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Title: More Cricket Songs

Author: Norman Gale

Release date: August 13, 2004 [EBook #13167]

Most recently updated: December 18, 2020

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Michael Ciesielski, Cathy Smith and PG Distributed Proofreaders

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MORE CRICKET SONGS ***

MORE CRICKET SONGS

by Norman Gale

Author of "Cricket Songs" "Barty's Star" "A Country Muse" and other works.

1905

DEAR JOHN DENTON,

Not long ago you reminded me that once, when you were a boy and I was a schoolmaster, I was angry with you because you pouted all through a lesson in arithmetic. Let bygones be bygones, and accept as a proof of my continuing friendship the dedication of this little volume, in which there are no other sums than those of the Telegraph.

Most sincerely yours,

NORMAN GALE.

Here's to the lad with his useful Fifteen,

Here's to the Bowler that's thrifty,

Here's to the Bat who is Lord of the Green

With his frequent and thundering Fifty!

For their courtesy in allowing him to reprint some of these songs the Author thanks the Editor of *The Westminster Gazette*, Prince Ranjitsinhji, Mr. James Bowden, the Editor of *The Country*, and the Editor of *The Sun*.

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OILING.

(A Song In and Out of Season.)

Excuse me, Sweetheart, if I smear,

With wisdom learnt from ancient teachers,

Now winter time once more is here,

This grease upon your lengthy features!

Behaving thus, your loyal friend

No whit encourages deception:

Believe me, Fairest, in the end

This oil will better your complexion.

Fairest, believe!

Did you imagine in the bag

To sleep the sleep of Rip Van Winkle,

Removed from sunshine's golden flag

And duller daylight's smallest twinkle?

Well have you earned your rest; but yet,

Although disturbance seem uncivil,

Unless your cheeks and chin be wet

With oil, your beauteousness will shrivel.

Rarest, believe!

Absorb, that, when for our delight

The May unpacks its lovely blossom,
With beaming face, with shoulders bright
You leave the bag's congenial bosom.
Then shall the Lover and his Lass
Walk out toward the pitch together,
And, glorying in the shaven grass,
Tackle, with mutual faith, the leather.
Dearest, absorb!

THE GOLDEN GAME.

If ever there was a Golden Game
To brace the nerves, to cure repining,
To put the Dumps to flight and shame,
It's Cricket when the sun is shining!
Gentlemen, toss the foolscap by,
Gentlemen, change from books to leather!
Breathe your fill of the breeze from the hill,
Thanking Bliss for the great blue weather.
If ever there was a bag could beat
The box possessed by Miss Pandora,
'Tis that in which there cuddle neat
The tools to shape the flying Fourer.
Gentlemen, watch the purple ball!

Gentlemen, keep your wits in tether!

Take your joy with the heart of a boy

Under the dome of the big blue weather.

If ever I feel my veins abound

With zealous blood more fit for Twenty,

'Tis when upon the shaven ground

Fair Fortune gives me runs in plenty.

Gentlemen all, while sinews last,

Bat ye, bowl ye, friends together!

Play the play till the end of your day,

Mellowest mates in the big blue weather!

But ever the ancient tale is told,

And History (the jade!) repeated:

By Time, who's never over-bowled,

At last we find ourselves defeated.

Gentlemen all, though stiff we be,

Youth comes along in finest feather,

Just as keen as we all have been

Out on the turf in the great blue weather!

There's ever the deathless solace left—

To gaze at younger heroes smiting,

Of neither grit nor hope bereft,

Up to the end for victory fighting.

Gentlemen all, we taste delight,

Banished now from the stream and heather,

Calm and cool on an old camp-stool,

Watching the game in the big blue weather!

THE FEMALE BOY.

If cursed by a son who declined to play cricket,

(Supposing him sound and sufficient in thews,)

I'd larrup him well with the third of a wicket,

Selecting safe parts of his body to bruise.

In his mind such an urchin King Solomon had

When he said, Spare the stump, and you bungle the lad!

For what in the world is the use of a creature

All flabbily bent on avoiding the Pitch?

Who wanders about, with a sob in each feature,

Devising a headache, inventing a stitch?

There surely would be a quick end to my joy

If possessed of that monster—the feminine boy!—

The feminine boy who declines upon croquet,

Or halma, or spillikins (horrible sport!),

Or any amusement that's female and pokey,

And flatly objects to behave as he ought!

I know him of old. He is lazy and fat,

Instead of this Thing, fit for punishment drastic,

Give, Fortune, a son who is nimble and keen;

A bright-hearted sample of human elastic,

As fast as an antelope, supple and clean;

Far other than he in whose dimples there lodge

Significant signs of inordinate stodge.

Ay, give me the lad who is eager and chubby,

A Stoddart in little, a hero in bud;

Who'd think it a positive crime to grow tubby,

And dreams half the night he's a Steel or a Studd!

