

GREAT NELSON LEE STORY STARTS TO-DAY!

The Boys' Realm 1d
of Sport and Adventure.

[SATURDAY, JULY 10, 1909.]

BOWLED OUT!

By Maxwell S.

A TALE OF
COUNTY CRICKET
&
NELSON LEE. DETECTIVE

By Maxwell Scott.



ENGLAND v. AUSTRALIA—THE THIRD GREAT TEST MATCH—AT LEEDS.



REDFERN MINOR.

The Second Instalment of Charles Hamilton's
Fascinating New School Tale.

"There'll be a crowd of Mods here in a minute. This way! Here, lend a hand, some of you—this chap has got to be rescued!"

Half a dozen Classical juniors promptly piled upon Redfern, and he was "rescued" in spite of his resistance. They whisked him out of the study, and down the passage. The whole troop of Classicals, whooping with triumph, followed. In the wreck of the study, Taffy & Co. sat up dazedly.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Taffy. "Really, chappy, I feel awfully—er—dishevelled!" murmured Vernon, trying to rub the jam out of his hair. "By Jove!"

Taffy staggered to his feet. "After them!" he grunted. "They're not going to collar that new chap and his giddy vote. We'll call up the fellows!"

And Taffy and Rake hurried out of the dismantled study. Vernon went on rubbing the jam out of his hair. He had had enough of "scrapping" for the time. But Taffy and Rake could do no good. Redfern had been whisked along the Fourth-Form passage to Skelton's study, and whisked into it, and the door was closed and locked on the inside. A yell of derision from a Classical crowd greeted the baffled Mods, and they speedily beat a retreat again.

Inside Skelton's study, Redfern was bumped down on the carpet. His rough handling had rather bewildered him, and he sat there for some moments hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Done them!" gasped Skelton. "A clean do!" chuckled Brown III, dabbing his nose with his handkerchief. Taffy's fist had smitten that nose, and smitten it hard, and there was a liberal flow of "claret" as a result; but little did Brown III care for that. He dabbed away and grinned cheerfully. Redfern jumped up.

"You stay where you are!" said Skelton warningly. "We've rescued you, and you belong to us. If you weren't a new kid, I'd lick

you for going around with Mods. We keep up the giddy dignity of our side in this school, I can tell you. As a matter of fact, the Classical side is the school, and the Moderns are nobodies, and nowhere. You ought to be jolly glad to be rescued from the measly boundaries. Now you're going to stick here till the Fourth-Form election comes off, and then you're going to vote for me!"

"Rats!" said Redfern cheerfully. "I haven't yet decided whom I'm going to vote for, but I'm not going to stick here, anyway. I suppose I'm my own master?"

"I suppose you're not!" said Skelton, with a sniff. "You young rotter, you're bound to stand by your side. You're a Classical, ain't you? You—you worm!"

"You're calling me some pretty names—" "I'll give you some pretty thick ears, too, if you talk to me!" said Skelton. "After all the trouble we've taken over you!"

"Ungrateful pig!" said Brown. Redfern grinned.

"Look here—unlock that door!" "No fear!"

"I don't want to stay here! For one thing, I want to speak to my brother as soon as he comes in. Now—"

"Blow your brother! I can tell you, you're not going to come any rot in the Fourth Form, because you've got a brother in the Sixth," said Skelton. "It's rather against a junior to have a major in an Upper Form, and the less you say about it the better!"

"More rats!" Redfern stepped towards the door, and Skelton stepped into his way. "Now, I want to get out!"

"You'll stay there!" "There'll be trouble!"

Skelton laughed. He thought it would be simple enough for himself and Brown to keep the new boy in the study. But he left off laughing the next moment as Redfern's strong grasp closed upon him. He was whirled away from the door, gasping in amazement at the muscular strength displayed by the new boy.

"Leggo!" he gasped. "Here, lend a hand, Brown—the beast will be getting out!"

Brown rushed forward. Redfern swung Skelton round, and, suddenly releasing his hold, sent him crashing into Brown.

"Oh!" roared Brown. He sat down violently in the fender, and Skelton sat on him. For the moment they were too dazed to move again. Redfern unlocked the door, and slipped the key into the outside of the lock.

"Hold on," roared Skelton—"hold on! I—"

"Gerroff my chest!" murmured Brown, in a muffled voice.

"Hold on—" Skelton leaped up, but it was too late.

"Good-bye!" said Redfern sweetly; and the door shut, and the key clicked in the lock as Skelton hurled himself madly upon it.

Skelton dragged at the handle, but the door was fast. He kicked and shouted, and was only answered by a chuckle from outside. Redfern slipped the key into his pocket and walked away down the passage.

Skelton kicked frantically at the solid oak door.

"Open this door!" he roared. "Rescue, Classicals! Collar that cad! Rescue!"

There were a good many of the Classical juniors still in the passage, and some of them had observed Redfern's action with blank amazement. At the kicking and shouting from within Study B they understood, and five or six of them ran towards Redfern.

"Collar him!" shouted Phipps.

Redfern broke into a run. He did not mean to be "collared" by either party of the rivals of St. Dorothy's, and he guessed that in the Close he would be safe from open attack. He ran for the stairs and ran down them, with half a dozen excited and angry Classicals whooping on his track. In the lower passage, he could see the open door, with the wide green Close beyond, and could catch a glimpse of the cricketers.

But just as he scudded for the door, with the pursuers close behind, a senior came in from the Close. There was no time for Redfern to stop. He was right upon the newcomer before he saw him, and nothing could possibly have stopped a collision.

Right into him Redfern dashed, and the Sixth-Former, with a startled and angry exclamation, staggered back. Redfern, dizzy from the shock, reeled against the door. The pursuing juniors, scared at the sight of a prefect "biffed" by a Lower-Form boy, scattered in an instant, and in the twinkling of an eye they had vanished from sight.

Redfern was not so lucky.

The Sixth-Former recovered himself in a moment, and his grasp closed savagely on the boy's collar. Redfern was dragged away from the door, and shaken till his head swam.

"You young sweep!" said the prefect angrily. "How dare you—Why—Sidney!" He released the junior, and at the same moment Sidney Redfern recognised his brother.

"Arthur!" Arthur Redfern looked at his minor with a gloomy expression.

"Come to my study," he said abruptly, and strode away.

And Redfern, with a curious sinking at the heart, followed him.

THE 5th CHAPTER. Ransome's Fag.

ARTHUR REDFERN'S face did not relax when he stood in his study and looked at his younger brother. In fact, the cloud on his brow seemed to deepen. Sidney stole a glance at his face, and his glance was half appealing. He knew that his major was angry with him, and he was greatly troubled by the thought. He had come to the school with the intention of doing everything in his power to gain the approval of Arthur. There were few things he would not have done to win a cordial nod from the big brother whom he regarded as the ideal of young manhood. He realised miserably that he had made a bad start.

"So you've come!" said Redfern major grimly.

Sidney started. "I—I'm sorry I biffed into you like that, Arthur," he said slowly. "The chaps were after me—of course, it was only a lark—and I didn't see you—" He broke off. He was beginning to realise that it was not the collision in the doorway that had brought that dark cloud to his brother's face. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing?" "Didn't you want me to come to St. Dorothy's?" asked the junior, and there was a ring of indignation as well as pain in his voice.

Arthur's expression changed a little.

