

The Fatal Hit

BY A. G. GREENWOOD

'A tie.
Harry Knowles, Beddington's bowler and last wicket, had been instructed to stone-wall. But the last ball of the last over of the match itched outside the leg-stump. The temptation was irresistible. He slashed at it.

It was the happy swipe of a rabbit of a batsman only dreams of. Up went a shout of applause, and up in a mighty arc, soaring over the huge oak in the hedge by London Road, sailed the ball, to pass out of sight and fall nobody knew whither.

Harry was smacked on the back, his hands were wrung, and the spectators applauded; but there was only one person in the meadow whose appreciation seemed to matter.

There she sat in a deck-chair by the score-board beside the tent.

He glanced aside as he neared her. Daphne Glyn was clapping with the rest, staring at him, and smiling. Nervously he smiled, too. She always made him feel nervous.

In the tent, hastily draining a tankard of ale, was Harry's uncle, Peter Knowles. He kept an hotel in Notting Hill, and occasionally spent a Saturday afternoon at Beddington admiring his nephew's bowling and deriding his batting. Harry's huge hit had delighted him.

So on the way to the station, arm-in-arm with Harry, he suddenly announced that he had decided to stretch out a helping hand.

"Fifty pounds, me boy," he said, to Harry's amazement. "Always meant to leave it to you. Rather you had it while I'm still above ground. I've me cheque-book with me."

It was past seven o'clock when an up train carried away Peter Knowles, minus his cheque for fifty pounds. Round to Mr. Palmer, the estate agent, went Harry.

Mr. Palmer, found in his garden, heard Harry out. Yes, Bryony shop and house were still on the market. Yes, if Harry put down fifty pounds, the building society would do the rest. Yes, he would certainly give Harry the keys.

With the keys of that half-timbered, lime-washed little house at the corner of Church Road and High Street in his pocket, Harry hurried to Mill Cottage, where Daphne Glyn lived with her mother. A footpath by the stream skirts the garden, and there, hidden by the quick-hedge, Harry waited till scurrying, fluttering, and cackling announced Daphne's arrival to feed the chickens.

"Hallo! Harry exclaimed, seemingly astounded at their meeting. "Lovely evening."

It took him five minutes to screw up his courage to suggest a stroll. Daphne was agreeable.

In Church Alley, Harry switched the conversation abruptly to Tudor cottages. Later he remarked that he happened to have the keys of Bryony in his pocket. Had she ever seen the house? She hadn't. She would like to.

So Harry took her round the walled garden, stocked with rosemary, lavender, and old-time favorites, and leaning apple-trees; and finally, over the little house itself.

"Isn't it jolly?" he said, as he opened the door of the old panelled parlor, empty and echoing.

It was a dream, Daphne said, eyes rapt.

In one of Beddington's back streets Harry still kept the antiquarian shop which was all his father had left behind him. The few who knew the Knowles' found their way again and again to the shop, but the great flood swirling through High Street swept by without dreaming of its existence.

How things would be changed were Bryony his Harry pointed out. He told her how, if he had fifty pounds to plank down, all might be well. She listened with shining eyes.

"What a shame!" she said. "Such a huge opportunity! Couldn't you raise the money somehow?"

"I have!" he then said eagerly. "Bryony's mine. I'm going to be the happiest fellow in Beddington if you'll let me be."

"Me!"
But she wasn't surprised. Probably Harry argued later on, she had known before he did.

Then, as the sun sank, they planned and day-dreamed in every room the little house contained; and he pictured her in his mind in each his wife and pal, and kissed her in each because he couldn't resist the temptation.

That night he sat in the moonlit garden at Mill Cottage.

"That great hit of yours!" exclaimed Daphne's mother. "Daphne told me all about it. It seems to have scored more than a 6, and won more than a cricket match."

It had—though Harry did not know it till later that night. He had gone home blissfully happy, to find Brooke, the XI's captain, awaiting him in his little room behind the shop.

"A frightful mess-up, Knowles!" said Brook glumly.

One of the small boys who had hunted for the lost ball had at length

thought of the new bungalow in London Road.

Here, stretched out on the front lawn, a few yards from the gate, a terrific bruise on his temple, lay a little boy, with the lost ball beside him.

"My heavens!" exclaimed Harry, aghast. "Not—not—"

"No. Unconscious still, though. Dr. Hopwood's with him, and a nurse from the hospital."

He had called twice before, Brooke said. The parents were newcomers to Beddington. Brooke had never met the father or mother before. In a frightful state they were. Only child. Seven.

"Of course, it's not your fault. Nobody could say that," Brooke added. "But it's ours, in a way—the club's, I suppose. Don't know how it stands legally."

"We can't find 'em," Harry said. "Their expenses must be paid. That's cricket."

"The club's in debt already," said Brooke. "My dear Harry, they can't get blood out of a stone."

"I—I'd better go round at once."

They went together. They saw the weeping mother, and talked in low tones to the despairing father.

A fracture of the skull was suspected. The tiny patient couldn't be moved.

