

## Curious Incidents at Cricket.

BY W. J. FORD.



HERE can be no one who has played much cricket who has not a fund of strange stories about the curious incidents that he has seen or experienced: indeed, one has only to foregather with some fellow-cricketers and to listen to their yarns to wonder whether some cricket stories might not well be ranked with "fish stories," so hard is it to believe them. But any reader of *THE STRAND* who perseveres to the end of this article will, I trust, be less incredulous in the future, and will credit the toughest tales with at any rate a foundation of truth, for what I have to tell are either facts that have come under my own observation or are otherwise well authenticated, many of them being drawn from that great source of information on matters concerning cricket, "M.C.C. Scores and Biographies." The stories are intentionally given in no set order, as few things are so dull as a series of anecdotes scientifically grouped under definite headings; it is better to let them flow forth at random, just as they would be told in the pavilion or the smoking-room.

Cricket had been played, or at least records kept, for about fifty years before pads were invented in 1790; queer pads they were, too, consisting of thin boards set angle-wise to allow the ball to glance off, and the inventor was one "Three-fingered Jack," of the famous Hambledon Club, the original nursery of cricket. He had lost one or two fingers, and consequently had the handle of his bat grooved, so as to get a better grip of it. This arrangement was no doubt a necessity, considering Jack's affliction, but I have seen an arrangement that was almost more curious in actual use: the batsman, liking a heavy bat for slow bowling and a light one for faster deliveries, had a hole bored in the back of

his bat about six inches from the bottom, into which he could screw a loaded disc of wood, thereby increasing the weight of his bat as required. He has never to my knowledge had any imitators. The bat, indeed, is often responsible for the fall of the batsman's wicket; but while bad manipulation is the main cause, yet this trusty friend often proves untrue, as happened a short time ago when, the batsman having made a good stroke, a splinter was broken off by the force of the hit and knocked the bail off; but Wells, the Sussex player, had a stranger experience in 1860, for the blade parted company with the handle (bats were often made in one piece then) and, leaving the handle in his hand, flew over his shoulder and dismantled the wicket. A third and



"THE BLADE FLEW OVER HIS SHOULDER AND DISMANTLED THE WICKET."



similar story is equally true: the string that bound a broken bat gave way unnoticed and dislodged a bail, the batsman being in the act of striking: hence, as in the other cases, he was out—hit wicket. But one wonders that the laws do not provide for so untoward an incident, which ought never to be fatal to the striker's innings.

Fast bowlers sometimes break a stump, but I have seen quite a slow bowler do so, hitting it presumably on the exact point of least resistance, while on the other hand I have seen a fast bowler palpably hit the wicket without knocking down a bail, and this happened twice in one innings! One hardly dares to tell the story and be believed, but Shacklock, of Nottingham was the bowler.

the stem into his throat, while another one actually impaled itself on the knife of an old woman who was dispensing ginger-beer and other commodities to the crowd. Spectators ought not to get hurt, for they are supposed to have their eye on the game; but an unfortunate lady at Eastbourne, who was skating on the covered roller-rink, was hit by a ball which descended through a window in the roof, and so startled her that she fell and broke her arm. Another lady, entering the ground and astonished to find her sunshade suddenly whisked out of her hand, turned round to remonstrate with the aggressor, which proved to be only a little globe of red leather, lately in rapid motion.

Bails often have unaccountable ways of



"ACTUALLY IMPALED ITSELF ON THE KNIFE OF AN OLD WOMAN."

Here is another almost incredible story, but true. Last year my brother, F. G. J. Ford, hit a ball straight back so hard that it struck the opposite wicket and bounded back within his own popping-crease, while I myself once hit a ball which caught in the edge of the thatched roof of the pavilion and ran about a foot up the thatch, though no one could understand how a ball which was necessarily dropping could take such a course.

But balls are perverse things: one which was hit to the ring is recorded to have struck the pipe of a spectator and to have driven

their own; they have been knocked into the air, but have settled tranquilly in their groove again. One is said—I *don't* vouch for this—to have flown into the air, and turning in the air to have readjusted itself on the stumps, but with the long end where the short should have been; they have been nipped between the middle and the outer stump, and so prevented from falling. We lost one once, and found it at last in the wicket-keeper's pocket, while the ball has struck one something like seventy yards from the wicket. It is not everyone who



knows that a former Prince of Wales, the father of George III., died from the effects of a blow from a cricket ball, which struck him in the chest and caused a cancerous growth, the removal of which resulted in death.

