

Plum Punch: The Game's the Thing

P. G. WODEHOUSE

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Etext by Dagny
and the Blandings Group

AFTER THE OTTER

(By our Confirmed Grumbler)

The visitor gives his cap a hitch to one side to indicate the sportsman, grasps his hazel walking-stick (white crooked handle and spike complete for eighteen-pence), and prepares to dash off in any direction in which the otter may show himself. There is a pause. He waits. He continues to wait.

"No," says a grizzled follower of the chase, in answer to a question. "Hardly think we shall be starting just yet. You see, the chief point about an otter hunt is the lunch. Your true sportsman has discarded the otter's pad as a club badge. He now wears the legend 'Never lose sight of the lunch,' conspicuously embroidered on his cap. Before the hunt can be begun, elaborate instructions must be given to the driver of the provision-van. He must be told exactly where luncheon is to be taken, and that sort of thing, don't you know. What?"

"Ah," says the visitor, "I suppose so."

Time speeds on, and at last the menial with the van has a vague idea of what is expected of him, and drives off. The noble Master and all the Members of the Hunt, in picturesque, if slightly sudden, suits of blue and red flannel, adjourn to the Inn for a modest quencher. Otter-hunters may be said to be inverted semi-teetotalers. No meet without drink is their motto. At last, the M.O.H., a man of energy, suddenly remembers that his hounds are waiting in the road outside, and, over the remains of a fifth whiskey-and-soda, suggests a start. The hunt, pure and simple, has begun.

Ladies, wearing short skirts bound round the edge with leather, and carrying bamboo poles, now leave their carriages and push their way through the crowd. Children, sternly resolved to get wet, find the deepest puddle and stand in it. Young men with ash-poles, upon which long rows of notches gleam, having manifestly been cut only that morning, rub a little damp earth into them and blush to find it fame. Old men buttonhole acquaintances, and tell them anecdotes of the sport they used to have fifty years ago, at five in the morning, m'boy, five sharp, and sometimes even earlier.

In short, things begin to move.

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At last the river! Obviously as stiff with otters as the Irishman's swamp was with snipe. The cavalcade moves silently along the bank. A wild cry of "Yoicks!" from a weedy youth in a stentorian Norfolk jacket and check cap. The M.O.H. stops the hounds, and turns back to see what has happened. Youth points with enthusiasm to a terrier's track which he has discovered under a culvert. Enters into a lengthy argument on the subject, but fails to convince the noble Master that there is not a substantial difference between a four-toed and a five-toed track. The sight of lunch is as oil on troubled waters, and for an hour the hunt may be described as a thorough success.

The last bottle of champagne has exuded its fascinating contents. The last cold chicken has been dismembered. The hunt is up again.

A sudden and very inconvenient increase of pace on the part of the hounds indicates that they have got on the drag of an otter. The pace is kept up for two miles, and many stragglers are left behind. Then a halt is recommended, and an anonymous individual in the crowd is surreptitiously cheering hounds on to a stray moor-hen, when somebody stumbles upon a wasps' nest, and matters for the first time become really exciting. The hunters become the hunted, and fly across country in a record-breaking manner, behaving like semaphores. The dogs snap and dive. Finally, the survivors foregather again half a mile down stream. "I rather think," says the M.O.H., making his only really popular observation of the afternoon, "that we'll be goin' home now." The hunt is at an end.

"Well," said the visitor to the grizzled sportsman as they walked back, "we have had a very pleasant stroll, but tell me, is this the sort of thing that always happens?"

"Well, no," replied the grey-beard; "not invariably. But it is a curious pastime, and the only person who has nothing to find fault with in it seems to me to be the otter. Perhaps the hounds are kept for his benefit. Hullo, here's the old chap who asked the hounds to come. Perhaps we shall have some sport after all. He seems excited."

After which the "old chap" explains in a breathless manner that it's all right now, your lordship, and he had meant to tell him afore. As he was coming back from mowing that morning, out jumped the otter from a ditch right at his feet, and he cut him in half with a scythe.

"Well," said the visitor, thoughtfully, feeling his swollen features, "I have no doubt that otter hunting is a noble sport, but what I say is give *me* rats."

CURIOSITIES OF CRICKET

[From the report of the Yorkshire v. Sussex match: "DENTON was out in a curious manner, hitting the top of the middle stump and bringing it forward to a sharp angle without disturbing the other two, in so strange a manner that FRY had the wicket photographed doubtless for a forthcoming number of his magazine."]

From *The Sporting Man* of the day after to-morrow: While stealing a short run in the Middlesex v. Surrey match last week, Mr. P. F. WARNER was so unfortunate as to lose his balance, and fall. Before the game was restarted, Mr. WARNER dictated an article for *The Westminster Gazette* on "Hard v. Soft Wickets: why I prefer the latter." The time thus occupied undoubtedly went far towards enabling Middlesex to draw the game.

An interesting ceremony delayed the progress of the second day's cricket between Leicester and Warwick. Coming in ninth wicket Sir A. HAZELRIGG, playing a fine, forcing game, speedily hit up three before falling a victim to an insidious long-hop from HARGREAVE. A magnificent display of fireworks and an impromptu country dance were given to celebrate the popular skipper's triumph. This is one of the Leicester Captain's highest scores in first-class cricket. Possibly the faster ground suits him. Yet even on a slow pitch, versus Lancashire, he made two in excellent style before he was run out.

