Reginald's Record Knock.

P. G. WODEHOUSE

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Reginald Humby was one of those men who go in just above the byes, and are to tired bowlers what the dew is to parched earth at the close of an August afternoon. When a boy at school he once made nine not out in a house match, but after that he went all to pieces. His adult cricket career was on the one−match one−ball principle. Whether it was that Reginald hit too soon at them or did not hit soon enough, whether it was that his bat deviated from the dotted line which joined the two points A and B in the illustrated plate of the man making the forward stroke in the Hints on Cricket book, or whether it was that each bail swerved both ways at once and broke a yard and a quarter, I do not know. Reginald rather favoured the last theory.

The important point is that Reginald, after an almost unbroken series of eggs in the first two months of the season, turned out for Chigley Heath versus The Hearty Lunchers in the early part of July, went in first, and knocked up a hundred and thirteen.

Reginald, mark you, whose normal batting style was a sort of cross between hop−scotch, diabolo, and a man with gout in one leg trying to dance the Salome Dance.

When great events happen the public generally shows an anxiety to discover their cause. In the case of Reginald's century, on the face of it the most remarkable event since the Flood, the miracle may be attributed directly to his personal popularity.

Carpers may cavil at this statement. It is possible, too, that cavillers may carp. I seem to see them at it. All around me, I repeat, I seem to hear the angry murmur of carpers cavilling and cavillers carping. I seem to hear them asking how it is possible for a man to make a century by being popular.

'Can a batsman,' they ask, 'by sheer amiability stop a yorker on the leg stump?'

Nevertheless it is true. The facts are these:

Everybody who plays club cricket knows the Hearty Lunchers. Inveterate free−drinkers to a man, they wander about the country playing villages. They belong to the school of thought which holds that the beauty of cricket is that, above all other games, it offers such magnificent opportunities for a long drink and a smoke in the shade. The Hearty Lunchers do not take their cricket in that spirit of deadly and business−like earnest which so many people consider is spoiling the game. A Hearty Luncher who has been given out caught at the wicket does not explain on arriving at the pavilion that he was nowhere near the ball, and that the umpire has had a personal grudge against him since boyhood. No, he sinks into a deck chair, removes his pads, and remarks that if anyone was thinking of buying him a stone ginger with the merest dash of gin in it, now is his time.

It will therefore readily be understood that Reginald's inability to lift his average out of the minuses did not handicap him with the Hearty Lunchers, as it might have handicapped him with some clubs. The genial sportsmen took him to their bosoms to a man and looked on him as a brother. Reginald's was one of those noble natures which are always good for five shillings at any hour of the day, and the Hearty Lunchers were not slow to appreciate it. They all loved Reginald.

Reginald was seated in his room one lovely evening at the beginning of July oiling a bat — he was a confirmed bat−oiler — when the telephone bell rang. He went to the instrument and was hailed by the comfortable voice of Westaway, the Hearty Lunchers' secretary.

'Is that Humby?' asked Westaway. 'I say, Reggie, I'm booking you for the Chigley Heath match next Saturday. Train, Waterloo, ten fifteen.'

'Oh, I say,' replied Reginald, a note of penitence in his voice, 'I'm afraid I can't — fact is, I'm playing for Chigley.'

'You're what?'

'They asked me last week — they seemed very keen that I should play.'

'Why, haven't they seen you play?'

'I'm awfully sorry.'

'Oh, all right. How do you come to be mixed up with Chigley Heath?'

'My *fiancee* lives down there.'

'I see. Well, so long.'

'So long.'

'You're all right for the Saturday after against Porkley−in−the−Wold, I suppose?'

'Yes, rather!'

'Good! So long.'

'So long.'

And Reginald, replacing the instrument, resumed the oiling of the bat.

Now Westaway happened to be of a romantic and sentimental nature. He was inclined to be stout, and all rather stout men are sentimental. Westaway was the sort of man who keeps old ball−programmes and bundles of letters tied round with lilac ribbon. At country houses, when they lingered on the terrace after dinner to watch the moonlight flooding the quiet garden, it was Westaway and his colleagues who lingered longest. Westaway knew Tennyson's 'Maud' by heart, and could take Browning without gas.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Reginald's remark about his *fiancee* living at Chigley Heath should give him food for thought. It appealed to him.