There's the youth for my fancy, all youngsters above—

The boy for my handshake, the lad for my love!

THE DARK BOWLER.

I know that Bowler, dark and lean,

Who holds his tongue, and pegs away,

And never fails to come up keen,

However hard and straight I play.

Spinning and living, from his hand

The leather, full of venom, leaps;

How nicely are his changes planned,

And what a lovely length he keeps!

Because he pulls his brim so low,

However earnestly one tries

One never sees the darkling glow,

That must be nimble in his eyes.

The fellow's judgment never nods,

His watchful spirit never sleeps.

There was a clinking ball! Ye gods,

Why, what a splendid length he keeps!

At times he bowls an awkward ball

That in the queerest manner swerves,

And this delivery of them all

Takes most elastic from my nerves:

It comes, and all along my spine

A sense of desolation creeps;

Till now the mastery is mine,

But—what a killing length he keeps!

That nearly passed me! That again

Miraculously missed the bails!

Too good a sportsman to complain,

He never flags, he never stales.

Small wonder if his varied skill

So fine a harvest daily reaps,

For how he marries wit and will!

And what a deadly length he keeps!

UNCLE BOB INDIGNANT.

("Flannelled fools at the wicket")

Come, poke the fire, pull round the screen,

And fill me up a glass of grog

Before I tell of matches seen

And heroes of the mighty slog!

While hussies play near mistletoe

The game of kiss-me-if-you-dare,

I'll dig for you in memory's snow,

And where my eager spade shall go

Uncover bliss for you to share,

My Boys!

As sloppiness our sport bereaves

Of what was once a glorious zest,

And female men are thick as thieves,

With croquet, ping-pong, and the rest,

Prophetic eyes discern the shame

Shall humble England in the dust;

And in their graves our sires shall flame

With scorn to know the Nation's game

Cat's-cradle; Cricket gone to rust,

My Lads

Ah, for a winged and wounding pen,

In vigour dipped, to pierce the age

When girls are athletes, not the men,

And toughness dwindles from the stage!—

When purblind poet cannot see

That in the games he wishes barred,

Eager, and hungry to be free

As when it triumphed on the sea,

The Viking spirit battles hard,

My Sons!

If you have need of flabbier times,

Colensos, Stormbergs, Spion Kops,

Tell cricketers to take to rhymes,

And smash at once the cross-bar props.

When sportsmen, tied to sport, refuse

To offer lead the loyal breast,

To tramp for miles in bloody shoes,

To smirch their souls, to crack their thews,

Then let the poet rail his best,

My Hearts!

Aye, if our social state be planned

Devoid of giant games of ball,

Macaulay's visitor will stand

The earlier on the crumbled wall.

Nerve, daring, sprightliness, and pluck

Improve by noble exercise;

The wish to soar above the ruck,

The power to laugh at dirty luck

And face defeat with sparkling eyes,

My Braves!

By George, there goes the supper-bell!

And yet your duffing Uncle Bob

Has never told you what befell

When all his team got out for blob.

So much for bad poetic gas

That gets my ancient dander up!

Well, to the banquet! What is crass

Shall deeply drown in radiant Bass

While we as Vikings greatly sup,

My Hearts!

I refuse to find attractions

In the ancient Roman native;

I am sick to death of fractions,

And of verbs that take the dative:

It is mine to be recorder

Of a boy's congested brain, Sir,

With the pitch in perfect order

And the weather like champagne, Sir!

I—the sport of conjugations—

I am cooped up as a lodger

Where I serve out mental rations

To a proudly backward dodger.

While the two of us are dreaming

Of the canvas and the creases,

Close we sit together, scheming

How to pull an ode to pieces.

Even now in London's gabble

Memory's magic tricks the senses!

Plain I hear the streamlet babble,

Smell the tar on country fences:

Down the road Miss Grey from Marlett

Skirts the fox-frequented thicket,

In her belt a rose of scarlet,

In her eyes the love of cricket.

There's my mother with her ponies

Underneath Sir Toby's beeches,

Pulling up to share with cronies

News of grapes and plums and peaches:

Many a gaffer stops to fumble

At his forelock as she passes,

While the children cease to tumble

Frocks and blouses in the grasses.

Though my body stays with duty

Here to work a sum or rider,

Mother's magnet and her beauty

Draw my soul to sit beside her!

Ah, what luck if I were able

There to play once more in flannels,

Free from all this littered table,

Virgil's farmyard, Ovid's annals!

There's a loop of leather handle

Peeping underneath the sofa!

Is tuition worth the candle

When the conscience turns a loafer?

'Tis the rich and backward Boarder

Proves indeed the Tutor's bane, Sir,

When the turf's in ripping order

And the weather like champagne, Sir!

