thought of his remarkable droppers need not influence us much, since they would probably have been got out pretty cheaply by any sort of bowling. None the less, Scougall watched the procession to and from the cow-shed which served as a pavilion with an appreciative eye, and his views as to the possibilities lying in the dropper became clearer than before. At the end of the innings he touched the bowler upon the shoulder.

"That seems all right," he said.

"No, I couldn't quite get the length—and, of course, they did drop catches."

"Yes, I agree that you could do better. Now look here; you are second master at a school, are you not?"

"That is right."

"You could get a day's leave if I wangled with the chief?"

"It might be done."

"Well, I want you next Tuesday. Sir George Sanderson's house-party team is playing the Free Foresters at Ringwood. You must bowl for Sir George."

Tom Spedegue flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, I say!" was all he could stammer out.

"I'll work it somehow or other. I suppose you don't bat?"

"Average nine," said Spedegue, proudly.

Scougall laughed. "Well, I noticed that you were not a bad fielder near the wicket."

"I usually hold them."

"Well, I'll see your boss and you will hear from me again."

Scougall was really taking a great deal of trouble in this small affair, for he went down to Totton and saw the rather grim head master. It chanced, however, that the old man had been a bit of a sport in his day, and he relaxed when Scougall explained the inner meaning of it all. He laughed incredulously, however, and shook his head when Scougall whispered some aspiration.

"Nonsense!" was his comment.

"Well, there is a chance."

"Nonsense!" said the old man once again.

"It would be the making of your school."

"It certainly would," the head master replied. "But it is nonsense all the same."

Scougall saw the head master again on the morning after the Free Forester match.

"You see it works all right," he said.

"Yes, against third-class men."

"Oh, I don't know. Donaldson was playing, and Murphy. They were not so bad. I tell you they are the most amazed set of men in Hampshire. I have bound them all over to silence."

"Why?"

"Surprise is the essence of the matter. Now I'll take it a stage farther. By Jove, what a joke it would be!" The old cricketer and the sporting schoolmaster roared with laughter as they thought of the chances of the future.

ALL England was absorbed in one question at that moment. Politics, business, even taxation had passed from people's minds. The one engrossing subject was the fifth Test Match. Twice England had won by a narrow margin, and twice Australia had barely struggled to victory. Now in a week Lord's was to be the scene of the final and crucial battle of giants. What were the chances, and how was the English team to be made up?

It was an anxious time for the Selection Committee, and three more harassed men than Sir James Gilpin, Mr. Tarding, and Dr. Sloper were not to be found in London. They sat now in the committee-room of the great pavilion, and they moodily scanned the long list of possibles which lay before them, weighing the claims of this man or that, closely inspecting the latest returns from the county matches, and arguing how far a good all-rounder was a better bargain than a man who was supremely good in one department but weak in another—such men, for example, as Worsley of Lancashire, whose average was seventy-one, but who was a sluggard in the field; or Scott of Leicestershire, who was near the top of the bowling and quite at the foot of the batting averages. A week of such work had turned the committee into three jaded old men.

"There is the question of endurance," said Sir James, the man of many years and much experience. "A three days' match is bad enough, but this is to be played out and may last a week. Some of these top average men are getting on in years."

"Exactly," said Tarding, who had himself captained England again and again. "I am all for young blood and new methods. The trouble is that we know their bowling pretty well, and as for them on a marled wicket they can play ours with their eyes shut. Each side is likely to make five hundred per innings, and a very little will make the difference between us and them."

"It's just that very little that we have got to find," said solemn old Dr. Sloper, who had the reputation of being the greatest living authority upon the game. "If we could give them something new! But, of course, they have played every county and sampled everything we have got."

"What can we ever have that is new?" cried Tarding. "It is all played out."

"Well, I don't know," said Sir James. "Both the swerve and the googlie have

come along in our time. But Bosanquets don't appear every day. We want brain as well as muscle behind the ball."

