

# The Evolution of Cricket.

BY ALFRED T. STORY.

Hail! Cricket, glorious, manly British game,  
First of all sports, be first alike in fame!



O wrote James Love, the comedian, in his "Cricket: An Heroic Poem," published in 1770. It was at that time—more than a century ago—essentially a "British," that is a national, game; and since then it has, if possible, become a more British, and, to judge by the position it occupies in the public mind and in the public Press to-day, a more glorious one, too.

At the time when Love was poetizing upon the subject, cricket was in a transition state, and was gradually developing into the form in which we now play it, but the evolution was not yet complete. It had, indeed, many steps still to take, although it had long grown out of the infant stage, and one may add the feminine stage too, if, indeed, the original and the developed forms did not continue to exist side by side.

Much has been written as to the origin of cricket, but, like the games of chess and of cards, its infancy is lost in obscurity. There are many theories as to its origin, some persons being of opinion that it arose out of the ancient game called "stool-ball"; others that it developed from "club-ball," a pastime similar to rounders; while a third party regards a northern form of "tip-cat," called "cat-and-dog," as the undoubted original of the game. There is much to be said in favour of each theory, and perhaps the truth is that in its general evolution cricket took something from each of the above-named pastimes.

Strutt, in his "Sports and Pastimes" (1810), says, "I have been informed that a pastime called 'stool-ball' is practised to this day in the northern parts of England, which consists simply in setting a stool upon

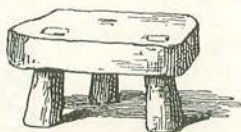
the ground, and one of the players takes his place before it, while his antagonist, standing at a distance, tosses a ball with the intention of striking the stool, and this it is the business of the former to prevent by beating it away with his hand, reckoning one to the game for every stroke of the ball. If, on the contrary, it should be missed by the hand and strike the stool, the players change places." In a note, Strutt adds that he believes the player might be caught out.

That such a game was played in the north, that is, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, so recently as the early fifties, I myself can testify, as I have played it as a child. The game was played, however, not as in our illustration of "stool-ball" (No. 3), taken from "A Pretty Little Pocket-Book" (1770) for children, but with the stool lying on its side, so that the ball was bowled at the seat of the stool. It would usually be played in a garden path with a parti-coloured leather ball stuffed with sawdust, which was purchased at the sweet-stuff shop for a halfpenny.

I do not recollect what the game was called; but I know the little wooden stools that were used were called "crickets" (No. 1). They were very different—these crickets—from the more finished and ornamental stools, and were formed of a thick piece of wood, round or square, which constituted the seat,

and three or four legs, as the case might be. They may be seen in the houses of the poor, almost anywhere in the north, and are rough, tough, and very durable pieces of furniture, admirably suited for children to play with

and knock about.\* It may be worth while to note, too, that I once saw a nurse-girl improvise a game of "stool-ball" in a very peculiar way to amuse a little boy. She placed a small foot-stool, or cricket, upside down, laid a comb across from



NO. 1.—A CRICKET.



NO. 2.—CLUB-BALL (14TH CENTURY).

\* In Todd's "Johnson" we find: "Cricket: a low seat or stool."



one leg to another like a wicket bail, rolled up a rag ball, and gave it to the boy to bowl with, while she defended her odd wicket with a hair-brush. She held the bat until the



NO. 3.—STOOL-BALL.

little bowler knocked down the comb, when she took the ball, and the youngster handled the hair-brush bat.

Strutt refers to a number of ancient English games in which a ball was used, as, for instance, goff (or golf), club-ball, trap-ball, and others. Cambuca was the same as goff, the Latin name being applied to it, says Strutt, in the reign of Edward III., deriving the denomination, no doubt, from the crooked club or bat with which it was played. The bat was also called a "bandy," from its being bent, and hence the game in England is frequently called "bandy-ball." Strutt gives a drawing of two persons playing at "bandy-ball," and the form of the bandy, as used early in the fourteenth century, from an MS. book of prayers, beautifully illuminated and written about that time.

