

The World's Greatest Cricketers

By

SIR HOME GORDON, BART.

MR. J. DARLING.

Mr. J. Darling must always loom as one of the foremost figures in Australian cricket in the last five years of the nineteenth century and the first five of the twentieth. Fine bat as he has proved himself, personally the study of the man's individualism as displayed in his captaincy has interested me more. There has always been a feeling that an Australian team on tour is not easy to manage. On one occasion in the later eighties friction was so great that two of the colonials fought with the bats in a saloon carriage which actually was besmattered with blood. Mr. W. L. Murdoch himself had not an entirely happy time as skipper, and the worries which beset his successors were enormous.

Mr. Darling altered all this. His rule was like himself—big and quiet. It was the iron hand in the velvet glove. He kept his men under control both off the field and—*even more important*—on it. Never was there a trace of disunion, and in that black time in 1902, when illness and bad weather reduced their spirits to zero, some of the new men declaring that they wanted to take ship home at once, Mr. Darling, though depressed from influenza, never lost his steady influence. The clouds lifted and triumph came, but if a weaker captain had been at the helm disaster must have been inevitable.

On different cricket grounds Mr. Darling was wonderfully quick to seize the idiosyncrasies of batmen he had never before met, and modified his field with judgment which was beyond question. The same concentration of purpose he displayed in his own cricket he imparted to his colleagues. In the 1905 tour up to the end of July he obviously felt the want of handling bowling of the highest class. It will always be a matter of debate whether he was wise to instruct Mr. W. W. Armstrong to bowl in the unsporting fashion adopted in order to avoid if possible losing the rubber of Test Matches. But this is the one doubt that can be cast on administration of the highest order, and now that Mr. Darling has retired, in order to pursue the vocation of a sheep farmer, it will be long before we meet his equivalent. He was a formidable left-handed bat, who would have shown even greater results in this country if he had not been burdened with the cares of captaincy. His tenacity of purpose was characteristic of Colonial grit. Never quite the equal of Mr. Clem Hill—the best left-handed bat the world has ever seen—he was always remarkably difficult to dislodge, and Mr. Stoddart considered him as the hardest wicket to obtain when on the Adelaide Oval or elsewhere. Few could come down more severely on bad bowling, none could play with greater coolness at a crisis. I have seen him score with tremendous force. I have also seen him indulge in absolutely purposeless stonewalling—for example on the occasion against Middlesex when the crowd at Lords whistled the "Dead March in Saul" whilst he and Mr. M. A. Noble were laboriously blocking a mild attack. Let it be added he was a splendid field anywhere, with a wonderfully good length return ball which saved the wicket-keeper's hands—no small merit, but one ignored with lamentable frequency. He had a head for finance, was civilly uninformative to inquisitive Pressmen, never indulged in conceit or self advertisement. He did what came to his mind as cricketer and as captain, and never swerved to the right or the left. Commendable and meritorious. My memory of him will be that of a cricketer who corresponds to one of those wonderful statues carved by M. Rodin.

LORD HAWKE.

No other man ever exercised such a superb moral influence over any sport as Lord Hawke exerts upon modern cricket. When he undertook the captaincy of Yorkshire, the side consisted of old-time professionals, half undisciplined. What he has made the modern Yorkshire eleven—apart from their unparalleled achievements—extorts the admiration of the whole world of cricket, and attains the true standard of what a team should be off the field and on. He has taught his professionals to have self-respect, and to lead in their captain their truest friend, whilst his method of remuneration by a system of marks forms the fairest device, and his fami-

ly, "back up, boys," is the best spur to his men.

It is, however, only as a Yorkshireman that Lord Hawke has rendered incomparable service to the game he loves. To him every umpire owes gratitude, for he obtained the increase of their remuneration. At the head of the Board of Control he has displayed tact in a chivalrous and responsible position. Every part of the world where cricket is played, he has not only shown how it should be played, but he has insisted that those composing the teams he has taken must exhibit the highest type of English behaviour. Many makers of the Empire are vaunted, but none have done more to tighten the links of true Imperial federation than Lord Hawke. Unlike others, he never forgets Indian, West Indian, South African, Australian, or American hospitality, and when his hosts from over the seas "come home," he entertains them with cordial delight, doing as much, not as little, as possible.

On his shoulders he bears all the cares of the modern game, he is consulted about every dispute, confessor to all perplexed sportemen, and emphatically remains the great figure-head of cricket. In private life, he has a perfect genius for friendship, is almost the only man of our generation who is a skilled letter-writer, and he is as sensitive as a girl as well as far, far too modest. He abominates making a speech, can sing with taste, is devoted to music, has shot big game everywhere, is deadly on a moor, rides hard to hounds, and was a sprinter at Eton.

