length of finger which is so strongly marked in most bowlers is absent. It is essentially a well proportioned hand, though, to borrow the language of the racing-stable, it is inclined to be on the small side. Great batsmen are evidently not a splay-fingered race. Mr. Stoddart's hands are characteristic of their owner. They have a thoroughly neat and workmanlike appearance. In one important particular they differ very materially from the hands of nearly every cricketer who submitted to the camera; they do not bear the faintest trace of the rough usage they must have undergone during Mr. Stoddart's dozen years of experience of fielding against all sorts and conditions of batsmen.

The next photograph gives an excellent illustration of the honourable scars which many less fortunate cricketers than Mr. Stoddart display. It is the photograph of the right hand of a very well known professional batsman, who, however, does not wish his name to be mentioned. Old cricketers can remember how before the days of batting-gloves it was no uncommon sight

at Lord's and elsewhere to see a player who had been badly hit on the knuckles stooping down and wiping the blood off his fingers in the dust and then continuing his innings none the worse for his wounds. We may not see such a sight nowadays, but all the same it is plain enough from the accompanying photograph that the modern cricketer requires just as much pluck as the players of fifty years ago. Batting-gloves may protect the batsman's knuckles, but what about the fieldsman's palms? The owner of the hand here reproduced, during the seven years he has been playing first-class cricket, has had his first finger broken once, his middle finger dislocated twice, while the scar, which can be plainly seen in the photograph, is the tell-tale mark of what the seams of a cricket ball can do when a fieldsman rashly interferes with the progress of a red-hot drive from the bat of a Jessop or a C. I. Thornton.

From a mere spectacular point of view wicket-keepers' hands are distinctly disappointing. That the hands of the wicket-keeper receive more continuous buffeting than those of any other cricketer is an indisputable fact, and one might reasonably expect to find in every "keeper's" hands

some unmistakable evidence of their owner's calling. But this expectation will not stand the test of cold fact. Two very interesting pairs of hands are reproduced here, Mr. McGregor's and Mr. A. E. Newton's. Readers of the WINDSOR have no need to be told that both these cricketers are in the very front rank of wicket-keepers, and that both of them have stood behind the stumps for many years to almost every type of bowler. But you could not tell this from their hands. Mr. Newton's hands are as free from bruises as Mr. Stoddart's, and Mr. McGregor's are almost as equally unmarked. In fact, except for a slight twist in the top joint of the first finger of his left hand, the ball has apparently spent itself in vain against Mr. McGregor's hands. It might be supposed that the scatheless condition of his hands is due to the fact that since Mr. McGregor has played for Middlesex the county has had really no very fast bowler to knock him about; but it must be remembered that for the first four years of Mr. McGregor's wicket-keeping life he had to "take" some of the fastest bowling in England. He was in the Cambridge Eleven at the same time as S. M. J. Woods, and in those days, before he took to making a thousand runs in a season,



A. E. NEWTON'S LEFT HAND.



A. E. NEWTON'S RIGHT HAND.



S. M. J. WOODS' RIGHT HAND.

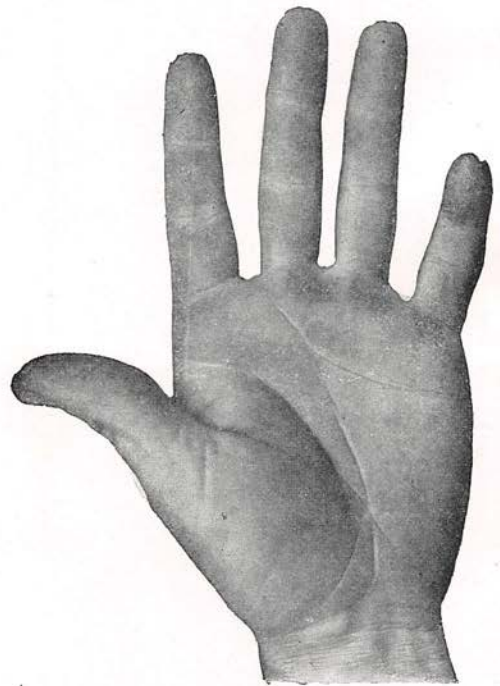
"Sammy" was one of the fastest bowlers in the world.

The belief, however, that wicket-keepers' hands show signs of the battering they have to endure is not altogether a popular delusion. The writer remembers seeing the hands of J. M. Blackham, the famous Australian, a few years ago. Nearly every finger on each hand had been either broken or badly dislocated, and they presented the appearance of a gnarled and knotted branch of a tree more than an ordinary hand. Wood, too, the veteran Surrey wicket-keeper, shows undeniable tokens of having been through the wars. Still, taken all round, wicket-keepers' hands look far more presentable than is generally supposed.