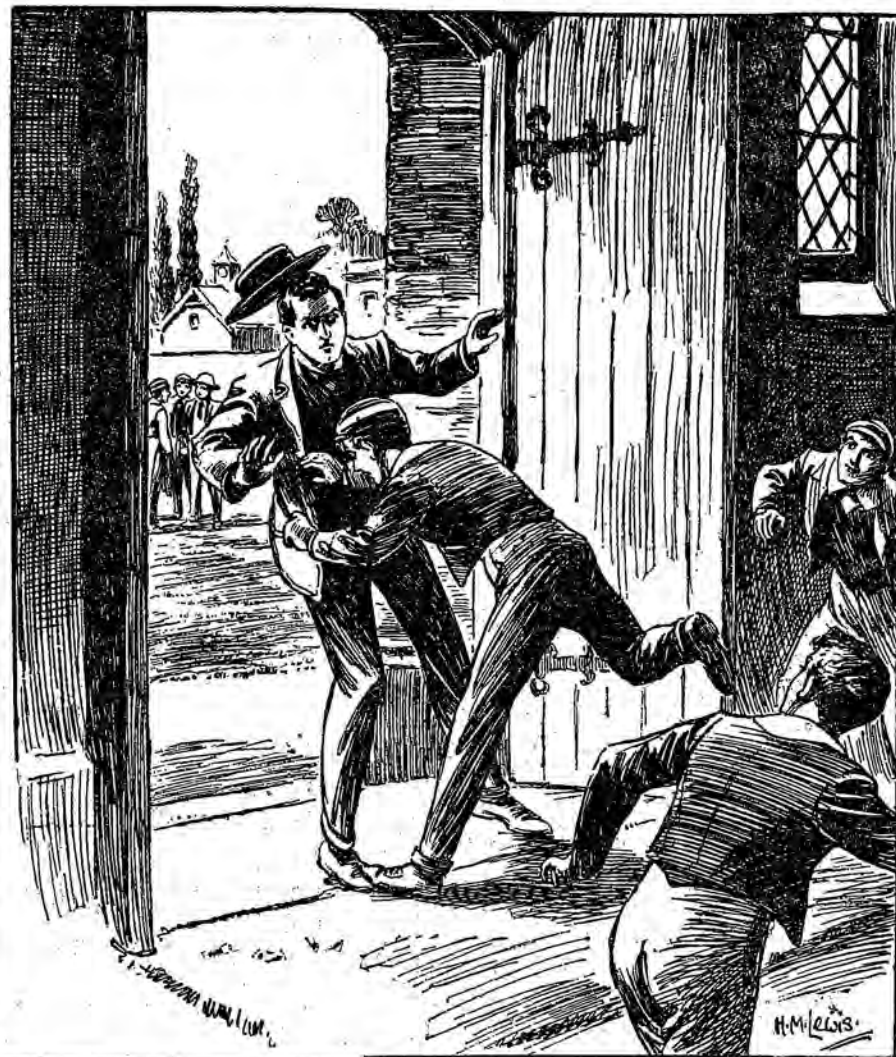
"Oh, rot!" he said irritably. "Of—of course I wanted you to come. I sent some fags to meet you. Did you see them?"

Sidney grinned at the recollection of his experiences with Taffy & Co.

"Oh, yes, that was all right!" he said.

"The mater wanted me to meet you," said Arthur, with an irritable laugh. "She doesn't know anything about public schools. We sha'n't be on the same terms here that we are at home in the holidays. You may as well understand that from the start. I'm in the Sixth, and a prefect. You're a Fourth-Form fag. We sha'n't see much of each other—perhaps sha'n't meet twice a week."

Redfern's face fell. This was very unlike the prospect he had



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THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

SIDNEY REDFERN, a bright, fun-loving lad who is a new pupil at St. Dorothy's School. Sidney has an elder brother at St. Dorothy's.

ARTHUR REDFERN, who is a prefect in the Sixth Form. Arthur Redfern is inclined to be easily led, and is under the by no means good influence of

RANSOME, another Sixth-Former, a slacker and a good-for-nothing.

SKELTON and **BROWN**, two Fourth-Formers, and leaders of the Classical side at St. Dorothy's.

TAFFY MORGAN, **VERNON** and **RAKE**, the leaders of the Modern side at St. Dorothy's, deadly rivals of Skelton and Brown.

At St. Dorothy's there is a deadly and everlasting feud existing between the Classical and Modern sides. At the time of the arrival of Sidney Redfern, the captain of the Fourth Form, who has always been elected from the Classical side, has just left, and affairs are in a complicated state. There are exactly as many Classicals in the Fourth as there are Moderns, and the result of the election for a new captain is bound to be a tie. Now Sidney Redfern has arrived, however, his vote will turn the scale one way or the other.

Skelton and Brown rush off to the station to meet Sidney, and attempt to coerce him into voting for the Classical candidate; but without success, for Sidney has not yet decided which side he will swear allegiance to.

Leaving Skelton and Brown eaten up with chagrin at their failure, Sidney falls into the hands of Taffy Morgan & Co., who go about their business in a diplomatic way—treat the new boy very enthusiastically, and invite him to tea in their study. Sidney sees through their little game, but does not let them know it. Skelton and Brown, with their Classical followers, discover that Sidney is in Taffy's study, and just as the Moderns with their guests are sitting down to tea the study door is flung open.

Skelton and Brown stand on the threshold, with wrathful and indignant faces. Behind them are a crowd of Classical juniors, evidently on the warpath.

"Caught you, have we?" roars Skelton.

"Look here, get out of our study, you Classical cads!" "Back up!" roars Skelton, and he rushes into the study, with his followers hot at his heels. "Down with the Mods!" "Hurrah!"

The three Modern juniors line up desperately, and hit out right and left; but the rush of the Classicals sweeps them away. The tea-table goes over with a crash, and there is crash on crash of smashing crockery. Plates and cups and saucers, jam and ham and butter and cake are trampled recklessly underfoot in a wild and whirling conflict.

(Now read this week's rattling instalment.)

THE 4th CHAPTER.

Redfern Meets His Brother.

"SOCK it into them!" "Down with the Mods!" But the Mods were down already. The table was down, and the crockery was down, and the tea and the cake and the tarts and the sardines were down, and the Moderns were sprawling among the wreckage, with the Classic juniors sprawling over them.

Skelton, flushed with victory, looked round the study. Never had there been so complete a wreck in so short a time. Several of the Classical juniors, in the heat and excitement of the moment, were attacking Sidney Redfern, forgetful of the fact that they had invaded the study to rescue the new boy from the clutches of the Mods. Redfern was giving a good account of himself, and two of Skelton's enthusiastic followers had rolled over under his fists.

"Hold on!" shouted Skelton. "This way, Redfern!"

"Eh?"

"It's a rescue!" gasped Skelton. "We're saving you from these Commercial bounders. Come on!"

And he clutched the new junior by the arm. "But I don't want to be rescued!" objected Redfern. "I was just going to have tea, and—"

"Blow tea! We'll stand you some tea! Come on!"

"But—" "Come on!" roared Skelton, losing patience.

dimly mapped out in his mind—of exercises done in Arthur's study, under Arthur's brother eye, of coaching on the cricket-field and the river, and jolly cycle rides in the summer evenings. Arthur did not appear to see the dismay in his face.

"Of course, I want to help you every way possible," he went on. "But it won't help you in your own Form to be backed up by a prefect. If the juniors think you've got a friend to stand by you in the Sixth, they'll make your life a burden."

Sidney coloured.

"I can look after myself!" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't dream of dragging you into a Fourth-Form row, Arthur. You can't think that of me."

