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Baxter's Second Innings

Henry Drummond





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Author(s): Drummond, Henry

Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library

Subjects: Fiction and juvenile belles lettres
Juvenile belles lettres

Contents

Baxter's Second Innings	1
Preface	2
Baxter's First Innings	3
Swifts: and the Story of the Captain's Shilling	5
Slows: and the Castle that was taken with a Single Gun	8
Screws; and what happened to Bob Fotheringham	10
Why the Demon Bowler was allowed to Bowl: and how the Scoring Sheet was kept	12
Baxter's Second Innings	17



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BAXTER'S SECOND INNINGS

by Henry Drummond

Preface

I THINK the best thing I can do, if I must make a Preface, is to print this letter from Baxter's small brother to another boy:

Dear Charlie,

Would you believe it? some fellow's written a Book about Fred! I think he's in an awful wax. N.B. The Book's a swindle. Except the story of a Castle (and one about a soldier or something) it's all yarn. I've not read it. What a licking we gave the Junior Pelican! I made 13, but they bowl frightful sneaks. Please tell Whitemouse to send me the crib to Caesar instanter.

Yours ever,

MIKE.

P.S.—Don't cut me for sending that book about Fred. I had to. And for any sake don't open it till Sunday.

P.P.S.—Monday. I've read it. It gets awfully serious some places. By the way, tell Whitemouse never to mind that crib just now.

M.

“To acquire all round proficiency, I am strongly convinced that constant practice and sound coaching have all to do with it.”

W. G. GRACE, *Cricket*, p. 221.

“I do not sympathise with the batsman who plays only to keep up his wicket and does not try to hit, but I do sympathise with those who, not possessing great hitting power, keep adding quietly, though slowly, to the score as best they can.”

The Same, p. 222.

Baxter's First Innings

“MAN in!” cried the umpire, and the fielders fell into their places. The Bowler stepped back a pace and poised the ball in his fingers. You never saw Power more clearly written on any face—it was almost weird; and his arm worked like a steel spring. The new Batsman, on the other hand, was only a boy. His cricket jacket was painfully new, and so were his cap and his wondrously varnished bat. And the expression on the great Bowler’s face when the “man in” walked to his wicket was strange to see.

This was Baxter’s first great match. I suppose this accounts for it that he did not recognise the Bowler; but to those of the spectators who *did*, the casual way in which he handled his bat was really ominous. “Does that greenhorn know he’s playing a *match*?” growled one of them. “If he doesn’t wake up I’ll back the first straight ball to finish him. The ass hasn’t even his pads on.”

At that moment the first ball whizzed down the pitch, and if it had been a hairsbreadth more to the right it would have been all over with the new Batsman. The second ball seemed to the spectators a hundred times swifter than the first, but what exactly happened no one ever quite understood. Whether the ball rose on an inequality of the ground, or glanced off the top of the bat, is not certain, but in any case the boy missed when he struck at it, and it caught him sideways on the head. The next moment he lay motionless across the pitch.

When he became conscious he found himself lying in the Pavilion on a pile of coats. “It was a narrow shave,” he heard the doctor say. “Whatever made the young idiot run in to a ball like that?”

“He did not know the bowling, doctor,” said the Captain, who was holding up his head; “it’s his first match. I hope the wound’s not serious?”

“Just missed the temple,” replied the doctor. “If it had struck *there* he was a dead man—sure. As it is, it may smart a bit, but that may be all.”

“Doctor,” whispered the patient, suddenly opening his eyes, “shall I be better next Saturday?”

“Why, you young imbecile?”

“Because I would like a second innings.”

“Innings!” exclaimed the doctor, who pretended to be a little gruff sometimes. “You may get a ball—perhaps two: I should not call that an *innings*.”

“It’s about all I deserve,” said the victim, drearily.

“We’ll see,” whispered the Captain. “Perhaps—”

But here the carriage came to carry the disabled cricketer home.

Some think Baxter dreamed what is now to be told, for the Sunday which followed that Saturday afternoon was very hot and the boy lay in a dozy sort of state in the south bedroom. But some think the Captain, who came in to be with him while the others were at church, had something to do with it. The Captain was not only the most brilliant cricketer in the county, but the best man in it, and though he was seldom known to talk like this, Baxter always quoted the Captain as if the interview which follows was a real report of what he said.