He reflected on it a good deal during the evening, and running across Blagdon, the Hearty Lunchers' captain, after dinner that night at the Club, he spoke of the matter to him. It so happened that both had dined excellently and were looking on the world with a sort of cosy benevolence. They were in the mood when men give small boys sixpences.

'I rang up Reggie Humby today,' said Westaway.

'One of the best, Reggie,' said Blagdon. 'Waiter, coffee and — what's yours? Coffee for two, a Maraschino, a liqueur brandy, and two of those old−shape Larranagas. Yes, dear old chap, Reggie.'

'Did you know he was engaged?'

'I did hear something about it — girl of the name of Belleville or something like that — Melville, that's it! Charming girl. Fond of poetry and all that, I believe.'

'She lives at Chigley Heath.'

'Then Reggie'll get a chance of seeing her next Saturday.'

'He tells me he's promised to play for Chigley Heath against us.'

'Confound him, the renegade! Still, we needn't scratch because of that, need we?'

Westaway sucked at his cigar in silence for a while, watching with dreamy eyes the blue smoke as it curled ceilingwards. When he spoke his voice was singularly soft.

'Do you know, Blagdon,' he said, sipping his Maraschino with a sort of gentle melancholy, 'do you know, there is something wonderfully pathetic to me in this business. I see the whole thing so clearly. There was a kind of quiver in poor Reggie's voice when he said: "I am playing for Chigley Heath, my *fiancee* lives down there," which told me more than any words could have done. It is a tragedy in its way, Blagdon. We may smile at it, think it trivial; but it is none the less a tragedy. That warm−hearted, enthusiastic girl, all eagerness to see the man she loves do well. Reggie, poor old Reggie, all on fire to prove to her that her trust in him is not misplaced, and the end — Disillusionment — Disappointment — Unhappiness.'

'He might be duck not out,' said the more practical Blagdon.

'He won't go in last for Chigley Heath; probably they think a lot of him. He may be their hope. Quite possibly he may go in first.'

'If Reggie's mug enough to let himself be shoved in first,' said Blagdon decidedly, 'he deserves all he gets. Waiter, two whiskies and soda, large.'

Westaway was in no mood to subscribe to this stony−hearted view.

'I tell you,' he said, 'I'm *sorry* for Reggie! I'm *sorry* for the poor old chap, and I'm more than sorry for the girl.'

'Well, I don't see what we can do,' said Blagdon. 'Not all the soda, thanks. We can hardly be expected to bowl badly just to let Reggie show off before his girl.'

Westaway paused in the act of lighting his cigar, as one smitten with a great thought.

'Why not?' he said. 'Why not, Blagdon? Blagdon, you've hit it!'

'My dear chap!'

'You have! I tell you, Blagdon, you've solved the whole thing. Reggie's a dashed good sort, one of the very absolute! Why not give him a benefit? Why not let him knock up a few for a change? It'll be the only chance he'll ever get of making a decent score. You aren't going to tell me at your time of life that you care whether we beat Chigley Heath or not!'

'I was thinking more of the dashing about in a hot sun while Reggie made his runs — I'm all against too much exercise.'

Blagdon was one of the non−stooping brigade. He liked best to field point with a good cover behind him.

'Oh, nonsense!' said Westaway; 'there won't be too much of that, we can be getting the rest of them out all the while; and, besides, fifty will satisfy poor old Reggie. We needn't let him make a hundred.'

Blagdon's benevolence was expanding under the influence of the whisky and soda (large) and the old−shaped Larranaga. Little acts of kindness on Reggie's part, here a cigar, there a lunch, at another time a box at a theatre, began to rise to the surface of his memory like rainbow−coloured bubbles. Having grown accustomed to the basic bizarreness of the hon. secretary's idea, he began now, as it were, to out−Westaway Westaway.

'No!' he said, 'let us do the thing in style. Reggie shall have his knock and he shall make a century, unless, of course, they put him in last. If they do that he will have to be satisfied with twenty or so.'

'As to squaring the bowlers,' said Westaway, 'can that be managed?'

'You and I will go on first, with Blake and Harris as first change. After Blake and Harris, Grigson can have an over, too. We will broach the matter to them at a dinner at which we will be joint hosts. They are all stout fellows who will be charmed to do a little thing like this for a sportsman like Reggie.'

'Yours is a noble nature, Blagdon,' said Westaway, reaching out for his glass.

'Oh, no,' said the paragon modestly. 'Have another cigar?'

