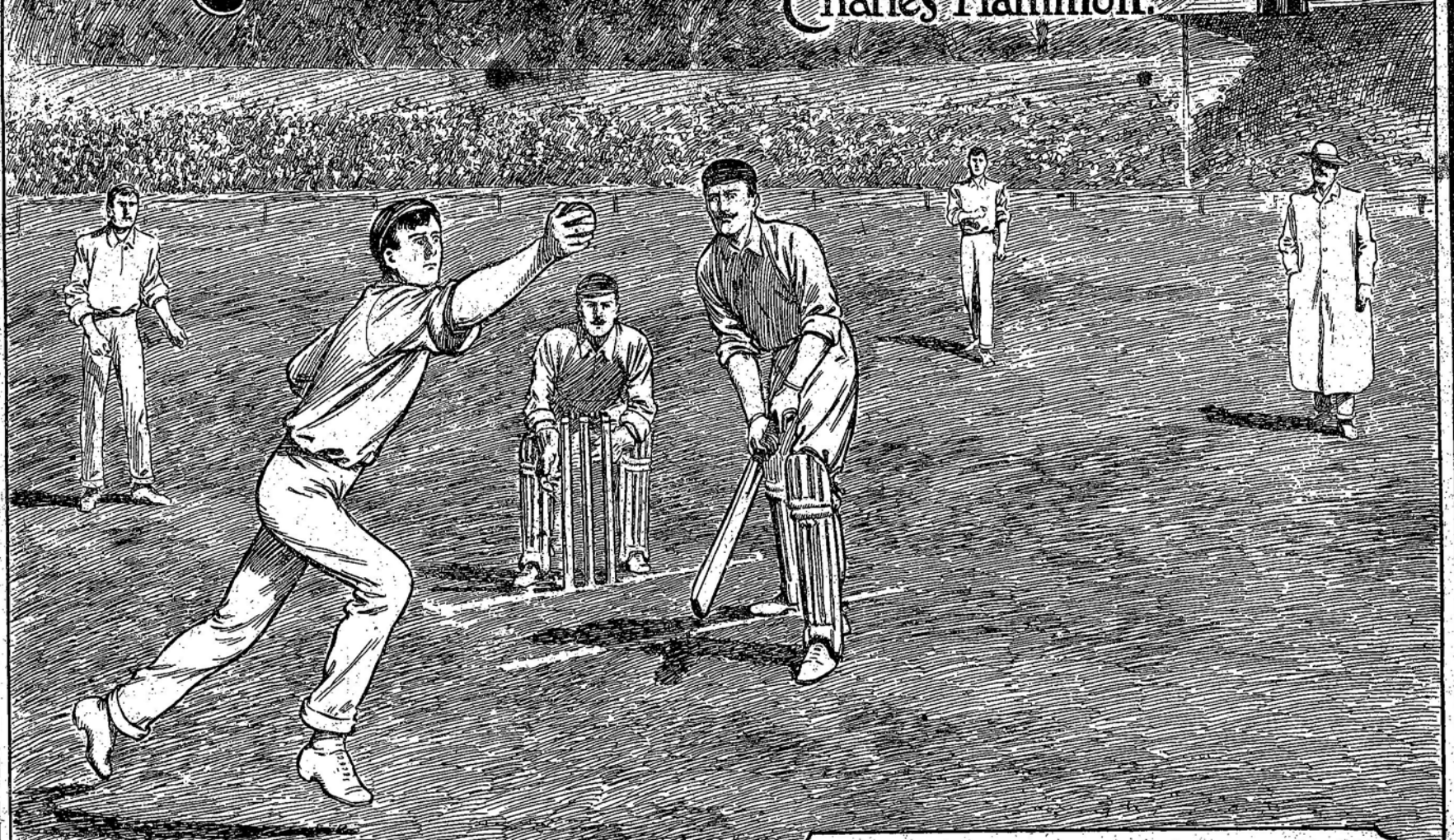


The Only Paper for Young Athletes!



KING CRICKET! By
Charles Hamilton.



ARTHUR LOVELL MAKES A
SPLENDID CATCH (See Inside.)

Healthy, Interesting, & Instructive.

You Must Read This Grand Athletic Tale!



KING CRICKET!

A Fascinating New Story of County Cricket.

Written by CHARLES HAMILTON, and Illustrated by E. E. BRISCOE.