The man who used to long-stop to a certain very fast bowler named Brown must have heard of this, for he used to arm himself with a pad of hay inside his shirt. He probably needed it, for Brown bowled with such speed that he is said to have sent a ball at practice *through* the coat with which the long-stop tried to stop it, and to have killed a dog on the other side! It must have been a very old coat and a very thin-skulled dog, unless the true version be that, the long-stop holding the coat to one side of him, the ball slipped, as it might do, along and under the coat, and then demolished the dog. Brown's bowling, however, was not always as deadly as this, for we read that in 1819 a player called Beldham—not, of course, the famous player who died comparatively recently—hit his bowling so hard that Brown was afraid to bowl to him! Yet Beldham was then fifty-three years old.

The laws of cricket suggest nine ways of getting out, to which Tom Emmett added a tenth, viz., "Given out wrong by the umpire," but this method does not often figure on the score-sheet, and usually exists only in the batsman's mind, for there are generally eleven good men and true—on the other side—to support the umpire's verdict; but in a match, played in 1829, between Sheffield Wednesday and Nottingham, Dawson, a Sheffield man, is, according to the Sheffield score-book, "cheated out," though the

Nottingham book only says "run out." This match seems to have provoked a good deal of feeling in other years also, as witness the Sheffield Wednesday book again. "A most disgraceful match! The Nottingham umpire

kept calling 'No-ball' whenever a straight ball was bowled, and Sheffield were foolish for continuing the game when they perceived that an unfair advantage was being taken." The Nottingham book still reflects that silence is golden, and ignores the incident. Betting was probably at the bottom of the occurrence, for matches for money, or on which money depended, were so frequent that "win, tie, or wrangle" has passed into a proverb.

This is certainly the only way in which to

account for such entries as: "Unfinished owing to disputed decision on the question of l.b.w.," "Given out unfairly and refused to retire," "Side refuses to go out and abide by the decision of the umpire." But, after all, what is to be done if an umpire gives a decision contrary to the laws of the game, as, for instance, when a man was given out in a first-class match for handling the *ball*? He might just as well have been sent back for blowing his nose. Another curious entry (1843) is "G. Plank, walked out." Is this an obscure joke about "walking the plank?" or did Plank walk away in dudgeon? or does it mean that Plank inadvertently walked away from his wicket and was "run out"? What, again, is "nipt out"? This sad fate befell Mr. Gandy in a match between Eton and Oldfield in 1793; and collateral evidence shows that "nipt" is not the same as caught, bowled, stumped, hit wicket, or run out. Remembering that to "nip" a ball meant



"A CRICKET BALL STRUCK HIM IN THE CHEST."



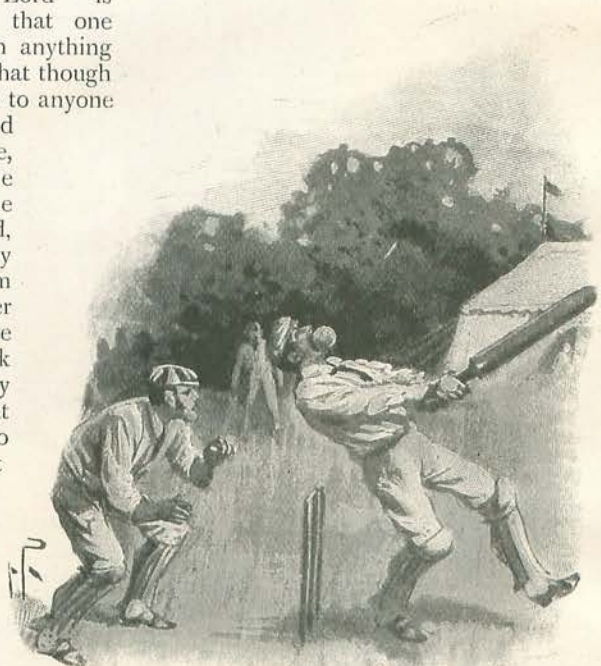
the same thing as to "snick" one, I think the expression signifies "Caught at the wicket," a fate which must have been rare in those days of all-along-the-ground bowling.

