
Opening Extract from...

A Last English Summer

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CHAPTER ONE

WHY DON'T YOU COME BACK WHEN IT'S LESS BUSY?

Michael Vaughan contemplates the 'uncertain glory of an April day' as another shower disrupts the start of the 2009 season at Lord's.

Lord's: MCC v. The Champion County, Durham, 9–12 April

The all-rounder turned writer-poet R. C. Robertson-Glasgow always believed that 'by foot' was the best and most respectful way to approach Lord's. It enables you, he said, to 'drink the slow, deep draught of anticipation'. He was right, and never more so than on the opening day of the season. For there are certain rules and rituals which rigorously apply to it, and the first is the obligatory walk, which became so familiar to Robertson-Glasgow from the moment he became chief correspondent of the *Morning Post* in 1933. It owes everything to history and – if done properly – the journey ought really to begin from Dorset Square beside an unobtrusive brown plaque with a peculiar arrangement of capital letters. It declares that:

> THOMAS LORD
> laid out his original
> CRICKET GROUND
> on this site in 1787

To start here is akin to bowing in deference to him. His portrait, which hangs in its gold frame in the Long Room, makes Lord look an unattractive, plain figure: balding with combed tufts of frosty hair, heavy eyebrows hooding the inky dots of his eyes, a long blade of a nose and thin, tight lips that suppress a half-smile. He wears a high, white starched shirt and a coal-black coat. Without Lord and his entrepreneurial acumen, there would be no Lord's. When Dorset Fields was just an untidy scrap of land, Lord fenced it, built a wood hut to store bat, ball and stumps and let the high-falutin' gentlemen of the White Conduit Club preen themselves within its rough boundary before the creation of the MCC. To set off from the Georgian elegance of Dorset Square today, with early blossom clinging to the branches of its trees, is to stroll with benign ghosts in breeches. Here, Alexander, Duke of Hamilton (sadly, no relation), once drove the ball so hard and high that it travelled one hundred and thirty-two yards.

Beyond Dorset Square is the rust-coloured brick-and-glass-canopied entrance of Marylebone Station, which John Betjeman described as the 'most gracious' of terminals. He thought he always heard birdsong on the platforms. There's no birdsong today; just the rattle of fully loaded lorries,

the din of revving engines and the impatient hooting of horns from black cabs. Any bird has to splutter a tune through exhaust fumes.

Eventually the road turns into Lisson Grove. On his route, which he described in 1951, Robertson-Glasgow picked out the 'cigarette shop', which had 'not changed', a boy pulling a boat on a string along Regent's Canal and the anglers dotted on its banks. The cigarette shop is now Tesco Express with glowing signage. The canal's chocolate-brown water is still and the banks are bare. Halfway along Lisson Grove is a second, grander plaque crested with the MCC's neat insignia. As a Yorkshireman, who always kept a gimlet eye on his wallet, Lord refused to pay increased rent on Dorset Fields. When his lease expired, he rolled up his turf and carried it here instead. The plaque – a pale, fading blue – commemorates the site of: 'The second Lord's Cricket Ground 1811–1813'. It sat on what is now the charmless, low grey sprawl of a housing estate. With an extension to the Regent's Canal threatening to slice off most of his outfield, Lord soon pocketed £4,000 in compensation and moved gratefully for the third and last time.

Sometimes to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive; but not in this case. At the top of Lisson Grove, between the choking traffic, is Lord's at last. Posters advertising today's fixture are attached to its outer wall. The blood-red font is quaintly old-fashioned, as though still belonging to the polite, sepia age when Jack Hobbs and Herbert Sutcliffe were paired on the scorecard. Those of us who have already arrived – it is 9.30 a.m. – won't be allowed inside for another half an hour. A dozen pairs of eyes peer pleadingly through the lofty magnificence of the Grace Gates, as if expecting the green-jacketed stewards to show some pity. The gates are a finely ornate example of Bromsgrove ironwork. The stone pillar, with its tribute to W. G. worn by the weather, is so grand that it wouldn't look out of place in Highgate Cemetery with the good doctor's bones buried beneath it.

