

FIRST DAY AT LORD'S

Written for "The Listener" by
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LAST time we had watched cricket it had been on a village green in Buckinghamshire. We had not known players or score, but the sun was shining and the grass was very green. We had stretched out, watched the white figures and drowsed. This was different. This was serious business, played at the very heart of the cricket world. This was Lord's on the first day of the second Test Match between England and New Zealand.

We arrived just after the lunch interval when the sky was hazy with heat and the massed white circle around the pitch was tense and troubled. Compton and Mann were striving to retrieve England's position and there was a stillness with every ball and elation with every run. Thirty thousand people, the papers said, were present. It was a pastel-coloured crowd, white predominating, with blobs of brown that were faces and above them darker smaller blobs that were heads. Brilliant touches of colour stood out, dabs of yellow and blue, and the scarlet of a Chelsea pensioner, standing just below us. It was a sun-scorched crowd, too; dark glasses, straw hats, knotted handkerchiefs and hats from newspapers—all were used for protection. Small boys in their hundreds sat along the inner circle of the grass, watching every stroke of the great Denis and cheering his every run. There were the regulars, grizzled elderly gentlemen with thermos flasks, sandwiches and cushions and an intimate knowledge of all the cricket that has ever been played.

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house. Girls tend to play "leader" games more than boys, and it is easy for the psychologist to see in the leader to player relationship a reflection of the mother's to the children. Promotion from player to leader depends (in such versions as *Colours* and *Steps and Strides*) not on skill but on luck or the leader's personal preference; and this too may be regarded by the determined psychologist as reflecting the fact that female success in life is more dependent on chance and the ability to win friends and influence people.

Physical and Emotional Outlets

One old game whose popularity has remained in spite of the lure of newer alternatives is *King Seenie*, or *Bar the Door*, or *Sheep, sheep Run*. Mr. Sutton-Smith thinks its continuation may have something to do with its resemblance to Rugby, for which it is possibly excellent training. Another game that will always be played is *Cops and Robbers* or *Cowboys and Indians*. The smaller children play cowboys and Indians or just goodies and baddies. As the game ascends in the school it is called by different names, and the juvenile version despised. By the time Standards 5 and



COMPTON IN ACTION—"This was serious business, played at the very heart of the cricket world"

One such gentleman sat next to us and from him we learnt much. He corrected us when we mistook Wallace for Donnelly and when I spoke of mid-on instead of mid-off; and particularly, we learnt from him the reasons for the solemn clapping that occasionally sounded forth.

There was clapping when Compton reached twenty-eight and that signified, we learnt, that he had now made three thousand runs in Test cricket. Another deliberate round of applause when the score was at 212 was for the hundred partnership between Compton and

Bailey. There were other bouts of clapping for more recognisable reasons, a maiden over, a good return, a fine stroke. Denis Compton reached his hundred, there was nothing deliberate about the applause then. The watchers on the grass rose and cheered, and thirty thousand pairs of hands acclaimed him. When he was finally caught, the whole arena stood and clapped him on his way to the pavilion. In the members' stand, too, they stood for him, and we remembered reading what a coveted mark of respect that is to a cricketer. Again they rose a few minutes later when Bailey followed Compton.

WATCHING cricket is a very concentrated business. Over the air the commentator's voice flows so easily; "the ball turned," "swept to leg," "middling it well." But from the stand there seems too much to watch. Keep your eyes on the bowler and you do not see the batsman crouched over his bat. Watch the fieldsman chase the ball, capture and throw it, and you miss the gallop down the pitch. And that afternoon at Lord's there were so many other things to watch. There was the nonchalant stand of the three men in slips and the effortless way a hand would reach out, catch and return a ball all in one gesture. There were the batsmen "gardening" (as John Arlott calls it) down the pitch, thumping at invisible hillocks, tossing infinitesimal pieces of loose turf to the side; and Sutcliffe and Compton chatting together for a moment at the field cross-over. There was the scoreboard to watch with its numbers turning so swiftly that the new score was recorded almost before the ball had reached the boundary. There was the rest of the English team, sitting up on the balcony of the pavilion, with Evans waiting all afternoon with his pads on. There were the scorecards with the results already printed on them and a little note on the back saying that it

was "not practicable to issue fresh cards at the fall of each wicket." There was the solid imperturbability of Burtt, looking at the ball, licking his fingers, bowling, and within seconds and without movement, picking up a ball viciously driven back to him. There were voices, too, to listen to. All round us there was a continual mention of "Denis" and what he was doing for England. There was Bailey's frantic "No" as Compton started an impossible run. And all the time there was the fielding to watch and admire. There was an effortless ease in the way the New Zealanders handled the ball, as though ball and hand must automatically come together. There seemed no thought, no effort, no movement; just a hand stretched out and the ball was there.

With the departure of Compton and Bailey, it was good to see the New Zealand bowlers reaping their reward, but there were anxious moments left when Scott and Sutcliffe came out to fill in the last fifteen minutes. We need not have fretted. Mann ringed Sutcliffe with eight fieldsmen and he slipped a ball just beyond them all, for four. Twenty runs in fifteen minutes and no wickets. It was a good ending to a good day.

Thirty thousand people poured out of Lord's. Barrow boys and newspaper boys waited for them. The crowd read of that other crowd at Wimbledon and that there had been excitement in the tennis world as well. Barrow boys were selling cherries and plums and autographed photos of the New Zealand team for sixpence and "All about the New Zealanders" for a shilling. And so to the queues. Queues stretched far down the road for buses to Baker Street and the West End, and from St. John's Wood Underground Station right down to the corner of the street. Everywhere, paper boys, barrow boys and policemen attended to the crowd.