In order that the reader may get the mental strangle−hold on the plot of this narrative which is so essential if a short story is to charm, elevate, and instruct, it is necessary now for the nonce (but only for the nonce) to inspect Reginald's past life.

Reginald, as stated by Blagdon, was engaged to a Miss Melville — Miss Margaret Melville. How few men, dear reader, are engaged to girls with svelte figures, brown hair, and large blue eyes, now sparkling and vivacious, now dreamy and soulful, but always large and blue! How few, I say. You are, dear reader, and so am I, but who else? Reginald, however, happened to be, and he considered himself uncommonly fortunate.

He was happy. It is true that Margaret's mother was not, as it were, wrapped up in him. She exhibited none of that effervescent joy at his appearance which we like to see in our mothers−in−law elect. On the contrary, she generally cried bitterly whenever she saw him, and at the end of ten minutes was apt to retire sobbing to her room, where she remained in a state of semi−coma till an advanced hour. She was by way of being a confirmed invalid, and something about Reginald seemed to get right in amongst her nerve centres, reducing them for the time being to a complicated hash. She did not like Reginald; she said she liked big, manly men. Behind his back she not infrequently referred to him as a 'poop'; sometimes even as 'that guffin.'

She did not do this to Margaret, for Margaret, besides being blue−eyed, was also a shade quick−tempered. Whenever she discussed Reginald, it was with her son Brewster. Brewster Melville, who thought Reginald a bit of an ass, was always ready to sit and listen to his mother on the subject, it being, however, an understood thing that at the conclusion of the seance she yielded one or two minted sovereigns towards his racing debts. For Brewster, having developed a habit of backing horses which either did not start at all or sat down and thought in the middle of a race, could always do with a pound or two. His prices for these interviews worked out, as a rule, at about two and a half guineas a thousand words.

In these circumstances it is not to be wondered at that Reginald and Margaret should prefer to meet, when they did meet, at some other spot than the latter's ancestral home. It suited both of them better that they should arrange a secret tryst each week. Reginald preferred it because being in the same room as Mrs Melville always

made him feel like a murderer with particularly large feet; and Margaret preferred it because, as she told Reginald, these secret meetings lent a touch of poetry, a sort of atmosphere of Marcus Stone's pictures, to what might otherwise have been a commonplace engagement.

Reginald thought this charming; but at the same time he could not conceal from himself the fact that Margaret's passion for the poetic cut, as it were, both ways. He admired and loved the loftiness of her Soul, but, on the other hand, it was the deuce of a business having to live up to it. For Reginald was a very ordinary young man. They had tried to inoculate him with a love of Poetry at school, but it had never 'taken'. Until he was twenty−six he had been satisfied to class all poetry (except that of Mr Doss Chiderdoss) under the heading of Rot. Then he met Margaret, and the trouble began. On the day he first met her, at a picnic, she had looked so soulful, so aloof from this world, that he had felt instinctively that here was a girl who expected more from a man than a mere statement that the weather was rippin'. It so chanced that he knew just one quotation from the Classics, to wit, Tennyson's critique of the Island Valley of Avilion. He knew this because he had had the passage to write out one hundred and fifty times at school, on the occasion of his being caught smoking by a master who happened to be a passionate admirer of *The Idylls of the King*.

A remark of Margaret's that it was a splendid day for a picnic and that the country looked nice gave him his opportunity.

'It reminds me,' he said, 'of the Island Valley of Avilion, where falls not hail or rain or any snow, nor ever wind blows, loudly; but it lies deep−meadow'd, happy, fair, with orchard lawns...'

He broke off here to squash a wasp; but Margaret had heard enough.

'Are you fond of poetry, Mr Humby?' she said, with a sort of far−off look.

'Er — oh, *rather!* I should think so!' said Reginald.

And that was how all the trouble had started. It had meant unremitting toil for Reginald. He felt that he had set himself a standard from which he must not fall. He bought every new volume of poetry which was praised in the Press, and learned the reviews of it by heart. Every evening he read painfully a portion of the Classics. He plodded through the poetry sections of *Bartlett's Book of Quotations*. Margaret's devotion to the various bards was so enthusiastic, and her reading so wide, that there were times when Reginald wondered if he could stand the strain. But he pegged away manfully.

He was helped by the fact that he actually saw Margaret but rarely. Being in a government office he found it impossible to get away during the week, Chigley Heath being a matter of thirty miles or so from London. Sunday was, as a rule, the only day on which they met; and [Image] studious application to the poets during the week always enabled him to ?name=/cm_showreply.femail';s[Image] menge [Image] acquit himself with credit.