"Well, I hope you won't. Have a little sense, and we shall get on all right. Don't forget that I'm a senior and you're a junior, and don't come marching up in the quad, or the cricket-field and calling me Arthur before all the seniors. There, there, I don't want to hurt your feelings!" went on the major hastily, as the minor's lower lip gave a suspicious quiver. "I know you're fond of me, and all that, but I'm speaking for your own good."

"I—I suppose so. It's all right."

"You haven't been taken as a fag yet?" asked Redfern major, changing the subject.

Sidney shook his head.

"I haven't been here long," he said; "only an hour or so."

"You might have been picked up at sight by any senior who wanted a fag. Look here, I'll speak a word for you to Lunsford, our skipper."

"Couldn't—couldn't I be your fag, Arthur?" asked Sidney hesitatingly. "I'd—I'd rather fag for you than Lunsford."

Arthur shook his head.

"No; it's impossible. I—"

There was a knock at the door of the study, and Ransome came in. He did not see Sidney for the moment, as he entered hastily.

"It's all right, Arthur!" he exclaimed.

"I've satisfied the beak that we were only going to Wyndale to see about some new cricket-nets—" Arthur was making furious signs to the Sixth-Former to hold his tongue, and Ransome caught sight of Sidney, and broke off: "Oh, I didn't know you had anybody with you!"

"It's only my young brother," said Arthur savagely.

Ransome recovered his coolness in a moment. He looked at Sidney with a cool and criticising gaze that took in every detail from his toes to his curly hair.

"Glad to meet you, Redfern minor," said Ransome, offering his hand, which Sidney took rather shyly. After Arthur's unpromising greeting, it seemed to him an act of great condescension for a Sixth-Former to shake hands with a new fag. "I should have known you anywhere, you're so like Arthur. Are you anybody's fag yet?"

"I'm going to speak a word to Lunsford for him," said Arthur quickly.

"No good," said Ransome coolly. "Lunsford's quite satisfied with Skelton, and Skelton would knock the new kid into pancakes if he ousted him. Look here, Arthur, I'll take your young brother as my fag."

"Look here, Ransome—"

"Wouldn't you like to fag for me, kid?" said Ransome, with a smile to Sidney—and he could look very agreeable when he chose. "You won't have a hard time. I treat my fags well—lots of pickings, and not much to do. You may get snapped up by Bully Crane. Better stick to me while you've got a chance."

Redfern looked at his brother.

"Better let him come to me, Arthur," said Ransome. "Look here, don't be an ass! It's necessary."

"What do you mean?" asked Arthur, with a start.

"You get out for a bit, kid," said Ransome. "Go and wait for me in my study—No. 4. I'll join you there in a jiffy."

Sidney again looked to his brother for instructions; but Arthur nodded shortly, and the junior left the study, closing the door behind him. The moment he was gone Arthur Redfern turned angrily to his friend.

"What do you mean by that, Ransome? I've told you I won't have the boy mixed up in anything, I tell you—"

"Softer, please!" said Ransome, in his provokingly cool way. "No need to shout, and tell the fags in the passage. That kid's coming to the school is a blessing, in disguise. You've told me how attached he is to you, and how you expect him to haunt and worry you. Well, my son, that's where we come in. I've heard something about him already that shows he's a lad with spirit. Look here, he will be useful to us."

"I've told you—" began Arthur hotly.

Ransome raised his hand.

"Soft, again! Don't be an ass! Mr. Man-nering met us on the road to Wyndale, and stopped us. I've succeeded in satisfying him that we were going there to see about some cricket things we couldn't get in Okeholme. But he's got an eye open—a jolly suspicious eye! We can't go again."

"I know we can't."

"Well," said Ransome, "you know how matters stand. Cunliffe is waiting for us there. He'll wait this evening, and if he doesn't see us there will be trouble. It's no good mincing matters, Arthur. You're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire. If we don't get a message to Cunliffe this evening, the man will come up to the school. What will happen then?"

Arthur's face went white.

"He would never dare!"

"What has he to fear? He has our paper—our signatures. We owe him money."

"He would never get a penny by giving us away—"

"Perhaps not; but I dare say it would be some satisfaction to him to show us up. You know, anyway, what Dr. Cranston would do if he saw the papers that Cunliffe could show him. We should be—"

"Expelled!" said Arthur, with a bitter groan.

"Exactly."

Arthur Redfern sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"What a mad fool I've been!"

Ransome watched him with a bitter sneer.

"That won't help you," he said. "This is a time for action. We can stave Cunliffe off; but we must either see him, or get a message through. If he comes here, or if we try to get to him, we're done for. If I had gone alone, without waiting for you, I should have got clear of Man-nering. But it's no good thinking of that now. We want a messenger—a chap we can rely on. Any of the fags would blurt the whole matter out in the Form-rooms. Your young brother might be trusted to hold his tongue. He will have to go."

"He can't—he shan't!"

"Very well; the game's up, then."

Ransome shrugged his shoulders. "What harm will it do the boy? He's quite able to take care of himself. He's just got to get to Wyndale, and give Cunliffe the note—nothing else. He won't know whom the man is, or what the message is about. How can it hurt him?"

"There's something in that, certainly," said Redfern, catching at straws. "After all, he will know nothing, and he'll never see the man again."

"Of course he won't! It will be just a pleasant little run for him."

"But can he get out?"

"You can give him a pass, as a prefect," said Ransome, with a grin. "That's all right. I'll see to the rest."

"I—I suppose there's nothing else to be done?"

"Nothing. It's all right, I tell you."

"Oh, do as you like," said Arthur. "I'm sick of the whole business. Do as you like."

Ransome nodded, and quitted the study. He walked along to No. 4 with a curiously derisive grin upon his features, and, entering, found Sidney Redfern standing by the table, waiting. The boy was looking uneasy and troubled. Ransome gave him a cheery nod.

"It's all right," he announced. "Your brother likes the idea of your being my fag, now I've explained to him. Of course, I had a right to take you anyway; but Arthur is my chum. Do you like the idea?"

"Ye-es, I think so," said Sidney doubtfully.

Ransome laughed as he threw himself into a chair.

"Good! In doing things for me you'll be doing them just as much for your brother, really, as we chum together. Which reminds me. I want a message taken to Wyndale. You know Wyndale?"

"No."

"It's a market town a few miles from Okeholme. I want a message taken there this evening. Your brother will give you a pass out of gates. I'll lend you my bicycle to go on if you like."

Redfern's face brightened up.

"That's awfully good of you!" he said.

"I'm always good to my fags. You'll take the message? It's really Arthur's business, but I'm seeing to it for him, you know."

"I'll go with pleasure."

"Good! Get down to the gates at dusk, then, and I'll see you there, and give you the letter. Mind, mum's the word! Not a whisper. Of course, the matter's not particularly serious, as far as that goes, but your brother's touchy about having his affairs chattered over among the juniors. You see?"

Redfern nodded. He had already observed that his brother was, indeed, touchy.

"You can buzz off, now—my other fag will get my tea," said Ransome graciously. "I think we shall get on together, Redfern minor."

And Redfern, who hardly knew whether to be pleased or not, quitted the study of his new master.

THE 6th CHAPTER. The Fourth-Form Election.

HERE he is!

It was Skelton who uttered the shout, as Sidney Redfern came along the Sixth-Form passage. With his mind occupied by the talk in his brother's study, and vague misgivings troubling him, Sidney Redfern had forgotten Skelton and Brown, and their rivalry with Taffy & Co., and the important election that was impending in the Fourth Form at St. Dorothy's.