A WIGGING.

"To throw your hands above your head

And wring your mouth in piteous wise

Is not a plan," the Captain said,

"With which I sympathise.

And with your eyes to ape a duck

That's dying in a thunderstorm,

Because you deprecate your luck,

Is not the best of form.

"The fact is, Johnson, I am tired

Of all this posing for a faint,

Because you think the stump required

Another coat of paint.

As greatly would you vex my soul,

And drag decorum from the Game,

If in the block your head you'd roll,

Or stand upon the same.

"This trick of striking attitudes,

Inelegant for men to see,

Will, to be candid, foster feuds

Between yourself and me.

On manners of the best this sport,

By right of glory, makes a call,

And he who will not as he ought

Should never play at all.

"Now Luck is lean, now Luck is fat,

And wise men take her as she comes:

The Bowler may be sure the Bat

Will share the sugarplums.

So never wriggle, nor protest,

Nor eye the zenith in disgust,

But, Johnson, bowl your level best,

And recollect, what must be, must!"

THE TWO KINGS.

(Written for W.G. Grace's Fiftieth Anniversary.)

When Arthur and his Table Round

Thought lusty thumps the best of sport, Sir,

And cups and cuffs, for all but muffs,

Were just the code the nobles taught, Sir,

Their jests were coarse, and swift their coursers,

Their throats were hoarse and strong as hawsers;

And they would shout a loud refrain

The while they pricked across a plain,

Observe this phrase just once again—

The while they pricked across a plain.

Then 'twas the sport of Arthur's Court

To hammer friendly helms with zeal, Sir,

Lo, sounding clear for all to hear,

The Tourney rang with lyres of steel, Sir!

These demigods of matchless story

For Love laid on, laid on for Glory!

Their horses flew like thunderbolts,

Or cut a brace of demi-voltes.

Observe this phrase. The mettled colts

Would cut a brace of demi-voltes.

When Arthur and his Table Round

Had lain in dust for many years, Sir,

Came cricket bats and beaver hats,

The stumps, the ball, the burst of cheers, Sir!

Thus horse-play broke on Time's rough breakers

And gentler games were hero-makers.

Men ceased to crave for olden times,
Whose daily deeds were modern crimes,
But guarded stumps, and wrote their rhymes,
And helped to keep the land from crimes.

While Arthur and his Table Round
In dreams were jousting once again, Sir,
The wit of man conceived a plan
To marry willow-wood and cane, Sir.

Thereat the Stung became the Stinger;
Thereat arrived the Century-Bringer!

Mere muscle yielded to the wrist
Poised lightly over clenching fist.

Observe the phrase. I here insist
Mere muscle yielded to the wrist.

The knights of Arthur's Table True
Wore helmets, gorgets, plumes, and greaves, Sir;

While Tourneys stayed, big sport was played
Without the joy of turned-up sleeves, Sir!

But Cricket showed in armoured showing
Without these noble players knowing,

For when at Beauty's door they tapped
They oft were at the wicket snapped.

Be sure of this. With rage was mapped

Each face when at the wicket snapped.

Remembering the Table Round,

Cricket at last begot a King, Sir.

One day was born the Bowler's Thorn,

The Bat of Bats for Rhyme to sing, Sir.

As for the Lady Ball, he swept her

From pole to pole with willow sceptre!

Old Mother England was the place,

The pitch the throne, the monarch Grace!

Off with your hats! Your brims abase

To greet his Royal Highness, Grace!

Ah, for some kingly match in Town,

To give the scene its fitting ode, Sir!

Could Pindar fire the athletic lyre,

A truant from his bright abode, Sir,

How would he chant the Chief heroic,

The trundler's hope become zeroic,

The drives from liberal shoulders poured,

The changing history of the Board!

Long may the champion's pith be scored

In figures leaping on the Board!

Strong in the arms as Hercules,
For club, a bat within his hand, Sir,
Behold him there, the foe's despair,
Persuade the bowling to the stand, Sir!
What if some wrinkles now take leases
Upon his brow? He's used to creases!
And, young in muscle, still can laugh
At fifty on Time's Telegraph.
This Toast, good comrades, let us quaff—
Three figures on his Telegraph!

THE APPEAL.

My boy, bethink you ere you fling
Upon my heart a cloud of gloom.
Pause, pause a moment ere you bring
Your father to an early tomb
By playing Golf! For if you seek
To gravel your astounded sire,
Desert the wicket for the cleek,
Prefer the bagpipes to the lyre!
My boy, along your veins is poured
Heroic blood full fit to boast;
For annals of the scoring-board

Have made our name a cricket Toast.
If now in pride or pique you choose
To make this scandalous default,
How many bygone Cricket Blues
Will issue, raging, from their vault!
My boy, the game that's big and bright,
The game that stands all games above,
And towers to such a glorious height,
Deserves the summit of your love!
Is this a time for dapper spats,
When foes arrive to test our worth?
Beg pardon of your gloves and bats,
And play the kingliest game on earth!

