

SPECIAL CUP FINAL NUMBER.

The Boys' Realm.

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EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

[SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 1907.

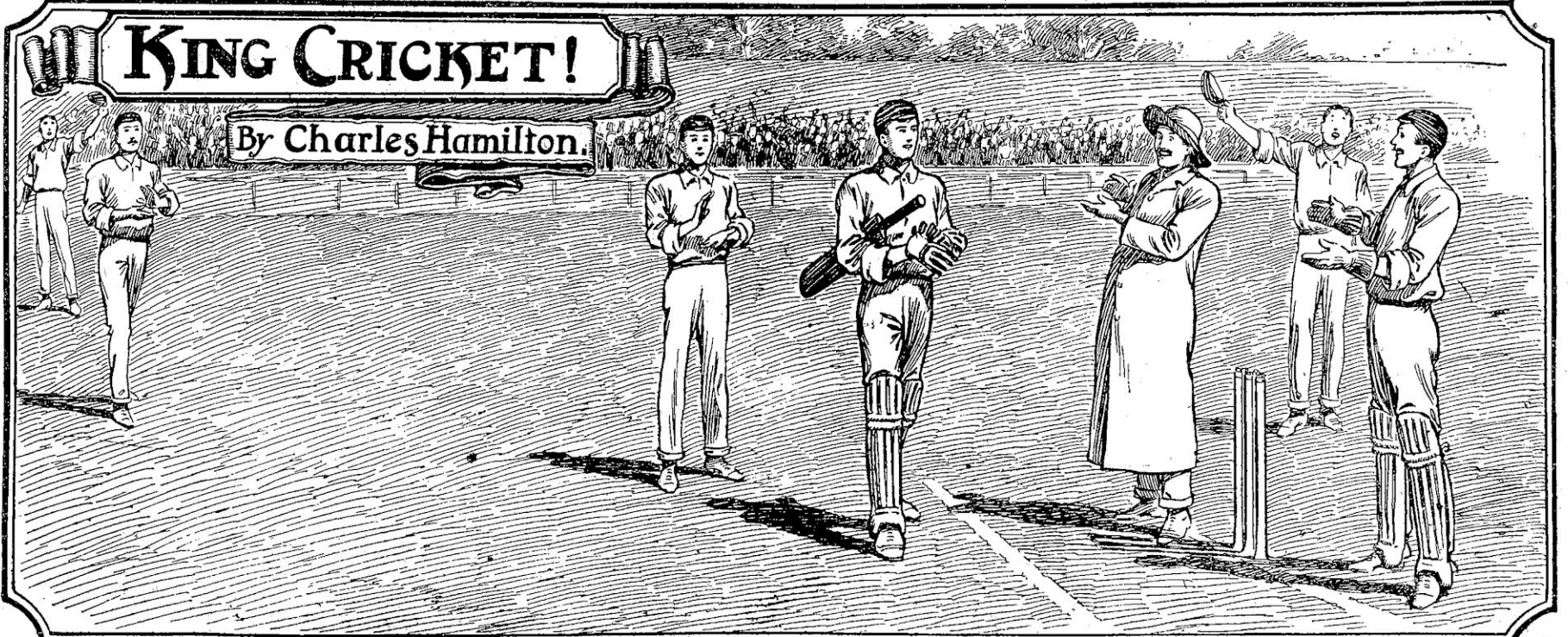
THE WAY TO WIN. A Story of a Cup Final.

By Clement Hale.



KING CRICKET!

By Charles Hamilton.



Fine Cricket Articles. By Albert Trott.

Your Editor specially asks that you will introduce this great new story to all your friends. It will prove one of the greatest cricket tales ever written.



The Chief Characters in this Fine Story.

ARTHUR LOVELL, Leamshire's champion bat. He is an amateur. His uncle is ruined by James Lagden.

KIT VALANCE, Leamshire's best bowler. He first comes to notice in the Colts' match, where he takes Arthur Lovell's wicket. Later he becomes Arthur's firm chum.

GEOFFREY LAGDEN, an amateur and a good bat. He is bitterly jealous of Arthur Lovell, whom he hates and endeavours to injure. He is Arthur's rival for the hand of Molly Hilton. A snobbish character.

JAMES LAGDEN, who has ruined Arthur's uncle.

BLANE, Captain of Leamshire, and the steady friend of Arthur and Kit. He is Molly Hilton's cousin.

PONSONBY, Geoffrey Lagden's friend, and a man of similar character—snobbish to a degree.

