

The Colonel's Cricket Match

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For two years the "town" of Hythe had given the garrison (or School of Musketry) a thorough beating at cricket. Our Colonel, formerly a capital player, was a great patron of the game and he felt these defeats sorely. It happened that when the "town" sent a third annual challenge, there were at the School of Musketry two lads in the *Rifles* who had acquired some fame with the bat and ball; Southey and myself. Southey had been Captain of the Eton eleven for two years and at that time we could muster a very fair eleven; I think our gallant Colonel wavered in consenting to the match for one minute and no more. He feared that the School might be beaten three years in succession; but he was too true a cricketer at heart to think twice about *that*, and a day was fixed for our match. What a ground it was! A large and level piece of Kentish turf on the edge of a mile of beach. No waving trees to fringe your line of sight; no dark hedges behind the bowler's arm; no shadows, but, sun in or sun out, all clear and light; with the shingle stretching down far and away to the blue waters of the English Channel. The wicket itself was almost too good-for the bowlers at least. It had no dead spots, no lively ones; no chance for "shooters," none for "bumpers," and, when you had bowled your finest and straightest, you could only feel you had done your best, and thank your stars that your ball was "stopped," and stopped only.

There was a proper telegraph to show the "runs, got" and the "wickets down" There were tents and spectators in abundance. There were the fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters of the good town of Hythe, all gathered together to see their side win; and a gay crowd they were, nearly all gaily dressed. But not half so gay as our lookers-on, and we had between two and three hundred brothers, Guardsmen, Highlanders, Riflemen, Sappers, Artillery, Marines, Dragoons, Linesmen, Company's Officers, red, green and blue, each with many kinds of facings, all mixed up together; every conceivable

uniform and corps (even Africans from a West India regiment), all there in a great crowd, waiting to see how the match went for the School. Away, on the other side of the ground, in a cluster by themselves, but at the proper angle for seeing play, were the club players from the neighbouring country clubs, honest enemies of each other, probably, and of Hythe certainly. There was our veteran Colonel, too, just as anxious and silent as if he were going to lead us all into the thick of a battle.

The Town won the toss for innings and put their men in first. I bowled at one end through the whole innings on that hot summer's day, and hard work it was. One of our adversaries scored 70 off his own bat: they totalled 138. Betting two to one on the Town. We went in for our innings. Old Southey and I only made 10 or 12 each, both given out "leg before wicket." Our side made a total of 73, which left us 65 to the bad- and very bad it was. Our dear old Colonel, attired in uniform, had stood most of the time of the first innings, attentively watching the game; sometimes with the town party friends, sometimes with ours. He always gave a word of encouragement to our lucky ones, and a word of kindness to the unlucky. But as the innings got on, and our eleven were falling fast in making that miserable 73, he suddenly disappeared. We thought he had gone away disgusted. The match went on. We were 73 to their 138 when they went in for their second innings; and, if ever two fellows were determined to bowl out our foes, they were Southey and myself. We played fiercely, for we knew well that now was the time when we must either do or die. Southey, though a good bowler and "field," and a terrific hitter, excelled most at the wicket; and that day he outdid himself. He caught two of the Town off my first "over," stumped two in my second, and caught number five in my third "over" - all clever catches and clever stumps, too. Southey bowled slow twisters at one end, and I bowled "round" at the other. We bowled all we knew, and our field worked like tigers. What mischief we meant the telegraph soon showed - "7 wickets down and 21 runs!"

Just then, at a slight pause in the game, when I went up to Southey he pointed away to a tent on the far side of the ground, and there, peering round the corner of the canvas, was our tall grey Colonel, *dressed in plain clothes*. He had not relished the crowd of spectators when the game was going against us, but although, while confident of our success, he did not care who saw him or talked to him

he could not bear to be seen or spoken to while we were losing; yet he could not resist seeing out the match, and had taken up his position by the tent, stealthily, alone, and in plain clothes. Southey and I didn't bowl any the worse when we knew who was looking at us from behind the tent. It fell out that the swell Town eleven, who in their first innings had kept us hard at it for four hours, were now disposed of in three-quarters of an hour, and for 30 runs! The excitement was now intense, the fire of the match was worked up to its utmost heat. We had 96 runs to get to win, and it was just on the cards that we might do it. Still, chances and betting were against us; for the ground was not what it was when we began: it was much cut up between wickets; the hot sun and the play had dried it, and made it lumpy and untrue. Southey and I sloped over to the Colonel. We felt that he had more interest in the game than even we had ourselves. He scarcely spoke: all he said was, "You couldn't have done better in the bowling than you did; the match isn't lost yet." Sergeant-Major McJug, of the Sappers, one of our best bats, went to the wicket first with Winterburn, a lieutenant in H.M. Foot. McJug was bowled out first ball. It was painful to see the Colonel's expression as the Sergeant's wicket fell. "Jim," said old Southey, who was captain of our team, "go in; cut over the slow bowling; when Winterburn's out, I'll join you, and if you die first, I'll follow." I went in. The first ball they bowled me was slow, overpitched, and to leg. I got hold of it, and sent it a good way towards the sea. We ran 4. The telegraph soon showed "10" towards the "96." Winterburn "mopped up" two or three more, was bowled out, and then Southey joined me. Presently the telegraph showed 20, when the other side took off their slow bowler and made a set to separate us; for they guessed we meant mischief. Every ball came straight on the wicket, and their fielding was first-rate. I think I see old Southey now; he has a peculiar way of stopping a good ball, thundering down on it as if he meant to batter it into little bits. They tried every dodge on the slate, and puzzled us considerably; they put on bowler after bowler, till I think every man in the eleven had his shy at us; but they could not get us out. At last "60" *our old number*, showed itself, and told us that the neck of our work was broken. Southey and I were happy then. We were "well in": we had collared the bowling; we were strong, and cared for no ball they could bowl. "Even if we fall," we said, "surely the fellows to follow can make the runs now."

It was about this time, in changing ends for a quiet single, that Southey called over to me in an Irish whisper, "Look at the Colonel!" There he was, *in his staff uniform*, in the thickest of the line of the lookers-on, a head taller than most of them, chatting gaily to everybody who came in his way. He had been home and had put on his gayest uniform, now that he saw that we were sure to win.

The rest is easily told. The loose balls we hit for fours and fives; the good ones we put away for singles. 70, 80 and 90 followed on the telegraph in quick succession, and Southey at length made the winning hit for "96," and the day was ours. We had made 80 runs in less than two hours, and carried out our bats; so you may guess that H.M. Rifles were at a premium that day. After the match was over the Colonel walked up to the wicket where we had fought all day, and looked over it as cricketers will look. He was as perfectly happy as a man may wish to be: his face literally shone with delight and pride; and I am sure he would have given a hundred pounds rather than we had lost the match. Of course, Southey and I were with him, and it did our hearts good to hear him thank us for "winning the match for *him*."