He was suddenly reminded of the acute and anxious state of Lower-School politics by a sudden rush of feet along the passage, and the laying of violent hands upon himself.

"Here, let go!" exclaimed Redfern, struggling in the grasp of his captors.

"Rats!" said Skelton. "Bring him along! The election's on, you young ass, and you'll be late for the meeting!"

"Oh, I'd forgotten the election!"

Skelton stopped, and relaxed his hold upon Redfern in his astonishment. He stared at the new junior blankly.

"You'd forgotten the election!" he ejaculated.

"Yes," said Redfern, grinning—"quite!"

"My only hat! He says he had forgotten the election, you chaps!"

"Frog's march him!" said Brown III.

"Jump on his silly neck!" said Phipps.

"Oh, bring him along! I'll teach him to forget the election, the—the worm!" said Skelton indignantly. "He's been skulking in the Sixth-Form studies all this time—"

"I haven't been skulking!"

"Oh, don't jaw, you new kid! Come along!"

And Redfern, willy-nilly, was dragged into the Fourth-Form room. That room was already crowded. Every member of the famous Form was there, the attendance being as complete as for classes, and much more willing. The red sunset glimmered in at the windows, and afforded light for the scene. Classics and Commercials were eager and excited.

Taffy, Rake, and Vernon were at the head of their followers, and they were looking anxious. The new junior belonged to the Classical side at St. Dolly's, and the chances were that he would vote with the Classics, and that the Fourth Form would, in consequence, have a Classical captain. The bid for power and consequence on the part of the Mods would end in defeat. Taffy & Co. had done their best; but Skelton had got hold of their recruit, and they could do no more unless, as Rake brilliantly suggested, they had a big row, and mucked up the election altogether. If it were put off there might be another new boy, or Redfern minor might be persuaded or punched into voting Modern.

The entrance of Skelton, Brown & Co. with the new junior was greeted with loud cheers by the Classical scholars present, and groans from the Commercials.

"Keep an eye on that bounder," said Skelton, as he mounted upon a desk. "If he bolts, I'll jolly well punch somebody's head."

"We've got him!"

"Leggo!" grunted Redfern. "I won't bolt! I meant to attend the Form election, only I'd forgotten all about it."

"Rats!"

"That's all right," said Skelton, looking down from his rostrum. "If the new kid gives his word, you can let him alone. Is it honour bright, Redfern?"

"Honour bright!" said Redfern cheerily.

"Good! Let him alone!"

And Redfern was released. Taffy waved his hand to him in the friendliest possible way.

"Come over here, Reddy!" he called out.

"Thanks, I'm all right where I am!" said Redfern.

"Don't stay with those beasts," said Vernon.

"Really, chappy, come over here, you know! Look here, we'll rescue you!"

"Just what I was going to say," said Rake.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Redfern, as the Commercials began to push back their cuffs, with the evident intention of rushing the Classics, and the latter prepared willingly enough for battle. "Hold on! I don't want to be rescued. I've been rescued once already, and nearly knocked into smithereens. If anybody starts rescuing me again, he'll jolly well get a thick ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Classics.

"Order!" bawled Skelton, thumping on the desk with a cricket stump. Bang, bang!

"Silence! Order!"

"Really, chappy, you're making enough row yourself, don't you know!"

"Shut up, you Commercials!"

"Rats!"

"Order!"

"Silence for the chair!"

"Go ahead, Skelton! On the ball, old chap!"

"Gentlemen of the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's—"

"Hear, hear!"

"This meeting has been called—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Has been called for the purpose of electing a Form captain for the Fourth, our late lamented captain having gone."

"He wasn't much good," remarked Taffy.

"He was a Classical."

"Order!"

"The history of the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's has come to a crisis," went on Skelton, with a defiant glance at the Commercials. "There is danger that a rotten Modern scholar may be elected Form captain, unless the Form rallies round the old flag, and seizes the opportunity with one voice, and nips it in the bud."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

Loud cheers and laughter greeted Skelton's effort at eloquence. His metaphors were a little mixed, but they all knew what he meant.

"I move that the Form now proceeds to the election of a Form captain," said Skelton, "and I leave it to the Form to elect a skipper worthy of the august traditions of the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's."

"Hear, hear!"

Taffy jumped up.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth Form—and Classics! You've all heard what that duffer has to say. Now, listen to some sense—"

"Hear, hear!" from the Mods.

"The antiquated and played-out part of this school known as the Classical side has too long crushed down liberty, equality, and fraternity under the iron heel of despotism," said Taffy—a flower of rhetoric that was enthusiastically cheered by all the Commercials. "It is time a new regime was established. Under Modern rule, the Fourth Form will go ahead by leaps and bounds. We shall hold our own on the cricket-field, on the cinder-path, and on the river. I appeal to the electors of the Fourth Form to back up Liberty and Reform."

"Bravo!"

"Rats!"

"Hands!" roared Skelton. "Hands!"

Vernon jumped upon a form.

"Gentlemen, order! Really, chappies, order, you know! I beg to propose my respected friend Morgan—otherwise called 'Taffy'—as Captain of the Fourth Form!"

"I second the motion," said Rake. "Show hands! Hands up for Morgan!"

Twenty hands went up, including Taffy's own. Every Commercial eye was bent eagerly upon the new boy. Would the kindness he had received from Taffy & Co. weigh against the coercion he had suffered at the hands of the Classics? He had been so short a time at St. Dolly's that the distinction between the parties might not fully appeal to him—and Taffy had certainly treated him well.

On Redfern, as sole arbitrator, rested the fate of the election. It was a curious situation for a junior who had not been two hours at the school.

The Commercials watched him with hope, the Classics with anxiety. His hands remained in his pockets; and Skelton gave a great gasp of relief.

"It's all right, Browney! He's going to be decent!"

"Vote! Vote!" shouted Taffy & Co. But Redfern only smiled.

"You've had your show," grinned Brown III.

"Now, hands up for Skelton. Who says Skelton as captain of the Fourth?"

Up went the Classical hands.

"Look here," exclaimed Taffy, struck by a sudden thought; "the new kid oughtn't to vote. He hasn't been here long enough."

"Just what I was going to say!" exclaimed Rake.

"Rats!" howled the Classics fiercely.

"Rats, and many of 'em! He can vote all right! You vote, Reddy! We'll stand by you!"

Redfern drew his right hand from his pocket and slowly elevated it above his head. As a matter of fact, his intention had not been in doubt in his own mind from the first. He knew the exact value of Taffy & Co.'s blandishments; and he had meant to stand by the side he belonged to.

The Classics gave a whoop of triumph as his hand went up.

"Hurrah!" roared Brown III.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Twenty-one for Skelton!" roared a dozen voices. "Do you Modern wasters want a count?"

Taffy & Co. did not demand a count. They knew how the numbers were well enough. It had all depended upon the new boy.

"Good old Reddy!" said Skelton, slapping Redfern heartily on the back—so heartily that the new boy staggered. "That's ripping of you! You might have said so at first; but never mind. It's all right. And I won't give you a licking for the trouble you gave us in the study. I was in there half an hour before Phipps found a key to fit. But I'll let you off."

"Thanks awfully," drawled Redfern. "It's a lucky thing for somebody that you'll let me off, too. Somebody might have been hurt."

But Skelton only laughed. He was too elated with his victory to mind even cheek from a new boy.