The first instalment tells how Arthur Lovell distinguishes himself in the Colts' match, in spite of the efforts which Geoffrey Lagden puts forth to keep him in the shade. In the second instalment, just as Arthur is about to take his place at the wicket, Lagden tells him that his uncle is a ruined man, thus putting him off his form. He is bowled first ball, much to the surprise of the spectators, including Colonel Hilton and his daughter Molly. At the earliest possible moment he leaves the field, and speeds towards London to learn exactly what is amiss, to face the terrible blow which has fallen upon him in the midst of his highest hopes. (Now follow his fortunes as detailed in the instalment below.)

THE 3rd CHAPTER.

Straight from the Shoulder.

A RTHUR! You here?" Mr. Lovell rose abruptly to his feet as the young Leamshire cricketer entered the room. Arthur came quickly towards his uncle, his eyes scanning anxiously the kindly old face he knew so well. He noted, with a pang, how pale and troubled it was.

"Yes, I am here," said Arthur quietly, as he gripped his uncle's hand. "You did not expect to see me?"

"No; I thought you were playing in the Colts' match."

"I came away the moment the match ended."

"But why?"

"Because," said Arthur, regarding him steadily—"because I had heard some news, uncle; news that came to me as a terrible blow. Is it true?"

"How can I tell you, until I know what it was?" asked Mr. Lovell, with a faint smile, but his lips were trembling.

"I heard it from Geoffrey Lagden. He told me you were ruined."

Mr. Lovell sank into his chair.

"Then it is true?" cried Arthur. "Uncle, don't attempt to conceal it from me. It is my place to help you if you are in trouble. Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"I hoped and hoped," groaned Mr. Lovell; "I wished to spare you. Even now all hope may not be lost—if James Lagden is merciful."

Arthur Lovell stared.

"Geoffrey Lagden's father? What has he to do with it?"

"He is the man who can ruin me or spare me as he chooses," said Mr. Lovell, in a low voice. "Circumstances have compelled me to fall deeper and deeper into his debt. He has made a huge fortune from the concern in which all my money has gone. That might make him consider me a little. But—"

"Geoffrey's father!" repeated Arthur. "Then that is how he knew!"

"Yes; his father has evidently told him all about my position," said Mr. Lovell, with a bitter smile. "He does not intend to spare me. I cannot make it worth his while, and James Lagden is not the man to do a kind action for nothing. My poor boy, I fear that we must look for the worst; but I would not have told you until I was sure."

"I am glad I know," said Arthur. "I can help you to bear it. But—why should Mr. Lagden do this? Why—?"

"I have been reckless—a fool, foolish enough to accept help from him, believing that he was actuated by feelings of friendship. After that, I was helpless. Now I am at his mercy, and it is to his interest to crush me. Yet—perhaps there is a chance." Mr. Lovell paused, and looked hesitatingly at his nephew. "You are on friendly terms with his son, Arthur?"

"Yes, I have been on friendly terms with his son, Arthur?"

KING CRICKET!

A Fascinating New Story of County Cricket.

Written by CHARLES HAMILTON, and Illustrated by E. E. BRISCOE.

The young cricketer smiled bitterly. "We are at daggers drawn, almost. Lagden has never lost an opportunity of showing his spite towards me; and if he gets into the club—as I have no doubt he will now—matters will be worse."

Mr. Lovell sighed. "Then I am afraid all hope is gone, Arthur. If James Lagden has one human feeling left in his breast, it is his affection for his son. He is devoted to Geoffrey. My dear boy, if it were only for myself, I would care little. My race is nearly run; but you, at the very beginning of your career, to have all your prospects blighted!" Mr. Lovell covered his face with his hands.

Arthur stood silent, with contracted brows. It had rushed upon his mind, all that this must mean to him—broken prospects in life, and the wreck of his career as a cricketer for his county—a career that had opened with such brilliant promise!

The blow was a staggering one, and it required all his pluck to face it without flinching. Yet, as he looked at his uncle's bowed head, all thought of himself was lost in compassion for the kind old man who had been more than a father to him. His heart ached as he saw a

old man, brought low through no fault of his own—had flitted through Arthur's mind. He felt that he might as well dismiss it now. In this matter, as in most others, Mr. Lagden was pretty certain to be governed by his son—the son of whom he was proud, and to whom all the love of his cold heart was given.

