

Chrystal's Century.

BY E. W. HORNUNG.

IT really began in the pavilion up at Lord's, since it was off Tuthill that most of the runs were made, and during an Eton and Harrow match that the little parson begged him to play. They had been in the same Harrow eleven some eighteen years before. The Rev. Gerald Osborne had afterwards touched the hem of first-class cricket, while Tuthill, who captained a minor county, was still the very finest second-class bowler in England.

"Who's it against?" asked Tuthill, with a suspicious glint in his clear eye; for if he was not good enough for first-class cricket, third-class was not good enough for him.

"A man who's made his pile and bought himself a place near Stangrove; they let him have a week in August on the school-ground, and I run the side against him for the last match."

"Decent wicket, then?" said Tuthill, with a critical eye upon the Eton bowling.

"I shouldn't wonder if you found it a bit fiery," said the crafty priest, with a timely memory of Tuthill's happiest hunting-ground. "And they'll put you up and do you like a Coronation guest."

"I don't care twopence about the doing," said Tuthill. "Will they keep my analysis?"

"I'll guarantee it, Tuttles," said the little parson. And Tuthill consulted the diary of a conscientious cricketer.

"I can," said he, "and I don't see why I shouldn't. I was coming up for the Oval Test in any case. It will only mean taking another day or two while I am about it. You can put me down."

"And rely on you?" added the other,

as one whose fortune was too good to be true.

"My dear Jerry," cried Tuttles, with characteristic emphasis, "I never chucked a match in all my life! It's a promise, and I'll be there if no one else is. But who is this sporting pal of yours? I suppose he has a name?"

Osborne went out of his way to applaud a somewhat inferior stroke by the Harrow boy who was making all the runs.



"TUTHILL CONSULTED THE DIARY OF A CONSCIENTIOUS CRICKETER."

"As a matter of fact," he finally confessed, "he was at school with us, though you probably don't remember him. His name's Chrystal."

"Not old Ginger Chrystal?"

"I believe they did call him Ginger. I don't remember him at school."

"But I do! He was in our house, and super'd, poor beast! Ginger Chrystal! Why on earth didn't you tell me who it was before?"

"You've named one of my reasons, Tuttles. He's a bit shv about his Harrow days. Then he says himself that he was no more use at cricket than he was at work, and I thought it might put you off."

"No more he was," said Tuttles, reflectively. "Do you mean to say he's any good now?"

"No earthly," replied the little parson, with his cherub's smile. "Only just about the keenest rabbit in the whole cricket-warren!"

The finest second-class bowler in England displayed a readiness of appreciation doubly refreshing in an obviously critical temperament.

"And yet you say he has done himself well!" he added, incredulously, as his mirth subsided.

"Only made a hundred thousand in South America, Tuttles."

"Nonsense!"

"It might be double by the way he does things."

"That utter old all-round rabbit?"

"He's not one now, Tuttles, at anything but cricket. That's his only weak point. At everything else Chrystal's one of the smartest chaps you ever met, though he does weigh you and me put together, and quite one of the best. But he's so mad-keen on cricket that he keeps a pro. for himself and his son of seven, and by practising more than any man in England he scores his ten runs in all matches every season. However, when this boy runs into three figures, or gets out, you must come and meet the modern Chrystal in the flesh; there's plenty of it, though not too much for the heart inside, and at the present moment he's spreading every ounce of himself in a coach he's got here in my name."

It was a fair enough picture that the parson drew, for Chrystal was really corpulent, though tall and finely built. He wore a stubby moustache of the hue which had earned him his school nickname, but underneath were the mouth of a strong man and the smile of a sweet woman. It was a beaming, honest, unassuming face; but the womanly quality reappeared in a pair of very shapely, well-kept hands, one of which could

yet come down with virile force on Tuthill's shoulder, while the other injured the most cunning bunch of fingers in second-class cricket. Then a shyness overcame the great fellow, and the others all saw that he was thinking of the one inglorious stage of his career. And his wife, a beautiful woman, took charge of little Osborne; and Tuthill, who had sense and tact, congratulated Chrystal point-blank and at once upon his great success in life. But for an instant Chrystal looked quite depressed, as though success at school was the only sort worth achieving; then his smile came out like the sun, and his big body began to shake.