"Club-ball," says Strutt, "was a pastime similar to goff, but clearly distinguished therefrom in an edict of Edward III." The dif-

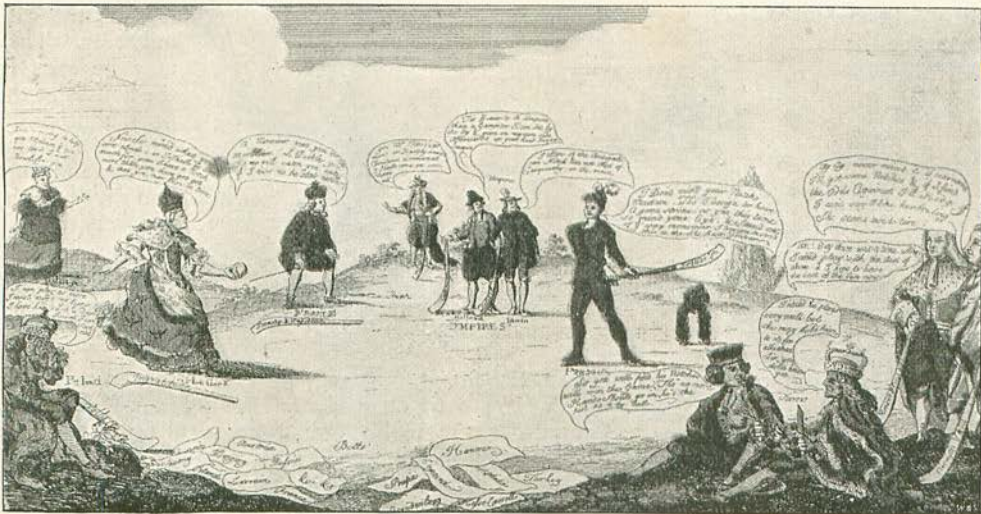
ference appears to have consisted in the one being played with a curved bat, and the other with a straight one. Strutt gives two engravings representing persons playing at club-ball. The first (No. 2), from an MS. in the Bodleian Library, dated 1344, exhibits a female figure in the action of throwing the ball to a man who elevates his bat to strike it. Behind the woman in the original delineation appear several other figures of both sexes, waiting attentively to catch or stop the ball when returned by the batsman. Strutt's other specimen of "club-ball," taken from a drawing more ancient than the former, a genealogical roll of the Kings of England of the time of Henry III., in the Royal Library, presents two players only. It does not appear how the game was determined.

The third game to which cricket is held to



NO. 5.—BOYS' CRICKET (1770).

have some analogies, and from which it is thought by some to have been derived, was called "cat-and-dog," and was formerly played much in the north. It is referred to in the Badminton "Cricket." Two holes were cut at a distance of thirteen yards. At



NO. 4.—THE CROWNED HEADS OF EUROPE: A SATIRICAL PRINT OF 1757.





NO. 6.

club-ball or rounders? The question is undoubtedly an interesting one.

Curiously enough, one of our illustrations (No. 13) is from a small German almanac of 1802, in which the game is designated "Thor-ball." The first syllable, "Thor," signifies "gate" (*i.e.*, "wicket"); so that the game appears to have made its first appearance in the Fatherland, not as "cricket," but as "wicket-ball." Note, too, that the earliest wicket was 2ft. in width.

See the illustration (No. 5) of a boys' game of cricket from "A Pretty Little Pocket Book" (1770), though this does not give a fair idea of what the bat had become by this time in politer cricket, as, for instance, in the hands of Royalty, as represented by Prince Adolphus Frederick (No. 6).

But whether such be the origin of the game or not, it certainly seems to owe something to "tip-cat." In agreement with this view, we have it on the authority of antiquaries of the game that the ball was originally adopted because the cat would not go far enough. The cat was cut down sharper and sharper, until it was at last

each hole stood a player with a club called a "dog." A piece of wood, called a "cat," 4in. long by 1in. in circumference, was tossed to one of the dogmen. His object was to keep the "cat" out of the hole.