The servant returned, and Arthur followed him to the library. He entered, and gave a start of annoyance—for it was not Mr. Lagden in the room. Standing on the hearthrug, regarding him with a peculiar smile, was Geoffrey Lagden!

Arthur Lovell paused.

"How do you do?" drawled Geoffrey. "I hardly expected to have the pleasure of seeing you so soon after the Colts' match in Leamshire."

Arthur bit his lip. The mocking light in Geoffrey's eyes was as good as a declaration of war.

"I expected to see Mr. Lagden here," he replied coldly. "It is your father I called to see."

Geoffrey shrugged his shoulders. "My father is occupied. I thought that perhaps I should be able to serve you as well."

Arthur made a movement towards the door.

"Thank you; but that is not the case. I will call again when Mr. Lagden is at leisure."

"Stop!" Arthur looked at him. An unpleasant sneer was upon the face of the Colts' captain.

"You may as well say out what you have come here for, Lovell. Do you think I don't know—and do you think it will be any good?"

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do," said Geoffrey coolly. "You have come to make an appeal to my father—to ask him for mercy."

Arthur was silent.

"It was what I told you on the Leamshire ground to-day that brought you posthaste to London," went on Geoffrey. "I knew that would be the case, and I followed."



Lord Hawke, the beloved captain of the Yorkshire C.C.

tear trickle through the old man's fingers. He laid his hand gently upon Mr. Lovell's shoulder.

"Don't think of me," he said quietly. "I am young and strong, and can face the world. I owe it all to you that I am fitted to face it. We can bear this together."

Mr. Lovell nodded without looking up. "Leave me now, Arthur," he said brokenly. "I am not quite myself. I am glad you came—I am glad to see you bear it so well. But leave me now for a time."

The young man went quietly from the room. He had been the prey of alternate hopes and fears during the rapid journey from Leamchester. Now he had heard the worst. It was ruin! Yet was it so certain?

His uncle seemed to be crushed by the misfortune that had fallen upon him—crushed and confused. It was possible that he took too grave a view of the situation; more than possible that James Lagden did not intend to be pitiless to a man who had never harmed him. There was one man from whom the young cricketer could learn the worst—one man who could tell him what he had to expect—and that man was James Lagden!

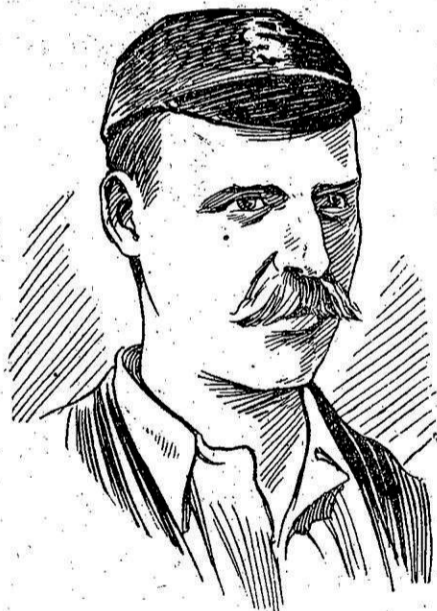
Arthur stood for some minutes in the hall in anxious reflection. Then he took his hat and left the house.

The lamps were lighted in the London streets. Arthur Lovell strode through the dusky, spring evening at a rapid pace. His mind was made up; James Lagden could tell him the worst, and he should! It was to Mr. Lagden's house that the young cricketer was hurrying. He reached it in a quarter of an hour.

The servant who admitted him took his name in, and left him standing in the hall. A travelling-bag was standing there, as if hastily set down by someone who had just arrived.

Arthur's eye caught the initials on—"G. L." His heart sank. He knew that meant that Geoffrey Lagden had arrived in his father's house. Lagden had followed him to London, then! Why? There was but one answer to that question. Lagden intended to be upon the spot to see that no concession was made to the Lovells—to see that his father used to the utmost the power that was in his hands.

Some vague thought of appealing to Mr. Lagden—of asking his compassion for a kind



Tom Hayward, the famous Surrey cricketer.

"I really don't see why you should have taken the trouble," said Arthur coldly.

"Don't you! I will explain, then. I have a good deal of influence with my father, and I am going to use it—to suit myself. Mr. Lovell is ruined. My father can save him, or leave him to sink, as he chooses. I shall see that it is the latter that he does."

"Why should you wish to injure a man who has never harmed you, or anyone else?" said Arthur, controlling his temper with difficulty.

