

MORE CURIOUS INCIDENTS AT CRICKET.

By W. J. Ford



PAPER which I wrote on this subject last year seems to have amused some of the many readers of THE STRAND, as several writers—strangers—have, like Oliver Twist, “asked for more.” Many of them, too, have been good enough to send some stories to help to swell the list. Of the other tales, some are writ large in books, others are the offspring of oral tradition, others have come under my own ken: in any case, I firmly believe them to be true, and hope they are; and, indeed, when it comes to the eccentric performances of bails, which seem to disregard all the laws of dynamics—well, if the reader will believe the *true* bail stories (as he is asked to do), none of the others will lie heavy on his mental digestion. The first bail story is as follows, and I was the hero of the incident. Bowling on a very dry day at the nets last year, no bails on, I managed to bowl a “yorker,” medium pace, which hit the leg-stump fair and square, whereupon the off-stump followed suit, but the middle one remained erect and apparently untouched. Solution requested: no one has accounted for it yet, still it happened, and several people saw it, and “alone I did it.”

Here's another personal experience. This time I was umpiring, at the bowler's end: the ball was thrown in from the field, the bowler took it, and broke the wicket, so as to run the batsman out. Then he said to me, “Look here, sir!” I looked, and beheld the bail accurately balanced on the top of the middle stump! Its mate was lying some

feet off the wicket. Suppose one *tried* to balance the bail thus by hitting the wicket with the ball, in how many million tries would one succeed? This would be a very pretty back-garden experiment. But the story is not quite finished yet. An American gentleman writes to me from New York, and tells of an even “curiouser” result, when the ball—“medium pace”—hit the wicket. It “took the off-wicket clean out of the ground”; not content with this, it also “hit the middle wicket; but the leg wicket was untouched, and on top of it was the leg bail balanced!” The match, by the way, was played between Brooklyn C.C. and King's County C.C., and the date was the famous “Fourth of July.” I may add, as a matter of coincidence, that this was approximately the time when the similar incident occurred to me in England. There is, however, a fine comprehensiveness in the havoc dealt by the American ball.

Fatal accidents are, fortunately, very rare occurrences in cricket, yet of those that are recorded none is more extraordinary perhaps than the following, which is taken from “Scores and Biographies.” Two privates of the 7th Royal Fusiliers were playing a single-wicket match in India. Bolan was the batsman's name and Goddard the bowler's. The former hit the ball and ran, but the latter, fielding it, ran up to the wicket and knocked a stump out with the ball. The stump, however, turned a somersault, and Goddard, tripping, fell on the brass-tipped end, which entered his neck, and the unfortunate man actually bled to death in ten

minutes, never speaking again! A more curious and more terrible tragedy can seldom have occurred.

It is hard to believe that wickets could be pitched twenty-six yards (last year I gave the distance as four *feet* instead of *yards*, hence the correction) apart, and that no one should discover it till 95 runs had been scored; yet this fact is recorded, and it is further stated that at the time of the discovery the bowlers were dead beat! One man rose to the occasion—a batsman, who had been run out, and claimed a second innings on the ground that he had had too far to go! Another Indian story describes how the ball was “skied” straight above the wicket, and so high that the batsman ran a run, but the ball falling on the wicket an appeal for “run out” was made and disallowed. As a matter of fact, though the batsman had made a run, he could not score it, for he had played the ball on to his wicket, and was consequently out—“bowled.” The writer once had a curious experience—in a University match, too—for in hitting to leg he chopped the ball down on to his instep, whence it rebounded into point’s hands, but as the umpire could not see exactly what happened the striker escaped. But a stranger thing is on record, for the ball was hit so hard to point once that he missed the catch, but the ball, striking him on the knee, bounded to the wicket-keeper who was standing some yards behind the wicket, and the catch was duly and legally made!

It would be hard to find a more extraordinary incident than the following: The ground of the Devonshire Park C.C. at Eastbourne is surrounded by lofty standards, which carry the globes for the electric lighting. These are, of course, on the boundary path. A certain batsman made an admirable leg-hit, which struck one of the globes and broke it to atoms. It is hardly credible, but the very same batsman hit the globe—not the same globe—on the same standard next year with a precisely similar stroke! The writer can vouch personally for the facts as stated; the opportunities for “embroidery” are obvious. Balls, like bails, do eccentric things at times,

Vol. xxi.—78.