THE OLYMPIANS.

Let those who will believe the Gods
On high Olympus do not travel
Along the lane that Progress plods,
The tricks of mortals to unravel:
Let them believe who will they shun
The average of C.B. Fry,
Or never from their liliated park
A little nearer Clifton run

To watch with joy the crimson lark

By Jessop bullied to the sky.

They love the Game. So warm they glow,

Not seldom rise imperial quarrels;

And not so many moons ago

Jove boxed with zeal Apollo's laurels.

The question ran, Was Arthur Mold

Unfairly stigmatised by muffs,

Or did he play a dubious prank?

Venus herself began to scold,

And Gods by dozens on a bank

Profanely took to fisticuffs!

When on the level mead of Hove

Elastic-sided Ranjitsinhji

With bowlers neatly juggles, Jove

Of clapping palms is never stingy.

Ambrosia stands neglected; wine

To crack the skull of Hector spills

While Lockwood cudgels brawn and brain;

And when the Prince leaves ninety-nine,

The cheers go valleywards like rain,

And hip-hurrah among the hills!

Prone on the lawn in merry mobs,

They note the polished art of Trumper,

The Surrey Lobster bowling lobs,

The anxious wriggles of the Stumper.

'Tis not (believe me) theirs to sneer

At what the modern mortal loves,

But theirs to copy noble sport;

And radiant hawkers every year

Do splendid trade in bats and gloves

With Jupiter and all his Court!

THE OLD PROFESSIONAL.

Sixty years since the game begun, Sir,

Sixty years since I took the crease!

Sixty years in the rain an' sun, Sir,

Death's been tryin' to end my lease.

Oh, but he's sent me down some corkers,

Given me lots of nasty jobs;

Mixed length-balls with his dazzlin' Yorkers,

Kickers an' shooters, grubs an' lobs!

Here I've stood, an' I've met him smilin',

Takin' all of his nasty bumps;

Grantin' at times his luck was rilin'

When reg'lar fizzers tickled the stumps.

Playin' him straight an' storin' breath, Sir,

Closely watchin' his artful wrist,

I've had a rare old tussle with Death, Sir,

Slammin' the loose 'uns, smotherin' twist!

Still I know I'm as keen as ever

Tacklin' the stuff he likes to send,

Cuttin' an' drivin' his best endeavour

While pluck an' muscle an' sight befriend.

I'm slow, in course; an' at times a stitch, Sir,

Makes me muddle the stroke I planned;

But I'm not yet ready to leave the pitch, Sir,

For Lord knows what in the Better Land!

Some dirty day, when eyes are dimmer,

Old Death will have his chance to scoff;

For up his sleeve he's got a trimmer

Bound to come a yard from the off!

It'll do me down! But if he's a chap, Sir,

Able to tell a job well done,

No doubt he'll give his foe a clap, Sir,

Walkin' out of the crease an' sun.

'Tis more than forty years I've tasted

Sweet and bitter supplied by Luck,

Never thinkin' an hour was wasted,

Whether I blobbed or whether I stuck.

Long as I had some kind of wicket,

'Twas never the wrong 'un, fast or slow;

An' I thank my stars I took to Cricket

Seven-an'-fifty years ago!

The game's been missus an' kids to me, Sir—

Aye, an' a rare good girl she's been!

I met her first at my father's knee, Sir,

An' married her young on Richmond Green.

An' as she's proved so true a lover,

Never inclined to scratch or scold,

When the long day's fun at last is over,

I'll love her still in the churchyard cold!

I've never twisted my brain with thinkin'

The way life goes in the world above,

But lessons here there ain't no blinkin'

Make me guess that the Umpire's Love!

God knows I've muffed some easy chances

Of doing good, like a silly lout;

But because He's fairer nor any fancies

I'm not in a funk of hearin', "Out!"

FIVE YEARS AFTER.

Many a mate of splice and leather,

Out in the stiff autumnal weather,

There we stood by his grave together,

After his innings;

All on a day of misty yellow

Watching in grief a grim old fellow,

Death, who diddles both young and mellow,

Pocket his winnings.

Flew from his hand the matchless skimmer!

Breaking a yard, the destined trimmer,

Beating the bat and the eyes grown dimmer,

Shattered the wicket!

Slow to the dark Pavilion wending,

His head on his breast, with Mercy friending,

The batsman walked to his silent ending,

Finished with cricket.

Whether or not that gaunt Professor

Noting his man; that stark Assessor

Of faulty play in the bat's possessor

Clapped for his foeman,

We who had seen that figure splendid

Guarding the stumps so well defended

Wept and cheered when by craft was ended

Innings and yeoman!