"Yet," he whispered, "they promised me a dog's life and a felon's death because I couldn't make Latin verses! Do you remember my second half of a pentameter?"

"*Laomedontaden!*" cried Tuthill, convulsed with laughter at the sudden reminiscence.

"I never could see where the laugh came in," confessed Chrystal, like the man he was. "But I've no doubt that was what cooked my goose."

Tuthill was much impressed.

"And the dear old chap never said it didn't matter," as he afterwards put it to the parson, "or changed the subject to the things he has done, or took out a big gold watch, or drowned us in champagne, or did or said a single thing that wouldn't have done honour to the bluest blood on the ground. All he did say, at the end of the innings, was that he'd give half he'd got to have been in the eleven himself! Oh, yes, I've promised to play in his all right; who could refuse a chap like that? I'm going for the whole week; let's only hope he won't drop all his catches off my stuff."

"You must forgive him his trespasses, Tuttles," the clergyman said, with some gravity, and no irreverence at all.

"I can't forgive that one," replied the candid demon of second-class cricket. "I never could and never shall."

But it was not for Tuthill to forgive when the great week came, or, at all events, before the week was at an end. It is true that the catches followed the non-cricketer to every position in the field, as catches will, and equally true that a large majority of them were duly "put on the floor." But as good luck and his own accuracy would have it, the great bowler was not usually the sufferer. Once, indeed, when it was otherwise, he did tell his host, with unpremeditated emphasis, that the ball wouldn't bite him; but that was

"He has such a good opinion of himself."

"He has reason!" cried Chrystal, with hardly 10 per cent. of envy in his loyal tone.

"Then I do think he's rather spiteful. To go and bowl you out first ball—if he did."

"He'd bowl me out if I was his long-lost brother! He's so keen; and quite right, too. You've got to play the game, dear." If it had been the game of battle, murder, and sudden death, Chrystal's manner could not possibly have been more serious.

But a silence had fallen on piano and billiard-room, and Chrystal hurried indoors, as he said, "to keep the ball rolling if I can't hit it." They were only talking about the final match, however, in which Chrystal played his gardeners and grooms, while little Osborne took the field against him with the like raw material from his own parish near Ware.

"It's all very well," said Chrystal, joining in the cricket talk, that was beginning to get on his nerves; "but I ought really to object to Tuttles, you know. He has neither the birth qualification nor the residential; he isn't even your deputy-assistant secretary, Jerry!"

"I suppose you don't really object?" said Tuttles himself, in the nicest way, the first time he and Chrystal were more or less alone.

"My dear fellow!" was all Chrystal said in reply. "I want to see you take all ten wickets," he added. "I promise you mine."

Tuthill smiled at the superfluous concession.

"I'll have to do my best," said he, as the hangman might of his painful duty. "But, as a matter of fact, I'm not sure that my best will amount to much to-morrow. I've been bowling a bit too much and a bit too well. My off-day's about due, and on my off-day I'm a penny treat. Full-pitches to leg and long-hops into the slips!"

Chrystal's mouth watered; the second sort of ball was often fatal to him, but the first was the one delivery with which he was almost as much at home in practice as in theory. He had seldom run into double figures without the aid of the repeated full-pitch to leg.

It so happened that there was rain in the night, but only enough to improve a pitch which had quite fulfilled little Osborne's promise of fire; and an absence of sun next day averted an even more insidious state of things. The last match was thus played on the worst day and the best wicket of the week. The ball came along stump high without any tricks at all. Yet Osborne's

side was out shortly after lunch for something under a hundred runs, of which Osborne himself made more than half. Tuthill, who did not take his batting seriously, but hit hard and clean as long as he was there, was beginning to look as though he never need get out when Chrystal, of all people, held him low down at point. It was a noble effort in a stout, slow man, but Tuthill walked away without a word. He was keen enough on his innings while it lasted; but at luncheon he was the first to compliment Chrystal, who had not been so happy all the week. Chrystal had written himself last in the order, but, thus encouraged, he was persuaded to give himself one more chance, and finally went in fourth wicket down.

It was then 3.20 by the clock on the little pavilion, and one of those grey, mild days which are neither close nor cold, and far from unpleasant on the cricket-field. The four wickets had fallen for fewer than forty runs, but Tuthill had only one victim, and it really did appear to be his off-day; but he looked grim and inexorable enough as he waited by the umpire while Chrystal took centre and noted that it was now 3.21; at 3.22 he would be safe back in the pavilion, and his cricket troubles would be over for the season, if not for his life.