The Chief Characters in this Fine Story.

ARTHUR LOVELL, Leamshire's champion batsman. He becomes a professional. His uncle is ruined by James Lagden.

KIT VALANCE, Leamshire's best bowler. He first comes to notice in the Colts' match, where he takes Arthur Lovell's wicket. Later he becomes Arthur's firm chum.

GEORGEY LAGDEN, an amateur and a good batsman. He is bitterly jealous of Arthur Lovell, whom he hates and endeavours to injure. He is Arthur's rival for the hand of Molly Hilton. A snobbish character.

JAMES LAGDEN, who has ruined Arthur's uncle.

BLANE, Captain of Leamshire, and the steady friend of Arthur and Kit. He is Molly Hilton's cousin.

PONSONBY, Geoffrey Lagden's friend, and a man of similar character—snobbish to a degree.

The first instalment tells how Arthur Lovell distinguishes himself in the Colts' match, in spite of the efforts which Geoffrey Lagden puts forth to keep him in the shade. In the second innings, just as Arthur is about to take his place at the wicket, Lagden tells him that his uncle is a ruined man, thus putting him off his form. At the earliest possible moment he leaves the field, and speeds towards London to learn exactly what is amiss. His uncle tells him that James Lagden is the cause of his ruin.

Arthur realises that he can no longer retain his position as amateur cricketer for Leamshire, and sends in his resignation; but his friend Kit Valance suggests his turning professional. Arthur thinks it a good idea, and decides to do so. He rejoins his club, and in the first innings of the match against Leicestershire he tops the century.

(Now follow his fortunes as detailed in the instalment below.)

A Friend in Need.

"KIT, what's the matter?" Arthur Lovell asked the question in a quick, anxious tone. It was the lunch interval. Leamshire were eight down for 165 when the cricketers knocked off for a well-earned rest. After lunch Arthur had missed Kit, and now he had suddenly come upon him sitting alone, with a look of the deepest dejection upon his face.

The young cricketer held a letter in his hand, but he was not reading it. He looked up quickly as he saw Arthur, and coloured.

Lovell looked at him anxiously. More than once he had observed about Kit Valance a gravity unusual in one of his boyish years, and he had attributed it to the sometimes slighting treatment he experienced in the Leamshire Club. Now it struck him for the first time that there might be a deeper cause for it.

"Is anything wrong, Kit?" Arthur said, with a glance at the letter in his chum's hand. "Of course, I don't want to inquire into your affairs, as you know; but if there's anything wrong, perhaps I could help you."

Kit shook his head. "I'm afraid nobody can help me, sir. It's my brother in trouble again."

Lovell looked surprised.

"I didn't know you had a brother, Kit."

The young bowler smiled bitterly.

"I'm not proud of him, sir, and I don't speak about him if I can help it. If the facts were known in Leamchester, I expect it would make my position in the club more difficult than it is now. Of course, with you it's different. If you cared to hear about it, I think it would be a relief to tell you. I've been on the point of doing so a good many times."

Lovell dropped into a seat on the bench by his side.

"Of course I should care to hear, Kit, if you're in trouble, though I may not be able to help you out of it. Why haven't you spoken about it before, old fellow?"

"Because you were rich, and the difficulty is chiefly a money one," replied Kit, with a faint smile. "I might have been misunderstood."

"I should never have misunderstood you, Kit," said Lovell quietly; "but I understand why you did not speak. Go on."

Kit was silent for a few moments, as if even to his chum he felt some difficulty in speaking about the matter which had always been a secret buried in his own heart.

"I suppose you'll think me a fool for troubling my head about Len at all," he said, colouring a little. "He has always been what people call 'a bad lot,' though I can't help believing that he has his good points. Len and I are twins, and I dare say that accounts for my sticking to him. He went to the bad years ago, and though he has never fallen into the grip of the law, I am afraid he owed that to his good luck. I thought he had turned over a new leaf when he got into the office of Mr. Lagden, but that doesn't seem to have lasted long, to judge by this letter."

Arthur Lovell started.

"Mr. Lagden? Do you mean James Lagden, Geoffrey Lagden's father?"

Kit nodded.

"Yes; of course, you know him. He's a rich banker."

"The man who ruined my uncle," said Arthur between his teeth. "The man who tricked and, I firmly believe, swindled him, though it is impossible to prove it."