But the strain was fearful.

It occurred to Reginald on this particular Saturday that he was in a position to bring off a double event. The Hearty Lunchers' match was to [Image]begin at eleven−thirty. Consequently, if he arranged to meet Margaret at ngly, a Text Size: [Image] their usual Sunday meeting−place — Brown's boathouse, which was about a mile from the cricket−field — at four−thirty, he could have his game and still have plenty of time to pull her up the river to their favourite honeysuckled cottage for tea. If his side happened to be fielding at four o'clock he could get a substitute to act for him; and if Chigley Heath batted last he would get his captain to put him in early, so that he could get his innings over in good time.

Having laid these plans he caught his train on the Saturday morning with a light heart.

All went well from the start, The day was fine, the sun warm but tempered with a light breeze. The Hearty Lunchers batted first and lost six wickets before the interval for a hundred and twenty. The Chigley Heath crowd, mainly composed of small boys and octogenarians, who looked on the Hearty Lunchers as a first−class team because they wore bright blazers, were loud in their approval of their bowlers' performance in dismissing more than half the side for so few runs.

Reginald, who quite inadvertently had caught a hot catch at mid−on, went into the pavilion thoroughly pleased with himself. It was a red−letter day for him when he caught a catch, and this had been a particularly smart one. Indeed, he had not realised that the ball was coming in his direction at all till it hit him in the stomach.

At the festive board the Hearty Lunchers, as usual, justified their name, and it was not until a quarter to three that the match was resumed. The Hearty Lunchers believed in scientific stoking preparatory to the strenuous toil of the afternoon. The bill of fare was good and varied, and the only bitter drop in Reginald's cup was that he could

not find his tobacco pouch. He had had it with him in the train, but now it had vanished. This rather saddened Reginald, for the pouch had been given to him by Margaret, and be had always thought it one more proof of the way her nature towered over the natures of other girls, that she had not woven a monogram on it in forget−me−nots. This record pouch, I say, was missing, and Reginald mourned for the loss.

He was still moody when the team went out to the field.

The remaining Hearty Lunchers did not offer very much resistance to the Chigley Heath fast bowler, and the whole side was out with the addition of forty runs.

It was now half−past three, and Reginald saw that if he was to do himself justice with the bat he must be put in early. Buttonholing the Chigley Heath captain he explained this to him, and the captain, a sympathetic soul, requested Reginald to get his pads on and come in first with him.

Having received one favour Reginald did not like to ask another, so greatly against his will he prepared himself to take first ball. He did this with grave care. Everyone who has seen Reginald Humby bat knows that his taking of guard is one of the most impressive sights ever witnessed on the cricket field. He tilted his cap over his eyes, waggled his bat about till the umpire was satisfied that he had got two−leg, scratched the crease with a bail, looked round at the field, walked out of his ground to pat down a blade of grass, picked up a fragment of mud, waved imperatively to two small boys who looked as if they might get behind the bowler's arm, and finally settled himself, left toe well in the air, to receive the first ball.

It was then that he noted for the first time that the bowler was Blagdon.

The sight sent a thrill through Reginald. He had seen Blagdon bowl at the nets, but he had never dared to hope that he might bat against him in a match. Exigencies of space forbid a detailed description of Blagdon's bowling. Suffice it to say that it was a shade inferior as bowling to Reginald's batting as batting.

It was Reginald's invariable custom to play forward, on principle, to each ball of his first over wherever it pitched. He called this playing himself in. In accordance with this rule he lunged grandly for six balls (three of which were long−hops to leg), and Blagdon registered a maiden. Four small boys near the pavilion clapped tentatively, but an octogenarian scowled, and, having said that cricket was a brighter game in his young days, went on to compare Reginald unfavourably with Alfred Mynn.

Scarcely had Reginald recovered from the pleasurable shock of finding Blagdon bowling at one end when he was amazed to find that Westaway was bowling at the other. Critics had often wrangled warmly as to the comparative merits of Blagdon and Westaway as bowlers; some thought that Blagdon had it, others that Westaway was the more putrid of the two; a third party called it a dead heat.

The Chigley Heath captain hit Westaway's first ball for three, and Reginald, coming to the batting end, suddenly resolved that this was an occasion on which conventional rules might be flung to the winds; instead, therefore, of playing forward at a full−pitch to leg, he waited for it, and lashing out sent it flying over short slip's head for a single.