Swifts: and the Story of the Captain's Shilling

"YES, my boy," began the Captain, sitting down beside his sofa, "you made a fool of yourself; but you did not know. Some one should have put you up to it. If you will not think me bumptious, I will tell you something about that fellow's bowling."

"Thank you," said the boy, "I believe I could do better if I only knew his form. He's a regular demon."

"I shall begin by telling you his name," said the Captain. "It is Temptation."

"Tim who?" said the boy.

"Temptation," repeated the Captain.

"Oh!" said the boy, "I hope you're not going to be religious. I thought we were talking about games."

"So we are," replied the Captain, cheerily. "We are talking of the game of Life. You know you asked me last night if you were going to live. If you are to live I had better tell you something about the game. Life is simply a cricket match—with Temptation as Bowler. He's the fellow who takes nearly every boy's wicket some time or other. But perhaps you can't stand this, Baxter. I'll stop it."

"No," said Baxter, "I'm as right as a trivet. Please go on. I know you won't preach."

"Well," continued the Captain, "stop me if I bore you. You see every boy has three wickets to defend. The first is Truth, the second Honour, the third Purity. I—"

"That looks mightily like preaching," interrupted Baxter. "Sermon with three heads: First Truth, Second—"

"No, my boy, I'm not in that line—I am going to tell you about the bowling. I *have* three heads, but not these."

"What are they?"

"Swifts, Slows, and Screws."

"That's better. Excuse me," apologised the boy.

"Now here is what I call a swift. Last winter I was ordering some lemons for a football match at S—the grocer's. By mistake I dropped some loose silver on the floor, and the pieces went scurrying all over the place. One piece—a shilling—rolled over to where the message-boy

was filling a basket, and quick as lightning he covered it with his foot and began to back against the sugar barrels till he had it safely stowed away. Presently, after I had gathered up the seven or eight other pieces and was completing my purchase, he stooped down and pretended to tie his shoe. Then he whisked the coin into his pocket, whistled "Rule Britannia," and went on with his work.

"I said nothing though I saw the whole game. There stood the culprit with his middle stump—Honour—as clean bowled as I ever saw it done. It was a downright ugly theft, and but for one thing I should have exposed him there and then. That one thing was that the ball which took him was a *swift*. The best of boys are sometimes taken with swifts. It was a swift that bowled out Peter when the girl sprang that question on him the night the cock crowed. As a matter of fact I found out that this boy was a fairly decent fellow, and a Sunday-school scholar. I waited two days to let the thing right itself—for that often happens with "swift" catastrophes. Then I waylaid the boy where I could talk to him without being seen. It was as I expected. The poor soul had spent the two most miserable days of his life. If he had had ten seconds to think what he was doing instead of the tenth of a second he would never have done it. As for the shilling, this penitent thief had bought twelve stamps with it and was watching his chance to post them to my house."

"How to play swifts?" the Captain went on, "that's not so easily said. You see the situation is something like this: A boy will tell a sudden lie where he would have spoken the truth if he had had a minute to consider. Well, this means that he is really two boys, a good boy and a bad boy. Now, the bad boy is usually on the spot first. It takes a few seconds for the other, as it were, to come up, and before he arrives the mischief is done. The thing to do, therefore, is to hurry up the good boy."

"But why should the bad boy turn up first?"

"You will understand it if we call them the new boy and the old boy. I suspect the bad boy has the start at birth. The new boy is born later. The thing is to grow the new boy and starve the old one till he is too thin and broken down to do much harm. We all know boys who could not do a mean thing. It is no effort to them not to do it; they have so nourished the better nature that it would be impossible to do it. What helps a cricketer in playing swifts is largely the sort of physical man he is. All his muscles are so up to the mark, and his faculties so alive and braced that he can rise to anything at a moment's notice. He plays a ball by instinct rather than by premeditation."

"You mean that swifts must be prepared for beforehand rather than when they come."

“Pretty much. The time to get ready a ship for the storm is not when the hurricane is on, but when the planks are being picked, and the bolts driven home in the dockyard. Build a boy of sound timber and he’ll weather most things.”