"I shouldn't wonder. I know from Len that he's a hard man—hard as nails—and merciless in his business methods. But read that letter."

Arthur Lovell took the letter, and glanced over it. His brow darkened as he read the carefully-written, flippant epistle.

"Dear Kit," it ran—"I am in trouble again, and, of course, I come to you. Can you let me have a twenty-pound note? I haven't bothered you for some time, you know, so you ought to be able to manage it. I am sure you will."

"It's a serious matter. I am in debt to just that extent to my excellent employer, Mr. James Lagden. He is not aware of it yet; but unless I have the money by Monday morning, he cannot fail to learn that I have been borrowing his cash without asking his permission first, and he is sure to be unreasonable, and to call it by a harsher name than mere borrowing. So, you see, I simply must have it."

"I know you'll stump up, like a good fellow. I follow your career with the keenest interest from this smoky old city, and often envy you playing the great game on the green, under the sunny sky. If I had had my fair allowance of sense I should have taken up cricket as seriously as you did, though I suppose I should never have become Leamshire's champion bowler. I am confident that you will head the bowling average this year, and as you are certain to play in all the county's first-class matches, you will scoop in quite a crop of fivers. Will you be able to spare one now and then for your affectionate brother? Anyway, do try to let me have the twenty by Monday, or before, or I shall be walked off that same day like Eugene Aram. You remember—the two stern-faced peelers, and

"Eugene Aram walked between, With gyves upon his wrists."

"I know you don't want that unhappy fate to overtake your twin and counterpart; and besides, as your classic features are well known, I might be mistaken in the dock for Leamshire's famous bowler, which would make things awkward for you in that extremely high and mighty club of little tin gods you have the honour to belong to."

"So stump up like a sportsman, and earn the undying gratitude of your affectionate twin, LEN VALANCE."

Arthur Lovell handed back the letter.

"If that were written to me," he said, "I should leave the writer of it to take the consequences of his action; but, of course, if he were my brother I should feel differently, I suppose. Is it true that he so strongly resembles you?"

"Yes," we have often been mistaken for one another."

"Then it is quite possible that awkwardness might arise from his arrest. It's an unfortunate position for you, Kit, old fellow. I know the limitations of a professional cricketer's income better than ever since I have become one. This must be a hard pull for you."

"It is, and one I cannot meet," said the young bowler miserably. "I actually haven't twenty pounds in the world, and so I cannot possibly send the money. That's what's worrying me."

"And you were not going to speak about it!" exclaimed Arthur reproachfully. "I think you might have remembered that I am your friend, Kit. It isn't as if I were rich now. I am as poor as yourself, and so there is no reason at all why you shouldn't have told me. I have twenty-five pounds in the bank. My riches have shrunk to exactly that sum," he went on, laughing. "You cannot refuse a loan."

"It's awfully good of you, Lovell," said Kit, in a low voice. "You're the only man in the world I would ask. I want ten pounds to make up the sum. I can manage the rest. I shall get five pounds for this match, and six if we beat Leicestershire. I shall hand it directly to you, and next week I shall be able to settle for the rest."

Lovell nodded.

"Then you shall send it off this evening. Kit, and get it off your mind. But after you have got Len Valance out of this hole, how do you know he will run straight in the future?"

Kit sighed.

"I don't know it, Lovell; in fact, I don't suppose he will. But he'll leave me alone for a time, and I shall be able, I hope, to meet his next difficulty. You must think me a fool," he went on, colouring, "but the last words I spoke to my mother on her deathbed were a promise to look after Len. He seems a bad lot to you; but he's rather weak than bad, and easily led

astray by others. He's the kind of man who runs straight so long as he's not tempted, and yields at once to bad influence. This money that he has—has borrowed from his employer, has gone into the hands of sharpers, I am convinced. I hoped at one time he would take up cricket—he was a good cricketer, and still plays sometimes—but he hadn't the patience to make slow beginnings—"

He broke off abruptly. "Hullo! Time's up."

He rose, and Arthur rose also. Lovell's face was grave, and his heart was heavy for his chum. They walked back in silence, each busy with his thoughts. The Leamshire innings had recommenced, and the crowd was thickening round the palisades, watching the resumption of play.

The Leicestershire Innings and a Quarrel.

LEAMSHIRE'S few remaining wickets soon went down to the bowling of

Jayes, King, and Odell, and the first innings of Leicestershire commenced.