But the first ball was that wide long-hop of which Tuthill himself had spoken. Down it skimmed, small as a racket-ball to Chrystal's miserable eye; he felt for it with half his heart, but luckily heard nothing before the dull impact of the ball in the gloves of an agile wicket-keeper standing back.

"No!" cried the tall Quidnunc at the opposite end, and Chrystal began to feel that he was playing an innings.

The second ball was the other infallible sign of Tuthill's off-day; it was a knee-high full-pitch just wide of Chrystal's pads, and he succeeded in flicking it late and fine, so that it skimmed to the boundary at its own pace. For one wretched moment Chrystal watched the umpire, who happened to be the man who had advised him not to take his cricket so seriously, and who now read his anxiety in a flash.

"That was a hit!" the unorthodox official shouted towards the scorers' table.

"And a jolly good one!" added the tall Quidnunc, while more distant applause reached the striker's trembling ears, and the ardent Tuttles waited for the ball with the face of a handsome fiend. Yet his next was nothing deadlier than a slow half-volley out-

side the off-stump, which Chrystal played gently but firmly as a delicate stroke at billiards, but with the air of Greek meeting Greek. Already the ball was growing larger, and it was close on 3.25.

Osborne was bowling at the other end; he always was either batting, bowling, or keeping wicket, but the bowler's was the only department of the game at which he exposed a definite inferiority. He was, however, very fond of bowling, and as he could claim two of the four wickets which had already fallen (one having been run out) it was extremely unlikely that he would rest himself until the tenth one fell. Osborne's first over after Chrystal's arrival was one of his least expensive. The Quid drove him for a languid single, while Chrystal, after keeping out of mischief for four balls, sent the fifth high and dry through the slips for three. The stroke was a possible chance to none other than Tuthill, but it was not off his own bowling, and the impression upon the observant spectator must have been a bad one.

"Don't begin by running yourself off your legs," Chrystal's partner crossed over to advise him between the overs. "There's the whole afternoon before us, and you won't have many to run for me. I'm as limp as a wet rag, and my only chance of staying here is to sit on the splice while you punch 'em. But don't you be in any hurry; you play yourself in."

If Chrystal had made a respectable score every day, the tone of the best batsman on the side could not have betrayed more confidence in him. He began to feel confident; the ball swelled to its usual size, and Tuttle's next long-hop went to third man for another sharp single. Chrystal apologized, but his partner had called him in response to an appealing look; evidently he was not too limp to run his captain's hits; it was only Chrystal himself who puffed and blew and leant upon his bat.

And even by the half-hour he was within a run of that two-figure rubicon which he had not passed for two seasons; his face showed the pale determination of a grave endeavour; it would hurt him more to get out now than to fall, as usual, to his only ball.

Yet what did happen? It was Tuthill's slow yorker, and Chrystal was in many minds from the time it left the bowler's hand; his good blade wagged irresolutely, and the odious projectile was under it in a twinkling. But at that instant the umpire threw up his arm with a yell, and Chrystal never heard the havoc behind him; he was only instinctively

aware of it as he watched Tuthill turn upon a comrade who had donned the long white coat over his flannels.

"No *what?*" demanded the best bowler in second-class cricket.

"I said 'No ball.'"

"You're the first man who ever said it to me in my life," remarked Tuttle, deadly calm, while he looked the other up and down as a new specimen of cricket curiosity. Then he held up his hands for the ball. "There's a man still in," he cried; and proceeded to send down a perfectly vicious full-pitcher upon Chrystal's legs, which the captain, who had the single virtue of never running away, promptly dispatched for another four.

He had now made thirteen runs in less than thirteen minutes, and already the whole world was a different place, and that part of it a part of Paradise. He was emboldened to glance towards the seats; there was his dear wife, strolling restlessly with her parasol, and their tiny boy clapping his hands. Chrystal could see how excited they were at a hundred yards; it only had the effect of making him perversely calm. "I'm all right--I've got going at last!" he wanted to sing out to them; for he felt all right. He had even passed the stage of anticipating the imminent delivery, and playing at the ball he expected instead of at the ball that came along. This had been one of Chrystal's many methods of getting rid of himself in the first over. And he had more suicidal strokes than an Indian Prince has scoring ones. But now he looked from his family in the long-field to the noble trees to square-leg, and from the trees downhill to the reservoir gleaming through third-man's legs; it was hardly credible that he had wished to drown himself in its depths both yesterday and the day before.