“But what if the swifts come straight at your head like that one yesterday,” suggested Baxter.

“Ah,” said the Captain, “it’s almost too ignominious to say it, but when that happens you had better get out of the way. It may look cowardly, but it is not really. There are temptations so awful that the strong thing to do is simply to step aside and let them pass. A lion won’t face a blaze, though any ignorant baby will. No, Baxter, some balls you can score off, and some you can only stand still and block; some you can slip for two and some you can drive over the ropes for four. But some—well, the best thing you can do is simply to duck your head.”

“Pity we couldn’t be all over pads,” laughed Baxter. “Head pads wouldn’t be bad.”

“And forget to put them on,” smiled the Captain. “Yes, there are lots of safeguards and we cannot put on too many, but unfortunately they don’t cover everything. I like pads because they have a sort of *defensive* feel. You seem rather to look down on them, Baxter.”

“Yes,” said Baxter ruefully, “because *I’m* an ass!”

Slows: and the Castle that was taken with a Single Gun

HERE Baxter's beef-tea came in. This was the old cook's institution—everybody who stayed at home from church had always to take beef-tea. While he was sipping it the monologue went on.

"When the Bowler sees you are up to swifts," resumed the Captain, "he turns on slows. What makes them deadly is that they look so insufferably stupid. They come dribbling along the pitch and you slog at them gaily—with the probable alternative of being "caught" if you hit, or "bowled" if you miss. Good slows are about as diabolical as anything in that region can be—and that's saying a good deal. The average boy is fairly proof against a very big temptation; it is the little ones that play the mischief."

"How's that?" asked Baxter, laying down his cup.

"We are mostly too proud to go wrong in a big way. Notorious sins are bad form; but when quiet temptations come which no one knows about, even the strongest may break down. Then of course there's the other side. One thing that keeps us up in great matches is the applause of the spectators. But on the week-days, when we are practising alone against the slow monotony of a private sin, there is no crowd to cheer us when we win or hiss at us when we lose. These are really the great days, Baxter. They are the decisive battles of a boy's life."

"But must a fellow meet *every* ball," said Baxter, "every miserable little slow? If he's a good all round man, is that not enough?"

"What do you mean?" said the Captain. "Do you mean that if we are ninety-nine parts good it does not matter if the hundredth part is a little shady?"

"I know I'm wrong," said Baxter, "but surely we are not meant to be *all* saint? Take your three wickets, for instance. I'm quite aware that if one is down the rest are down; but suppose a fellow keeps all these fairly standing—Truth, Honour, Purity—what more need he care for?"

"Baxter, you have forgotten something. There are more than wickets."

"What?"

"*Bails*," said the Captain.

Baxter was silent.

“I’ve lost several matches that way, Baxter. Stumps all standing; only one miserable inch of a bail off. No, we must play a whole game—no sneaking.

“But I’ll tell you something more. I believe Temptation sometimes does nothing but bowl at the bails. Some players are so much on their guard that it would be useless trying anything else. I suppose you know that every boy has some one weak point to which nearly all the bowling is directed.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, each boy has his own Temptation—different in different cases, but always some one thing which keeps coming back and back—back and back day after day till he is tired and sick. What though he score off all the other balls if this one takes him? It’s not new sins that destroy a man—it’s the drip, drip, drip of an old one.

“Have you ever heard of the Castle that was taken with a single gun? It stood on the Rhine, and its walls were yards thick, and the old knight who lived in it laughed when he saw the enemy come with only a single cannon. But they planted the cannon on a little hill, and all day long they loaded and fired, and loaded and fired, without ever moving the muzzle an inch. Every shot struck exactly the same spot on the wall, but the first day passed and they had scarcely scratched the stone. So the old knight drank up his wine cup and went to his bed in peace. Day after day the cannonade went on, and the more they fired the louder the knight laughed, and the more wine he drank, and the sounder he slept. At the end of a week one stone was in splinters; in a month the one behind it was battered to powder; in ten months a breach was made wide enough for the enemy to enter and capture the castle. That is how a boy’s heart is most often taken. If I had any advice to offer anybody I should say “Beware of the slow sins—the old recurring Temptation which is powerful not so much in what it is or in what it does *once*, but in the awful patience of its continuance. It is by the ceaseless battery of a commonplace Temptation that the moral nature is undermined and the citadel of great souls won.”