Leamshire were all down for exactly 199, of which, as we all know, 105 belonged to Arthur Lovell.

No other Leamshire score had come anywhere near his, and he was the acknowledged champion of the day; acknowledged, that is, by all whose hearts were not touched by the demon of jealousy.

His name was on the lips of all the crowd, and if it was mentioned with a sneer or a shrug, it was only within the Leamshire pavilion.

For Geoffrey Lagden's hatred was fed by the success of the man he persisted in regarding as his rival, though there was no thoughts of rivalry in Arthur's mind. And the figure Lagden had cut in the Leamshire first innings was certainly a humiliating one, and bitterly disappointing to an ambitious cricketer. Arthur Lovell had topped the century, and Lagden had retired with a duck's egg to his credit, and his heart was seething with bitterness in consequence.

Leicestershire opened their innings with Sir Arthur Hazelrigg, the skipper, and Knight.

Blane placed his men deep to field, and sent Kit Valance to bowl the first over. Kit was looking all himself again. The difficulty which had disquieted and depressed him was removed now, thanks to the friendship of Arthur Lovell. That it would undoubtedly crop up again later did not trouble him now. He was given to taking things quietly, and never meeting trouble half-way. The weight once gone from his mind, he dismissed the matter, and gave his whole thoughts to the game he was playing.

Lovell glanced at him, and was glad to see him in such good form. Lovell was fielding at point, watchful for chances. The Leamshire crowd, who knew Kit Valance well, became interested the moment he was seen to take the ball in hand.

The Leicestershire captain also knew Valance's bowling, and was keenly on his guard against it. He was a good and steady bat, as he soon showed. As he came to the wicket Kit ceased bowling trial balls to the wicket-keeper, and prepared for business.

He took a short run, and his arm went up and over with the lightning movement the Leamshire crowd had learned to know.

Clack! And the ball flew from Sir Arthur Hazelrigg's bat, and skimmed away just beyond the clutch of point, and the batsmen ran and ran again.

The next ball gave Hazelrigg a single and Knight faced the bowling.

Kit sent down a fast ball, full of spin, which glanced off the Leicestershire man's bat, fairly into the outspread hands of point.

Up went the ball from Arthur Lovell's hand, skyward, to fall straight as a die into his palm again.

And the batsman looked glum as a cheer rang out.

"Well caught!"

"Oh, well caught!"

He glanced at the umpire rather unnecessarily.

"Out!" was the laconic decision. And the Leicestershire man walked away.

Odell came to take his place at the stumps. He lived through the rest of the over, stopping the balls without a single run, and then the field crossed, and Tweedie took the ball.

Tweedie was a medium-sized, active Scotsman, a professional in the Leamshire team, and a good, sometimes brilliant, bowler. He was nowhere the equal of Kit Valance, but at the same time it was certain that he was streets ahead of any other bowler in the Leamshire team, and after Kit, it was upon Tweedie that Blane placed his chief reliance.

Both Lovell and Lagden were good change bowlers, but the business of taking wickets fell to Kit Valance and Alex Tweedie.

The Scotsman was a slow bowler, but he

could at times send down a ball that would puzzle the most experienced batsman. He did not cut so handsome a figure on the bowling crease as Kit, but he could be dangerous to the enemy, and after all that was the chief thing to be desired.

Tweedie's slow balls, however, did not seem dangerous to the Leicestershire captain, who played the first for six and the second for two, and the third for another two. The fourth ball came off his bat and whizzed past point and straight for cover-point, as if he had designed to give Ponsonby, who was fielding there, a catch!

Blane, who was keeping wicket, grinned with glee. The catch was an easy one, and he had not the slightest doubt that Ponsonby would gather it in without difficulty, and dismiss one of the most dangerous of the Leicestershire batsmen for a small figure.

It was all a matter of a few seconds.

Arthur Lovell, at point, had no chance to touch the ball, but he followed its flight with his eye, and he saw that Ponsonby was not alert. There was no time to waste—no time to think of anything but that an easy catch was about to be "muffed."

"Look out, Ponsonby!" called out Arthur.

Ponsonby started. He was by no means so alert as a fieldman should be. He was not looking for that catch; though, of course, he ought to have been looking for that or anything else. And he would certainly never have even caught at the ball until too late, but for Lovell's warning exclamation.