Not long before the ball that beat him,

All ends up, went down to meet him,

Tie him up in a knot, defeat him

Once and for ever,

He told his mates that he wished, when hoary

Time put an end to his famous story,

To trudge with his old brown bag to Glory,

Separate never!

There on the clods the bag was lying!

There was the rope for the handle's tying!

How can you wonder we all were crying,

Utterly broken?

Scarred and shabby it went. We espied it

Deep where the grave so soon would hide it,

Safe on his heart, with his togs inside it—

Tenderest token!

There we stood by his grave together,

Out in the stiff autumnal weather,

Many a mate of splice and leather,

After his innings;

All on a day of misty yellow

Watching in pain a grabbing fellow,

Death, who diddles both young and mellow,

Pocket his winnings.

DOCTOR CRICKET.

Dear Tom, I do not like your look,

Your brows are (see the poets) bent;

You're biting hard on Tedium's hook,

You're jaundiced, crumpled, footled, spent.

What's worse, so mischievous your state

You have no pluck to try and trick it.

Here! Cram this cap upon your pate

And come with me to Doctor Cricket!

Don't eye decanters on the shelf.

Your tongue's already thick with fur!

Up, heart! and be your own dear self

As when we chummed at Winchester.

Destroy these pasteboard dancing girls;

This theatre-bubble, come, Tom, prick it!

Love more the off and leg-break curls

Arranged for us by Doctor Cricket!

You feel worn out at twenty-two?

Your day's a thing of thirst and gloom?

Old chap, of course I'll see you through,

But—drop that rot about the tomb!

Let's overhaul your bag. A pair

Of noble bats to guard a wicket!

Out, Friend, to breathe the sunny air,

And wring the hand of Doctor Cricket!

Be healed; and shun the flabby gang

That tricked your taste with cards and drink,

When out of independence sprang

A silly downfall. Think, Tom, think!

While stupid lads debase their worth

In feather-headed Folly's thicket,

Get back your muscle and your mirth

Beneath the eye of Doctor Cricket!

PHILOSOPHY.

'Tis sometimes Fortune's little joke

With vinegar to brim the cup;

And on the grass this fickle Lass

Makes pennies come the wrong side up.

But though a Head instead of Tail

Is sure to greet my anxious call,

'Tis better to have tossed,

And lost,

Than never to have tossed at all.

To do our best in spite of luck,

To stop or gallop for the drive,

To seek our fun in bronzing sun,

Shall cause both head and heart to thrive.

And though the penny's face I choose

That next the turf is bound to fall,

'Tis better to have tossed,

And lost,

Than never to have tossed at all.

For though we field the whole day long

Hope's spark refuses to expire;

A wily lob's successful job

At once renews the slackening fire.

Be Spartan, then! Crave not to flirt

With Tennis and her female ball!

'Tis better to have tossed,

And lost,

Than never to have tossed at all.

THE ENTHUSIAST.

The Major, till the paper comes,

Is by a hundred fidgets shaken;

Upon the tablecloth he drums,

Condemns the toast, pooh-poohs the bacon:

But when at last the boy arrives,

Not his to scan the market prices;

Though liner sinks or palace burns,

The Major lives by rule, and turns

To cricket first, and then the crisis.

Though getting grey and rather stiff,

The Major loves a long day's outing,

And gives a military sniff

When lads complain of lengthy scouting.

Each summer morn at break of day

From bed before the lark he tumbles,

And if the mercury be vile

There carries nearly half a mile

The Indian vigour of his grumbles.

When winter brings its snow and ice,

As well as divers pains and twinges,

The Major's language gathers spice,

And oftentimes his temper sings.

On Christmas day he oils his bats,

And, on the crimson hearthrug scoring,

Through Fancy's slips he cuts the ball,

Or lifts her over Fancy's wall,

Till all the ghostly ring is roaring!

And when at length the day is near

For Death to bowl the Major's wicket,

(The Major swears he has no fear

That Paradise is short of cricket!)

If in the time of pad and crease

His soul receives its last advices,

With final paper on his bed

I know the Major will be wed

To cricket first—and then the crisis!

CRICKET AND CUPID.

She understands the game no more

Than savages the sun's eclipse;

For all she knows the bowler throws,

And Square-Leg stands among the Slips:

And when in somersaults a stump

Denotes a victim of the game,

Her lovely throat begets a lump,

Her cheeks with indignation flame.

She scarce can keep her seat, and longs

To cheer the fallen hero's fate;

Her fingers clench upon the bench

As if it were the Trundler's pate!

Because this rascal's on the spot

Her passion fails to be concealed;

She asks me why the wretch is not

Immediately turned off the field.