By the way, there is a charmingly *naïve* record about a match between England and Twenty-two of Nottingham in 1818, for the game is said to have been sold on both sides; an umpire changed for "cheating" (this was illegal, the changing as well as the cheating), and Lord F. Beauclerc's finger was broken by an angry and desperate fielder. Reading between the lines, one gathers that his lordship was bowling too well to please one of the fieldsmen, who, having backed the other side, did not like to see them bowled out, and tried to incapacitate the bowler. The name of "Lord" is so great a name to cricketers that one does not like to associate it with anything shabby, but it is nevertheless true that though Lord had promised twenty guineas to anyone who could hit out of his ground (the original site of Dorset Square, and now absorbed, I fancy, by the Great Central Railway), yet he refused to pay up to E. H. Budd, who had earned the money by performing the feat. A similar sum was offered, it is said, by a member of the Melbourne C.C. to anyone who succeeded in hitting the clock over the pavilion, and he duly handed over the money to that colossal hitter, G. F. Bonnor, who hit the clock face and broke it. This same Mr. Budd once played a single-wicket match, probably for a stake, with a man named Brand. Budd scored 70 and purposely knocked down his wicket; he then got Brand out for 0, and there being no follow-on at single wicket went in again, and again knocked his wicket down after making 31.

Brand again scored 0, so that he probably had as much of Budd's cricket as he wanted.

Another single-wicket match was played out in twelve balls, off the last of which the solitary and winning run was made. This must be the shortest match on record, but it is only fair to Diver, the Rugby coach, who lost, to say that he was only allowed to play with a broomstick. Here is a nice little bit of bowling, date 1861. The United Master Butchers played twenty of Metropolitan clubs, and got them out for 4 runs; C.

Absolon, the well-known veteran, had eighteen out of the nineteen wickets that fell. With my own eyes I have seen the ball run up the bat, cut the striker's eyebrow and bound into a fieldsmen's hand, so that he was caught out, and bad luck we thought it; but E. Dowson had worse luck at the Oval in 1862, for one of the opposing bowlers sent down a ball that rose and hit him in the mouth, knocking him on to his wicket, so that he was out for hitting wicket. Worse offenders have escaped unharmed; one for instance—Winter was his name—hit his wicket so hard that "all three stumps were almost horizontal, but the bails were jammed," and consequently did not fall off, so that



"A BALL ROSE AND HIT HIM IN THE MOUTH, KNOCKING HIM ON TO HIS WICKET."

Winter continued his innings. In 1860 something similar occurred, but how it happened passes my understanding, for we are told that in a match played at Cambridge, between the University and the Town, the bowler, Reynolds, forced a ball one inch into the stumps, but did not dislodge it! This sounds incredible, but as the occurrence is comparatively recent let us hope that someone who was playing in the match will see these lines and explain matters.



The following score is curious: Chalcot was playing Bow; Bow scored 99, Chalcot 27 and 11; so far all is simple, but one Chalcot batsman, H. Payne, scored 24 and 10, being not out in each innings; wides totalled 3 and 1, so that the other ten batsmen were got out twice each and scored never a run between them—ten “pairs of spectacles in one match!” “Pro-digious!” as Dominie Sampson would have said. Another single-wicket match must not escape us: it was played in 1853 between Messrs. Barrett and Swain. Swain scored 5, and Barrett 3 and 1; yet neither made a run, for they were all wides!

I believe 37 is the largest number of runs ever scored for a single hit, the wickets being pitched at the top of a hill, down which the ball was hit, and over which it was thrown when originally retrieved; but F. P. Miller hit a “thirteener” at single wicket, which must be a record; the ball, of course, was not returned within the boundary stumps, so that the unhappy fieldsman had to chase his own throw what time the batsman was sprinting between the stumps. The mention

of hills recalls a famous bowler of old time, Lumpy by name, who always contrived to pitch the wickets, or to get the wickets pitched, in such a way that there should be a little declivity on which to drop the ball; for as the local poet sang—I quote from memory:—

Honest Lumpy did allow  
He ne'er could pitch  
but o'er a brow.

I wonder what the ground man at Lord's or the Oval would say if Jack Hearne or Lockwood insisted on selecting a pitch to suit them! Where the word “honest” comes in, few cricketers could see. A

tussock of grass once killed a cricketer, who, presumably when fielding, tripped over it, ruptured himself, and died in consequence; luckily cricket is a game of few fatal accidents.