As it was he caught at it too late or too clumsily. The ball escaped his grasp and rolled on the ground at his feet. From the palisades, whence the blunder had been watched and noted, came a loud hoot.

"Butter-fingers!"

Ponsonby stooped and picked up the ball, his face red with rage. He darted a savage glance towards Arthur.

"What the dickens do you mean by shouting at me?" he exclaimed. "Mind your own business, confound you!"

A hot retort rose to Lovell's lips. But he did not utter it. He remembered himself in time, and biting his lip to keep back the angry words, he turned his back on Ponsonby.

The latter returned the ball, and stood with a dark frown upon his brow. He had muffed an easy catch, and he knew it, and given the Leicestershire skipper's innings a new lease of life. But he wasn't thinking of that. He was thinking of the unheard-of insolence of a paid professional in daring to shout at him in the open field.

The Leicestershire batsman breathed more freely as he realised his narrow escape, and he probably felt grateful to Ponsonby. His innings had been threatened with an abrupt termination, and now he showed that he was not slow to profit by the lesson.

He batted steadily and cautiously, and there were no more easy catches offered to the Leamshire fieldsmen. The chance had come, and gone, and it was not repeated.

Sir Arthur Hazelrigg's score had mounted to forty before Kit Valance succeeded in clean bowling him.

Then came in King, the left-handed batsman, and he did well for his side, piling up thirty runs before he was dismissed, i.e.w.

After that the Leicestershire men had very little of a look-in. Kit and Tweedie between them accounted for the wickets at a good rate, amid cheers from the Leamshire crowd watching their achievements.

Lovell, put on as a change bowler, captured one wicket, clean-bowled, but the rest of the work was done by Kit Valance and the Scotsman.

The Leicestershire innings closed just before the time appointed for the stumps to be drawn, with a total of 101 runs.

Leamshire were ninety-eight ahead, and full of confident anticipations for the morrow's play.

Indeed, Colonel Hilton was inclined to believe that the match would probably finish in two days instead of the three allotted to it as a first-class county fixture. And the colonel was far from dissatisfied with the prospect.

He was a cricketer and a sportsman to the fingertips, and whatever might be the views of committee and secretary, the colonel thought more of the game than the "gate."

It was scarcely possible to doubt now that Leamshire would beat their visitors, and that would be an auspicious opening for the season, and a promise of what was to come in the contest for the County Championship.

Already in his dreams the colonel saw Leamshire as champion county, encountering the Rest of England at the Oval, and winning a glorious victory.

But there were other Leamshire men on the ground who were far from being in the same satisfied mood as Colonel Hilton.

Ponsonby had come off the field in a towering passion. He had been nursing his injury, as he considered it, all through the Leicestershire innings, and now he was bursting with it.

The crowd was dispersing after the play had ceased, and Arthur Lovell was chatting with Kit, when the incensed amateur strode up to him.

(Continued on the next page.)

ANSWERS
ONE PENNY.
Every Tuesday.

Another Long Instalment of This Grand Story Next Week.

KING CRICKET.

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Hallo, here's Ponsonby on the warpath, Lovell!" muttered Kit, as he saw the amateur approaching with rapid steps and a black brow. "Looks like a row."

Arthur compressed his lips. A glance at Ponsonby showed that Kit's prediction was probably a correct one. The cricketer was in a passion, and there was no consideration in his heart towards one who was, in a way, at his mercy.

"Yes, it looks like it, Kit," said Arthur Lovell, in a low voice. "I thought from his expression several times during the Leicestershire innings that he was looking for trouble."

"He has no reason to get his rag out. Anybody might have called out to him as you did. I should certainly have done so if I had been in your place; so would anybody else in the team," said Kit.

Lovell nodded. A bitter smile was on his handsome face for a moment.

"Yes, Kit, any other member of the team might have done so unremarked. But I forgot for the moment my position in the club."

"I see. That's what's got his back up?"

"I imagine so."

Ponsonby had now reached them.

Arthur Lovell looked calmly at him, and nodded.

"What the dickens did you mean by speaking to me on the ground in the way you did, Lovell?" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"I think that's pretty evident," said Arthur quietly. "I spoke to you in the way I did because you couldn't see that catch coming, and I wanted to save it."

"What business was it of yours, confound you?" broke out Ponsonby violently. "Are you employed here to teach gentlemen how to play the game?"

Arthur winced. But his manner was perfectly quiet and calm as he replied to the insulting speech.