But if the batsmen force the pace,

From me she quickly takes her cue;

Perceives the fun of stolen run,

The overthrow that makes it two.

And as the ball bombards the fence,

Or rattles on the Scorers' hut,

She claps with me the Drive immense,

And prettily applauds the Cut.

Divided at the heart, I seek

With skill to serve a double call:

Though great the Game, it were a shame

To miss her bosom's rise-and-fall.

Cupid and Cricket, unafraid,

Must sink their dread of partnership,

Nor fear to join as stock-in-trade

The boxwood bail, the honeyed lip.

Time was when bigotry compelled

A total worship of the game,

Before the test had pierced my breast,

Before the Idol-breaker came.

But suddenly the sky let down,

Escaped from heaven in pink and gold,

A child to conquer by her gown

The sport so starkly loved of old.

Sweet are her little cries, and sweet

The puzzled look her forehead wears;

For all she knows the Umpire goes

Away to Leg to say his prayers.

And yet, so velvety her eyes,

I even find a charm in this,

And think, How foolish to be wise

When Ada's ignorance is bliss!

A BOUNDARY.

What nonsense, Charles!

Though rather stiff,

And foreign from the style of Twenty,

There's still enough of cricket stuff

Remaining for the pastime. Plenty!

Why, such a creed as now you preach

Is only fit for scoffs and jeers;

Wait till you lose your wind and reach—

Wait till you come to fifty years.

What nonsense, Charles!

You still can put

The figures up by bounds and leaps, Sir;

There's little myth about the pith

You carry in your muscle. Heaps, Sir!

Not yet the camp-stool period comes,

With feelings precious close to tears;

Still at your choice the leather hums—

Wait till you total fifty years.

What nonsense, Charles!

In you I see—

You, lord of curl on shaven plots, Sir—

A magazine of Fourers clean

Prepared to bruise the railings. Lots, Sir!

I have a dog's-eared birthday list

That makes me mock your silly fears

And hope for centuries from your wrist—

Wait till you come to fifty years.

THE COMMENTATOR.

The throstle in the lilac,

Not far beyond the Nets,

Upon a spray of purple

His beak severely whets:

He hears the players calling,

He wonders what they're at,

As thunder frequent Yorkers

Against the stubborn bat.

And as the rank half-volley

Its due quietus gets,

The bird begins to carol

A greeting to the Nets:

Amazed at noisy kissing

Of ball and wooden blade,

In rivalry he whistles

A ballad unafraid.

Right jocund is the music

That, poured in lovely jets,

Accompanies superbly

The heroes in the Nets;

And sweet the startled pauses

Amid the royal song

That come when shout together

The drive-delighted throng.

The greatness of the uproar

Benumbs him, and he lets

His pulsing bosom ponder

The tumult in the Nets;

But soon afresh, while warbling

His comment on the game,

He puts all human songsters—

Quite easily!—to shame.

Thou Herrick in the lilac,

The damp of evening wets
Upon our shoes the pipeclay,
And bids us leave the Nets;
But come again to-morrow
To mingle with our joy
The magic learnt in Eden
When Time was but a boy!

LUCKY LADS.

See in bronzing sunshine
Twenty-two good fellows,
Such as help the world along,
Such as Cricket mellows!
Health and heartiness and joy
Come to them for capture,
Lucky lads, plucky lads,
Relishing the rapture!
Watch the flying fieldsman,
Keen to save the fourer,
Gallop past the wooden box
Sacred to the scorer!
Think you demi-gods of Greece
Matched him in their story?

Lucky lad, plucky lad,

Sprinting hard for glory!

Watch the hitting hero

Loosely clad in flannel—

There's a figure to adorn

Any sculptor's panel!

Every inch of him enjoys

Sharing in the tussle,

Lucky lad, plucky lad,

Speed and grit and muscle!

See in bronzing sunshine

Thousands of good fellows,

Such as roll the world along,

Such as Cricket mellows!

These shall keep the Motherland

Safe amid her quarrels,

Lucky lads, plucky lads,

Trained to snatch at laurels!

CRICKET IN THE GARDEN.

Before the aproned nurse arrives,

To tell of soap and tub and sponges,

My nephew, fierce and ruddy, drives,

Disgraceful edges, callous lunges.

Twenty auriculas declare

The zeal of his peculiar magic,

Till every aunt is in despair,

And even Job (the cat) looks tragic.

Down goes a tulip's noble head!

(Poor Auntie Nell is nearly crying!)

And now a stately stock is dead,

And now a columbine is dying.

Vainly the cook with female lobs

Desires to hit the egg-box wicket;

And not among the housemaid's jobs—

'Tis very plain—is garden cricket.

Whack on the bee-hive goes the ball!

"That's six!" screams Noel to the scorer.

A foxglove, steeped best of all,

Now sinks beneath a flying fourer.