I'm relieved to be early, and mindful of the advice J. M. Kilburn – one of Robertson-Glasgow's contemporaries in the press box – once gave about coming to Lord's: 'To arrive breathless and dishevelled at the main gate would be an offence almost beyond forgiveness.' As the most patrician of writers, deferential to the MCC and its traditions, Kilburn expected what he wrote about it to be taken seriously. None of us loitering on the pavement, repeatedly glancing at our watches in the forlorn hope that doing so might hurry time along, is dishevelled; and we are only

breathless for the beginning of the match. Our numbers slowly grow. There is pole-thin man in a blue windcheater and jeans who mournfully reports that he's recently been made redundant from his job – 'another victim of the recession', he says – and will be watching 'more cricket than usual'. He clutches a Lord's cushion against his chest. There is a trim gent with a prominent nose, shaped like a fin, and protuberant cheekbones, the reddish skin pulled tight across them. His veins are like marks in marble. He is wearing a deerstalker and a tweed jacket, as if dressed for an afternoon's shooting on the moors. There are two elderly couples, who greet one another in the fulsome, short sentences of Hirst greeting Spooner in Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land*. 'Ah,' says the woman, offering her left cheek for a kiss. 'The South Africans last summer. Smith and McKenzie. Hundreds for both. Lovely day. How are you?' The reply is sucked away on the stiffish breeze.

Those of us who aren't MCC members are told to buy our £15 ticket from a wooden, padlocked door set into the wall. Soon a young, sallow attendant appears clutching a set of keys. The door, rusted over the winter, refuses to budge without a heave, which threatens to take it off at the hinges. When it does open, the attendant reaches for strips of plasticene, rolls them into several tight balls and produces an oblong notice which he fastens on to the wall. 'PLAY IS NOT GUARANTEED', it says, like the warning small print of a contract. 'REFUNDS WILL NOT BE GIVEN'. Play certainly isn't guaranteed this morning. The proof that we live on a small, damp island is all around us. The sky is the colour of slate. Spots of rain are falling. The wind – gathering in strength – cuts like a scythe. On one hand it is ridiculous to be playing a showpiece game so prematurely when low fronts and powerful gusts roll in from the Atlantic like a punishment. If not thoroughly drenched, we'll all be blown and buffeted and end up looking as though we've been storm-tossed at sea. On the other, cricket's congested calendar, top-heavy with Twenty20 and other assorted one-day jamborees, must squeeze in matches such as this one whenever it can.

As well as the glacial cold, rain or bad light are sure to act as prolonged punctuation marks during the next eight hours. But the visceral experience of the moment – to be at Lord's at the very beginning of the season – outweighs the discomforts. And enduring the foul bleakness of what Shakespeare euphemistically described as the 'uncertain glory of an April day' is yet another part of the ritual; a rite of

passage into what will hopefully turn into a long hot summer. You have to be suffering from a gentle madness to want to be here in such wretched conditions. To miss it would still be the greater lunacy. I willingly pay my money. I take my purple ticket. I walk through the Grace Gates. I count a knot of twenty-eight others jostling beside me and calculate our average age as seventy-three; hardly older than the patriarchs of Genesis, but old enough in total years to suggest we've survived harsher mornings than this one.

The away dressing room at Lord's is small and sparse. The walls are apple-green and white. In one corner, there's a glass-fronted drinks cooler and a silver kettle with an assortment of cups and saucers. Cheap plastic coat hangers dangle from shiny gold pegs beneath the honours' board – black capital lettering on pale oak – which is like turning the pages of every *Wisden* ever published. There's S. J. (Sid) Pegler's 7-65 for South Africa two years before the Great War; Bob Massie's improbable 16 Ashes wickets in 1972; Gordon Greenidge's 214 in 1984; and centuries for Ganguly and Jayawardene, Mankad and Hardstaff. On the functional white board near the door, there are three points written in streaky blue ink:

10.25 a.m.: Toss
10.30 a.m.: Photo in Harris garden
11.00 p.m.: Scheduled start

The two captains, Rob Key of MCC and Durham's Will Smith, walk through the Long Room and trot down the pavilion steps punctually. In the Long Room, where Lord's alternates displays from its collection of 2,000 paintings, someone has mischievously hung Sir Donald Bradman's portrait directly beside Douglas Jardine's. When Jardine died, aged only fifty-seven, in June 1958, Bradman was asked to provide a few perfunctory sentences about him for posterity. With Bodyline still a sore on his flesh, Bradman gave a terse 'No comment'. Below them is the round, pink face of Pelham Warner, the MCC's manager on the tour, who betrayed the captain after it was over. With the second Ashes Test at Lord's only two and a half months away, I doubt politics and politeness will allow the Bradman–Jardine–Warner juxtaposition to survive until then.

The Long Room floor is well swept, and the sturdy wooden chairs stand in two immaculate rows, as if as regimentally as troops on parade. Alan Ross's poem 'Test Match at Lord's' immediately comes to my mind.

Bailey bowling, McLean cuts him late for one
I walk from the Long Room into the slanting sun
Two ancients stop as Statham starts his run
Then, elbows linked, but straight as sailors
On a tilting deck, they move. One square shouldered as a tailor's
Model, leans over, whispering in the other's ear:
'Go easy. Steps here. This end bowling'
Turning, I watch Barnes guide Rhodes into fresher air
As if to continue an innings, though Rhodes may only play by ear

Ross's poem is like a bridge arching back into the past, and the image it leaves on the eye lingers like a handprint on glass. Reading these nine lines summons Sydney Barnes and the sightless Wilfred Rhodes into the Long Room again. In my imagination I half expect Walter Hammond or Frank Woolley also to pass through in their pomp: fit and lithe and lean with their faces unlined, a bat tucked underneath the arm or a long-sleeved sweater draped across the shoulder. Appearing instead is Michael Vaughan. The build-up to the game has focused almost exclusively around him. The question is whether he can recover his England place four years after his captaincy wrestled the Ashes from Australia. The television cameras and photographers stare hard at Vaughan. The lenses of both trail him wherever he goes like a stage spotlight.

It is impossible not to think about his lachrymose but dignified farewell from the England captaincy in 2008; the way Vaughan slowly dissolved into soft sobs when telling a press conference what his father had said to him. 'You can walk away a proud lad because you've given it everything.' A week or so after his resignation I watched Vaughan in the County Championship at Scarborough, where he was awfully out of form and kilter. The devotion of his home crowd, like palliative care, dragged him through a difficult four days. The same level of devotion is palpable today. There is a choreographed approval for Vaughan; murmurs of good luck, handshakes and slaps on the back. Indeed, the crowd seems intent on treating him like a convalescent.

The previous afternoon Vaughan was in the Nursery End nets. He wore his black Yorkshire helmet and tracksuit top and strapped gleaming pads on to bare calves. With each ball, he came forward with a big, decisive stride; the sort of stride, in fact, that Geoffrey Boycott always maintains was the true sign of his own prime form. But Vaughan didn't middle every shot. He mistimed a drive off Sajid Mahmood, which ballooned in the direction of extra cover. He took an extravagant swish at a ball from Kabir Ali and got a faint but audible nick. The ball swished and bulged against the back of the net in front him. 'That'll do,' he said, moving into the next net, where Adil Rashid was bowling; Yorkshire master faced Yorkshire pupil. Rashid is just twenty-one; Vaughan is thirty-four. He came down the pitch and tried to lift the leg spinner towards the Indoor School. He was too early on the shot. The ball struck the bottom of the bat and squirted miserably along the ground. Rashid smiled and playfully wagged his finger at him. 'Nearly got you there,' he said.