There are those who hold that we get single wicket from "club-ball" and double wicket from "tip-cat," under its old name of "dog-and-cat," and there is much to be said for that view.

One of the earliest mentions we have of the game of cricket is in Florio's "Italian Dictionary," published in 1595, in which we find *sgrittare* defined as "to make a noise as a cricket; to play cricket-a-wicket and be merry." "Cricket-a-wicket" means cricket at the wicket. Now, Professor Skeat derives the word "cricket" from the Anglo-Saxon *cricc*, a staff, and *et*, the diminutive; hence, a little staff. Can it be that cricket grew originally out of a domestic game, in which children threw a ball at the garden wicket (*i.e.*, gate) while it was defended by a player with a crooked stick or club, a sort of



NO. 7.—MISS WICKET AND MISS TRIGGER (1778).



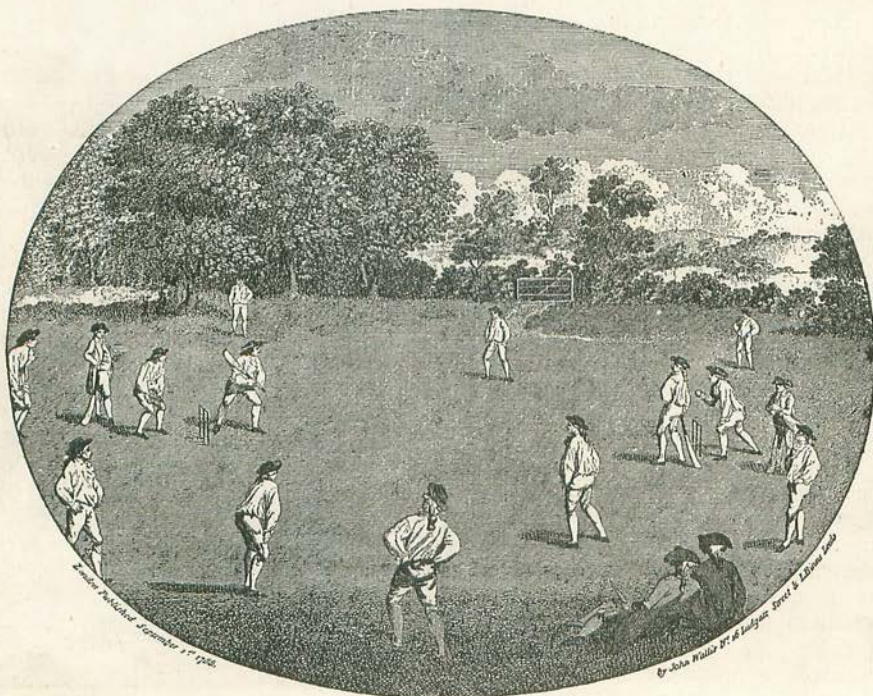


NO. 8.—"A MATCH PLAYED BETWEEN THE COUNTESS OF DERBY AND SOME OTHER LADIES OF QUALITY AND FASHION, AT SEVEN OAKS, KENT, 1779."

reduced to a badly-shaped ball, and the first cricket ball was consequently a wooden one. Another link with "tip-cat" is to be found in the fact that, in the game of cricket as originally played, there was a round hole between the stumps, into which the ball had to be placed to put a man out.