Here the Captain paused. Baxter lay very still, as if he had fallen asleep. His visitor rose gently and made on tiptoe for the door. He was opening it when the boy exclaimed:

“And what about the *screws*?”

“I thought you were asleep,” said the Captain. “I was afraid I bored you.”

“I was never more awake in my life,” said the boy. “I was thinking. All that’s new to me. If you don’t mind I should like to hear the rest.”

“I protest,” urged the Captain; “—but I will at least tell you a story.”

Screws; and what happened to Bob Fotheringham

“WHEN I was a youngster there was a sort of Prize Boy in our village called Bob Fotheringham. He came to my mother’s Sunday Class, and was the best boy in it. Every one liked Bob; he was good at everything, and especially clever with his fingers, and his father wanted him to follow his own business of carpenter. But Bob had a rich uncle who kept a public-house. On busy Saturdays the boy used to go there and bear a hand in an amateur sort of way. Sometimes a drunk man would take a fancy to him and give him money, so that Bob learned to get money easily and became rather fond of it. Just as he finished school his uncle offered to make a publican of him. He had no sons of his own, and he half promised Bob that one day the business would be his.

“Now Bob did not like the public-house. But how could he lose such a chance? He need not touch drink himself, he argued; and if he did not sell it some one else would. So he decided. His parents solemnly warned him to let it alone, but Bob urged that it would only be for a few years, and then he would set up in some other business and do good with the fortune he would make. Bob’s heart was full of good, and I verily believe he meant to end his days by becoming a great philanthropist.

“But there was a *screw* on that ball. A screw goes wide at first and then suddenly rounds upon you and twists in among your wickets before you know where you are. For three or four years Bob lived as straight as a parson. When his uncle died he found he had to sample what he bought. What harm? Better to sell good stuff than bad. The business went swimmingly, and Bob had to sample a good deal oftener than he liked. Finally, he “liked” a good deal oftener than he had to sample. After that he was always “sampling.” You know the rest. One day a bail fell off. Bob thought no one noticed it and went on with the game for a year or two. Then a wicket fell—Truth then Honour. Do you remember that blackguard who used to sell Cards at the Sports? That was Bob.”

“There’s something all wrong there,” cried Baxter almost fiercely. “I don’t blame Bob. How was he to know that was a screw?”

“My boy,” said the Captain, “I’m glad to see you frightened.”

“Frightened! Why, this might happen to any of us. How is a fellow to know he is not being taken in all the time?”

“You mean if you were Bob you would just have done the same?”

“Certainly; I would do it to-morrow.”

“No, you would not, Baxter.”

“Why?”

“Because you are frightened. Bob was not frightened. A man who underrates the strength of an enemy is pretty sure of a licking. When you are constantly on the watch for screws the game is half won.”

“But I don’t see how he could have escaped this trap. It looked all right.”

“Screws always do,” replied the Captain. “That’s where they differ from swifths. But where Bob went off the rails is plain. First, he disobeyed his parents; second, he wanted to make money regardless of consequences either to himself or others; third, he trifled with one of the biggest temptations in the world.”

“I hope that’s all,” said Baxter.

“No, there is one thing more. I won’t mention it unless you wish, Baxter.”

“What was it?”

“Well, he did not—he did not *pray*.”

“Perhaps he thought that was only for women.”

“The people who need it most are boys,” said the Captain seriously. “If Bob had done that he would not have “entered” Temptation. Bob saw the gate open and walked straight in.”

Why the Demon Bowler was allowed to Bowl: and how the Scoring Sheet was kept

“IT’S a good deal blacker than I thought,” said Baxter. “That Bowler knows his business. But I should like to ask a question—if you’re finished.”

“I’m only beginning,” said the Captain, “but I think it’s your turn. That bowling would take another month to tell about. I’ve only mentioned three kinds, and there’s heaps more—sneaks, for instance, and *mixtures*—”

“Mixtures?”