Vaughan will have to wait to find out whether his coordination has returned properly. Key wins the toss and decides to bowl. He plants his right hand into the pocket of his MCC blazer – in the manner of the Duke of Edinburgh at an official function – and strides off, smart enough to have wandered out of one of the cigarette cards of the 1930s. Hard though it is to believe, the sky has become greyer and more swollen, and so low that I wait for it to descend like a heavy wool blanket across the impeccably mowed and rolled turf. Robertson-Glasgow wrote about the greenness of Lord's in comparison to the 'huge, glaring, yellowy arenas of Australia'. It is true. Even in this murky light, the ground is a brilliant emerald and as lush as crushed velvet. The Old Father Time weather-vane is already manically spinning, as if it might take off like Dorothy's house in *The Wizard of Oz*. It is a morning for coats, scarves and hats, a thermos of strong tea and a portable heater. But, as Key drops the new ball, as glossy as a conker, into Ali's hand, there is the celebratory pop of a cork. A young couple, sitting in the Grand Stand, hug one another and toast the new season with a bottle of Marks and Spencer champagne.

Sprinting in from the Pavilion End, Ali's first delivery is well up to the left-handed Michael Di Venuto, who unflappably pushes it straight back, as though already well set for run-making. The sound of ball on bat is like a pistol shot around the cavernous, empty ground. The echo of it vibrates for a long time afterwards. Ali's fourth delivery is much wider, shorter and looser, and Di Venuto darts at it eagerly. He squeezes a

thickish outside edge past gulley, and Rashid gives pursuit, as urgently as a man chasing his hat in a gale. The ball easily beats him to the rope. Perhaps bowling at a pair of left handers – Mark Stoneman is Di Venuto's partner – disturbs Ali and Mahmood, both of whom don't properly exploit the bruised, overcast conditions. Rather than pitching deliveries up, and letting swing and seam occur naturally, the ball is frequently too short, and Di Venuto and Stoneman cut and pull and lean away to drive impressively off the back foot. The bowlers' spikes tear up the turf, revealing the black, wet earth beneath.

Key and Vaughan are positioned, like Donne's extended compass points, at mid-on and mid-off. Vaughan is swaddled in two sweaters, a shirt and his full-body Skins ICE, which he advertises – arms folded and gaze proud and intense – in the pages of cricket magazines in the manner of a modern-day Captain Webb resplendent on a box of matches. Even with all these layers, which includes the best contemporary science is capable of designing, he still looks perished, as if in need of a bowl of soup and a wood fire. He has incongruously wedged a wide-brimmed sunhat on his head. Key presses his hands beneath his armpits for warmth and lets his chin drop to his chest, like someone huddled in a doorway waiting for the last bus home. Neither has much to do. Apart from a balletic dive to stop a Di Venuto drive, Vaughan's main duty early on is to scoop up handfuls of sawdust and sprinkle them over the bowler's footholds.

A thin blowing of rain, which drifts like a dirty veil from the direction of the Tavern Stand, forces an interruption after just 53 minutes and 67 balls. Di Venuto and Stoneman are reluctant to leave, like poker players forced to give up a good hand of cards. Di Venuto has been especially solid. His runs have come with stylistic correctness. At 48 for no wicket, the electric scoreboard unhelpfully points out in vivid blue what we already know – rain has stopped play. Vaughan sits on the middle step in front of the pavilion gate and tilts his eyes skyward, like an inquisitive bird. He climbs up, nods in the direction of an MCC member and vanishes inside.

No day is without virtue at Lord's. That is because no sport is more conscious of preserving its relics, however eclectic, than cricket. If we are all truly reflected in the things we own, then the game has a well-stocked mind, an eccentric personality and an obsessive penchant for hoarding.

The museum behind the pavilion contains an idiosyncratic miscellany of curios and curiosities: ancient bats and china bowls, pictures and mounted cricket balls with silver bands, caps and gold medals and, of course, the inconspicuous Ashes Urn, which sits in a thick glass case like the Imperial State Crown in the Tower of the London. I twice pass it without a flicker of recognition; perhaps because the personal minutiae of the museum are more fascinating than the shiny, teak-stained perfume bottle, so frequently photographed that an actual sighting of it has no impact whatsoever. What leaves the deepest impression are the intimate, quotidian items of the famous: K. S. Ranjitsinhji's silver cigarette case, which he used most days of his life; W. G.'s snuff box and his enormous boots, which reveal his bulk's ample proportions; R. E. Foster's immaculately kept black bound diary of the 1903–04 tour of Australia, the handwriting shaped and flourished with upward swirls and downward curls, in which he details an innings of 287 not out; Len Hutton's silver hip flask; and the oddity of Denis Compton's kneecap, which lies in a case like an ageing and unsightly lump of wax.