It was not until the early part of last century that the national game assumed anything like the form in which it is now played. Indeed, it is from that time that the changes

gradually began to be made in it which developed it into what we may call the scientific game of the present day, and we may be sure that those changes would not have taken place unless the game had been growing more and more popular. Thus we learn that in the reign of Queen Anne the wickets were placed about the same distance apart as now, namely, 22yds., that is, the length of a surveyor's chain, but the stumps were only 1ft. high and 2ft. wide,



NO. 9.—"THE NOBLE GAME OF CRICKET" (1785).



surmounted as now with a bail. At that period, too, a feature existed to which reference has already been made. Between the stumps a hole was cut into the ground large enough to contain the ball or the butt end of the bat or club. In running a notch the striker was required to put his bat in this hole instead of touching over the popping-crease, as is now the rule. The wicket-keeper, in putting out the striker when running, was obliged, when the ball was thrown in, to place it in this hole before the adversary could reach it with his bat. Many severe injuries of the hand were the consequence of this regulation, and the present mode of touching the popping-crease was substituted. About the same period the wickets were increased to 22in. in height, and narrowed to 6in. in breadth, and the wicket-keeper was required to put the wicket down, having the ball in his hand. Subsequently (1775) the middle stump was added, and the bails divided into two pieces. Not long afterwards the stumps were given an additional height of 2in., while at the same time the width of the wicket was increased to 7in. The "Noble Game of Cricket," as played in 1785 (No. 9), will give an idea of what it was like at this time.



NO. 10.

Meanwhile a set of rules had been formulated for the game. Cricket had no written laws till 1770. The earliest copy we have of them is dated February 25th, 1774. They were drawn up by a committee of noblemen and gentlemen (including Sir Horace Mann, the Duke of Dorset, and Lord Tankerville), at the "Star and Garter," Pall Mall. At this time the crease was cut, not painted. "No ball," so far as crossing the crease went, was just like "no ball" to-day. "Indeed," says one authority, "the game was essentially the game of hockey, except that if a ball were hit, the other player may place his body anywhere within the swing of the bat, so as to hinder the bowler from catching her, but he must neither strike at her, nor touch her with his hands."

One of the influences for progress in the game was the formation of the old Hambledon Club, which is the earliest we hear of that was of any account. It was



NO. 11.—"THE LARKINS CHILDREN" (1790).



established about 1750, though the game was played at some of the public schools long previous to that. The Hambledon played at first on Broadhalfpenny Down, afterwards on Windmill Down, both close to the famous Hampshire village, and for many years the club played the same part with regard to other clubs that the Marylebone Club does now. An old print represents the Hambledon eleven in their club costume of knee-breeches, stockings, and buckled shoes, with velvet caps; by no means so elaborate a uniform as that of Lord Winchilsea's team, which used to play in silver-laced caps.

Some idea of the dandified costume of the period may be gained from the figure on the admission card of the Oxford Cricket Club (No. 10).

The Hambledon Club numbered a lot of famous cricketers amongst its members—men who were giants in their time, and left their mark upon the game. One of them, David Harris, was the cause of the alteration in the shape of the "bat." Up to nearly the end of the eighteenth century its form was one to which the term "club" might more properly be applied. In all the old prints of the game the shape of the bat varies from a hockey-stick or that of a volute, or rather of an old-fashioned dinner-knife, curved at the back, bulging out at the front, and having a broad curl at the end, as will be seen by comparing the satirical prints of the "Crowned Heads of Europe" (No. 4), and "Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger" (No. 7). The shape of the bat as it obtained in 1790 is shown in the group from the picture of "The Larkins Children" (No. 11), and may be compared with the development it had reached in 1800, as seen in the hands of the boys from the picture, "The Soldier's Widow" (No. 12).

With such a weapon as the bat in its curved form a man must hit—block he could not; and a length ball must inevitably have