Gradually he has become so fine a captain that he is worth playing on any side if he never made a run. As a matter of fact in his twenty-sixth season he is still a tremendously dangerous bat. Going in far too late, he has perfected self-effacement until it has become second nature. Scoring with great power so soon as he is set he makes runs all round the wicket, exhibiting the true Eton cut, and driving with force, so that for his county alone he has scored upwards of fifteen thousand runs. This in no way represents his value as a bat, for, like Ted Wainwright, he always does his biggest just when things look ominous for his side. Yorkshire grit is proverbial, but it is at high water mark when "the skipper" is demonstrating that he does not know when he is at his best. Whatever the public may think, we who intimately know Lord Hawke—and intimacy inspires affectionate admiration—are aware that for him cricket has not always lain in easy places. The more credit to him for all that he has achieved. Truly it may be said that he is sans peur et sans reproche, doing what he has to do with his might and with a singleness of purpose, never looking for praise, but, like his great ancestor the Admiral, doing his duty and doing it as it should be done.

MR. V. TRUMPER.

Brilliance is the attribute specially applicable to the batting of Mr. Victor Trumper, and when the highest honour was intended to be paid to Mr. R. H. Spooner after his great performance in the final Test Match at the Oval in 1905, he was by popular consent called "the English Trumper." In 1902, when in England, the young Australian was absolutely the best bat in the world. Last year, judged by his own standard, he failed. A grave illness may have mitigated some of his former marvellous aptitude, but he gave himself less than a fair chance by persisting in "getting going" at once instead of waiting to "get his eye in." On occasions he was as great as ever, but it was no longer on the greatest occasions.

Memory prefers to hark back to what he did here in 1902, when he was alone comparable with Ranjitsinhji. Prior to that though he had played with fair success from a lad in Australia, he had only been brought here as last choice in 1899. He had not, however, long to wait to make his mark. Though he failed to score in his first match on English soil, and also in his first Test innings, he speedily asserted himself in the second at Lords, that worst debacle ever known to English cricket at headquarters. Playing a big game he scored 135 not out, and the way in which he pulled the bowling of Mead and Rhodes was a revelation.

Then he was an attractive lad. In 1903, at the age of five and twenty, he electrified the public, who had imagined he would not fulfil his promise because he had just failed against Mr. MacLaren's second team, a failure due to officious work at night. He positively dazzled us by batting which justified the observation that it was electric. At

Lords v. M.C.C. he positively handled the attack of Trott, J. T. Hearne, Brand, and Cranfield as though it were that of rustics bowling to him at nets. Agnis at Sheffield, though Hirst, Barnes and Rhodes were opposing him, he scored 62 out of 86 in fifty minutes, doing exactly what he liked with the attack. A feature, quite unique, was that his amazing power of forcing runs predominated when the wicket was on the soft side rather than when it was fast. A great judge wrote, "Only a combination of wonderful eye and supreme confidence could have rendered such pulling as his at all possible. The way he took good length balls off the middle stump and sent them round to the boundary had to be seen to be believed."

I am tempted to assert that he played the cricket of imperishable youth. If the Greeks had batted, it would have been thus. A Trumper grown to be Quail would be the bitterest spectacle of individual metamorphosis. Happily that can never be. Perhaps he will not play much more, for he told me professional occupation must soon absorb him. To us he will remain a beautiful memory of unique realisation of batting. The barefaced attempt to purchase him for an English county was a piece of bribery happily averted. Perchance he might have failed as poor Ferris failed. Personally he was the most delightful and the most modest of all the younger Australian cricketers, "a regular Trump of a Trumper" as was once said of him. Let it be placed on record that he never spared himself for the sake of his batting, but is one of the finest of out-fields, and no less vigilant close in. He is the most enterprising batsman Sydney ever turned out.

MR. B. J. T. BOSANQUET.

The very worst good cricketer in England, but the very best bad one, is the truest description of the ability of Mr. B. J. T. Bosanquet. Despite his strength there is something effeminate in the appearance of "Bos," and there is a feminine variability about his cricket. Dealing with the man, in his enthusiasm for the game, it may be mentioned that he will talk on cricket for the hour but only allows one opinion—his own. He is said to consider that no one who has not played first-class cricket should write on it, and he is a standing example that great skill at cricket does not make a good critic.

As a bat he belongs to the gentle tappers, and forms the despair of the orthodox for he is as ungainly in his strokes as he is successful. But though at the opposite pole to a Palairet or Spooner, he is a hurricane hitter. He was not good enough for the Eton eleven until his last year, when he knocked up 120 against Harrow in rather crude style. He has improved on that, for against Sussex at Lords in 1905, he made two hundred in a match, taking less than three hours for the joint effort, and he gave Essex leather-hunting to the tune of 179. Last season he only turned out in six matches for his county, and for ten innings had an average of 35.80.