On the first day of the season, and particularly when rain has interrupted it, the sensible thing is to act as a lazy browser or Parisian *flâneur*, ambling across Lord's 5½ acres without apparent purpose. In the 1830s, well after Thomas Lord's strategic threat to build houses on the land – a crude bargaining chip which brought him £5,000 after its eventual sale – Lord's was ridged and furrowed and surrounded by laurels and shrubbery. A sheep pen sat in the upper north-east corner; the sheep kept the grass short. Early paintings reveal a pitch of uneven parkland across which horses were ridden, leaving hoof marks in the soft grass. Today Lord's is a slick brand and carries a leaden gravity about it. It has a corporate and colour-coordinated feel. Almost everything is sugar white: the stylish lines of the Grand Stand, its fine metal like the threads of a spider's half-finished web; the Mound Stand, with its cone-like pediments; the bucket seating and the glass-fronted Media Centre. The pavilion remains the jewel: the red brickwork with its nooks and niches, the sculptured balconies and the symmetrical, semi-circular windows, which conceal the secret life of the place. Near the Grace Gates, and attached to the back of the Allen Stand, there are enormous photographs of contemporary Test captains, such as Daniel Vittori and Ramnaresh Sarwan. Accompanying them are exuberant testimonials, like the excitable puffs on film posters, which convey the privilege of playing at

Lord's, as if Lord's really needs to advertise itself, let alone so brazenly. The first photograph is Kevin Pietersen's. After his abrupt fall during the winter, the description of Pietersen as England captain has been clumsily obscured with strips of uneven white tape. Soon I suppose Pietersen's photograph will go too, and be quietly replaced in the dead of night; much in the same way that the Cold War Soviet Union once sent out portraits of its new leader and disposed of the old with subtle sleight of hand, as if nobody could tell the difference.

Somehow Lord's manages to be simultaneously intimate and intimidating. Sometimes it acts like a hostess, who professes that she's so pleased to see you while at the same time edging you out of the door and on to the pavement. There can be a snooty aloofness about the place, as if some of the more over-mannered stewards regard you as a nuisance and ripe for patronisation. I always expect to be ticked off, moved on or told I should sit up straight. When my geography goes awry, I turn by mistake into the lower tier of the Warner Stand, not noticing the sign which says 'Members and Friends'. Groucho Marx, on a visit to Lord's in 1954, registered the same sign and took his cigar out of his mouth long enough to say: 'That's the most ambiguous thing I've ever heard.' Ambiguous or not, Lord's still adheres to it; no one but members and friends are allowed to put their backside on Sir Pelham's seats. I've taken no more than a quarter pace towards doing so when a steward appears. 'I'm sorry, sir,' he says, immediately flattening his hands together and half bowing. 'This is for members and friends only.' There is a short pause before he adds with an edge of superb condescension: 'Why don't you come back when it's less busy?' Leaving aside the obvious contraction – for I'm unlikely to become a 'member' or a 'friend of a member' in the next six hours – I'm struck by the evidence of my own eyes. The Warner Stand has a capacity of 3,000. I count the number of members and friends presently occupying it. There is one person in the whole stand; a middle-aged man in a blue jacket sitting on the front row and jammed next to the pavilion. Everyone else is disguised as rows of empty seats. 'Thank you, sir,' the steward says as I slink off, suitably chastised. 'Enjoy your day.'

Like me, the rest of the unwashed and underprivileged mostly occupy the middle, covered tier of the Grand Stand. Lord's is sombre and silent, and rain slants in silvery sheets across the pavilion. When the rain becomes heavier, and the clouds are dragged across the sky behind it on a vigorous