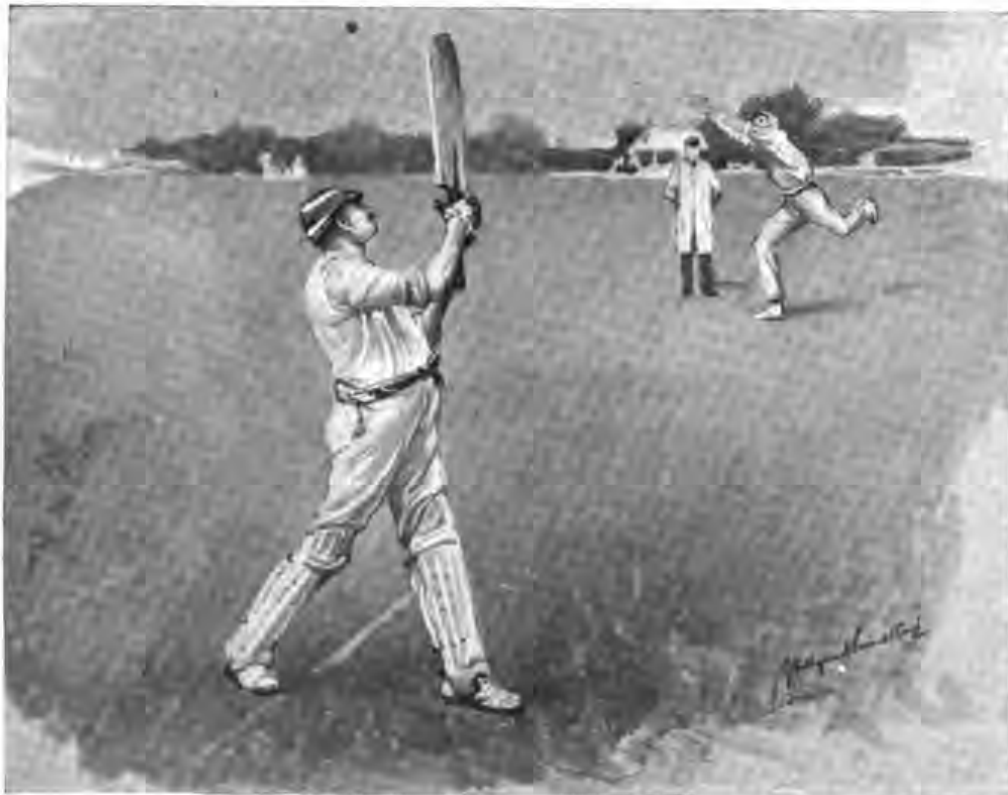
The worst player in the world, with his eye in, may resist indefinitely the attack of the best bowler; after all, a ball is a ball and a bat is a bat, and if you once begin getting the one continually in the middle of the other, and keeping it out of harm's way, there is no more to be said and but little to be done. Chrystal was soon meeting every ball in the middle of a bat which responded to the unparalleled experience by driving deliciously. The majority of his strokes were not ideal, though even a critical Cambridge Quid was able to add a stimulating "Good shot!" to not a few, while some were really quite hard and clean. Never before had this batsman felt the bat leap in his

hands, and the ball spring from the blade beyond the confines of his wildest hopes, at an unimagined velocity, half so often as he experienced these great sensations now. Great! What is there in the sensual world to put on the same page with them? And let your real batsman bear in mind that these divine moments, and their blessed memory, are greatest of all where they are most rare, in his heart who never had the makings of a real batsman, but who once in his life has played a decent game.

Chrystal was in heaven. No small boy succeeding in his first little match, no international paragon compiling his cool hundred

thoughts wandered between the overs it was back to Harrow, and to the pleasing persuasion that he might have been in the eleven but for his infernal ineptitude for Latin verses. Meanwhile, every ball brought its own anxiety and delight, and for several overs there was really very little to criticise except the batsman's style; then came an awful moment.