The delighted Classics seized the new elector and hoisted him shoulder-high.

Redfern, who did not know what they intended at first, struggled.

"Here, chuck it! Hold on!"

"It's all right!" chuckled Skelton. "We're going to shoulder you. You've helped us to turn the Commercials out! You've saved the situation! Come on, kids, carry him round the quad! It will be one in the eye for all the Commercials."

Redfern struggled in vain. It was already dusk, and he was thinking of his appointment with Ransome. But the prospect of "one in the eye" for all the Commercials was not to be resisted by the Classical juniors. They bore the hero of the election out of the Form-room, and out into the dusky quadrangle.

There, amid cheers from Classics, and hoots and catcalls from Modern youths, they bore him round, shoulder-high, in triumph.

"Here, let me go!" exclaimed Redfern, as from his perch he saw the school porter come out of his lodge to lock the gates. "I must be off!"

"Rats!" said Skelton, as they set him down at last. "You're coming in to tea now—tea in my study!"

"I can't!"

"Stuff! Why can't you?"

"I'm fagging!" said Redfern. "I'm fagging for Ransome. Let me go."

Skelton made a grimace.

"Oh, all right, then! Ransome's the worst cad in the Sixth, and I'm sorry for you. I know you can't fall out with him. Come into my study when you've finished."

"Right you are!"

Redfern ran into the house to get his cap. He had to wait some minutes for the juniors to disperse, so that they should not see him going to the gate. He remembered Ransome's instructions that the expedition was to be kept secret; and if the juniors saw him crossing the quad, there was certain to be remarks.

It was quite dark when he hurried down to the gates at last. They were closed and locked, and for the moment he thought that the Sixth-Former was not there. But as he peered round in the gloom, a shadowy form loomed up from the darkness of the wall, and a fierce grasp was laid upon his shoulder.

"You young cad! What do you mean by keeping me waiting?"

(Another rattling long instalment next week.)



THE CATCH of the SEASON.

A Splendid Complete Cricket Story by CHARLES HAMILTON.

THE 1st CHAPTER. A Cricket Challenge.

STOP!" said Wilmington. Wilmington, the captain of Highcliffe School, slowed down and jumped off his bicycle. His two companions, fellows belonging to the Sixth Form at Highcliffe, dismounted also, in some surprise.

The three had ridden out of Highcliffe Lane into the village of Cliffe, and were passing along by the village green. The green was crowded with people, looking on at a village cricket match. It was Saturday afternoon, and the local team were meeting a visiting side, and, judging by the shouts that rang out, the Cliffe folk thought their cricketers were doing very well.

"What on earth are you stopping for, Wil?" asked Dacre. "We shan't be in before looking-up if we waste time here."

"Oh, Wil wants to pick up some cricket tips from the villagers," said the other fellow, Bertie Howard; and Dacre laughed.

"Rats!" said Wilmington. "We can spare time to look on."

"Look on at a Cliffe cricket match!" "My dear chap, for the fun of the thing."

"Oh!" "You see, these fellows fancy they can play cricket," grinned Wilmington. "They're a team of mechanics and farmers' sons, and so on, and they think they can play cricket. I've been curious to see them at it, and I'm not going to miss this opportunity."

"Oh, good!" said Dacre indifferently. "I don't mind. Let's have a look at the local Frys and Jessops and Ranjies, by all means."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "It will be worth watching," said Wilmington. "We can leave the machines here. Come on!"

They leaned their bicycles against the rail of the village green, and then pushed into the crowd that looked on at the match. They soon made way for themselves, and obtained a good view of the pitch.

Cliffe seemed to be going ahead. They were certainly making rings round their visitors; but the visitors were a poor team, and there wasn't much credit due to the home side.

But the Cliffe folk cheered lustily. A stout man in a straw hat, evidently a hard-working mechanic in his best clothes, was clapping his hands lustily and cheering whenever the batsman made a hit. That batsman was evidently a favourite with the Cliffe folk, and they cheered him loudly by name.

"Bravo, young Mark!" "Well hit, Williams!" "That's Mark Williams," grinned Wilmington. "He's captain of this precious team. Come on; it's as good as a comedy!"

"Bravo, Marky!" shouted the most enthusiastic admirer, as the ball went on its journey once more. "Go it, Marky!" Wilmington turned to the man.

"You know the batsman, sir?" he asked, with an affectation of polite inquiry and an undercurrent of irony that the honest mechanic did not notice.

The big man in the best clothes looked at the Highcliffe fellow with a beaming smile. "Know him, sir? That's my son Mark."

"Indeed! How proud of him you must be!" "That I am, sir," said Mr. Williams unsuspiciously. "He's a good son, is Marky; and the best cricketer in Cliffe, too. You would know something about cricket, sir. You're from the big school yonder, I take it."

"Exactly," said Wilmington, with a nod to Mr. Williams, and a wink to his companions that almost made them choke in suppressing their merriment. "I have an idea that I know a little about the game. Of course, we're nothing like Marky's form up at the school."

my boy would like it, but there's an impression that Highcliffe mightn't think a village team good enough for them to meet."

"Oh, not at all." "What do you think of my boy, sir?" said Mr. Williams proudly. "Ain't he fit to bat for his county?"

"Ha, ha! I mean, yes, certainly." "Look at that late cut—look, I say! What do you say?"

"Ripping!" said Wilmington. He had not looked, but the crowd had, and they cheered lustily. As a matter of fact, that late cut was very pretty, and it had earned 3 runs. But the Highcliffe fellows were there for fun, and if an incipient Hayward had been playing in the village team, they would not have noticed it.

Mr. Williams clapped his hands loudly. "Go it, Marky! Give 'em beans!"

Mark Williams gave his father a smile and a nod as he waited for the bowler. The match was close to its finish. The visitors had followed their innings, and the total was not large. Cliffe did not need to finish their second essay. Two more runs were wanted to win.

"We'll finish in this over, sir," said Mr. Williams, "you see!" "Splendid!" said Wilmington.

"Ripping!" said Dacre. "Marvellous!" exclaimed Howard.

"It's very nice of you to say so," said the unsuspicious old gentleman, "specially as you know a lot about cricket up at the school."

"Oh, nothing like this," said Wilmington. "There goes the finish!" exclaimed Mr. Williams.

The last ball of the over had been knocked

"We were just admiring the play," he explained. "We have seldom seen cricket like this."

"Very seldom!" agreed Dacre. "Never, in fact!" said Howard.

"You weren't wanted to see this," said Mark abruptly. "Nobody asked you to come here. As for the cricket, I dare say it's as good as you play at Highcliffe."

"Better," said Wilmington. "You don't think so, but it's very likely true. Anyway, our fellows never come up to your ground making fun of you!" said Mark hotly.

"Marky, you're wrong. I was telling the young gents that—"

"What a good son you were!" said Wilmington blandly. "The good Mr. Williams has given us quite a great deal of information."