wind, the pavilion resembles a man o' war galleon cutting through the ocean with its flags aflutter. To add to the naval image, a seagull alights on the left-hand turret and turns in profile, as if posing like the figurehead on the prow. Looking at the pavilion, I find it difficult to believe that the Australian Albert Trott cleared it with a drive off Monty Noble in 1899. Trott's shot made him famous, and he often got himself out in vain and vainglorious attempts to repeat it; a case of the best possible intentions leading to the worst possible consequences. He only attempted it in the first place to keep warm. Trott was wearing a thin silk shirt on a day so bitter that his partner, Cyril Foley, promised he'd see snow for the first time. Those of us in the Grand Stand wouldn't be surprised to see snow now too. Around me lunch is already underway: thickly cut sandwiches emerge from Tupperware boxes, black coffee or tea the colour of riding boots is poured. In the roaring heat of mid-summer we'll remember this day at Lord's and tell everyone how much we deserve whatever sunshine we get as a reward for enduring it. In the meantime, we wait patiently and stoically for something to happen. We stare at the covers, as though we might remove them through sheer force of our own will.

In early afternoon the rain finally lifts and the light clears, and Di Venuto and Stoneman press on. Di Venuto square cuts Tim Bresnan and brings up his half-century in 103 minutes off 67 balls. Bresnan is only in the team because of someone else's misfortune: Middlesex's Steven Finn was a late withdrawal after turning an ankle. Bresnan is burly, bull-necked and slightly barrel-chested. If there's ever a remake of *The Go Between*, he'd be ideal casting in its cricket match as the village smithy, dashing in and cresting the brow of the hill before heaving his arm over. He is nonetheless the MCC's most savvy seamer. In 15 balls, he removes first Di Venuto – caught by Ian Bell at second slip – and then Stoneman, clipping his off bail. The other notable bowler is Chris Woakes. A year ago Woakes had made only one first-class appearance for Warwickshire. By the end of 2008 season, he'd taken 42 wickets at 20.57 to become, at nineteen, the county's youngest-ever leading Championship wicket taker. Until collecting his MCC kit the previous day, he'd never seen Lord's, let alone played here. When the pre-match photographs were taken in the Harris Garden, Woakes looked wide-eyed, slightly bewildered and overwhelmed, as though he was apart from the event rather than a part of it and half-expecting to be jabbed awake from this most unlikely of

Chris Woakes, who progressed from a wide-eyed and slightly bewildered on-looker to become one of the MCC's most impressive seamers.

sweet dreams. He could easily pass for sixteen rather than the twenty-year-old he became just five weeks earlier.

At first Woakes is so anxious and jittery that the wicketkeeper, James Foster, tumbles and lunges in pursuit of a series of wayward deliveries. But, as he shakes the nervousness of out his young system and realises that Lord's won't bite, he finds extravagant movement off the pitch. He is stringy and raw-boned, and burns energy like rocket fuel. Eventually he gets one to jag away from Gordon Muchall, and Foster is yelling his throaty appeal. Woakes is phosphorescent with joy. Next, Dale Benkenstein moves slowly and cumbersomely, as if wearing full body armour, in a tame effort to pull Mahmood. He gets the ball high on the bat instead and spoons a catch in front of square. He shakes his head, unable to believe his own rashness and hair-trigger judgement. As the match froths up, the plot of the play tilts unexpectedly towards the MCC. From 104 without loss,

Durham sink to 141 for four. Their first 100 came up in 154 balls. The 150 isn't reached for another 144. It is dour and dismal work until the fizzing spirit of Durham's new recruit from Somerset, Ian Blackwell, takes over. By now, the clouds have gone, the sky has turned from pewter to cobalt, and the temperature has risen to a level that makes only frostbite, rather than full-blown hypothermia, a possibility.

There has been a dull orthodoxy to Key's captaincy, which never comes vividly alive. He serves the staple but unimaginative diet of pace and seam, much to the vexation of the spin connoisseurs longing to watch Rashid use the ball decoratively with his flight and twirl. As each bowling change leaves Rashid redundant, frustrated grunts and muttered syllables are heard from the Grand Stand. After 62 overs, there are long, ironic hosannas and shouts of 'at bloody last' as Rashid marks out his short run from the Nursery End. The cold has infiltrated Rashid's joints. The ball repeatedly drops on the back of a length, and Blackwell savages it with pure, clean slices. His 50, including ten fours, takes a mere 44 deliveries. Rashid wears the glum expression of someone wasting his time. Occasionally he appeals, but these are more tender wails than shouts of conviction.