"Some of them need teaching, Mr. Ponsonby, to judge by the way they played the game this afternoon," he said.

Ponsonby gritted his teeth. Arthur Lovell's quietness added to his rage. He had come there to bully, and he was a little puzzled and nonplussed by the man whom, somehow, he did not seem to be able to bully. He was silent for a moment, and Lovell turned away.

Ponsonby started forward and caught him by the arm.

"Stop a bit, Lovell," he exclaimed; "I haven't finished!"

Arthur looked him steadily in the face.

"Let go my arm," he said.

"Do you think you are going to give orders to me?"

"Let go my arm!"

The veins were standing out on Lovell's forehead; his right fist was clenched hard. If Ponsonby had not obeyed him, he would have been lying on the grass the next moment, whatever the consequences might be.

But he realised it, and it was no part of his desire to come to blows with a man who could have thrashed him easily. He released his hold. But that tacit defeat only added to his rage.

"I haven't finished yet!" he exclaimed thickly. "You spoke to me on the ground in a way I have no intention of submitting to. You forget that you are a paid professional, and that it is part of your business to be respectful to a gentleman."

"I have never, to my knowledge, failed in respect to a gentleman," said Arthur, with a look of quiet scorn that stung the other to the quick.

Ponsonby drew a deep, hissing breath.

"You will either apologise to me for what you said on the field this afternoon, Lovell, or I shall report you to the committee for insolence!" he exclaimed.

Arthur Lovell stood quite still.

Kit's eyes were blazing with rage. For two pines he would have flung himself upon Ponsonby and sent him flying. But he realised that it was Arthur's affair, and that he had no right to interfere. He stood by, quivering with anger, his nails digging into the palms of his hands.

Ponsonby took no notice of him; his eyes were fixed upon Arthur Lovell. His look expressed a mean triumph, for his threat was one that the young professional could not combat. To be reported to the county committee for insolence to a gentleman amateur was no light thing. That the colonel would stand by him Arthur was pretty certain. But to most of the committee he was simply a paid player. It might lead to friction between the old soldier and his colleagues if he stood up for Lovell.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Ponsonby, with a ring of triumph in his voice.

Arthur's lips were white, but his voice was quite steady as he replied:

"I had no intention of offending you when I spoke on the field. I might have expected you to know that. But, since you have taken offence, I am sorry I spoke."

Ponsonby smiled grimly.

"Then you had better take more care in the future, that's all," he said; and he turned on his heel and walked away.

Kit made no remark. Lovell, with a short nod to his friend, walked away, his brow dark and moody. Never had the change in his posi-

tion been brought home to him so keenly, so bitterly as at that moment. And, not for the first time, he doubted whether he had done wisely, after all, in returning to Leamshire.

Bitter Blood.

THE Leamshire men opened their innings on the second day of the match in high spirits. Their success of the previous day was inspiring, and they had no doubt whatever of their ability to handle their visitors, and they looked forward to an innings lasting from the time the stumps were pitched to the time they were drawn.

There is no need to describe that innings in detail. It was a good deal like that of the previous day, excepting that Lagden succeeded in scoring forty before he was bowled by Odell, and Arthur Lovell's score reached only seventy before he was caught out by King.

The innings lasted well into the afternoon, and at length Leamshire were all down for a hundred and sixty. It was late in the day when Blane led out his men to field.

Leicestershire opened their second innings in a grim, determined humour. They had an enormous leeway to make up, if they were to win; and, as a matter of fact, their best prospect was of making the match an unfinished one. But this was not likely to be easy with a bowler like Kit Valance in the ranks of the home eleven.



A. C. McLaren, the Famous Lancashire cricketer.

Kit seemed to be in his best form. By the time play closed for the day four Leicestershire wickets had fallen for thirty runs, and of these two had been accounted for by Kit Valance. The visitors had been left an impossible task for the third day of the match, and in the Leamshire team there was rejoicing for a certain victory.

Arthur Lovell was changing his clothes in the dressing-room when there was a tap at the door, and a note was brought in for Kit Valance.

Kit took it from the boy who brought it, and a look of vexation came over his face as he glanced at the writing.

Arthur looked at him.

"It's from my brother," said the young bowler quietly, as he tore open the letter.

He read it through, the expression of vexation upon his handsome face becoming more pronounced.