“Yes. When the Bowler *alternates*. He’ll send in one ball slow, the next swift, and the third perhaps a wide, to throw you off your guard—dodgy, Baxter, isn’t it?”

“It’s downright low,” cried Baxter. “That’s just what my question was about. You won’t be angry?”

“No,” said the Captain, “go ahead.”

“Well,” said Baxter, “*Why do they let him play?*”

“They let him play,” replied the Captain, “to make a good game. Every boy who is worth his salt likes to play in a great match, and there cannot be a great match without him.”

“I thought it a disgrace to have anything to do with him.”

“No. It is an honour.”

“An honour!”

“Yes, the greatest honour of a boy’s life. You have heard of the wise man who ‘counted it joy.’”

“Joy! I count it uncommon hard lines. It’s bad enough to call it an honour, but to call it joy—I find it most disgustingly miserable.”

“Stop,” said the Captain, “we are at cross purposes. You are talking about *Sin*. I was not.”

“About what then?”

“About *Temptation*.”

“But they’re the same thing.”

“They’re as different as night and day! Temptation is no sin.”

“I don’t see how that can be,” said Baxter. “I never dreamt it was anything else. Are you quite sure?”

“Positive. You can see for yourself. Did Christ ever sin?”

“No.”

“Was He ever tempted?”

“Well, sometimes.”

“No, not sometimes, *always*. A boy can be tempted every hour of the day, yet he need not sin. Keep that distinction in mind, Baxter; it will save you a lot of trouble. Don’t think it’s all up because you are tempted. Temptation is only an invitation; it does not become sin till you accept it. The hang-dog sense of being a hopelessly bad lot, the idea that it’s no use trying to be any better because we are so often tempted, is a mistake. That’s what often turns the finest fellows into sneaks—fellows who, if they only knew that Temptation was no sin, would hold up their heads and play the man. The guilt of doing wrong, when one *does* do it, is quite enough to stagger under without feeling that the Temptation is criminal.”

“Even then,” said Baxter, “I don’t see where the *honour* comes in.”

“When I was at school,” replied the Captain, “I was Secretary of the Cricket Club. You may guess my astonishment when one morning the post brought a challenge from the All England Eleven! That was about the biggest day of my life. I suppose, though we did not know it then, they challenged every club in the Kingdom; and though we modestly declined it, there was not a boy in the Eleven who did not feel an inch taller for the rest of the season. *This* challenge, Baxter, is considerably more honourable. Temptation is the greatest Bowler in the world.”

“All the same, I wish I had not to play him,” said Baxter.

“Then you would never come to anything. You would be a poor weak noodle to the end of the chapter. A boy’s only chance of coming to anything is when he is tempted. That’s what makes a boy play up. How could you score if there were no bowling?”

This was certainly a conundrum, and the boy thought hard for a minute.

“You write shorthand, Baxter?” resumed the Captain. “I heard you got the prize there?”

“Yes,” said Baxter. “But I don’t think I need take down what you’ve said. Anything that is dead straight like that goes in to a fellow.”

“That’s not what I meant,” laughed the Captain. “But how did you win that prize?”

“Practice,” said Baxter. “There’s nothing in it. It’s all practice.”

“And what made you such a good oar?”

“Who told you I pulled?”

“The mantelpiece,” said the Captain, smiling. “Do you think I don’t know the Junior cup when I see it?”

“Well,” blushed Baxter, “I suppose it’s the same thing—Practice. Everything seems practice.”

“I agree,” said the Captain, “*everything*—down to tying your necktie. But did you ever think what makes a good man? No? Well, it’s the same thing that makes a boy a good oar, or a good shot, or a good anything; it’s practice. A boy who never goes to the gymnasium or uses the dumb-bells gets no muscle in his arm. A boy who never pushes against Temptation gets no muscle in his character. Temptation is simply dumb-bells. It is really a splendid thing. The more practice a fellow gets the stronger he can become. Every ball the Bowler sends in is a chance to score.”

“I shouldn’t care about scoring,” said the boy, “if I could only keep up my wicket.”

“Baxter,” said the Captain, “that’s not *Cricket*. I see you have never read Grace’s book. When you get hold of it, turn up page 222 or somewhere thereabouts—I was reading it last night.”