"Funny we should talk like this," said Dr. Sloper, taking a letter from his pocket. "This is from old Scougall, down in Hampshire. He says he is at the end of a wire and is ready to come up if we want him. His whole argument is on the very lines we have been discussing. New blood, and a complete surprise—that is his slogan."

"Does he suggest where we are to find it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact he does. He has dug up some unknown fellow from the back of beyond who plays for the second eleven of the Mudtown Blackbeetles or the Hinton Chawbacons or some such team, and he wants to put him straight in to play for England. Poor old Scougie has been out in the sun."

"At the same time there is no better captain than Scougall used to be. I don't think we should put his opinion aside too easily. What does he say?"

"Well, he is simply red-hot about it. 'A revelation to me.' That is one phrase. 'Could not have believed it if I had not seen it.' 'May find it out afterwards, but it is bound to upset them the first time.' That is his view."

"And where is this wonder man?"

"He has sent him up so that we can see him if we wish. Telephone the Thackeray Hotel, Bloomsbury."

"Well, what do you say?"

"Oh, it's pure waste of time," said Tarding. "Such things don't happen, you know. Even if we approved of him, what would the country think and what would the Press say?"

Sir James stuck out his grizzled jaw.

"Damn the country and the Press, too!" said he. "We are here to follow our own judgment, and I jolly well mean to do so."

"Exactly," said Dr. Sloper.

Tarding shrugged his broad shoulders.

"We have enough to do without turning down a side-street like that," said he. "However, if you both think so, I won't stand in the way. Have him up by all means and let us see what we make of him."

HALF an hour later a very embarrassed young man was standing in front of the famous trio and listening to a series of very searching questions, to which he was giving such replies as he was able. Much of the ground which Scougall had covered in the Forest was explored by them once more.

"It boils down to this, Mr. Spedegue. You've once in your life played in good company. That is the only criterion. What exactly did you do?"

Spedegue pulled a slip of paper, which was already frayed from much use, out of his waistcoat pocket.

"This is *The Hampshire Telegraph* account, sir."

Sir James ran his eye over it and read snatches aloud. "Much amusement was caused by the bowling of Mr. T. E. Spedegue." "Hum! That's rather two-edged. Bowling should not be a comic turn. After all, cricket is a serious game. Seven wickets for thirty-four. Well, that's better. Donaldson is a good man. You got him, I see. And Murphy, too! Well, now, would you mind going into the pavilion and waiting? You will find some pictures there that will amuse you if you value the history of the game. We'll send for you presently."

When the youth had gone the Selection Committee looked at each other in puzzled silence.

"You simply can't do it!" said Tarding at last. "You can't face it. To play a bumpkin like that because he once got seven wickets for thirty-four in country-house cricket is sheer madness. I won't be a party to it."

"Wait a bit, though! Wait a bit!" cried Sir James. "Let us thresh it out a little before we decide."

So they threshed it out, and in half an hour they sent for Tom Spedegue once more. Sir James sat with his elbows on the table and his finger-tips touching while he held forth in his best judicial manner. His conclusion was a remarkable one.

"So it comes to this, Mr. Spedegue, that we all three want to be on surer ground before we take a step which would rightly expose us to the most tremendous public criticism. You will therefore remain in London, and at three-forty-five to-morrow morning, which is just after dawn, you will come down in your flannels to the side entrance of Lord's. We will, under pledge of secrecy, assemble twelve or thirteen ground-men whom we can trust, including half-a-dozen first-class bats. We will have a wicket prepared on the practice ground, and we will try you out under proper conditions with your ten fielders and all. If you fail, there is an end. If you make good, we may consider your claim."

"Good gracious, sir, I made no claim."

"Well, your friend Scougall did for you. But anyhow, that's how we have fixed it. We shall be there, of course, and a few others whose opinion we can trust. If you care to wire Scougall he can come too. But the whole thing is secret, for we quite see the point that it must be a complete surprise or a wash-out. So you will keep your mouth shut and we shall do the same."

Thus it came about that one of the most