That stroke marked an epoch. Reginald was now set.

The ordinary batsman, whose average always pans out at the end of the season between the twenties and the thirties, does not understand the whirl of mixed sensations which the really incompetent cricketer experiences on the rare occasions when he does notch a few. As ball follows ball, and he does not get out, a wild exhilaration surges through him, followed by a sort of awe as if he were doing something wrong, even irreligious. Then all these yeasty emotions subside, and are blended into one glorious sensation of grandeur and majesty, as of a giant among pygmies. This last state of mind does not come till the batsman's score has passed thirty.

By the time that Reginald, ballooning one of Blagdon's half−volleys over cover−point's head, had made his score thirty−two, he was in the full grip of this feeling. As he stood parting the pitch and waiting for the ball to be returned from the boundary, he felt that this was Life, that till now he had been a mere mollusc. His eye rolled proudly round the field.

As it did so it was caught by the clock of the adjacent church, and the sight of that clock was like a douche of cold water. The hands stood at a quarter past four.

Let us pause and ponder on this point for a while. Do not let us dismiss it as if it were some mere trivial everyday difficulty, because it is not. It is about the heftiest soul problem ever handed out to suffering man. You, dear reader, play a long and stylish innings every time you go to the wickets, and so do I; but Reginald was not like us. This was the first occasion on which the ball had seemed larger to him than a rather undersized marble. It

was the first occasion on which he had ever hit at a ball with the chances in his favour of getting it anywhere near the centre of the bat.

On the other hand, he was passionately devoted to Margaret Melville, whom he was due to meet at Brown's boathouse at four−thirty sharp. It was now four−fifteen, and Brown's boathouse was still a mile away.

Reginald Humby was at the cross−roads.

The mental struggle was brief but keen. A sharp pang, and his mind was made up. Cost what it might he must stay at the wickets. Not even for Margaret could he wilfully put an end to an innings like this. If she broke off the engagement — well, it might be that Time would heal the wound, and that after many years he would find some other girl for whom he might come to care in a wrecked, broken sort of way. But a chance like this, a chance of batting thoroughly set, against the bowling of Blagdon, Westaway, Blake, and Harris, could never come again. Such things did not happen twice in a lifetime. Only to the very favoured did they happen once. What is Love compared to a chance of knocking up a really big score?... Reginald prepared to face the bowling again.

Soon a burst of applause from the pavilion signalled the fact that Reginald had made the first fifty of his life.

The time was now twenty−five to five, and Brown's boathouse was exactly where it had been at a quarter past four, a mile away.

But there was no room now in Reginald's mind for even a passing thought about Brown's boathouse, for his gleaming eyes had seen that Grigson was being put on to bowl. Antony would have forgotten Cleopatra if he had had the chance of batting against Grigson.

If Grigson, as a bowler, had one fault more than another (which his friends denied), it was that he was too tantalising. In pace his deliveries were — from a batsman's point of view — ideal. It was in direction that they erred. His first ball soared languidly into the hands of second slip, without touching terra firma. His second was fielded and returned by point. Reginald watched these truants with growing impatience.

At the third ball he could restrain himself no longer. The sight of the square−leg umpire shaping for a catch maddened him. He bounded from his crease, pushed the official to one side, and was just in time at the end of this manoeuvre to smite the ball as it bounced and send it hurtling to the pavilion. There were cheers; the octogenarian who had compared him to his disadvantage with Alfred Mynn handsomely retracted his words; and two small boys in their enthusiasm fell out of a tree.

Of the remaining hour and ten minutes of his innings Reginald's recollections are like some blurred but beautiful dream. He remembers occasional outstanding hits — as when he scored a boundary off a ball of Grigson's which stopped dead two−thirds of the way down the pitch, and when he beat short−slip in a race for a delivery of Harris's. But the greater part of the innings has fled from him.

One moment, however, still stands out sharp and clear in his memory — the moment when a second burst of cheering, beside which the first was as nothing, informed him that his score had reached three figures. After that one or two more lofty hits, and finally the crash of the stumps and the triumphant return to the pavilion on the shoulders of a mixed bevy of Chigley Heathens and Hearty Lunchers.

For some fifteen minutes he sat on a bench in a moist, happy trance.

And then, suddenly, like a cold douche, came the thought of Margaret.

Reginald sprang for the dressing−room and changed his clothes, his brain working feverishly.