“What does he say?” asked the boy.

“He says, *The duty of a batsman is to make runs.*”

“I wish I could,” said Baxter. “That’s just what I can’t do. I’m bowled every time.”

“Oh no, Baxter!”

“It’s true,” replied Baxter, “I’m not going to be a humbug to you. I’m a bigger fool than Bob. That Castle that was taken with the single gun—that’s me. Every day almost I’m bowled out. Nobody knows it. I’m the worst fellow ever breathed.” And he turned away his head. I suppose he expected sympathy, but for some minutes the Captain made no reply. Then he looked at the boy almost sternly.

“Baxter, this will be found out.”

“What I’ve done?” cried the boy.

“Possibly, very likely; but if you go on being bowled out it will certainly be known.”

“How?”

“There are reporters at every match.”

“No, no! Not in this case. It’s a private pitch.”

“But I tell you it’s all written down—all.”

“Where?”

“On the scoring-sheet.”

“What scoring-sheet?”

“Your scoring-sheet. Your *character*.”

“Oh!” groaned Baxter.

“Yes,” continued the Captain, almost mercilessly, “it’s all there, every innings you play and every run you make and every ball you miss. There’s not a mistake on that sheet, nor an omission. Character cannot lie. Character cannot be taken in. Character hides nothing. It forgets nothing.

“Centuries ago a soldier scribbled a bad word on the barrack-wall of a Roman city. A mile or two off slumbered a burning mountain. One day the mountain awoke, and the lava poured from its crater, and ashes rained upon the city and covered it up, and it was hidden and forgotten for seventeen hundred years. Then a peasant, digging a well in his garden, struck his shaft into the amphitheatre; the ashes were dug away, and Pompeii was restored. As you walk through the silent streets to-day the guide takes you to that barrack and lets you see the writing on the wall. And as you read, you think of the long dead soldier’s living sin. And you shudder as you remember that no sin can ever die, that what one *is* is the record of what one has been.”

“Oh!” said the boy huskily, “this game is terrible, terrible. I—I don’t see how I can risk it.”

“Risk what?”

“Another innings. I can’t face that bowling. And the past?—it’s a frightful handicap.”

“The past can be forgiven, Baxter,” said the Captain quietly. “Can it?” said the boy. “Thank you for saying that much.” Then he broke out again. “But is there the ghost of a chance? Could I ever win? I might block for a bit perhaps, but I could never score.”

“Baxter,” said the Captain, “I think you will win.”

“You do?” replied the boy. “Why?”

“First, because you are frightened; second, because you are in earnest; third, because your Captain never lost a match.”

“But I can’t always have you,” sighed Baxter.

“My boy, I’m not your Captain,” answered his friend, taking him by the hand. “I could not help you much if I would. But you need a Captain, Baxter. You must have one. Do you understand?”

It was nearly ten minutes before Baxter spoke. Then he uncovered his face and pressed his visitor’s hand. “Yes,” he whispered, “I know. I was almost funkng it. But I think I’ll go in.”

Baxter's Second Innings

(Extract from the Athletic Column – Weekly Chronicle)

“. . . BUT the feature of the match was the play of young Baxter who made such an unfortunate spill last Saturday. It was clear that he meant to retrieve himself in the Second Innings for he was in such form—at least after the first over—that the Bowler could make nothing of him. He began by blocking every ball in a dogged sort of way, but soon started scoring, running up threes and fours in rapid succession. After an unusually brilliant drive for six, he seemed to become over-confident, and made a narrow escape by cutting a ball he ought to have blocked, but with this exception he did not offer a chance, and was well up the score-list before time was called for lunch.

“After luncheon the Bowler changed to slows, and the batsman, who showed weakness here, had certainly a hard time to keep his wicket. But eventually he mastered the situation, and from playing a merely defensive game began to knock the ball about right and left and was into three figures almost immediately. Baxter kept up this form to the close, and after one of the most careful and brilliant innings we have seen, carried his bat for the top score of the season. Our reporter, unfortunately, was not present afterwards in the Pavilion, but we understand the usual ceremony was duly performed and the Captain, in a congratulatory speech, presented the lion of the hour with the traditional cricket-bat.”