Geoffrey laughed. "You are mistaken. I do not care a snap of the fingers for Mr. Lovell. His fate is less than nothing to me. I am dealing with my enemy—the man who has tried to supplant me with the girl I love; the man who has tried to keep me out of the Leamshire Club; the man who has backed up the bounders I have always been down upon—in short, yourself!"

"You are mistaken," said Arthur, still keeping calm. "I have never tried to keep you out of the club, and never had any thought of doing so!"

"Dare you deny that you have run me down to Colonel Hilton, who values your opinion as much as the club committee value his?"

"I have never run you down to anybody."

said Arthur contemptuously. "I am not in the habit of running people down behind their backs. I was strongly tempted to let the colonel know the reason why you tried to keep Kit Valance in the background in the Colts' match—but I did not."

"You do not expect me to believe that?" Arthur Lovell's eyes flamed. But he would not lose his temper—more especially as he suspected that it was Geoffrey's object to make him do so. He turned to the door.

"It's useless to discuss the matter, anyhow," he said quietly. "We have never pulled together, and we never shall, I suppose!"

"There won't be any need," said the other coolly. "Our ways in life lie far apart. Lovell, from this day, I have been assured that I shall be asked to play for the Leamshire Club"—he paused for a moment, hoping to see chagrin in Arthur's face, but the young man's look expressed nothing of the kind—"and you will never play for Leamshire again."

"How do you know that?"

"Because a beggar is not wanted in a county club," replied Geoffrey, "and in Leamshire less than in any other club. I think I shall give you a Roland for your Oliver, Lovell. You tried to keep me out of the club, and you have failed. But I shall succeed in ridding Leamshire of you!"

"That will not rest with you," said Arthur scornfully. "And even if I give up regular cricket, I shall probably play for the county occasionally, whenever I can find the time, in fact. So you will be disappointed in that!"

"I think not. County cricketers are rather particular about their associates, and the nephew of a beggared swindler is not likely to find a warm welcome," said Geoffrey, with an insulting laugh.

Arthur Lovell quivered from head to foot with rage.

An insult to himself he could have borne, but a brutal insult to his uncle, and from the son of the man who had ruined him, was too much.

Geoffrey Lagden felt an inward quail as he saw the look upon the young cricketer's face. Arthur strode towards him.

"You coward!" he said thickly. "You cad! Apologise for that lie—that mean lie—insultingly, or—"

Geoffrey Lagden recovered himself in a moment.

"Or what?" he cried mockingly. "What will you do? Apologise?—hardly. Your uncle is a beggar, and a swindler, too, and you are—"

He got no further.

Arthur's last vestige of self-control vanished, and he sprang upon Geoffrey like a tiger. He forgot where he was—he forgot why he had come there. He only saw his enemy's sneering face—heard only his insulting words.

"You cad! You coward!"

In a moment, Arthur Lovell was upon his foe. Geoffrey struck him in the face, but the blow passed unheeded. The young cricketer's clenched fist crashed upon Geoffrey's mouth, and he went to the floor with a crash.

And as Arthur stood over him, with blazing eyes and heaving chest, the door opened, and James Lagden looked into the room.

The banker stood petrified.

"What—how—?" He stammered with rage. "Lovell! So this is how you—"

Arthur turned crimson.

"I—I am sorry, Mr. Lagden," he said. "I forgot myself. But if you had heard his words—"

"Sorry!" cried Mr. Lagden. "Yes, I imagine so! I will make you sorrier! Henry, show this man out of the house!"

Geoffrey Lagden staggered to his feet. His face was white with hatred, and there was a red trickle of blood from his bruised mouth.

"Yes, go!" he hissed. "Go, you beggar! You know what to expect now!"

Arthur Lovell, his heart beating tumultuously, quitted the room, the glances of father and son following him with bitter hate.

In the street, he drew a deep breath. Misfortune seemed fated to dog his steps. He had only made matters worse by his visit to the banker's house, yet he could not have foreseen it. He knew that Geoffrey had deliberately provoked him in order to make the breach between his father and Mr. Lovell complete, and he had fallen into the trap. The young cricketer's heart was very heavy as he returned with slow steps towards his uncle's house.

(Continued on the next page.)

ANSWERS

THE 4th CHAPTER.

On the Cricket Ground Again—Struck Down.

CLICK!
The ball broke in from the off, curled under Lagden's bat, and whipped a stump out of the ground in the neatest possible way.

Geoffrey Lagden muttered something under his breath, and Kit Valance, who had bowled that ball, smiled.