It was a half-volley on his legs, and Chrystal hit it even higher than he intended, but not quite so hard. One of those vigorous young schoolmasters was keeping himself hard and fit at deep-mid-on; he had to run like a greyhound, and to judge a cross-



"HE HAD TO RUN LIKE A GREYHOUND."

before fifty thousand eyes, was ever granted the joy of the game in fuller or in sweeter measure than was Robert Chrystal's that afternoon. Think of his failures. Think of his years. Think of his unathletic figure. Think of ball after ball—big as a football to him now—yet banged to a bullet into thin air or down the hill or under the trees. "Thank Heaven, there's a boundary," murmured Chrystal, wiping his face while they fetched it. Yet he was cool enough in the way that mattered. His mind was entirely concentrated on the coming ball, but it was an open mind until the ball arrived. If his

flight as he ran; but the apparent impossibility of the catch was simply a challenge to the young schoolmaster's calibre as a field; the ground was just covered, and the ball just held with extended hand. It was a supreme effort—or would have been. There are those catches which are held almost, but not quite, long enough to count. This was an exaggerated instance. Unable to check himself, the young schoolmaster must have covered at least a yard with the ball in his hand. Then it rolled out, and he even kicked it far in front of him in his headlong stride.

"Got him! No, he hasn't. Put him on the floor!" Chrystal heard the little parson say, as he himself charged down the pitch in his second run. He saw nothing. His partner was calling him for a third, and Tuttles was stamping and railing at the bowler's end.

"Was that a chance?" gasped Chrystal, as he grounded his bat.

"A chance?" snorted Tuttles. "My dear fellow, he only held it about twenty minutes."

"Am I out, then?" asked Chrystal of the umpire, his hot blood running cold.

"Not out!" declared that friendly functionary without an instant's indecision.

The incident, however, had a disturbing effect upon Chrystal's nerves. He shuddered to think of his escape. He became self-conscious, and began to think about his score. It was quite a long time since they clapped him for his fifty. He must be in the eighties at the very least. On his own ground he would have the public scoring apparatus that they have at Lord's; then you would always know when you were near your century. Chrystal, however, was well aware that he must be pretty near his. He had hit another four, not one of his best, and had given a stumping chance to little Osborne, who had more than once exchanged the ball for the gloves during the past two hours.

Yes, and it was a quarter past five. Chrystal saw that, and pulled himself together, for his passive experience of the game reminded him that the average century is scored in a couple of hours. No doubt he must be somewhere about the nineties. Everybody seemed very still in the pavilion. The scorer's table was certainly surrounded. Chrystal set his teeth and smothered a half-volley in his earlier "no-you-don't" manner. But the next ball could only have bowled him round the legs, and Tuttles hardly ever broke that way, besides which this one was too fast, and, in short, away it went skimming towards the trees. And there and then arose the sweetest uproar that

Robert Chrystal had ever heard. They were shouting themselves hoarse in front of the little pavilion. The group about the scoring table was dispersing with much hat-waving. The scorer might have been seen leaning back in his chair like a man who had been given air at last. Mrs. Chrystal was embracing the boy, probably (and in fact) to hide her joyous tears. Chrystal himself felt almost overcome and quite abashed. Should he take his cap off or should he not? He would know better another time; meanwhile he meant to look modest, and did look depressed; and half the field closed in upon him, clapping their unselfish hands, while a pair of wicket-keeping gloves belaboured his back with ostentatious thuds.

More magnanimous than any, Tuttles had been the first to clap, but he was also the first to stop clapping, and there was a business air about the way in which he sig-



"A BEAUTIFUL SWING, A LOVELY LENGTH, AND CHRYSAL'S MIDDLE STUMP LAY STRETCHED UPON THE GRASS."

nalled for the ball. He carried it back to the spot where he started his run with as much deliberation as though measuring the distance for an opening over. There was a peculiar care also in the way in which he grasped the leather, rolling it affectionately in his hand, as though wiping off the sawdust which it had not been necessary to use since the morning. There was a grim light in his eye as he stood waiting to begin his run, a subtle something in the run itself, the whole reminding one, with a sudden and characteristic emphasis, that this really was the first bowler in second-class cricket. A few quick steps, firm and precise, a couple of long ones, a beautiful swing, a lovely length, and Chrystal's middle stump lay stretched upon the grass.