as witness one which in 1891, on the Ipswich ground, lodged in a forked branch high out of reach. “Lost ball” was called, but the umpire, contrary to the present rule, disallowed the call. On this an active fieldsman climbing the tree secured the ball and appealed for a catch. This appeal was allowed, and the batsman had to retire. A similar tale is told about a ball which was hit into a tree and disappeared, being eventually retrieved from an old crow’s nest. For the following story the cricket editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*—himself a reader of *THE STRAND*—is responsible. At West Lynn, in the earlier eighties, a Winnipeg scratch team met the West Lynners. C. Rickards, one of the Winnipeggers, made a long and lofty hit, but to the astonishment of the long-field, over whose head the ball had been hit and who was hot in pursuit of it, the umpire, a local man, yelled “Lost ball!” This strange proceeding caused an indignant remonstrance to be addressed to the umpire, who retorted, in self-defence, “Well, that ball was hit out of Canada into the United States, and I think that entitles



“THE BALL WAS EVENTUALLY RETRIEVED FROM AN OLD CROW’S NEST.”

any umpire to call 'Lost ball'!" They were playing on the boundary line, and under the circumstances it was held by all playing that the umpire was justified in his action. I know a man, a good player in his day, too, and to whom I am indebted for many precious hints, one of whose aphorisms it is that "there is no bad luck in cricket," *e.g.*, it is your own fault if your partner runs you out, because you are not obliged to go, and ought to look out for yourself. But the following

case might move even his cynical heart. A batsman, after completing his run, was standing with his feet outside his crease (the cynic certainly has a chance here) and his bat inside. The ball, thrown up by a fieldsman, hit the bat out of his hand and then dribbled into the wicket, wherefore the hapless man was run out. If he had used a wicked word I believe the recording angel would have been deaf for the moment. Nor can it be called anything but bad luck if the binding on one's bat breaks and the flying end carries off a bail. There are two good instances of such an event recorded, and one better instance, for, when the bail was dislodged and the appeal lodged, the umpire's verdict was "Leg before wicket!"

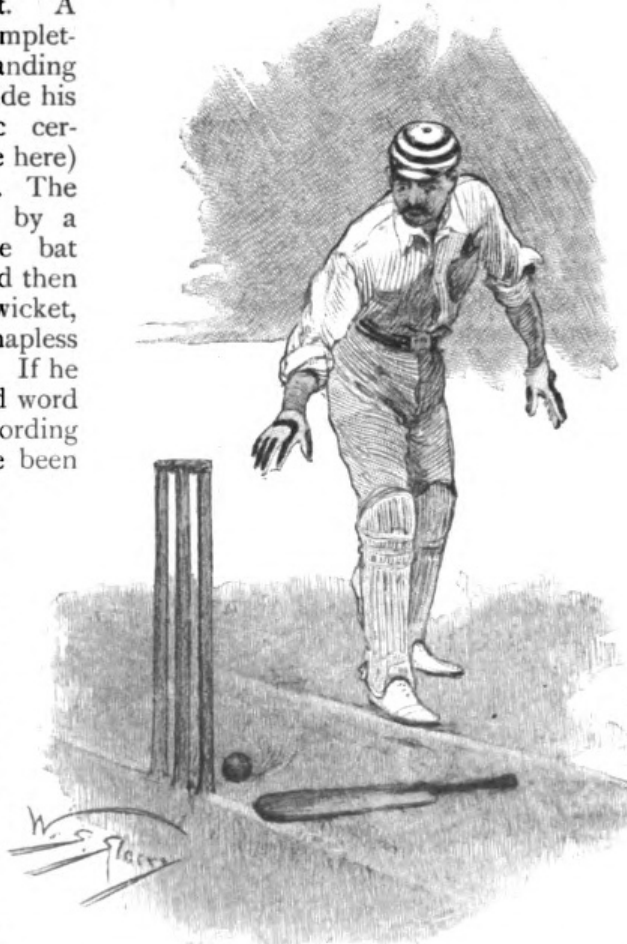
Here is a curious finish to a match played at Uckfield in August, 1884, the weather being recorded as "hot" and the umpire as "bad." There were five wickets to fall and five runs to get; the batsmen proceeded to fail to get the runs as follows—none of them scored: No. 7 was bowled, and No. 8 stumped. No. 9 ran himself out, No. 10 hit his wicket, and No. 11 so far forgot himself as to attempt a run and to fall flat on his face between the wickets. Hence the rivals of Uckfield,

name of club unknown, snatched a surprise victory.