Both the "Colts" were now in the County Eleven, and the committee were of one mind as to which was the more valuable recruit of the two. Lagden was a good bat, but he was no better in that respect than Valance, while as a bowler the latter had no equal in Loamshire.

To Loamshire, weak in bowlers, Kit Valance was a prize. But the former groundman was in the team as a "professional," and he had little courtesy to look for from Geoffrey Lagden and others of the same kidney.

Lagden's scarcely veiled contempt and dislike, however, appeared to have absolutely no effect upon the young professional. He never seemed to be even aware of it.

They were at practice now on the Loamshire ground, and Lagden was trying in vain to keep his wicket up against Kit's bowling.

"Bravo!" came from the field, as Lagden's wicket went down for the fourth time. "A good ball that, Kit!"

The young bowler looked round quickly as he recognised Arthur Lovell's voice.

Arthur had come on the ground unnoticed; but as soon as he saw him, Kit Valance walked quickly towards him, tossing the ball to Ponsby.

"Hallo, sir!" Kit exclaimed. "So you are back in Loamchester? Where have you been all this time?"

He scanned Arthur's face keenly as he asked the question.

He noted at once the change that had come over the young cricketer. The old careless look was gone from Lovell's face. He looked like a man upon whom trouble had fallen, and fallen heavily. Yet in his firm face and steady eyes could be read undiminished pluck and self-reliance.

And quick sympathy came into Kit's look. He had always been on the best of terms with Arthur Lovell; even when he was only a groundman and Lovell a wealthy amateur member of the county team, a friendship had grown up between them. There had never been a hint of patronage about Arthur's manner, and Kit had been very careful not to transgress the unwritten, but nevertheless strict, rules of county cricket etiquette.

"I've been with my uncle," said Lovell.

"You have heard, of course?"

Kit nodded. He knew that Arthur referred to the bankruptcy of Mr. Lovell and the ruin which had overwhelmed his own prospects.

"Yes," he said, "I heard, and I was very sorry. I was afraid we might never see you again down here, sir. You are not going to give up county cricket, then?"

"I'm afraid so, Kit," replied Lovell. "I am absolutely thrown upon my own resources now. My uncle has saved a small annuity from the wreck of his fortune, but I cannot be a burden upon him now, even if it were possible. I have got to earn my own living!"

Kit's face was very grave. They had walked out of hearing of the cricketers at practice on the ground.

"This is a terrible position for you, sir!"

Arthur smiled faintly.

"I don't know. A man who is worth his salt ought to be able to earn his own living, I suppose."

"It would be different if you had been brought up to it," said Kit. "When I was a groundman for Loamshire Club, I often thought how jolly it would be to be born to a position like yours. I loved cricket, but I had to work my way up through heaps of difficulties, and now I am a county player, I am only a professional!" He made a grimace. "It was your kindness, sir, that made my lot a great deal easier than it would otherwise have been. Now I think that perhaps I was better off, after all. It's easier to fight the world when you have had to do it from your early boyhood."

"I suppose so. But I shall make my way somehow, I hope, Kit. I shall be sorry to say good-bye to the old club, especially at the beginning of the season." A shade crossed his face. "I've been looking forward to it so much. We've got such a lot of splendid matches on the list. I wanted to play Surrey at the Oval, the M.C.C. at Lord's, and the South Africans here in Loamchester, and the rest. I wanted to see Loamshire top county. I wanted— But it's no use grumbling. I wanted a lot that I'm not likely to get now!" He laughed. "I'm down in Loamshire to say good-bye to the old ground, and to you, Kit, and—to someone else."

Kit knew whom he was thinking of. A bright face, framed in sunny hair was floating before the mental vision of Arthur Lovell.

"I understand, sir," said Kit quietly. "But it is absolutely necessary to say good-bye to Loamshire cricket?"

"I have told you how I stand, Kit."

"You say you have to earn your living now, sir. Hasn't it occurred to you that there is a living to be made at the good old game—as I am making mine?"

Arthur Lovell started. He had turned over in his mind many schemes for the future since his uncle's bankruptcy, but he had not thought of that. As an amateur he had played for Loamshire, and good judges had considered him the county's best bat. But as a professional!

That had not crossed his mind. Yet, why not? There was, as Kit said, a living to be got at the game—nothing like a big income, perhaps, but enough to live upon decently; and surely a man could not earn his bread in a more honourable manner than by playing the national game. He was a born cricketer; it was one thing, at least, that he could do thoroughly well.