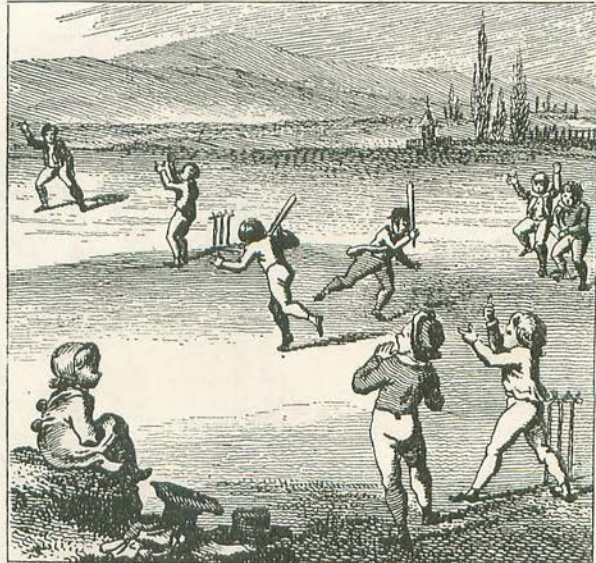


NO. 12.—GROUP FROM THE PICTURE OF "THE SOLDIER'S WIDOW" (1800).

lowered his stumps. The crooked bat was not ill-adapted to the style of play that originally obtained, which, being purely offensive, required something with which a good deal of hard hitting could be got through; but with the development of the game the curved bat was bound to go. The change not only revolutionized cricket, but opened up the mysteries of modern scientific batting.

As already said, Harris was the cause of the alteration of the shape of the bat, as being, if not the inventor, at least the introducer of the "length" balls, and against his bowling the old hockey-stick arrangement was of no use. The introduction of "length" bowling had a vast deal to do with the progress of the game. Not only did it lead to the alteration of the bat, but the

stumps likewise had again to be raised in height. By 1814 the wickets had grown to 26in. by 8in., and in 1817 they were once more altered to 27in. by 8in., at which they now stand. At the same time, to compensate for the extra inch on the stumps, an extra 2in. was given to the distance between the



J. H. P. Ambury del.

G. Schiele sculp.

NO. 13.

Thorball.

(1802.)



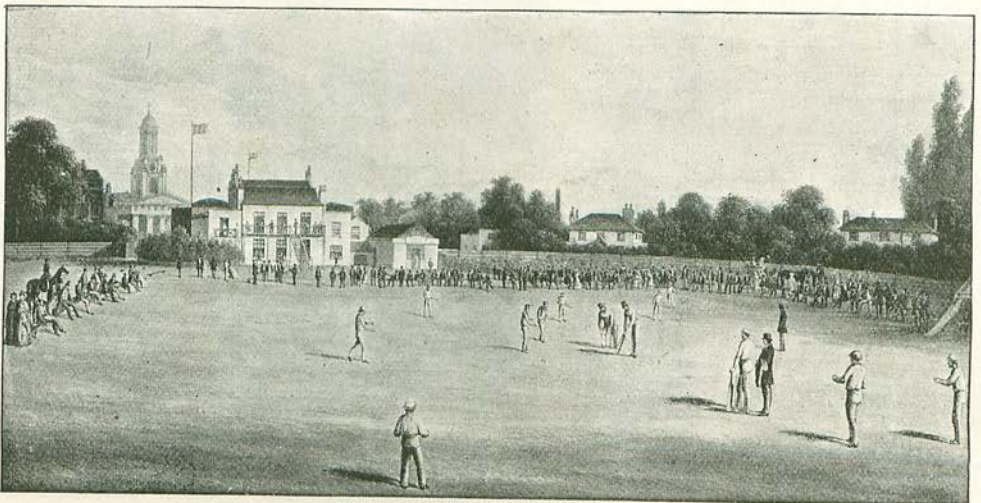


NO. 14.—CRICKET AT LORD'S (1820).

creases, thus increasing it to 4ft. Old Small, a famous cricketer in his day, and "one of the best hands at the draw that ever lived," says Dr. Grace, is said to have made the first straight bat.