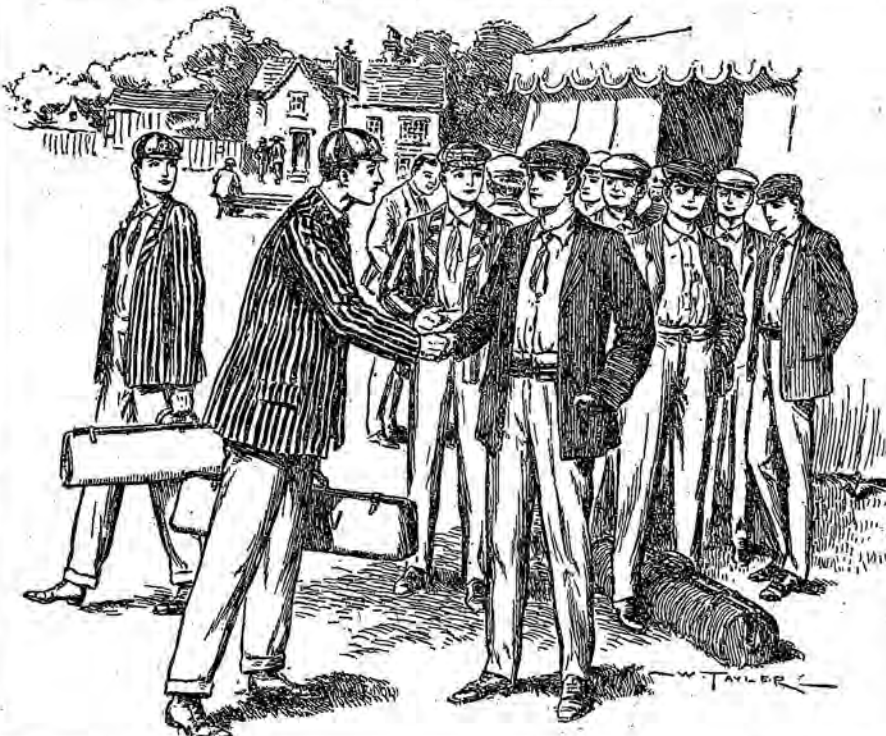
Mark went scarlet. "You cad!"

Wilmington flushed, too. The word stung him, and something within told him that it was deserved. After all, it was not quite the thing to poke fun at a fellow who had never offended him. Wilmington wished for a moment that he had let the Cliffe cricketers alone.

"Cad!" Several of the village folk took up the word, and a hiss ran through the crowd. Wilmington's eyes flashed.

"Thank you!" said he. "I suppose that is the courtesy one expects from the kind of fellows you are!"

"What courtesy have you shown us, then?" said Mark angrily. "You came here to sneer, and it would serve you right if we ducked you in the horse-pond!"



Mark greeted the visitors politely, and, as Wilmington held out his hand, he shook hands with him.

away for a boundary, and Cliffe had easily won. The crowd cheered their men, and young Williams especially. He came over to where his father was standing, with his bat under his arm.

"We've beaten them, dad!" "I knew you would, Marky. These young gentlemen have been a-watching you," said Mr. Williams. "They say there ain't no cricket like this up at the school."

Mark Williams looked at the Highcliffe fellows quickly. He knew very well that Highcliffe prided themselves upon their cricket, and also that the Highcliffe fellows had a reputation through all the countryside for snobbery. He had not come into contact with them personally, but he felt the natural repugnance of an honest, manly nature for a nature that could be insincere; and snobishness and insincerity go hand-in-hand.

He immediately knew that Wilmington and his friends had been making fun of the unsuspicious old gentleman, and his eyes flashed at the thought of his father being made a laughing-stock of. Wilmington met his look with an ironic smile.

The Highcliffe fellows drew closer together. Tainted with snobbery they might be, but they had plenty of pluck, and they would not have hesitated to tackle the whole village eleven rather than run, if they had been attacked.

Some of the cricketers were quite ready to attack, too; but Mark waved them back.

"Let them alone!" he said. "They're not worth touching!"

"My hat!" murmured Dacre. "That from a mechanic! We're not worth touching by his lordship from the ironworks! My hat!"

"Let them go," said Mark, pushing his companions back. "If they think they can play cricket better than we can, let them come and play us. We're ready. But I fancy they'll be satisfied with sneering."

"Why, you cheeky young huffer!" cried Wilmington angrily. "Are you duffer enough to think that you could play a Highcliffe eleven?"

Mark laughed scornfully. "I would show you if you cared to come."

"Yes; we're likely to come here and play

a team of shopboys!" exclaimed Dacre furiously. "Get out of the way, you cads!"

"Oh, no, you won't come—but not because we're shopboys!" said Mark bitterly. "You won't come, because you're afraid!"

"Afraid?" "Yes, that's the word."

Wilmington gritted his teeth. "Look here, if you really mean that you'd have the cheek to meet us, young Smith—"

"My name is Williams."

"Well, Williams, then. If you'd really have the cheek to meet us, we'll bring down an eleven next Wednesday afternoon and wipe you up."

"I am at work on Wednesday afternoons," said Mark quietly. "Make it next Saturday, and I'll get up a team to meet you with pleasure, and show you that shopkeepers can play cricket as well as idle dandies."

"Agreed, then?" "Hold on, Wil!" muttered Dacre. "We can't meet such a crew—we—"

"Stuff! I'm not going to refuse a challenge, if it came from a gang of hooligans!" said Wilmington. "Our secretary will write you details, young Brown—I mean Williams. It's settled."

"Good!" The Highcliffe fellows turned towards their machines. Mark Williams stepped after Wilmington quickly.

"Stop a minute! I—"

The Highcliffe captain looked round. "Sorry already?" he asked.

"No," said Mark, flushing; "I was going to say I'm sorry I said you were afraid. I—I didn't mean it. That's all!"

"Oh, all right!" said Wilmington carelessly. The three Sixth-Formers of Highcliffe mounted their machines, and rode off towards the school. As soon as they were out of hearing of the Cliffe folk Dacre looked wrathfully at Wilmington.

"Nice mess you've got us into!" he growled. "I don't see it!"

"We can't get out of that match now without knocking down."

"We don't want to get out of it."

"What will the fellows say to playing a crew like that?"

"They can say what they like!" Wilmington set his lips. "I'm captain of the Highcliffe team, I suppose. Besides, let the fellows alone! As a matter of fact, it was caddish to chip them as we did!"

"Well, that's good from you! Who started it?"

"Never mind that. It was rather caddish. We'll play them, and give them an awful licking to put them in their place. That's better than chipping them!"

"H'm! I don't like the idea."

"Lump it, then!" said Wilmington briefly. And after that the ride went on in silence.

THE 2nd CHAPTER. The Rival Cricketers.

THE Highcliffe fellows were not pleased; but it could not be said that the Cliffe Club were happy at the prospect.

They played a good game, considering their opportunities, but it was not to be expected that their form would be up to that of Highcliffe, who had time every day for practice, and everything necessary for the game of the best quality as well as a ground incomparably superior to the village green.

None of the Cliffe cricketers felt inclined to back out. But they all felt that Mark had taken on too much; as Tom Grayle said, he had bitten off more than he could chew.

Tom Grayle was Mark's chum, and worked with him. Next to Mark, he was the best cricketer in the Cliffe team.

But Mark was a player of real distinction. He was one of those fellows who seem to be born for cricket. He could handle the bat splendidly, and at the same time he was a wonderful bowler. In the field, however, he was most dangerous of all. He had often delighted his companions by the facility with which he brought off apparently impossible catches. And his returns were so swift, so unexpected, that unlucky batsmen who had expected a couple or three after a hit, sometimes found themselves stumped on the first run.

Given opportunities, Mark could have distinguished himself in a colt's match, and perhaps have played for his county. He would have been an acquisition to many a county team. His chances did not lie that way. He was content to play for his village, and help Cliffe on to getting a strong local team. And in spite of the sneers of the Highcliffe fellows, Cliffe were a good team.

The appurtenances were not so expensive as at Highcliffe, no doubt, but the cricket was all right; and, after all, that was the main point.