Two to the lad's-love; and beyond

The lavender just half-a-dozen;

And TWELVE for dropping in the pond

A rank half-volley from his cousin!

To see my pinks give up the ghost

Is what no longer can be suffered:

Before I lose the scented host

This game, like candles, must be snuffered.

Noel, at ninety-two, not out,

Is carried to the nursery, screaming;

And later with a precious pout

Lies in his bed of down and dreaming.

There shall his Century be achieved,

Larkspurs and tiger-lilies humbled,

Geraniums of their fire bereaved,

And calceolarias torn and tumbled.

With fairy craft from dusk to dawn

Quaint Puck himself may bowl half-volleys,

But I have vowed, by love and lawn,

To weed one thistle from my follies!

THE PRINCE, BATTING.

As out of a cannon comes the ball!

Quickly it flies to the human wall.

Didn't it go with a will and a whiz?

How lovely it is! How lovely it is!

Four to the east, and four to the west!

Arrowy shots at the Umpire's chest!

Placid the sinewy batsman beams—

How easy it seems! How easy it seems

Watch! For a ball we could barely poke

The master hand and the radiant stroke!

Glances and cuts and drives and hooks—

How easy it looks! How easy it looks!

Now is the time we may all forget

Paper and books, for the Prince is set.

Here in the grass, with our work at heel,

How happy we feel! How happy we feel!

THE REASON.

Now why did Arthur Hoare pull out

A sovereign with a happy shout

And give it rashly to his scout,

Who almost had a fit?

Why of a sudden did he fling

A hard-boiled egg at Eustace Ling,

Forgetting how an egg can sting

The person who is hit?

Why after dinner did he turn

In fury on his room, and burn

His old oak chairs with unconcern?—

A stupid thing to do!

And why so harshly did he pelt

With forks a fresh and timorous Celt

Afraid to utter what he felt?

Arthur had got his Blue!

A LONG GRACE.

(W.G. Grace's XI. versus XXII. of Bath.)

Nothing went right. The Champion cut

And drove and glanced, and cut again,

Till every bowler we possessed

Deep down within his smarting breast

Half wished he'd lost that early train!

Dobbin went on with Sneaks,

Robin appeared with Tweaks,

And Diccory Dizzard, as fast as a blizzard,

Contributed Lightning Streaks!

Nothing went right. The Champion's bat

Seemed twice the breadth of postern door.

The leather flew at pace immense

To crackle on the boundary fence,

Acknowledged by the public roar.

Dobbin went on with Tweaks,

Robin obliged with Sneaks,

And Diccory Dizzard, as fast as a blizzard,

Exhibited Lightning Streaks!

Nothing went right. At last, at last

A bell (than Angelus more fair!)

Rang respite for the fieldsmen who,

By sprinting hard from twelve to two,

Had scarce a ragged breath to spare.

Robin abstained from Sneaks,

Dobbin abandoned Tweaks,

And Diccory Dizzard, as fast as a blizzard,

Prohibited Lightning Streaks!

Luncheon went right. The weary team

Found benches, beer, and salad sweet.

But asking blessing was too bad,

Because they all were somewhat sad

From too much Grace before their meat!

Health to your noble name,

Monarch in fact and fame,

From twenty-two hearty lads in a party

Broadened and bronzed by the Game!

REMEMBER, PLEASE!

When the run of the bowler is measured,

And he, with brows knotted,

Bowls fierce at your timber-yard treasured,

To pot, or be potted,

If the ball to the bone that is funny

Fly swift as a swallow,

And you squeal like a terrified bunny

As agonies follow:

Then, then is a capital season,

More fit than another,

Loose language of silly unreason

In courage to smother.

Clean speech is too frequently shamed

For Cricket to shame it!

One word is too often exclaimed

For you to exclaim it!

THE FORERUNNERS.

Beside the pillar-box a girl

Sells daffodils in golden bunches,

And with an apron full of Spring

Stays men a moment from their lunches:

Some fill their hands for love of bloom,

To others Cupid hints a reason;

But as for me, I buy because

The flowers suggest the Cricket season!

Although I trouble not to seek

A maiden proud to wear my favour,

Right glad am I to change my pence

For blooms, and smell their wholesome savour;

For as I carry blossoms home—

Sisters of gold with golden sisters—

My heart is thumping at the thought

Of pads and bails and slow leg-twisters.

My only sweetheart is a bag—

A faithful girl of dark brown leather,

Who's travelled many a mile with me

In half a hundred sorts of weather!

Once more to clasp your friendly hand,

To tramp along by Hope attended,

Dreaming of glances, drives, and cuts,

My Dear Old Girl, how truly splendid!

NET PRACTICE.

We had a fellow in the School

Whose batting simply was a dream:

A dozen times by keeping cool

And hitting hard he saved the Team.