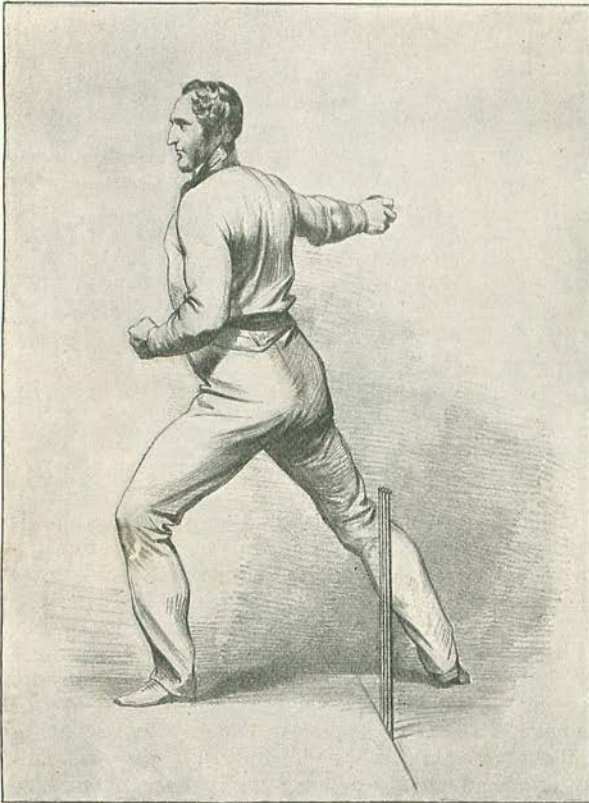
It would take an entire article by itself to go into the question of bowling; but it may be mentioned here that a very important renovation in that respect, namely, round-arm bowling, came into force about 1825. It had frequently been tried before, but had been condemned as unfair; and it was not until the underhand style was found easily playable that the round-arm came in to stay. Tom Walker, one of the "famous men" of those days, was among the most celebrated of early round-arm bowlers. The Hambledon Club, however, objected to the new thing, and the so-

called "throwing" bowling was placed under the ban. It had among its opponents, too, such men as John Nyren (born 1764) and Lambert (born 1779), the two worthies, by the way, to whom we are indebted for the earliest printed instructions as to how to play the game—both of whom viewed it with disfavour, Lambert declaring that, if continued, it would have a degenerating effect. But it won its way in the end, and was very generally adopted about the time mentioned. Willes was perhaps the first to put into practice the style of bowling identical with that now so universally adopted, though the delivery then was not so high as it subsequently became. The new style of bowling led to other minor, though not unimportant, changes. On the hard and uneven surfaces upon which cricket was then frequently



NO. 15.—SURREY AT THE OVAL (1820).





NO. 16.—MR. ALFRED MYNN.

played, it became so dangerous that recourse was had to leg-guards and batting gloves, articles which previously had not been unknown. Incidentally, too, it led to the better preparation and more careful keeping of the grounds devoted to the game. In this respect a vast difference will be perceived between the pitches as represented in the noble game of 1743 and the subsequent ones at "Lord's" (No. 14) and the "Oval," 1820 (No. 15).

The earliest matches of which the scores have been preserved were those of Kent *v.* All England, in the Artillery Ground, Finsbury, 1743, and the Hambledon *v.* Kent, which took place at Bishopsbourne Paddock, Canterbury, August 17th, 1772. The latter portion of the eighteenth century was notable for the formation of the Marylebone Club, which took place in 1787, on the dissolution of the White Conduit Club, which had been in existence several years, and which played chiefly on the Islington fields, from which it took its name. The new club,

destined to become the controller of cricket, located itself in Dorset Square, Marylebone; subsequently it removed to North Bank, Regent's Park, and finally, in 1814, settled down in St. John's Wood Road, its present quarters. "Lord's," as the home of the M.C.C., has always been known as the best-appointed cricket-ground in the kingdom.

It would have been interesting to give some account of these early clubs and of their more notable members, did space permit. A few only of the hundreds of cricket celebrities have been mentioned. The annals of the game are full of their traits and exploits. Among the more famous men of the earlier half of the century mention may be made of Alfred Mynn (No. 16), the "demon bowler" of his day, of whom it is recorded that he actually took men's wickets before they knew where they were. He found a match, however, in Ward, the noted batsman, and in Fuller Pilch (No. 17), perhaps the most famous handler of the willow amongst the past generations of cricketers.



NO. 17.—FULLER PILCH.