It was a great end to a great innings, a magnificent finale to a week of weeks; but on the charming excesses on the field one need touch no more than on the inevitable speeches that night at dinner. Field and house alike were full of good hearts, of hearts good enough to appreciate a still better one. Tuthill's was the least expansive; but he had the critical temperament, and he had been hit for many fours, and his week's analysis had been ruined in an afternoon.

"I wasn't worth a sick headache," he told Chrystal himself, with his own delightful mixture of frankness and contempt. "I couldn't have outed the biggest sitter in Christendom."

"But you did send down some pretty good ones, you know!" replied Chrystal, with a rather wistful intonation.

"A few," Tuttles allowed, charily. "The one that bowled you was all right. But it was a very good innings, and I congratulate you again."

Now, Chrystal had some marvellous old brandy; how it had come into his possession and how much it was worth were respectively a very long and rather a tall story. He only broached a bottle upon very great occasions; but this was obviously one, even though the bottle had been the last in the cellar and its contents liquid gold. The only question was whether they should have it on the table with dessert or with their coffee in the library.

Chrystal debated the point with some verbosity; the fact was that he had been put to shame by hearing of nothing but his century from the soup to the speeches; and he resolutely introduced and conscientiously enlarged upon the topic of the brandy in order to throw a deliberate haze over his own

lustre. His character shone the more brilliantly through it; but that could be said of each successive incident since his great achievement. He beamed more than ever. In a sudden silence you would have expected to catch him purring. And Mrs. Chrystal had at last agreed to his giving her those particular diamonds which she had over and over again dissuaded him from buying; if he must make some offering to his earthly gods it might as well be to the goddess on the hearth. But none but themselves knew of this, and it was of the Chrystal known to men as well that all sat talking when he had left the dining-room with his bunch of keys. Mrs. Chrystal felt the tears coming back into her eyes; they were every one so fond of him, and yet he was all and only hers! It was she who made the move, and for this reason, though she said she fancied he must be expecting them to follow him to the library, for he had been several minutes gone. But Mrs. Chrystal led the other ladies to the drawing-room, merely pausing to say generally to the men:--

"If you don't find him there he must have gone to the cellar himself, and I'm afraid he's having a hunt."

Now the Chrystals, like a sensible couple, never meddled with each other's definite departments in the house, and of course Mrs. Chrystal knew no more about her husband's cellar arrangements than he did of the inside of her store-room. Otherwise she would have known that he very seldom entered his own cellar, and that he did not require to go there for his precious brandy.

Yet he did seem to have gone there now, for there was no sign of him in the library when the cricketers trooped in. Osborne was saying something in a lowered voice to Tuthill, who, looking round the empty room, replied as emphatically as usual:--

"I'm glad you think I did it well. Man and boy, I never took on such a job in all my days, and I never will another. The old sitter!"

And he chuckled good-humouredly enough.

"Steady!" said the major of the Indian regiment.

"It's all right, he's down in the cellar," the cherubic clergyman explained. "Trust us not to give the show away."

"And me," added the scholastic hero of the all-but-gallery catch.

"You precious near did," Osborne remonstrated. "You held it just one second too long."

"But fancy holding it at all! I never thought I could get near the thing. I thought a bit of a dash would contribute to the general verisimilitude. Then to make the catch of a lifetime and to have to drop it like a hot potato!"

"It showed the promising quality of self-restraint," the clerical humorist allowed. "You will be an upper usher yet."

"Or a husher upper?" suggested a wag of baser mould—to wit, the sympathetic umpire of the afternoon. "But your side-show wasn't a patch on mine. Even Osborne admits that you had a second to think about it. I hadn't the fifth of one. I called that no-ball between the time the bat was beaten and the sticks were hit! Tuttle, old man, I thought you were going to knock me down!"

"I very nearly did," the candid bowler owned. "I never was no-balled in my life before, and for the moment I forgot."

"Then it wasn't all acting?"

"Half and half."

"I thought it was too good to be untrue."

"But," continued Tuttle, with his virile vanity, "you fellows buck about what you did, as though you'd done a thousandth part of what I did between you. You had your moment apiece. I had one every

ball of every over. Great Lord! if I'd known how hard it would be to serve up consistent tosh! Full-pitches on the pads! That's a nice length to have to live up to through a summer afternoon. I wouldn't do it again for five-and-twenty sovereigns!"

