

## THE CRICKET OF THE FUTURE.

BY W. G. GRACE.

There is more cricket played to-day than has ever been played since the game began, and the number of good players is increasing yearly. England, Australia and America keep sending out fresh recruits, and soon India and the Cape will attract notice with representative elevens. Everything points to a forward movement, and when the champions and veterans of to-day lay down bat and ball, their hearts will be gladdened by the sight of younger players worthily maintaining the prowess they themselves displayed in days gone by.

County cricket, now the backbone of the game, will pursue the even tenor of its way, and will create greater interest and excitement than ever. The cry from this and the other county, that there is a dearth of local talent, is nothing new. Nearly every county has uttered it at some time or other; but in the history of all of them, the first glimpse of sunshine broke through the clouds just when they seemed darkest. Surrey is at the top of the tree to-day, but it had many years of uphill work to go through, and there is hardly a first-class county which has not had the same experience. In '76 and '77 Gloucestershire was at the head of the first-class counties; in '86 and '87 it was at the bottom, but it is now coming up again, and it would be rash to prophesy that in '96 it will not again be at the top. It is the same with the minor counties. Derbyshire, Warwickshire, and Somersetshire have all had their ups and downs, but it is difficult to say which will have pride of place three or four years hence. The County Cricket Council, in my opinion, is almost sure to come to life again, and despite all the mud that has been thrown at it, will do useful work. There are minor points to be settled for the good of county cricket, which the Council alone can do thoroughly and satisfactorily.

The birth and residential qualification demand consideration, but we can hardly find fault with those counties, who, being richer than their neighbours, keep a sharp lookout for promising talent, and spend their money freely to obtain it. Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and Lancashire have a larger field to draw from in the matter of local talent than the counties of the south, and for the most part are in as good financial positions to cultivate it. I readily grant that it is not pleasing to find out, when too late, that a future Briggs, Sharpe or Lohmann has been allowed to leave the county of his birth, and become a thorn in its side in after years. But it is a mistake which is often made. A law might again be passed giving each county the right of first claim upon the services of every player born in the county, the claim to be made at the beginning of each season; but this would seem a poor incentive for counties to spend thought and money in developing the talent of players who otherwise might never have become first-class.

Another important point to be considered is the appearance of consistent slow scorers, whose chief desire is to stand well in the averages, and the effect this may have on the welfare of the game. It is not too much to say that if it extend much further the game will lose some of its interest for the spectator. Playing a defensive game to save a match is a widely different thing to merely keeping up one's wicket in the hope of being not out, and thus showing up well in the averages at the end of the season. In the former case the game benefits, in the latter the individual only. The public will not go to watch men blocking and playing with their legs all day long, causing matches to be drawn that might have been won by a little more spirited play. The sooner county committees realize this, and act on it, the better for their own interests and those of the game: the old enthusiasm for a spirited and dashing innings is still as strong in the hearts of spectators as it ever was; perhaps stronger, since it is more seldom roused. There is just the possibility of being a very scientific batsman, and yet being wanting in the spirit of a true sportsman. It is the same with regard to bowling: maiden over after maiden over may keep down the runs, but it is the plucky bowler who does not mind risking

something and being hit, who is of most use to his side, and does most for the game.

The future prospects of the game in Australia are very bright. That country has always been blessed with exceptionally good bowlers, and there can be little doubt that future teams will uphold the reputation of those which have preceded them. Lord Sheffield's team, which in all probability is going out at the end of the present season, will be the twelfth which has visited Australia, and will be quite worthy of the old country, and we may almost depend on Australia sending a team here in 1892 or 1893, the equal of any team that has ever visited England. After that, I think, there will be a rest for some years. So far the teams, which have come and gone, have been more or less arranged by individuals; in the future they will be managed by the different cricket associations, and the interests of the game will be the chief consideration. The history of English teams in Australia has shown us the wonderful progress the game has made in that country. But although our best eleven has very rarely gone out there, the matches played against odds have been greatly in excess of those played against eleven a-side. I believe that this will soon be reversed, and it is not improbable that in the near future Australia may win two out of the three representative matches generally played.

Everything points to the professionals keeping the upper-hand of the amateurs now. Occasionally, as in the past, an amateur will shine out for a year or two and turn the tables in the Gentlemen v. Players contest; but it is pretty safe to predict that the Players will have the better all-round team, and win most of these matches in the future.

The laws of the game are about as perfect as possible. The l.b.w. question will always be a vexed one, and no alteration which can be made with regard to it will stop the grumbling of the batsman or bowler. The law empowering the captain of a side to declare his innings at an end works well in a match lasting three days; but in one day's matches it has done more harm than good. Too often, two or three batsmen get all the runs, and, not unfrequently, the same players have to do most of the bowling. The result may be victory; but it is very barren honour for the rest of the eleven. A repetition is sufficient to destroy their love of the game, and discourage them for good.

Twenty-five years ago a carefully prepared ground was the exception, and not the rule; but now, in every first-class county, there are two or three good grounds. In the future, these grounds will be improved, as far as possible, and their number will continue to increase. In fact, good grounds are now springing up all over the country.

It has been suggested to me that golf is likely to prove a formidable rival to cricket, and, certainly, to the lovers of our national game, the hold golf has taken in England in the last few years must be of more than ordinary interest. While it was played principally in Scotland, and was confined, more or less, to players of advanced years, cricketers only gave it a passing thought; but now that it has crossed the border and taken a firm footing in their midst, they cannot help considering the effect it is likely to have on cricket. It will not do to say that golf holds out no attractions to cricketers, for it has come under my own notice that a few first-class cricketers have suddenly given up the game which they had followed with enthusiasm from boyhood, and identified themselves with this new and powerful claimant for their affections, just as closely as they ever did with cricket.

Wherein lies the charm of golf I know not. So far, I have only looked on at the game. I am more concerned with its possible influence on my own particular branch of sport, and here I do not think there is much occasion for anxiety. Everyone will remember the doleful predictions which were uttered some ten years ago when lawn tennis became so popular. Well, the number of lawn tennis players has increased yearly without lessening the number of cricketers. The American baseball invasion was another scare which lasted for a short time, but it has had no effect on cricket.