When in the Oxford eleven, at the end of last century, he was a conventionally ordinary fast bowler. His famous leg-breaks were subsequently developed almost by accident. He discovered them by idly shying lawn tennis balls at a wall. From this he passed on to bowling at any lady who would oppose him with a racket, and thence he brought his new development into cricket. Leg breaks were, of course, not new, for Mr. R. C. Ramsey had tried them up at Cambridge in 1882, Mr. G. E. Palmer had employed them in 1886 on the Australian tour, Mr. C. L. Townsend had debauched as a boy-swarvel with them, and Joe Vise had alone developed speed with them. Mr. Bosanquet at first found them pretty costly. He had one sensational afternoon at Trent Bridge, but it was only in 1908 that the possibilities became recognised, his difficulty then being to acquire command over his length.

Of course it is easy to comment on the fact that he has sent down more bad balls than any other good bowler, and that several times one has pitched twice before it has reached the batsman. These are things intolerable in village cricket. Yet on his day he is more likely to get a great side out than any other bowler. The question is when it is his day; some people declare he has now had it and that one must wait a month of Sundays for any more.

However that may be, on two auspicious occasions he fairly brought off his best work in Test matches. At Sydney in February, 1904, it was he who actually gathered up the mythical ashes,

for in the fourth Test, when the Australians were confident they would make the 320 runs required, he went on with the total at 74, and in conjunction with Lilly for the wicket, he captured five wickets for 12 runs. History repeated itself in the first Test match in 1905 at Nottingham, for the Australians had to go in for some 400 runs on fourth hands. Everything pointed to a draw, but Mr. Bosanquet beat them, changing 63 for none to 03 for four. In a fading light he took eight of the nine wickets that fell, fairly "blumming" the star Colonial bats. Though subsequently the main agent in getting two of the four Middlesex victories of 1905, he materially slipped back in public esteem, for the class of his play when off-colour is more apt to produce irritation than sympathy. In fact, he is the champion freak cricketer. It is a great feat to send down an off-break with a leg action, but it is greater luck to obtain so many wickets by rank bad balls.

Next Week:

MACLAREN, DUFF AND SCHWARZ.

HOCKEY.

Thames v. Auckland.

Perfect weather prevailed for the match between the Auckland and Thames representatives for the Championship Shield on Saturday. The attendance was moderate. The ground was in good order and a fast game resulted. Mr. E. Madden, of the Auckland Referees' Association, ably controlled the match. The following were the teams:—

Thames Team—Colours, Blue and Gold—Goal: Menzies; full-backs, Rockley, Driver; halves, Brokenshire, L. Whitaker, J. Griffin; forwards, Thompson, L. Griffin, Martin, Brownlee and Renshaw.

Auckland Team—Colours Blue and White—Goal, C. H. Howell; full-backs, P. S. Shirriffs, H. D. Speight; halves, J. R. C. Badham, D. K. Purter, V. O. Kavanagh; forwards, W. Brooke-Smith, H. Mather, F. R. Mason, R. W. Barry, H. O. Wellam.

Auckland won by 5 goals to nil, and thus retains the shield.

Waikato B. v. Auckland B.

A team from Auckland journeyed to Hamilton on Friday evening, meeting the Waikato representatives on Saturday afternoon. After a fast game, victory rested with the visitors by four goals to one.

Otago v. Canterbury.

In the hockey match Otago v. Canterbury Otago won by two goals to nil. In the first spell play was pretty even. Canterbury's chance seemed to lie in the weakness of the Otago half-backs, who did not seem to understand where to send the ball, or where it was likely to go. On the other hand, the Canterbury forwards showed want of combination, and, as the Otago backs and goalkeeper were reliable, Canterbury's attacks were fruitless. Nevertheless, it was a hard and fast game, won by the better team.

CYCLING.

World's Cycling Record.

A. N. Wills, in a bicycle contest at Munich, covered a distance of 99 kilometres in an hour, establishing a record.

The previous record for the hour's run was put up in Germany by P. Guignard in 1908, the distance covered, following pace, being 59 miles 86 yards, following 61 miles 1613 yards covered by Wills in the present attempt.

RIFLE SHOOTING.

Brisbane Rifle Meeting.

At the Rifle Association meeting, Sergeant Edwards, New South Wales, won the King's Prize with a score of 232 points, Private Guy, Queensland, being second with 228 points, and Hyde, Queensland, third with 226 points.