A thoughtful shade came over his brow. Loamshire would probably be glad to have him. There was nothing at all of the snob about Arthur, but he realised that it would not be quite pleasant to play as a paid professional for the team in which he had been an amateur and looked up to. But a man thrown suddenly upon his own resources, without a profession, could not expect to find things pleasant. He had thought in a hazy way of emigration, of a ranch in Canada! How much better to stay in Loamshire—to remain near Molly Hilton, though, of course, he must give up all thoughts of her now, and to play the game he loved, and to help Loamshire up the hill to the county championship.

"I never thought of that, Kit," said Lovell, after some minutes' thought. "But I think I like the idea. I expect Colonel Hilton would find room for me."

"Of course he would, sir. Your retirement from county cricket has upset all his calculations. I know he feels it keenly. He would welcome you back on any terms. Of course, it's a big come-down for you. If you had a better prospect—"

"I have no prospects, Kit, and really I don't see that it's a come-down," said Arthur slowly. "There's plenty of the finest fellows in England playing the game for a living. What is good enough for men like Hayward and Hirst is good enough for me, Kit." He smiled slightly. "As for the loss of the 'Esquire' after my name, that will not trouble me very greatly."

Kit laughed. "I suppose not, sir. Then why not speak to the colonel on the matter while you are down here? You are staying in Loamchester?"

"Yes; I intended to see to-morrow's match as a last look at Loamshire cricket before I said good-bye to the county. You are playing, I suppose?"

"Yes; it isn't much of a match—a one-day fixture, you know, which will help us get our hand in for the season," said Valance. "I don't think Drayholme will bother us much to-morrow. Next week we meet a first-class county, and that is when we shall miss you if you are not with us, sir."

"Well, I shall be on the ground to-morrow morning for the Drayholme match," said Arthur. "I will speak to the colonel at the first opportunity about this matter. I shall be glad to get back into the club if it turns out all right."

The two cricketers had a long talk, and when Arthur parted with Kit, he walked to his hotel in Loamchester in a much more cheerful frame of mind. He did not disguise from himself that the path of a professional player in a county club like Loamshire might be set with thorns; but he would have at least one true and steady comrade—Kit Valance. And so long as he "played the game," and deserved men's respect, what did it matter to him if he lost the esteem of unthinking snobs?

Bright and early the following morning Arthur Lovell was on the Loamshire County Cricket Ground. The stumps were pitched early, as it was a one-day contest. It was a friendly match between Drayholme and the county.

York, the Drayholme skipper, won the toss, and elected to bat. One of the visiting team had not yet arrived upon the ground, owing to some accident, and the Drayholme captain hoped that he would turn up before the innings reached its conclusion. Colonel Hilton was seated in the pavilion enclosure, with Molly by his side, when the girl uttered an exclamation: "Mr. Lovell!"

She gave her hand impulsively to the young cricketer. The colonel looked at him quickly, and shook hands with him also. There was a vacant seat beside the old county player, and Arthur dropped into it.

"I'm glad to see you again, Lovell," exclaimed Hilton. "I haven't had an opportunity of telling you how sorry I am for what has happened. So you have come down to have another look at Loamshire cricket?"

"Yes; and also to speak to you, sir, after the match is over," said Arthur. "It makes me feel ten years off my age to see the good old game and hear the ball on the bat again. How well Kit Valance handles the ball. He is in good form to-day."

"Yes; there is not a Drayholme bat fit to face him, I think. Of course, they are nothing like a match for us. They are a man short, too, owing to some accident."

Arthur watched the cricket with keen interest. It was a fine, sunny morning, and the sight of the level green, the white-flannelled figures of the players, and the cheery sound of bat meeting ball, were like wine to the young cricketer. The clouds, which had settled darkly over his life, seemed to melt away as he gazed at the familiar scene.

The Drayholme men found Kit Valance an exceedingly tough customer. His bowling was a bit above their weight, so to speak. The visitors' wickets fell merrily when Kit had the ball, which was as often as possible, for the young bowler seemed untrifling. And the face of the Drayholme skipper grew longer. His absent batsman had not yet arrived; and the missing man happened to be one of the best

of the Drayholme bats. If he did not come in time for "last man in," the captain would be compelled to ask for a substitute.

"Bright down for forty," said Arthur, with a smile, as another Drayholme wicket fell. "Our friends are having a lively time of it. Hallo, the Drayholme skipper is consulting Blane! What is the matter, I wonder?"