A friend of mine, an old Cambridge man, used to tell a good story illustrative of obstinacy and contempt for rules. A stalwart miner was bowled out first ball, which apparently he regarded as “trial,” and made no move, till the wicket-keeper suggested that he was out and had to go. “I ain't out,” he replied; “I ain't out till I'm purred out: happen not then.” “Purring,” the uninitiated should be informed, is good Lancashire for “kicking.” A match was played last year between one-armed men and one-legged men, and was freely commented on as a curiosity, whereas it was only a revival. Such a match took place as early as 1796, and was certainly played, annually I think, in the fifties and early sixties, the one-armed men generally winning as being the better runners and bowlers.

A violin is a charming instrument, but it has not often saved a man's life; it is credited with such a performance in a good old day, when one Small just interposed it in time to save his head from the ball. Possibly the ball was of his own make, for Small was not only a violinist and a good cricketer, but a manufacturer of cricket balls as well, being originally a cobbler by trade. He lapsed into the poetical when he devised him a signboard, for the legend on it ran:—

John Small  
Make Bat and Ball  
Pitch a Wicket  
Play at Cricket  
With any Man  
In England.

Let us hope his bowling was not so erratic as his final rhyme.



“SMALL INTERPOSED IT IN TIME TO SAVE HIS HEAD.”



All cricketers can dilate on the extraordinary catches they have seen made, they themselves being generally the victims; but putting those aside which concern them personally, they would, I believe, combine in giving their second votes, as the Athenians gave theirs to Aristides, to a Captain Adams who was playing in Phoenix Park, Dublin, in 1751. The ball was hit to him in the long field, and he not only jumped a fence 3ft. 10in. high, but actually caught the ball in the course of his jump. The story is a hard one to believe,



"HE ACTUALLY CAUGHT THE BALL IN THE COURSE OF HIS JUMP."

but there it is, duly recorded in print, with dates and measurements all in apple-pie order.

There are plenty of curious incidents that depend on statistics alone, as for instance in a match of very low scoring, played between South Sussex and North Sussex, when in an aggregate of 89 runs for thirty-two wickets there was only one hit, a three-er, above a single; again in one innings no fewer than seven men were run out; in a single match of three innings there were twenty duck's-eggs; and in an innings of 120 there was no hit for 2, though there were plenty of 3's and 4's.

Again, in an innings of 38, no fewer than seven men scored 4 each; while in another match, Gentlemen *v.* Players, Burbidge, the Surrey amateur, caught five men in one innings, "all of them fine catches."

The ball occasionally gets played into a man's shirt. This has, indeed, occurred to W. G. Grace himself; but it has played more curious pranks than this, having lodged in a man's pads and once in the wicket-keeper's arm-pit; in this case short slip extracted it and claimed the catch; but the following note does not explain itself very lucidly. Playing for Yorkshire against Surrey, Anderson "played the ball on to the heel of his shoe, and was there (*sic*) caught by Lockyer," the wicket-keeper. A cricketer's costume was regarded as important even in 1828, for *Bell's Life* has a remark to the effect that "it would be much better if H. Davis would appear in a cricketing dress, instead of in that of a sailor"; but it is hardly probable that it has ever happened before 1899 that only two men turned out to field in a county match properly apparelled; yet so it happened at Dewsbury, where the Derbyshire professionals found that the water had not been turned off at night in their dressing-room, and that all their clothes were soaked through and through. Luckily only about a quarter of an hour was required to finish off the match.

Most of us cricketers recall a match in which H. J. Scott, the Australian, wound up with six, six, six, four; but a certain G. Hall, playing for the Gentlemen of Sussex against the Players of the County, hit the first three balls of the match out of the ground. I myself once received the first and the last ball of a match, each of which went out of the ground, and each of which was bowled by the same bowler.

The dog which Brown killed, as already told, is not the only dumb spectator that has met with an unnatural death at the hands—if I may be allowed the "bull"—of a cricket ball, for is it not on record that Tom Hearne, the great Middlesex cricketer of early years, was just about to deliver the ball when a



pigeon flew across the wicket? Tom stopped, aimed at the bird instead of the stumps, and brought it down dead. F. Cæsar did the same thing in 1847, the victim this time being, however, a swallow; while a good story is told about S. E. Gregory, the Australian cricketer. He was fielding at cover-point, but his attention was astray, when a sudden shout of "Look out, Sid!" recalled his wandering wits. He made a sudden grab at what he thought was the ball—and fielded a swallow! *Apropos des bottes*, my brother-in-law not long ago decapitated a lark with a golf-ball.