But Mark himself had his doubts about this challenge to the college, when he had had time to calm down and think over the matter.

Highcliffe might be snobbish, but they had a great reputation as a cricketing college, and they could certainly have made hay of the average local team. Cliffe were certainly far above the average; but were they far enough above it to be able to tackle a team like Highcliffe?

That remained to be seen. Only one thing was certain, and that was that there was no avoiding the match.

"And I don't want to!" Mark broke out, as they discussed the match one dinner-hour at the ironworks. "I wouldn't avoid the match for anything. I'd rather be licked than that. But I should like to beat them."

"So should I!" said Tom Grayle, with a sigh. "It would be ripping to lower the Highcliffe colours for once!"

"Yes; and show them that they're not the only cricketers in the county, though they think they're the salt of the earth," said Dick Harding.

Mark nodded.

"We'll do our best, boys. The only thing is to squeeze in every possible minute of practice before Saturday, and be in our finest form. If we can't lick them, we'll give them a tussle!"

"We can do that! I'd like to see them play, and get an idea what form they're in," Tom Grayle remarked.

"We could do that—it wouldn't be much out of our way to pass the school going home from work," said Mark. "There's only a fence on the side of their cricket-ground, and we could see them through the palings easily enough. They're bound to be at practice at that time, too."

And when the chums left the ironworks, they made it a point to look in at Highcliffe. Sure enough, the college team were at practice. There were a good many games going on, in fact, on the extensive ground belonging to the school; but Mark at once picked out the Sixth-Form team, captained by Wilmington.

Wilmington was giving the whole team a trial, in a practice match against a scratch eleven picked out of the Sixth and Fifth Forms. And certainly they were doing very well.

The Cliffe lads stood watching them through the railings for some time, and their brows were very serious.

The Highcliffe fellows, unconscious of their proximity, played on till dusk, and then knocked off the practice. Mark and his comrades had watched them for over an hour, and they walked on to Cliffe with serious faces.

"They're in good form," said Tom Grayle. "Yes; and if they play like that—" began Harding.

"They'll play better, most likely."

"Then we—" Tom paused.

Mark Williams threw up his head proudly.

"Let them! We'll give them a good game, and if we're licked, we're licked! But we'll play them hard."

Meanwhile, Wilmington and his men walked indoors after the play, feeling very satisfied with themselves.

The idea of playing a team of mechanics was not palatable to all of them, but they were in for it, and they did not mean to risk the possibility of a defeat, which would cover them with ridicule after what they had said. It was all very well for them to pride themselves upon social superiority; in their hearts they knew that it was all humbug, and that the luck of birth and fortune was no real subject for pride. But cricket was a real thing—to be a good cricketer was something more substantial, and to be licked was a serious matter for fellows who considered themselves, as Dick Harding had put it, the salt of the earth. Highcliffe felt that they could never hold up their heads again if the "team of mechanics" by any chance got the better of them; and so, though they believed themselves to be the greatly superior side, they left nothing to chance.

"Of course, we shall walk over them," said Dacre; "but in case of accidents, we'll be in our best form. If they licked us, they'd say—"

"That we could brag, and couldn't play," remarked Wilmington, "which would be about right, too, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, rats! Of course, a lot of mechanics—"

"Oh, get off that!" said Wilmington, who seemed to have got into the way of taking a somewhat different view since his talk with Mark Williams. "Don't be a snob!"

"Well, my hat, I like that, from you!"

"Well, shut up, then!"

"Look here, Wilmington—"

"Oh, ring off," said Wilmington crossly. "The fact is, that chap made me feel small the other day, and he's a decent chap. Of course, we're going to put him in his place. It was like his cheek to challenge us. But don't run him down. Beat him on Saturday, and that's enough."

And Wilmington thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and walked away. His chums stared after him. They could not quite understand Wilmington of late; but one thing was certain—they didn't share his present views.

THE 3rd CHAPTER. A Fight to a Finish.

MARK WILLIAMS was an anxious lad that Saturday. He had put in all the practice possible with his team during the week, and he was satisfied with the result, as far as that went. Whether the team were good enough to meet Highcliffe was a question that could only be answered at the wicket. They were certainly in good form—the best form of the season, so far—and with that he had to be content.

The portion of the village green which was assigned to the young cricketers as a pitch had no care but what they bestowed upon it themselves. They rolled it and cared for it, and many of the Cliffe folk willingly lent them aid in that work. The ground was not nearly so good as the Highcliffe ground, but it was not bad—not anything so bad as some grounds the Cliffe team had played upon away.

On that sunny day in early summer it looked very pleasant and cheerful, with the green, level turf glistening in the sun, and the white tent where the scorer sat. People were begin-

ning to gather for the match before the stumps were pitched. All Cliffe, of course, was greatly interested in the match. To see the local team play the big school was a great and unexpected event. The village looked forward eagerly to a victory for the Cliffe side, but it was much more of a hope than of an expectation.

The Cliffe team looked very fit in their white flannels, and Mark looked over them with satisfaction.

"All right," he said, "you look fit. Mind you play up, that's all."

"What-ho!" said Tom Grayle. "Hallo, here's the Highcliffe fellows!"

A brake rolled up, and the Highcliffe eleven poured out.

They, too, looked very fit, and certainly their cricketing clothes were much better and more elegant than those of the Cliffe lads. It remained to be seen whether their cricket was better.

Mark greeted the visitors politely, and, as Wilmington held out his hand, he shook hands with him.

Wilmington glanced over the ground, and over the big crowd. All Cliffe seemed to be there, and there were country people from all quarters.

The Highcliffe captain smiled.

"There's a good deal of interest being taken in us," he remarked.

"The good folk have come to see us licked!" grinned Dacre. "I think we shall open their eyes on that subject."

"I hope so."

Wilmington and Mark tossed for choice of innings, and the Cliffe captain won. He decided to bat first.

Wilmington placed his men to field.

The crowd observed the swagger in the manner of the Highcliffe fellows, and resented it. Even if they were the better team—and that remained to be proved—there was no excuse for swagger. There were few there who would not have given a great deal to see the swaggers soundly licked.

But that hope seemed to be a delusive one, for the Cliffe innings opened far from well. The Highcliffe bowling was dangerous all the time, and the wickets went down for a low average of runs.

It was not until Mark Williams went in to bat that it livened up at all.

Mark stopped the bowling effectually enough. Wilmington sent on Howard and Bohun, his best bowlers, in turn, but without avail, and the runs mounted up for Cliffe. Mark Williams had knocked up 20 before another wicket fell, and then it was not his wicket that went down. He went on scoring, amid loud cheers from the villagers. Old Mr. Williams clapped his hands like the report of a rifle at every hit.

"Bravo, Marky! Buck up, my boy! Hurrah!"

And Mark gave his father a confident smile.

"By Jove," said Wilmington, "that kid is hot stuff, after all! Do get him out, some of you!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Howard, as the field crossed over. "Try it yourself! I can't touch his rotten wicket!"

Wilmington did try it himself, when Mark had the bowling again; but he could not touch the stumps.

Mark piled on runs, and the wickets fell slowly, till he was not out for 50 runs out of a total of 70.

It was good for the first innings, considering everything, and the Cliffe fellows were pretty well satisfied.

They waited eagerly to see what kind of batting they were to expect from Highcliffe. Wilmington opened the innings with Dacre and Bohun.

Mark went on to bowl. There was a shout of anticipation from the spectators.