"I suppose his man hasn't arrived," the colonel remarked. "He will have to play a substitute. I suppose that's what he's speaking to Blane about."

The colonel's words were soon proved to be correct. Blane, the Loamshire skipper, came towards the colonel, with the visiting captain along with him. He gave Arthur a welcoming nod.

"I saw you on the ground, Lovell," he said. "One of the Drayholme men has not turned up. Mr. Yorke is looking for a substitute, and I wondered whether you would volunteer."

"You see, it's no good our expecting our man now," said Yorke. "If he hasn't got here by this time, there's something up, and he won't be here at all probably. Anyway, he'll be too late for our innings, which has not lasted so long as I expected." He made a slight grimace. "Mr. Blane mentioned you to me, Mr. Lovell, and I wondered whether you would play for us as a substitute."

Arthur Lovell rose to his feet at once. As a true sportsman, he was quite willing to render any assistance in his power to a cricket captain in a difficulty.

"I am quite willing," he replied, "if Blane doesn't object to an old Loamshire player playing against him."

The Loamshire skipper laughed.

"Not at all," he replied cheerily. "Then come along," said the Drayholme captain. "We have the things for you, and it won't take you long to change."

"I have heard a great deal of your batting, Mr. Lovell," the Drayholme skipper remarked, as he showed Arthur into the visitors' dressing-room in the pavilion. "We haven't made much of a show against the county, and perhaps you can give us a leg-up."

"I will try," said Arthur, laughing.

"As an old member of the Loamshire Club, of course, you know Valance's bowling?"

"Yes; he's a great chum of mine, and the only Loamshire bowler I am afraid of," said Arthur.

"Well, keep up your wicket against him if you can. I'll put you in with Simpson. Simpson is a stone-waller. He gets a run about once in a dog's age, but he can stand the bowling like a brick wall," said Yorke. "Here's your things. I think you'll find them a decent fit. It's jolly good of you to come to the rescue like this!"

"Oh, I'm glad to, as a matter of fact!" said Arthur. "It's splendid to handle a bat again, and I'm glad of the chance; and glad to help you, too, of course."

The Drayholme captain left him to change, and returned to the field. Arthur Lovell was not long in changing, and he selected a bat. In a few minutes more a shout announced that another Drayholme wicket was down.

"Ready, Lovell?"

"Quite," said Arthur cheerily.

With his bat under his arm, and buttoning his glove, the young cricketer walked out of the pavilion.

Some of the Loamshire fieldsmen started to see their old comrade on the opposite side. The crowd round the palisade, numbering some five hundred, soon recognised Arthur Lovell, and gave him a cheer as he took his place at the wicket.

Geoffrey Lagden looked at Arthur with a spiteful gleam in his eyes. He was considered a good change bowler, and he happened to be put on to bowl the first over against the Drayholme new recruit.

Arthur smiled as he saw him take the ball in hand. He was not afraid of Lagden's bowling, and he waited with easy confidence for the ball. Down it came, and the gleaming bat met it with a dull clack! It dropped dead on the crease.

The same was the fate of the second ball. But at the third Arthur Lovell saw his chance. His eye gleamed, and the bat swept the air, meeting the ball as it rose from the pitch with an impact that sent it whizzing far, far from the fieldsmen's reach. Away went the leather-hunters, and the batsmen ran—and ran again—and again!

Once more? No—Arthur settled his bat on the crease—the ball was whizzing in from the country, but the batsmen were secure. The three runs had come easily to Arthur, but now he had lost the bowling. Lagden finished the over against Simpson.

Simpson was, as the Drayholme skipper had said, a stonewaller and nothing else. He could stop a ball when he wanted to, if he could do nothing further. Lagden might as well have bowled at a wall. Not a single run did the Drayholme man score, but his wicket was still intact when the field crossed over.

And now Arthur had the bowling again, and a buzz of deep-drawn breath went through the crowd as Kit Valance went on to bowl. The best bat in Loamshire, and the best bowler, were pitted against each other. What would be the result?

Kit gave Arthur a smile as their eyes met across the pitch. There was a real friendship between them, but that had nothing to do with cricket. It was Kit's business to take his comrade's wicket if he could, and he meant to do it.

The eyes of all the spectators were upon the bowler. He took a little run, and his right arm went up. Down went the ball, pitching

at a good length, and breaking in from the off in a tricky way that had proved fatal to many of the Drayholme batsmen. But Arthur Lovell was ready for it. Clack!