I find another note or two about bails and their ways, which are certainly uncanny. In one case the bail wedged itself half-way down between the middle and off stumps; in another the off-bail, on the stump being hit, fell off like a gentleman, but the leg-bail leapt amazed into the air, turned himself over, and settled, but reversed, into his native groove; while a third lot refused to budge even when

the mid-stump was knocked 6in. out of the perpendicular. Somehow or other they contrived to wedge; but a similar thing happened in a big match in Australia, when the action of the sun on the varnish was held to account for the obstinacy with which the bails retained their position, though their central pillar of support was gone. The match in which this occurred was played, date unknown, between Victoria and New South Wales, the middle stump was bowled "clean away," and the batsman was given "not out." A funny match in some respects was one played at Clevedon, Somerset, in 1873. On one side were two brothers, an uncle, and a cousin: the bro-

thers got all the wickets, the cousin did all the stumping, and the uncle held those catches which went not to the other three; hence these four were solely responsible for all the wickets captured in the two innings and for the modes of their defeat. It is in no spirit of family pride that I record that the four all bore the name of Ford. Charlwood, of Sussex, once compressed a good many technicalities into one stroke, for he hit a catch to the long-field, and was missed. He then ran three runs, and was run-out over the third, the umpire



"THE BALL HIT THE BAT OUT OF HIS HAND AND THEN DRIBBLED INTO THE WICKET."

also calling "One short"; hence he was missed, got one run, ran three runs (two of which did not count), and got run out, all off a single stroke. Another curious feat I find on record of a ball which wedged itself between the stumps without disturbing either bail, yet the ball is described as "very fast." This, I confess, is rather a tough mouthful, and the following is also funny: In a match played at Hastings C. A. Alberga was batting, when the wind blew his handkerchief from his belt and twisted it round the wicket without removing a bail.

Bails, as we have seen, cut curious antics at times, but the cricket ball has also some funny ways of its own, and here is an account of one of its vagaries. A low, skimming hit was made to long-on, who dashed at the ball, touched it, but failed to hold it, as it was travelling too fast. Everyone, however, lost sight of the ball, till the fieldsman, recovering his balance, found a lump inside the front of his shirt—the ball of course, which had hit his wrist, ripped and run up the sleeve of his shirt, finally lodging in the body of it. This extraordinary tale, duly recorded in "Scores and Biographies," occurred on March 17th, 1877, at Cavendish, near Hamilton. Another mysterious disappearance was due to the tail-pocket of an umpire's coat, the said umpire having wheeled round sharply to avoid

a vicious crack to square-leg. Several incidents group themselves round square-leg, where the ball often comes very rapidly and very unexpectedly; thus Charles Wordsworth was once caught out by the wicket-keeper off the back of the umpire who was posted there; and I have an authentic account—temporarily mislaid, so that the identification of the incident is not for the moment possible—of a batsman who made a slashing hard hit to that place. The fieldsman was, technically, asleep, and the ball hit him a smashing blow on the forehead, or, rather, fair on the brim of his straw hat, which broke the blow but did not save him from being momentarily stunned. The ball "towered" and went to short-leg fine, who caught it and then gently rolled it up to the bowler's wicket. Meanwhile, the other batsman had left his ground and had gone to the fieldsman's assistance, but the latter recovered his senses in a very short time, and it was found that no harm had been done. So far all had gone fairly well, but difficulties arose when an appeal for a catch was made, for neither umpire, both being engrossed with square-leg's fate, had seen the catch made; hence they were bound to say, "Not out." Chagrined at this, the bowler, to whom the ball had been returned as aforesaid, broke his wicket and appealed for "run out," his batsman being still looking after

short-leg. This appeal was also met with a negative, "because," as the sympathetic umpire said, "he had only gone away out of a fellow-feeling!" I think we may agree with the umpire that under the circumstances the ball was constructively dead.

A memorandum about an Eton and Harrow match now catches my eye. In this match a certain Harrow bowler bowled a most remarkable over to Lord Grimston and his brother the Hon. E. H. Grimston, who was only fifteen years old. Off the six balls bowled Lord Grimston hit three for 5 runs each and his brother three for 3 runs each, twenty-four in all, fives and threes coming alternately; while in 1832 a curious sequence of



"ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE WAS DUE TO THE TAIL-COAT POCKET OF AN UMPIRE'S COAT."