"And I," put in the quiet Quidnunc—"it's the first time I ever sat on the splice while the other man punched them, and I hope it's the last." He had been tried as a bat for an exceptionally strong Cambridge eleven.

"Come, come," said the grave major. "I wasn't in this myself. I distinctly disapproved. But he played quite well when he got his eye in. I don't believe you could have bowled him then if you'd tried, Tuttle."

If the irascible Tuthill had been a stout old man he would have turned purple in the face; being a lean young one, at least in effect, his complexion gained a glorious bronze.

"My good sir," said he, "what about the ball after the one which ran him into three figures?"

"Where is the dear old rabbit?" the ex-umpire exclaimed.

"Well, not in the hutch," said the little parson. "He's come right out of that, and I shouldn't be surprised if he stopped out. I only wish it was the beginning of the week."

"I'm going to look for him," the other rejoined, with the blank eye that has not seen a point. He stepped through a French window out into the night. The young schoolmasters

followed him. The Indian major detained Osborne.

"We ought all to make a rule not to speak of this again, either here or anywhere else. It would be too horrible if it leaked out."

"I suppose it would." The little parson



"ABOUT YOUR CENTURY, DARLING?"

had become more like one. Though full of cricket and of chaff, and gifted with a peculiarly lay vocabulary for the due ventilation of his favourite topic, he was yet no discredit to the cloth. A certain superficial insincerity was his worst fault. The conspiracy, indeed, had originated in his nimble mind, but its execution had far exceeded his conception. On the deeper issues the man was sound.

"Can there be any doubt?" the major pursued.

"About the momentary bitter disappointment, no, I'm afraid not; about the ultimate good all round, no again; but, there, I don't fear, I hope."

"I don't quite follow you," said the major.

"Old Bob Chrystal," continued Osborne, "is absolutely the best sportsman in the world, and absolutely the dearest good chap. But until this afternoon I never thought he would get within a hundred miles of decent cricket; and now I almost think he might, even at his age. He has had the best practice he ever had in his life. His shots improved as he went on. You saw for yourself how he put on the wood. It is a liberal cricket education to make runs, even against the worst bowling in the world. Like most other feats, you find it's not half so formidable as it looks once you get going; every ten runs come easier than the last. Chrystal got a hundred this afternoon because we let him. I said just now I wished it was the beginning of the week. Don't you see my point?"

The major looked a brighter man.

"You think he might get another?"

"I don't mind betting he does," said the little parson, "if he sticks to country cricket long enough. *Possunt quia posse videntur!*"

They went out in their turn; and last of all Chrystal himself stole forth from the deep cupboard in which he kept his cigars and his priceless brandy. An aged bottle still trembled in his hand; but a little while ago his lip had been as tremulous, and now it was not. Of course he had not understood a word of the little clergyman's classical tag, but all that immediately preceded it had

made, or may make, nearly all the difference to the rest of even Robert Chrystal's successful life.

His character had been in the balance during much of what had passed in his hearing and yet behind his back; whether it would have emerged triumphant, even without Gerald Osborne's final pronouncement, is for others to judge from what they have seen of it in this little record.

"It was most awfully awkward," so Chrystal told his wife. "I was in there getting at the brandy—I'd gone and crowded it up with all sorts of tackle—when you let all those fellows into the study and they began talking about me before I could give the alarm. Then it was too late. It would have made them so uncomfortable, and I should have looked so mean."

"I hope they were saying nice things?"

"Oh, rather; that was just it; but don't you let them know I overheard them, mind."

Mrs. Chrystal seemed the least bit suspicious.

"About your century, darling?"

"Well, partly. It was little Osborne, you know. He knows more about cricket than any of them. Tuttles is only a bowler."

"I *don't* like Mr. Tuthill," said Mrs. Chrystal. "I've quite made up my mind. He was trying to bowl you out the whole time!"

"Little Osborne," her husband continued, rather hastily, "says I ought to make a hundred if I stick to it."

Mrs. Chrystal opened her eyes.

"But you have!"

"I mean another hundred," he added, in some confusion.

"Of course you will," said Mrs. Chrystal, who just then would have taken her husband's selection for England as a matter of course.

Chrystal was blushing a little, but glowing more. It was one of those moments when you would have understood his making so much money and winning such a wife. Never was a mouth so determined, and yet so good.

"I don't know about that, dear," he opened it to say. "But I mean to try!"