Point made a desperate clutch at the round, red ball, but it was inches past his reach. As the leather shot away, Arthur was running. Once, twice, the batsmen crossed, and the ball came in too late. A couple of runs, and Arthur still had the bowling.

Kit's second ball was stopped dead; his third snicked away through the slips for two. Then a drive to the boundary gave the batsman four without the trouble of stirring from the crease. Then a single brought Kit opposite Simpson for the last ball of the over.

And then Yorke's face became a little anxious. Simpson was as good as a wall in front of a wicket against most bowlers—slow, fast, or medium, straightforward or tricky—but there was no telling what to expect of a bowler like Kit Valance.

Like many another skipper who had been opposed to Valance, Yorke knew that nothing was to be expected of him but the unexpected, to use a paradox, and so, in spite of his faith in Simpson, he felt extremely uneasy. But the stonewaller did well.

Kit Valance took a little run, and seemed to turn himself into a catherine wheel for a moment, and the ball came down like lightning. But with a clack it was dropped to the ground, and Drayholme had lived through one more over.

Then the bowling was Arthur Lovell's again. Lovell was feeling all his old self now. The mere feel of the cane handle of the bat was exhilarating to the born cricketer. The troubles that had so darkly clouded his life were forgotten now. On the field he thought only of the game. His eyes were bright with a light that had not been in them for some time, and there was a happy, healthy flush in his cheeks as he stood at the wicket.

And Blane, his former captain, now his opponent, muttered to himself as he looked at him:

"If the other man can keep his end up, Arthur Lovell's set for the day, and the innings won't wind up before lunch, after all."

The same thought had come to Yorke, and he was smiling jubilantly. His new recruit, the substitute picked up by chance on the Loamshire ground, might even pull the game out of the fire, he thought, and bring upon Drayholme the dazzling glory of defeating the county.

And, indeed, it looked as if that might come to pass. Lovell was getting well set, and he handled the bowling in a masterly style. He had an easy, careless air at the wicket, but no wielder of the willow could have been more alert, more keenly watchful.

That over gave Arthur Lovell fifteen, and the bowling for the next over. Then again Kit Valance was put on, and again Arthur, who knew his chum's bowling as no other batsman knew it, played it with success.

The crowd cheered him loudly at the end of the over. The score-board showed thirty-two for Arthur Lovell, and he was only getting his hand in. Then over followed over, and always Arthur kept his end up, and managed to keep most of the bowling, well backed up by Simpson, who knew what was expected of him, and tried only to prolong Arthur's innings without gaining any laurels for himself.

And from the pavilion Colonel Hilton watched eagerly, yet at moments with a cloud upon his brow. The old cricketer was thinking of what Loamshire had lost in losing Arthur Lovell.

"By Jove, he is in good form to-day!" the colonel remarked to Molly, when the Drayholme score reached 130, of which 87 were Lovell's. "He is certain to go over the century, and the innings will decidedly not close before lunch, unless his partner fails him. Ah, there is Lagden going on to bowl again! I am afraid he will never be able to touch Lovell's wicket."

Molly Hilton laughed, with a shake of her golden curls.

"Hardly, dad. He is looking very determined, though. Perhaps there is a surprise in store for us."

"Perhaps—but I do not think so."

Geoffrey Lagden was indeed looking very determined. His bowling was at its best upon a hard wicket, but, so far, he had not been able to make any impression upon Arthur Lovell. He caught a smile upon Lovell's face as he went on to bowl, and his eyes glittered with a peculiar light. For some time a thought had been working in his mind, and at that moment it took definite shape, and he came to a sudden determination.

The first ball of the over Arthur played for two, and the second gave him a boundary. That peculiar light had intensified in Geoffrey Lagden's eyes as he prepared to send down the third ball of the over. Up went his arm, and the ball flew with a kind of sudden jerk. And Molly, who knew as much about cricket as any umpire, involuntarily ejaculated:

"That was a throw, dad!"

But before the words were well out of her mouth the catastrophe came. For the ball went down like a bullet, struck the pitch like a hailstone upon glass, and rose like lightning from the hard turf and crashed full upon the forehead of Arthur Lovell. There was a general cry of consternation as the young batsman staggered forward, dropped his bat, and fell senseless to the earth.

(The third instalment of this enthralling new cricket story will appear in next Saturday's BOYS' REALM—1d.)