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Old-fashioned sportsmen are complaining that it was unnecessary for the match between Northants and Notts to be interrupted for a protracted period while the Northants team were photographed singly and collectively in characteristic attitudes. For ourselves we yield to none in our respect for the rigour of the game; but it must be remembered that this was the second time in one month that Northants had reached double figures in a single innings, and we think that latitude may be allowed to the natural excitement consequent on the success of the plucky little county.

Playing for Bampstead Wanderers v. Army and Navy Stores "A" at Acton last Saturday, B. W. BULGER, who heads the Wanderers' averages this year with 8.03, remarked to the umpire who gave him out l.b.w., "I think your decision quite just. The ball pitched on the off-stump, and would have taken the middle but for my leg being in the way. If all umpires had your honesty and judgment, cricket would be a different game." At the umpire's request the match was stopped while Mr. BULGER repeated his remark into a gramophone. Batsman and official then shook hands, and after three ringing cheers had been given by the fieldsmen Mr. BULGER retired to the scoring-bench.

In the Chickenham v. Pigbury annual match on the latter's ground, Farmer JENKINS, umpiring for the former team, twice gave SAM GILES, the Pigbury crack, not out, on appeals for "caught at the wicket" and "run out." It was only after the hat had been sent round and its contents and an illuminated address presented to Mr. JENKINS by the spectators and the rest of the home team that the match could be resumed.

MR. PUNCH'S FOOTBALL EXPERTS

Although *Mr. Punch* has watched with sympathy the spirited policy of one of his contemporaries in employing such authorities on the winter game as Lady HELEN FORBES and Mr. PETT RIDGE to report football matches, he feels that the scheme is capable of development. There are others able and willing to let the public have pen-pictures of the game they love so well. Graphic accounts of last Saturday's matches by some of his own corps of special reporters are appended:

BERMONDSEY HORNETS
V.
HANLEY WOLVES
BY
D-V-D LL-OYD G RGE
Hornets 2. Wolves 0.

I am a comparatively poor man, but, if I were half as poor as the work in front of goal of the Hanley Wolves, I should be tempted to give up the Stock Exchange altogether as too risky. It was this, combined with the spectacle of that great track of uncultivated land (land which might have been congested with happy and prosperous agriculturists), that spoiled my Saturday afternoon. And this is going on all over the country, while British labourers emigrate to America. I spoke to a Bermondsey farmer after the match and he gave me some figures which appalled me. Every footballer destroys twenty turnips a day. You cannot have half-backs and agricultural prosperity. You must choose between outside rights and inside wrongs. I looked into the housing of the spectators. In many cases whole families were packed into a space which a sardine would have considered inadequate. I saw ten reporters huddled together in a single room. I have no remedy to suggest. I merely mention the facts.

PLYMOUTH TIGERS
V.
NEWCASTLE CORPORALS
BY

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W-NST-N CH-RCH-LL
Tigers 2. Newcastle 2.

The pointless struggle between these two great teams, the third in three successive matches, encourages me to think that the time is now ripe for some arrangement for the reduction of excessive armaments. For years team-building has gone on between these two football-centres with ever-increasing activity. In 1909, the Tigers spent L3,501 19s. 3d. on their front line. Newcastle replied by purchasing Scotsmen to the value of L4,002 18s. 5d. In 1910, Newcastle paid over six thousand pounds for backs of the Dreadnought class. The Tigers responded by laying down a new goal-keeper at a cost of well into the seventh thousand. And so it has gone on ever since. Now, the proposal which I put forward in the name of His Majesty's Government is simply this. Let Plymouth say to Newcastle: "If you will put off buying centre-forwards for twelve months from the ordinary date when you would have opened negotiations with the slave-dealers, we will put off buying half-backs in absolutely good faith for exactly the same period." That would mean that there would be a complete holiday for one year between Plymouth and Newcastle. The relative strength of the two teams would be absolutely unchanged.

SHEFFIELD TUESDAY AFTERNOON

V.

LEYTONSTONE HOTSTUFFS

BY

S-LV-A P-NKH-RST

Tuesday Afternoons 0. Hotstuffs 0.

The crude exhibition of masculine fatuity which attracted 30,000 prejudiced males to Leytonstone on Saturday ended, as one might have foreseen, in a result as negative and fruitless as the Government's opposition to the Cause. A pointless draw, I heard it called by one man. Another, a moment later, stated that each side had secured a point. Can anything better illustrate the futilities and contradictions of this man-made sport? As long as football is confined to one sex, as long as Man guards it jealously as his special preserve, so long will this inane state of things continue. Women are not permitted to become members of First League teams. What is the result? Idiotic and ineffectual struggles like Saturday's at Leytonstone. These footballers do not know the rudiments of warfare. Not a single member of either eleven carried with him on to the field a bomb, a horse-whip or even a hat-pin. There was an autocratic official who, I believe, is known as the referee. I saw this man blow his whistle and refuse to allow one burly player a goal which he had scored. What did the player, the craven, do? Did he hunger-strike, like a man of spirit? No, he took it lying down. For the rest, the Hotstuffs wear rather sweet shirts, pink relieved with a green insertion; and the Tuesday Afternoons' goal-keeper has a nice face.