Shivering, though the summer night was sultry, Harry went home. Sleep was impossible. His fault? No. Common sense denied it. The boy's fault? Of course not. Whose, then? Nobody's. Danger had never been suspected. Never before had any batsman lifted a ball over the oak.

But the racket of the thing—the doctor's bill, the nurse's, the appalling fee a surgeon would charge were an operation decided on—who was to pay?

The club? Impossible. The parents? A struggling clerk and his wife!

Who but the man who had made the fatal hit?

Futile to reiterate that it wasn't his fault. He shut his eyes and saw Daphne—Daphne here, there, everywhere in Bryony. She faded. She had to fade. The whole day-dream faded. It would be only a day-dream—if he had to pay up.

An immediate operation had been decided upon, he learnt, having called early at the bungalow next morning.

With the child's father, Harry walked up and down the little garden. Quiet, with the quietness of despair, the man was.

"It wasn't your fault in the least," he said, shaking hands with Harry at the gate. "You mustn't worry, old man."

But worry had haunted his eyes and had crept into every sentence. Even in his grisly fear for the boy's life, he could not shut his eyes to the huge load of debt piling up with every passing hour.

To Mill Cottage Harry went. With Daphne he sat beside the stream in the shadow of a huge yew, and there she heard him out.

"And he doesn't demand anything?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"He doesn't threaten?"

"No. He owns it's no fault of anybody's."

"How splendid!" she breathed.

He glanced at her. She wasn't looking at him in the light he had come to see it in. That, perhaps, was natural. She hadn't hit that fatal ball. Nothing lay on her conscience, stamping, coloring every thought.

"But I mustn't take advantage of that, Daphne," he muttered.

"Why, no!" she said quickly, and her hand stole out and her fingers crept between him. "I know what you're thinking. It won you fifty pounds, that hit. And it's lost you it again—or some of it."

"That's how you look at it?" he said, staring at her, thrilling, in a strange sense of elation.

"There isn't any other way, is there?" she said.

They said good-bye to Bryony together, wandering all over the little house; then, still together, solemn, they went to Mr. Palmer's house.

The estate agent, busy in his garden, heard them out. He was ready to cancel the verbal agreement. But it wasn't Harry's fault. Nobody would play cricket, or golf, or even tennis if—

"Whose fault was it?" Harry asked. That stumped Mr. Palmer. He gave it up.

They went that afternoon to the bungalow. A London surgeon's car stood at the gate. His real fee was a hundred guineas, Harry heard, as he walked in the back garden with the ashen father. But the specialist had been told, and was letting them down easily. The district nurse, too, cost only a nominal sum. But the other, the surgical nurse—

Some of the fifty pounds? Harry realized it meant it all and more—much more.

After argument and protest, he left the cheque for fifty pounds, endorsed, behind him, and rejoined Daphne. In the front garden they waited.

"Splendid, they say! Doing fine!" was the bulletin they subsequently took away.

New Job For a Woman



RADIO TELEPHONES INSTALLED ON BERENGARIA
Elizabeth Pilot, Ossining, New York, and chief wireless operator of Berengaria, inaugurating new wireless telephone service on board the ship.

Back to Mill Cottage and supper. Out on to the bank of the stream in the shadow of the yew. And there he told her that struggling for ever. He saw that. He was wondering— Sell up. Little, if anything, would remain. Go to Canada—anywhere. Work—as only her lover, with Daphne waiting, could work. Save and slave—and send for her at last.

"Wait alone?" she said, and her tears dripped on his fingers. Yet it was best. She acknowledged that.

"After all," said Harry, "if I hadn't slashed out and made that swipe, I'd never have had the fifty pounds. Without it I'd never have dared ask you to marry me. Daphne, if it wasn't for the poor little lad, I'd have to be glad!"

In silence they clung to each other. An agitated voice in her mother's garden made them draw back.

"The lawyer came tonight," they heard, and Harry recognized the voice of the boy's father. "It was only this afternoon she owned up. Miss Barton—only daughter of Barton—the bootman—the millionaire. Lost her head, she says. Didn't dare stop. Blinding along. Why, she admits she was doing forty-five!"

"I don't understand one bit!" protested Mrs. Glyn.

"Yesterday," he went excitedly on. "The accident. She was driving along London Road. My boy must have run out of the front garden for the ball. He picked it up, she says, then darted back across the road. You know what kids are. She braked and swerved, she says. Thought she'd missed him. But the back of the car knocked him down. She looked back. He was up and making for the house. And she went on."

The man choked.
"Money!" he ejaculated shrilly. "Lashings of it! Ready—longing to pour it out, they are!"

"It wasn't the ball?" cried Mrs. Glyn. "You mean it hadn't anything to do with Harry?"

On Harry's sane Daphne's lips. Against his heart beat.

"That's it!" the man agreed. "That's what brought me round. He's a brick, and here's his cheque for fifty pounds!"—Answers.

The Pebble

There's nothing unimportant
In this wondrous world of ours,
From its mountains and its rivers
To its butterflies and flowers;
So you need not be downhearted,
And the gods of chance impeach.
If you're very undistinguished—
Just a pebble on the beach.