And as he laced his boots there came, like some knell, the sound of the clock outside striking six.

Margaret and her mother were seated in the drawing−room when Reginald arrived. Mrs Melville, who had elicited the information that Reginald had not kept his appointment, had been saying 'I told you so' for some time, and this had not improved Margaret's temper. When, therefore, Reginald, damp and dishevelled, was shown in, he felt like a man who has suddenly discovered the North Pole. Mrs Melville did her celebrated imitation of the Gorgon, while Margaret, lightly humming an air, picked up a weekly paper and became absorbed in it.

'Margaret, let me explain,' panted Reginald.

Mrs Melville was understood to remark that she dared say.

Margaret's attention was riveted by a fashion plate.

'Driving in a taximeter to Charing Cross this afternoon,' resumed Reginald, 'I had an accident.'

(Which was the net result of his feverish brain−work in the pavilion dressing−room.)

The weekly periodical flapped to the floor.

'Oh, Reggie, are you hurt?'

'A few scratches, nothing more; but it made me miss my train.'

'Oh, Reggie! but why didn't you wire? I have been worrying so.'

'I was too agitated, dearest.'

'What train did you catch?'

'The five−one.'

'Why, Brewster was coming home by the five−one. Did you see him,'

Reginald's jaw dropped slightly.

'Er — no,' he said.

'How curious,' said Margaret.

'Very curious,' said Reginald.

'Most curious,' said Mrs Melville.

They were still reflecting on the singularity of this fact when the door opened again, and the son of the house entered in person.

'Thought I should find you here, Humby,' he said. 'They gave me this at the station to give to you; you dropped it this morning when you got out of the train.'

He handed Reginald the missing pouch.

'Thanks,' said the latter, huskily. 'When you say this morning, of course you mean this evening but thanks, all the same — thanks — thanks.'

'No, Reginald Humby, he does not mean this evening,' said Mrs Melville. 'Brewster, speak! From what train did that guf — did Mr Humby alight when he dropped the tobacco pouch?'

'The ten−fifteen, the porter chap told me — said he would have given it back to him then only he nipped off in the deuce of a hurry in a cab.'

Six eyes focused themselves upon Reginald.

'Margaret,' he said, 'I will not try to deceive you —'

'You may try,' observed Mrs Melville, 'but you will not succeed.'

'Well, Reginald?'

Reginald fingered his collar.

'There was no taximeter accident.'

'Ah!' said Mrs Melville.

'The fact is, I've been playing cricket for Chigley Heath against the Hearty Lunchers.'

Margaret uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'Playing cricket!'

Reginald bowed his head with manly resignation.

'Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you arrange for us to meet on the ground? I wanted to watch the match, only I couldn't get there in the morning, and it didn't seem worth it for such a little while in the afternoon.'

Reginald was amazed.

'You take an interest in cricket, Margaret? You! I thought you scorned it, considered it an unintellectual game.'

'Why, I play regularly in the ladies' match.'

'Margaret! Why didn't you tell me?'

'I thought you might not like it. You were so spiritual, so poetic. I feared you would despise me.'

Reginald took a step forward. His voice was tense and trembling.

'Margaret,' he said, and his accents thrilled with a dawning hope, 'this is no time for misunderstandings. We must be open with one another. Our happiness is at stake. Tell me honestly, do you like poetry really?'

Margaret hesitated, then answered bravely:

'No, Reginald,' she said. 'It is as you suspect. I am not worthy of you. I do not like poetry. Ah, you shudder! You turn away!'

'I don't,' yelled Reginald. 'I don't. You've made me another man, Margaret!'

She stared, wild−eyed, astonished.

'What! Do you mean that you, too —'

'I should jolly well think I do. I tell you I hate the beastly stuff. I only pretended to like it because I thought you did. The hours I've spent mugging it up! I wonder I've not got brain fever.'

'Reggie! Used you to read it up too? Oh, if I'd only known!'

'And you forgive me — this afternoon, I mean?'

'Of course. You couldn't leave a cricket match. By the way, did you make any runs?'

Reginald coughed.

'A few,' he said, modestly. 'One or two. In fact, rather a lot. As a matter of fact, I made a hundred and thirteen.'

'A hundred and thirteen!' whispered Margaret. 'My hero!'

'You won't be wanting me for a bit, will you?' asked Brewster, nonchalantly. 'Think I'll smoke a cigarette in the garden.'

And sobs from the staircase told that Mrs Melville was already on her way to her room.