But oh! his fielding was so vile,

As if by witch or goblin cursed,

That he was called by Arthur Style,

King Butterlegs the Worst!

At tea-time, supper, breakfast, lunch,

For many disappointed days,

We reasoned with him in a bunch,

Imploring him to mend his ways.

He listened like a saint, with lips

As if in desperation pursed;

Then gave three fourers in the Slips—

King Butterlegs the Worst!

'Twas after this the Captain tried,

In something warmer than a pet,

To comfort his lamenting Side

By pelting Curtice in a net.

Aware of his tremendous power,

The Captain used it well at first,
And peppered only half-an-hour
King Butterlegs the Worst!
But half-an-hour at such a range—
From such a Captain!—was enough
To work so prompt and blest a change
That Curtice ceased to be a muff.
When from his bed at last he came,
Where fifty bruises had been nursed,
He was no more a public shame,
Nor Butterlegs the Worst!

THE CATCH OF THE SEASON.

He was a person most unkempt,
And answered to the name of Cust.
He had a frenzied mass of hair,
A little redder than red rust,
And trousers so exceeding short
It looked as if by mounting high
They meant unceasingly to try
To change to knickers on the sly.
He was a person whom a Bat
Could view without the least distrust.

He caught me at the fifth attempt—

Imagine my profound disgust!

For if the ball had gone to hand

I had not felt the least unrest;

But, as it happened (Fate knows best!)

It struck him smartly on the chest.

I cannot tell you how he squirmed

And capered on the greensward there,

Until at last he took the ball

(Or so it seemed) from out his hair,

And meekly rubbed the coming bruise.

Thus was I humbled in the dust

Because of Albert Edward Cust.

Imagine my profound disgust!

Here's to the freckles and fielding and fun,

Here's to the joy that we ponder;

Here's to the Game that will glow in the sun

When the babes of our babies are—Yonder!

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Notes on Books.

In issuing a list of new and forthcoming publications, Mr. Alston Rivers cannot but express his gratification at the spirit of fair play which has enabled him to realise such a striking series of successes. The primary business of a publisher is to discriminate, both as to intrinsic literary merit, and with regard to what will hit the public taste, a classical illustration of the difficulty in gauging the latter being the rejection of "John Inglesant" by the late James Payn, then "reader" for an eminent firm. While fully recognising the remarkable gifts of the author Mr. Payn's hesitancy as to the book's attractions got the better of his judgment; and with "*The House of Merrilees*" it is now an open secret that very much the same point of view was taken in more than one instance. Mr. Marshall's "*Peter Binney, Undergraduate*," had been and is still decidedly popular, but his new book was more ambitious, possessing such a plot as to require peculiarly delicate handling. Had it been handled in a way that combined a really high literary standard with more stirring qualities? The question requires no answer now, for the triumph which the publisher at once foretold on reading the manuscript has been more than attained, and "*The House of Merrilees*" is indisputably the novel of the season. It has at the same time demonstrated to the publishing trade that a sensational story does not labour under any disadvantage by the abduction of literary style.

In a wholly different vein are "*The Discipline of Christine*" and "*The Unequal Yoke*," by Mrs. Barré Goldie and Mrs. H.H. Penrose respectively. In the former the ways and moods of childhood are depicted in original and inimitable fashion, which makes it safe to predict that the author will go far beyond her first effort as a novelist. In "*The Unequal Yoke*" Mrs. Penrose has taken for her theme the love story of a clergyman whose benefice is an Irish coast town, and in whose flock prominence is attained by narrow zeal rather than by amiability. He is really a good man, and is lucky enough, or the reverse, to win the hand of a delightful young lady whose charms, however, do not command the unanimous approval of the parishioners. The possession of high musical attainments makes her temperament all the more interesting, and accounts for the presence in so remote a district of her German friend whose acute sense of the ridiculous leads to such untoward results. It is hard to say whether the author's talents are best evinced by her true pathos or by the delicate touches of humour which pervade the book. Another commendable feature of the novel is an alert skill in construction which stamps it as a thoroughly artistic production.

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"*The Countermine*" is the work of Mr. Arthur Wenlock, whose "*As Down of Thistle*" showed

considerable promise, though perhaps his subtle vein of sardonic philosophy escaped due recognition. As its name denotes, the interest in the new novel is largely military; in every line the soldier, with his nice sense of honour, his virility, and his direct methods, stands revealed. "*The Countermine*" is certainly a most thrilling tale, and should raise the author to the front rank of writers on "Service" topics. Of Mr. Thomas Cobb, whose reputation is already firmly established, it is only necessary to say that in "*The Friendships of Veronica*" his fertile and resourceful pen is at its best if, indeed, his literary reputation has not been substantially advanced.

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