You may long to be a mountain,
Or a cliff or towering crag,
Or a bright and radiant jewel,
Quite the biggest in the bag;
But the least and oft the lowliest
Great lessons have to teach,
And the stormy waves are baffled
By the pebbles on the beach.

Perhaps life never meant you
For a place of rank and power,
For a mighty, moving century,
But only for an hour;
But it gave you form and beauty,
And a place a child can reach,
When it made you just a pebble,
One of many on the beach.

—A. B. Cooper.

Dominion Status

Sydney Sun (Aus.): (South Africa has appointed a Minister to the United States. Australia is still only represented by a trade commissioner.) To the Government of the United States, Canada and the South African Union are nations, while we are still colonies. To Canada she sends her own Ambassadors, and no doubt will do so now with South Africa. This, invidious and inferior position of Australia is purely Australia's own choice. There is absolutely no reason why she, too, should not assume national rank in America by sending a Minister to New York. Why it has not been considered by the Government is a mystery. The world is so constituted it takes men and States largely at their own valuation, and we may be sure that the fact that the Ambassadors of Canada and South Africa may claim audience with the representatives of the United States Government and our commissioner cannot, does not help our estimation in the eyes of a nation which is peculiarly susceptible to face values.

Happy Bush Friends in Captivity



HERE IS A BURYING GROUND OF ANTAGONIS
Babies of the Berlin Zoo a rhino and gnu, stand side by side at the feeding troughs and calmly dine.

Fishing With The Cormorant In Japan

Dr. E. W. Gudger, American Museum of Natural History

Cormorant fishing in the rivers and lakes of Japan is carried on both as a sporting and as a commercial proposition. As a regular sporting attraction, usually carried on at night, it attracts a large number of sight-seers among the Japanese, and barges with lanterns, servants, and refreshments carry the visitors to the fishing grounds.

A writer in the London Times, Major-General Palmer, gives a clear account of how the fishing is done at night, by the light of great capes of blazing pine-knots suspended over the bow of each boat to attract the fish:

"There are, to begin with, four men in each of the seven boats before us, one of whom, at the stern, has no duty but that of managing his craft. In the bow stands the master, handling no fewer than 12 trained birds with surpassing skill. Amidships is another fisher, of the second grade, who handles four birds only. Between them is the fourth man who, with a bamboo instrument, makes the clatter necessary for keeping the birds up to their work. Each cormorant wears at the base of its neck a metal ring, drawn tight enough to prevent marketable fish from passing below it, but at the same time loose enough to admit the smaller prey, which serves as having attached to it at the middle of the back a short strip of stiffish whalebone, by which the great awkward bird may be conveniently lowered into the water or lifted out when at work; and to this whalebone is looped a thin rein of spruce fiber, 12 feet long, and so far wanting in pliancy as to minimize the chance of entanglement.

"The master lowers his 12 birds one by one into the stream and gathers their reins into his left hand; and forthwith the cormorants set to at their work in the hearties and jolliest way, diving and ducking with wonderful swiftness as the astonished fish come flocking toward the blaze of light. The master is now the busiest of men. He must handle his 12 strings so deftly that, let the birds dash hither and thither as they will, there shall be no impediment. He must have his eyes everywhere and his hands following his eyes. Specially he must watch for the moment when any of his flock is forged—a fact generally made known by the bird itself, which then swims about in a foolish helpless way, with its head and swollen neck erect. Thereupon the master, shortening in on that bird, lifts it aboard, forces its bill open with his left hand, which still holds the rest of the reins, squeezes out the fish with his right, and starts the creature off on a fresh foray—all with such admirable dexterity that in another moment the whole flock is again perfectly in hand."

This account gives the reader an excellent idea of this combined sport and business. As for the cormorants, . . . they are trained when quite young, being caught with bird-lime on the coasts. Once trained, they work well up to 15, often up to 19 or 20 years of age; and though their keep in winter bears hardly on the masters, they are very precious and profitable hunters during the five-months' season. For one bird will catch about 150 fish of four or five inches length in an hour, or 450 for the usual three-hour fishing trip. Every bird in a flock has and knows its numbers; and one of the funniest things about them is the quick-witted jealousy with which they invariably insist, by all that cormorant language and pantomimic protest can do, on the observance of their recognized rights. No. 1, or "Ichi," is the senior in rank. His colleagues come after him in numerical order. Ichi is the last to be put into the water and the first to be taken out, the first to be fed, and the last to enter the baskets in which when work is over, the birds are carried home. If, for instance, No. 5 be put into the water before No. 6, the rumpus that arises is a sight to see and a sound to hear."

Cormorants are also used in another way—by men wading in streams. The cormorants are often as pointer dogs, and apparently full of perfect enjoyment. To the right and left they plunge with lightning strokes, each dip bringing up a shining fish. When the fish are sorted the small fish are thrown first to one bird and then to another. Each bird catches his share "on the fly" and makes a sound which doubtless means that he likes the fun and will be glad to try it gain at the proper time.

(Note: The author quotes at length from the accounts of many ancient and contemporary writers to show that this time-honored Japanese sport is carried on now much as it has been for centuries.)—The Scientific Monthly.