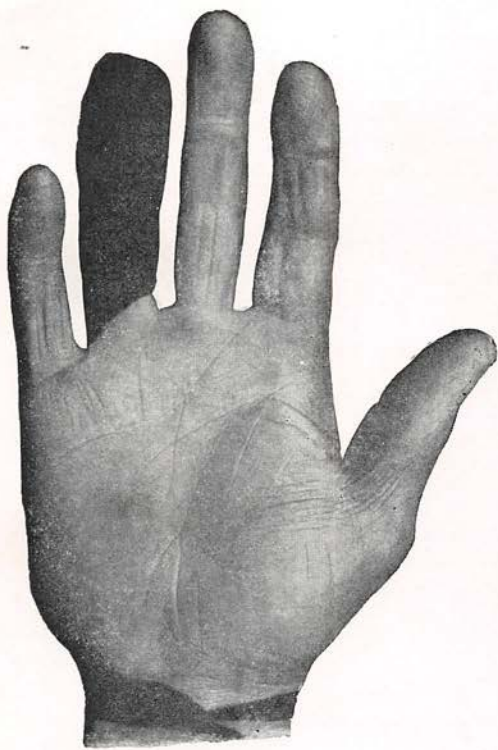
The next photograph, unfortunately, hardly does justice to its original. "Sammy's" (nobody ever dreams of calling him Mr. Woods) hands are like their owner; they must be seen to be appreciated, but they are just the pair of hands you would expect to find at the end of the arms of the most popular cricketer in England. Their massiveness and general expansiveness suggest their breezy and lion-hearted owner; they look the sort of hands that in a rough and tumble you would much prefer to have on your side than on the other fellow's. The

very sight of S. M. J. Woods' hands forbids the thought of kid gloves. A Viking in a frock-coat would be about as appropriate a figure. What a professional palmist would divine from the lines of this hand I am unable to guess; long life would be a fairly safe prophecy; but the most casual observer cannot but be struck with the enormous length of the palm compared with size of the fingers. In the case of nearly every other bowler whose hands I examined while preparing this article, the length of the fingers was a very conspicuous feature, but in this respect S. M. J. Woods' hands are an exception to the rule that long fingers make good bowlers.

The canon, by the bye, that the excellence of bowling is in a direct ratio to the length of the bowler's fingers must be taken as applying mainly to fast bowlers. The hands of most of the slow bowlers who submitted to my examination were somewhat inclined to stumpiness. This was particularly the case with left-hand bowlers. The accompanying illustration shows the hand belonging to a very famous left-hand bowler indeed. The amount of break which this bowler can get on the ball is popularly supposed to be a natural gift, and to be in some way or the other communicated by



A FAMOUS LEFT-HAND PROFESSIONAL BOWLER'S HAND.



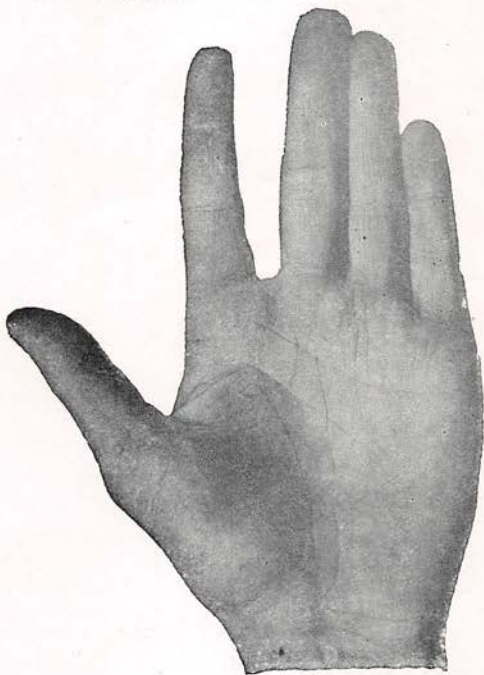
V. T. HILL'S RIGHT HAND.

some peculiar formation of his fingers, but judging from the appearance of his hands I should feel inclined to think that this bowler's success is due more to art than nature. As can be seen from a glance at the photograph, there is nothing whatever unusual in the formation of the hand, except, perhaps, that the thumb is abnormally bent back and slightly flattened. But as the thumb does not play a very important part in the propulsion of the ball, the peculiar shape of this bowler's thumb may safely be neglected in forming any theories as to what his particular skill depends on.

In 1892, Mr. Vernon Hill immortalised himself by scoring a century in the Oxford and Cambridge match by some of the hardest hitting ever seen on Lord's ground. Mr. Hill's hand will be interesting if only because century makers in the 'Varsity match are few and far between. But in addition to that particular feat he has long been

recognised as one of the best of our left-handed batsmen. The bandage which appears in the photograph on Mr. Hill's finger is not a perpetual ornament; the photograph was taken last year, before he had time to recover from the wound he received while playing for Somerset against Oxford University. The shape of the hand is what I call the typical batting hand. It is small, rather short in the finger, and supported on a sinewy wrist.

If anyone cares to examine the two photographs, he will find a most remarkable resemblance between A. E. Stoddart's and R. C. N. Palairet's hands. The shape of the fingers in both hands is almost identical, and, except that Mr. Stoddart's hands are rather shorter in the palm, it would puzzle a "palmologist" to detect any difference between them. This is all the more remarkable as the hands of nearly every batsman who came under the gaze of my camera possessed some strongly marked distinctive feature of their own, which made it quite impossible to confuse them with those of any other cricketer.



R. C. N. PALAIRET'S LEFT HAND.