"Go it, Mark!"

"Give 'em beans!"

Wilmington watched the local captain narrowly. His batting had been above the average, and he wondered what his bowling was like. He soon saw!

There was a click, and Dacre's bails were down. He was out, first ball of the first over. The crowd gave a delighted yell.

"How's that?"

"Out!" said the umpire.

Dacre stared down at his wrecked wicket.

"My hat!" he said. And carried out his bat.

Wilmington went on in his place. He stopped the rest of the over, but he did not score. When the field crossed over, the Highcliffe fellows looked a little more serious. They realised that Mark Williams was indeed "hot stuff."

But batting was the strongest point of the Highcliffe fellows, and Mark's bowling was not so dangerous after they had taken the measure of it. The wickets fell far faster than the collegians had expected. But they did not fall fast enough to draw the Cliffe fellows level. There were two more to fall when the visitors passed the home total of 70.

The innings finally concluded at 85. Highcliffe had easily expected to pass the century, and they were disappointed. But they were 15 runs to the good, and they had no doubt of the result.

During the interval before the resumption of play, Mark was very quiet and serious. The first two innings had been unfavourable. Cliffe's task was harder than ever now. They had to pull up leeway in the second innings.

But Mark was in a mood of grim determination. The Highcliffe swagger, which had been dropped a little for a time, had returned in full force now. The visitors were certain of victory, and they were not prevented from showing their certainty by any considerations of modesty or politeness. They hardly concealed the fact that they looked down on the Cliffe team, and considered it like the cheek of Mark Williams to have challenged them. The village captain had taken on too big a job, and was getting properly licked, as he might have expected. That was what the manners of the Highcliffe fellows implied.

"We must lick them, Tom," said Mark, with a set face. "I can't stand their swagger. They've got to be licked."

Tom Grayle nodded rather glumly.

"We'll do our level best, Marky."

Highcliffe went out to field again with confident smiles. And, indeed, they seemed, at first, to have reason for confidence. Two wickets fell in the first over for 1 run, and the crowd looked blank.

"What does this look like?" grinned Howard.

"We sha'n't want our second innings!" laughed Dacre.

But Mark was at the wicket now.

His batting was not so full of results as in the first innings, for the Highcliffe fieldsmen were more attentive to him, and they understood him better. But there was a steady flow of runs. When Tom Grayle joined him at the wickets, there was a spell of brilliant play. Tom was not a great batsman, but he was a stone-waller of great skill, and he stopped the balls with phlegmatic calm while his partner piled up the runs.

Mark took no chances now, either. He knew how badly runs were wanted, with the Highcliffe innings to follow, and he risked nothing. Steadily he piled up runs, till the score for his own batting was 60. The crowd cheered him wildly. They were hoping for a century from his bat alone. That was not to be; but his brilliant score had bumped up the Cliffe total splendidly, for the rest of the batsmen did pretty well. The total, when Mark was bowled at last by Wilmington, was 98 for the second innings. Mark carried out his bat, flushed and full of hope. The crowd cheered and clapped loudly, and old Mr. Williams flung his best

straw hat into the air, and never thought of looking for it when it came down.

Dick Harding gave Mark a friendly thump on the shoulder as he passed him going in to take his place at the wicket.

"We'll pull it off!" he exclaimed.

"Looks like it, old chap. Stick to it!"

The Highcliffe bowlers exerted themselves now. The innings finished soon after the fall of Mark's wicket, and Cliffe were all down for 115. The total for both innings was 185.

This was a great deal better than the beginning, and Highcliffe wanted exactly 100 runs to tie, 101 to win. They opened their second innings determined to get them.

It was still bright afternoon, and unless the innings was very much prolonged, there was certain to be plenty of light to finish the match. Cliffe had nothing to hope from the dusk. And, as a matter of fact, the Highcliffe play was brisk. Howard and Northcote were piling up runs, and Northcote's wicket fell for 20, and then Dacre came in, and did still better.

At 50 the Highcliffe wickets were three down. They had given the Cliffe fieldsmen plenty of leather-hunting.

The score crept up. Dacre's wicket fell to a throw-in by Tom Grayle, and a few minutes later Bohun was caught out at cover-slip by Mark Williams. But the score was at 70. Five down for 70. Only 31 wanted to win, and the rest of the wickets still in hand. The hopes of the Cliffe crowd, which had risen high, went down with a bump. Wilmington had not batted yet, and he alone was worth the 30. But Mark was bowling now, and putting all he knew into it.

Another wicket down, bowled as clean as a whistle, and the score at 80! Then a man out l.b.w., and laughter and cheers from the crowd. Seven down for 80! Then a spell of successful batting, with the score creeping up slowly and steadily.

Ninety runs!

Down goes another wicket, shattered by a smart return from the long-field, with the bat inches off the crease. The next man comes in, and captures 6 runs before his bails are scattered by an irresistible ball from Mark Williams.

Nine down for 96!

Five runs wanted for Highcliffe to win. And now the big, athletic Wilmington comes down, bat under arm, with a smile on his lips. The man at the other end—Herberts—is a stone-waller, who cannot be moved, and Wilmington is a mighty hitter, worth 50 or 60 runs to his side any time. And only 5 more are wanted to win.

The bowling is to Wilmington, too. Why, a single boundary will tie, and then— And Wilmington is capable of many boundaries.

Last man in! But the last man is the most dangerous of the side. Wilmington takes his stand without any swagger, but with a quiet confidence that means much more than any swagger.

Mark grits his teeth for a moment.

Fortune was playing with him, after all. If he could have bowled that over he might yet have knocked out Wilmington; but he had bowled the last. Tom Grayle takes the ball, and sends it down as well as he knows how, and Wilmington snicks it away through the slips for 2.

Ninety-eight! And Wilmington waiting for the bowling again, and the Highcliffe fellows before the tent looking on and laughing.

Down comes the ball again, and Mark Williams, at cover-slip, watches its flight, and then—

Click!

"By Jove, that'll be a boundary!" says Dacre, with a grin. "It's all over, bar shouting!"

The Highcliffe fellows are all ready to shout. But stay! Where is the ball? What is that slight sound, something between a click and a kiss? Cover-slip has leaped clear of the ground, his eyes intent and gleaming, his hand outstretched. He will never catch it; it's impossible. He's mad! Why, nobody could touch it. But there is a roar:

"Caught!"

"Oh, well caught!"

There stands Mark Williams, the round, red ball in his hand. Up it goes skyward, and comes down straight as a die into his palm again.

Wilmington stares at him blankly. He has been caught out; the most difficult catch he has ever seen on the cricket-field; brought off by the skipper of the "team of mechanics."

"My only hat!" gasped Wilmington, as he threw down his bat. "It's the catch of the season!"

Only 3 runs were wanted to win, 2 to tie. But they were never to be taken. The Highcliffe innings was over. Cliffe had beaten them by 3 runs.

"Licked!" roared Tom Grayle. And he rushed to Mark Williams and thumped him frantically on the back. "Hurrah!"

And the crowd roared wildly:

"Well caught! Hurrah!"

The Highcliffe team went defeated home. They didn't like it. But, ere they went, Wilmington sought out Mark Williams, and gripped him hard by the hand.

"Jolly well played!" he said. "And that catch was the catch of the season, by Jove! You've licked us fair and square, and I'm sorry for what passed before the match. Good-bye!"

And Mark readily enough returned the warm pressure of his hand.

THE END.

(Next week a fine complete tale of St. Andrew's School will appear.)

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