matches was played between Eton, Harrow, and Winchester, in the "Public Schools Week," Harrow beating Winchester, Winchester beating Eton, and Eton beating Harrow. As if this was not contradictory enough, each victory was gained in a single innings. Problem—to find the strongest school. Similar paradoxes occur yearly, but the most elaborate and audacious fictionist could not have invented a more striking instance of the uncertain nature of cricket. I did a curious thing once at Swindon: the screen not being more than sixty yards, or thereabouts, from the bowler's end, a very hard, lowish return hit the canvas full and split it, so that a little boy put his head through the crack and grinned at us. The explanation lies not in the hardness of the hit—though it was pretty smart—but in the fact that it hit the lacing of the canvas, which was rotten, and consequently gave way. I told last year of a tremendously hard and straight return made by my brother, F. G. J., which hit the bottom of his partner's wicket and rebounded inside his own crease. This I thought to be unprecedented, but found a record the other day of a similar feat, performed, too, by a bowler, who hit the striker's wicket with so fast a shooter that the ball came right back to him, which is an even stranger performance than my brother's, though in the latter case a curious little question arises: "Had the ball on its return hit his (the striker's) wicket, would he have been out?" While on the subject of shooters, I recall one which went *over* the wicket—the explanation being that as it snaked along the turf it encountered the excrescence of the batsman's block-hole, and consequently took an airier course. Thus the block-hole saved the man; but once it contributed, so the man alleged, to his defeat, for he declared on being asked why he got out to a none too difficult ball that he had found a worm in his block-hole, which fact had completely put him off his play! A bad excuse, men say, is better than none: this must have been the striker's very last line of defence. I must record the following, for though it is hardly a curious

incident of cricket, it is a curious instance of credulity. Likewise, it is true. A certain player who knew more about the furnishing of the outer man than the practice of the game observed that one or two men went in with the blades of their bats bound with black twine. Curiosity led him to inquire the reason, and a kind friend informed him—it was a happy inspiration—that it was a new way of showing that he was in mourning. "Really," quoth the other; "why, a cousin of mine died last week: I must get my bats seen to," and he did, with the result that for the rest of the season all his bats had a broad black line painted on them, as a tribute to the memory of the deceased! Here is another story, for



"IN MOURNING."

which I do *not* vouch, but it is good. A certain batsman who was very stout managed, so it is said, to obstruct the passage of the ball to his wicket with his stomach, and the umpire did not see his way clear to give him out "leg-before." At lunch, however, a compromise was arranged. The batsman's stomach was to count as his leg for the purposes of Law 24; but, to make matters even, if the ball hit him on the antipodes the umpire was to call "Wide!"

Curious feats, perhaps, hardly come under the head of "curious incidents," but one feat

of V. E. Walker's, related in "The Walkers of Southgate," must be reproduced. He used to follow up his bowling in the hope of a "caught and bowled," but noticed on one occasion that the non-striker followed *him* up rather closely; so waiting his opportunity (*i.e.*, till the ball was played back to him) he threw it between his legs, without turning round, at the non-striker's wicket, and in this clever fashion ran him out. I got a curious "sixer" once: the ground was a natural one with a made piece in the centre, longish grass about seventy yards from the wickets, and here and there a tussock of thick grass, one of which was about ten yards behind mid-off. I hit a hot one right through this fieldsman's legs into the tussock, but curiously enough no one else saw exactly what had happened, for mid-off dashed off to recover the ball from the long grass farther back, and of course couldn't find it. When he had called "Lost ball" I went and picked it out of the tussock, about fifteen yards from the bowler's wicket! The hit was so hard that no one believed it could have so wedged itself.

It was on the same ground, and I think in the same match, that a "not-out" rashly remarked at lunch that he had never been bowled by a "yorker." Our slow bowler, who could bowl a very fast and good "yorker," overheard this, and tried him with one the very first ball after lunch, with most convincing effect, and towards the close of the day had a second try at him with similar result, so that another good theory was dispersed to the winds.

In a match played on a big open ground I

once saw a batsman make a fairly long hit, and the fieldsman who chased the ball did not overtake it till it had stopped. He picked it up to throw it back, when to our surprise he dropped it like a hot potato; then, after a careful examination, he threw it up, and came back himself with his finger in his mouth. During the momentary quiescence of the ball a wasp had settled on it, thinking it a new sort of apple, I suppose, and had avenged itself after the manner of its kind on the hapless fieldsman's intruding finger. One good story, about an exciting finish. The two last men were in, and "time" was at hand. One of the strikers made a drive towards a part of the ground where some cocoa-nut "shies" stood. Fieldsman and batsmen dashed off, but the wily fieldsman stopped and, instead of chasing the ball, seized a cocoa-nut and hurled it to the wicket-keeper, who promptly broke the wicket and pocketed—well, the ball for the time being! "Out," said the umpire, up came the stumps, and the trick was



"HE DROPPED IT LIKE A HOT POTATO."

never discovered till the culprits "gave it away."

The following story must be the very last; it has the merit of being strictly true. An Eton boy was batting at the nets, the bowler being of the "donkey-drop" type—"high, slow, and easy." He ran in to drive one of the slow droppers, when to his amazement there was no dropper to drive! Another ball, either thrown in or hit from another net, had struck his objective at the exact psychological moment, *i.e.*, exactly as it reached the ground, and one great drive at least was lost to the world.