Wenman, a great cricketer early in the century, once experienced a curious piece of good luck, the ball passing clean through the stumps without removing a bail; yet experiment proved afterwards that the ball could not go through without touching them. The explanation must be that the stumps "spread" just enough to permit the passage of the ball without unseating the bail, and then closed up again, as is quite possible if the ground was hard. But even if possible, it was curious, and scarcely cheering to the other side, as Wenman eventually scored 139, and was not got out. It was not uncommon in early days for a side whose chances were hopeless to give up the game; did not Dingley Dell surrender to All Muggleton? But in so late a year as 1858 the Old Etonians gave up a match to the Old Harrovians, "because they did not want to come up on the second day." The Old Harrovians, however, were winning hands down. It is also in the history of the Middlesex Club that the "secretary courteously gave up the match," rain preventing the opposing side from getting the two or

three runs required to win. Of course, this was a "club" match, and not a county match, the opponents being The Butterflies; still, one would be surprised to find such a thing done in the present day, even in the "tenthst" of tenth-rate matches.

An interesting match, which certainly has claims to be called "curious," was played in 1858 between eighteen veterans and England, the veterans scoring 82 and 164, England 96 and 51.

The veterans ranged from thirty-nine to fifty-four years of age, though Chester, aged thirty-four, was specially allowed to play for them; yet seventeen years later only three of the older men were dead, two of whom were accidentally killed. In the same year five amateurs

played in a game between Kent and England; the scoring was not heavy, only 380 runs for thirty-five wickets, but the ten innings of the amateurs only produced 11 of the runs.

One would think that no stupendous effort, mental or physical, is needed to measure twenty-two yards with perfect accuracy, yet the ground man has failed at least twice in this simple task. In 1861 it was not discovered till four men were out that the pitch was 4ft. short, so the match was continued, not recommenced, on another and a proper pitch, while a similar thing occurred on the Cambridge University ground in a first-class match about 1880, two or three wickets having fallen before the error was discovered: the game, however, was begun afresh, and one of the Studds who had got but few runs in his first try now made 60 or 70. Recommencement was clearly the proper course, but the moral is, "Trust to a chain and not to a tape, as the latter may easily meet with an accident unobserved or unnoted."

Here are a few more oddities from my



"HE MADE A SUDDEN GRAB AND FIELDIED A SWALLOW!"



note-book. In an innings of 202 a man made 32 threes and 32 twos; another man struck the ball on to the ground, but managed to hit it a second time as it bounded up, and into point's hands, the umpire actually deciding "Out." The same thing exactly has happened to myself, the ball going to short-slip, but the umpire knew his business better, and I went on with my innings.

I have just recalled what "Narrow escape of two ladies," a memorandum in my book,



"THE BALL PASSED BETWEEN THE HEADS OF TWO LADIES."

means. We were playing a scratch game at Eastbourne to fill up an afternoon, and I was fielding in the region of the tea-tent, the spectators standing about rather in my way. Suddenly I saw a hard hit coming that way, and, shouting "Look out!" went for the ball, which passed between the heads of two ladies busily engaged in chatting, and fell

into my hands: their faces must have been within a couple of feet of each other.

I remember, too, nearly robbing our college club of secretary and captain at one fell blow, the ball whizzing between their heads as they were talking: the funny thing was that the net was apparently between them and me, as they stood near where mid-off would be posted in a match, but the ball curled, as a hard-hit ball often does curl on the off-side, and showed them that their security was more ideal than real.

The laws limit the bowler's privilege of changing ends; but as "nice customs curtsy to great kings," the M.C.C. once allowed a match to be played at Lord's between the Club and the Gentlemen of England, in which R. Holden, with "ten picked fields," bowled all through, changing ends at the close of each over. He must have been a good stayer to stand so much work without an "easy."

How is this for a case of unfair play? Lord F. Beauclerc, in a single-wicket match between three of Surrey and three of England in 1806, "unseen took a lump of wet dirt and sawdust and stuck it on the ball, which, pitching favourably, made an extraordinary twist and took the batsman's wicket." Umpires had to be as "slim" as the players in the days when matches were played for money.

One could cover pages with such incidents as I have jotted down, but, unfortunately, though the fund of stories is almost inexhaustible, there is a limit to what is generally regarded as illimitable—space; but the reader who, like Oliver Twist, asks for more need only apply to the first cricketing friend he meets, who will, temporarily at least, be able to appease his appetite for curiosities.