"Is the fellow who gave you this waiting for an answer, my lad?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Tell him I will be with him in ten minutes from now."

The boy took his departure, and Kit turned to his chum with a worried look.

"It's from Len," he said. "He has come down here, and wants to see me at once. I don't know why. But I feel that there is something wrong. I sent him the money last night, as you know. This looks as if there is something else. I suppose he did not tell me all."

"If I can do anything, Kit, don't fail to tell me."

"Thank you! I don't know what he wants, but he hasn't come all the way down to Leamshire for nothing. I am convinced of that."

And, with a dark expression upon his face, the young bowler quitted the room a few minutes later.

Arthur finished his dressing, and left the pavilion in a very thoughtful and serious mood. The unpleasant encounter with Ponsonby of the previous evening was still in his mind; and he was thinking, too, of the trouble which Kit bore so quietly and bravely. Each of them had a battle to fight, each in his own way, and each needed all his pluck not to give in and go to the wall.

"Mr. Lovell!"

He looked up quickly, and raised his cap.

Molly Hilton was standing before him. Buried in thought, he had not seen her till she spoke. She was looking at him with a mischievous smile in her dark-blue eyes.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Lovell," she said brightly. "Although I think I can guess them. You are planning some mighty strokes to astonish the natives at Lord's and the Oval when the Leamshire team goes up to town."

Arthur laughed.

"Not at all," he said. "Forgive me if I say that I was thinking of anything but cricket at that moment. What did you think of the day's play, Miss Hilton?"

"Very creditable to Leamshire," she said.

"Leicestershire haven't a chance left for to-

morrow. It is a good augury for the season, though we shall find the fight harder when we have to face teams like the M.C.C., Surrey, and Kent. Do you think we have any chance of robbing Kent of the championship, Mr. Lovell?"

"I hope so, if the Leamshire men 'pull' well together," said Arthur. "We have made a good beginning, at all events."

"And you are glad to be in the ranks again?"

"Ye-es," said Lovell slowly.

The girl caught something in his tone, and changed the subject tactfully.

"My father is busy in the secretary's room, and it is such a lovely evening that I thought of walking home," she said. "If you are not too fatigued, you may walk as far as Lincroft with me, Mr. Lovell."

"Fatigued?" said Lovell, delighted. "Scarcely. I shall be very happy and honoured, Miss Hilton."

At that moment Geoffrey Lagden came up. He bowed to Molly Hilton, without taking the slightest notice of Arthur.

"Ah, I have been looking for you, Miss Hilton," he said, with his most agreeable smile.

"Indeed!" said Molly coldly.

"Yes; as the colonel is not returning just yet, I thought you might accept a lift in my dogcart as far as Lincroft. I have the colonel's permission to ask you."

"Thank you, Mr. Lagden, but Mr. Lovell is going to walk home with me."

Lagden bit his lip.

Arthur could hardly help smiling. Lagden had deliberately tried to ignore him, as if unaware that he was standing there, and Molly's refusal was a "facer" for him.

"But—" began Lagden, rather confusedly.

Molly looked at him calmly.

"Well?"

Lagden paused. Hot and angry words were on his lips, but Molly's presence was a restraint. He felt keenly his humiliation in the eyes of the man he had wished to ignore and insult. But the sight of Lovell's stepping to Molly's side was too much for his prudence.

"Miss Hilton, as I said, I had your father's permission to drive you home!" he exclaimed quickly, "and—and—"

"I have already told you, Mr. Lagden, that Mr. Lovell is going to walk with me to Lincroft, and I thank you all the same," said Molly calmly.



K. S. Ranjitsinhji, the Indian Prince, who rivals John Bull at his own game.

Lagden's eyes burned. He was reckless now. "But, really, Miss Hilton, I am afraid the colonel will not be pleased."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed. You are too good and generous, Miss Hilton, to remember Lovell's social position, but—"

Molly's eyes flashed.

"You have said quite enough. Come, Mr. Lovell."

"Not quite enough," said Lagden, with a bitter sneer. "Even the fear of your anger, Miss Hilton, cannot prevent me from saying that the colonel may be angry at the presumption of a paid player in offering—"

Arthur was nearly choking with rage.

"Be silent, sir!" exclaimed Molly. "How dare you insult Mr. Lovell—my friend? If I were not here, I do not think you would venture to do so. If you were a gentleman, you would apologise to him upon the spot. But I suppose it is useless to expect that of you."

Her scorn made Lagden wince as if a whip had struck him. "Mr. Lovell, I am waiting for you."

"Mr. Lagden is right, Miss Hilton," said Arthur, in a low voice. "He has spoken like a cad, but he is right. You are kind enough to forget that I am no longer your equal, but I cannot forget it, and others will not."

Molly made an imperious gesture.

"Nonsense, Mr. Lovell. Come, I am waiting."

Arthur could say nothing further. They walked away from the Leamshire County Ground together, down the leafy, shady lane that led to the colonel's house.

Lagden stood looking after them, grinding his teeth, his eyes on fire with rage. Never had he realised so keenly how much he loved Molly Hilton, as at this moment when he saw

her leave with Lovell, her last glance towards him being full of stinging scorn and contempt. At that moment Geoffrey Lagden could have stricken his rival to the earth with a savage pleasure.

Arthur Lovell's brow was gloomy as he walked by Molly's side. The girl was the first to break the silence.

"I am sorry you should have been exposed to such a scene, Mr. Lovell. I hope you will not attach any importance to Mr. Lagden's remarks. His words were dictated by his own mean heart. My father has never dreamed of regarding you as anything else but a friend because of the change in your fortunes."

"I am sure of that," said Arthur. "Yet he was, in a sense, right. I have no right to claim your friendship now that—now that—"

"You are wrong," said the girl quietly. "You have every right to claim it, and unless you tell me you do not want it—"

"Ah, that will never be! It is almost the only thing I have left, and I shall not part with it lightly. Yet—"

"Then say no more on that topic. I think even Mr. Lagden will be ashamed of his ungenerous words when he is cool."

"I am beginning to think I made a mistake in coming back to Leamshire," said Arthur gloomily.

"You made no mistake," said Molly. "You did rightly. You are following the path of duty, and what matters the carping of small minds and mean hearts?"

Arthur nodded, and his face brightened. After all, Molly was right. He could afford to despise Geoffrey Lagden, and what mattered the contempt of one who was himself contemptible?

A short walk brought them to Lincroft. They entered the old garden by the path along the river, and at the gate Molly left Arthur, with a bright smile of encouragement. The girl's graceful form disappeared among the trees, but Arthur was in no hurry to leave the spot.

The sun was setting over the woods of Leamshire, and the hour was very quiet and calm. Arthur stood, leaning back on the gate, watching absently the stream as it rippled by, red in the sunset, save where fell the shadows of the trees, almost at his feet.

A sudden footstep startled him from his reverie.

He looked up quickly. Geoffrey Lagden stood before him. With a quick glance, Lagden noted that Arthur was alone.

"So I have found you!"

Arthur's lip curled with scorn.

"You followed me?"

"Why not?" said Lagden, shrugging his shoulders. "Are you to direct my actions—you, a hireling—a man paid to—"

"Enough," said Arthur, restraining his temper with difficulty. "You have sought me out to insult me, I can see. It is brave of you to heap taunts upon a man whose position ties his hands. I warn you that you may presume too far upon my forbearance."

"Your forbearance!" Lagden laughed mockingly. "I have sought you out to speak to you—to warn you. To warn you," he went on savagely, "not to presume upon Miss Hilton's foolish and mistaken kindness. If you do not know how to keep your place, you must be taught!"

Arthur's hands twitched to be at the throat of his insulter, but he still restrained himself, though with a terrible effort.

"I wish to have nothing to say to you, Geoffrey Lagden!" he said thickly. "Let me pass, please."

Lagden did not stir.

"I shall let you pass when I have said my say, which is not yet. I—"

"Let me pass! I tell you I will not listen to you! I will not answer for myself if you say more!"

"Bah! What do I care for—"

Arthur Lovell brushed past him roughly. Lagden staggered aside, and then, red with rage, raised his hand, and struck the young cricketer full in the face with the open palm.

It was the last straw! Arthur's clenched fist shot out like lightning, and Lagden reeled away—reeling on the verge of the deep river, and lost his footing in the rushes. There was a sharp cry, a sullen splash.

For a moment a white face looked from the waters as the swift current swept its victim away, and then it disappeared. Arthur Lovell stood on the bank, gazing out over the dusky river with wild, horrified eyes.

(Another enthralling long instalment of this great new cricket story will appear on Saturday next.)

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