For a shilling on match days during the mid-nineteenth century, you could hire bat, ball and stumps and play on one of the Lord's pitches. If someone other than the ground-staff or a cricketer so much as sets a toe on the outfield in this game, the stewards fuss like over-protective, whining nannies. At long leg, Vaughan is asked to sign numerous books and photographs by teenage boys who lean over the fence. He solicitously beckons them towards him. The boys dash as a pack into the Warner Stand and some scale the low fence. A steward in the Grand Stand acts as though this is a wilful act of sacrilege. Immediately he starts barking into his walkie-talkie, which crackles back at him. The urgency and shard of panic in his voice is an extreme over-reaction, as if someone has toppled over and shattered an exhibit in the Victoria and Albert Museum. As he rushes closer, with the intention of restoring order and decorum with a hardline approach, a balding spectator, well upholstered around the girth, leans back in his seat and casually tells him that Vaughan is responsible. 'He asked the lads to come to him,' he explains. The steward shrivels, like a balloon abruptly deflated, and backs off. Robertson-Glasgow would have recognised the charmless streak and over-officiousness of the Lord's stewards, who even in his era saw the average spectator as a foe to be fought and dealt with him

gratuitously. The proof is in the last paragraph of his 1951 account. 'Two attendants,' he wrote, 'persuaded some 50 spectators who had emerged on to vacant benches in the sun to return to the cold shade of the covered seats.' His final line implies incredulity at both the imperious nature of the stewards and the pacifism he witnessed in response to it. 'They would not have retired so obediently at Sydney,' he concluded.

At least the day's play ends at 7.01 p.m. in quiet serenity, and beneath the vaulted canopy of a Windsor blue sky, which was unimaginable in the morning. I am convinced already that Durham will retain the Championship and pocket the much-improved £500,000 winners' cheque this season.

On my way out I walk past the latest additions to Lord's – two floodlights, which poke from either flank of the pavilion like a pair of ugly jug ears. I imagine Robertson-Glasgow turning the corner at the top of Lisson Grove and shaking his head in sorrowful regret at the sight of them. I return to Dorset Square exactly the way I came, and dawdle because of his instance that 'life is too short to hurry'. Alas, life proved all too much – and far too short – for Robertson-Glasgow. He died, at sixty-four in 1965, by his own hand after swallowing a handful of pills. He was a good, unpretentious man who too often felt depression's darkness at noon and tried to combat it with bouts of extreme high spirits – the consequence of his bipolar condition. That he was also unfailingly modest is reflected in his autobiography, *46 Not Out*. He records his career-best bowling figures, as though dismissing them as strictly mundane, in no more than two factual sentences on page 142. 'In 1924,' he wrote, 'Somerset beat Middlesex at Lord's by 37 runs. In their first innings of 128, I had 9 for 38.'

Robertson-Glasgow was always more expressive about others. He memorably said of Donald Bradman that 'poetry and murder lived in him together'. He thought the task of trying to remove Jack Hobbs was 'like bowling to God on concrete'. He described Hampshire's Philip Mead as taking guard 'with the air of a guest who, having been offered a weekend by his host, obstinately decides to reside for six months'. The best thing ever written about him belongs to David Foot. He called Robertson-Glasgow 'sweet of nature, uplifting, funny, poetic, gently sagacious, a profound student of the human condition, scholarly without ever making it appear so, happy in every word . . . and ultimately tragic'. The tragedy was that Robertson-Glasgow was obliged to hide so much of himself from

others and wear his joviality like a mask until, finally, it slipped off, and he slipped away. What, thankfully, he never hid was his love of Lord's. It drew me here today. It takes me slowly home again.

And I feel as if I'm walking in the footmarks Robertson-Glasgow left behind.

Umpires: N. L. Bainton, J. W. Lloyds
Toss: MCC

Durham first innings

D. M. Di Venuto	c Bell	b Bresnan	**53**
M. D. Stoneman		b Bresnan	**49**
W. R. Smith*	not out		**71**
G. J. Muchall	c Foster	b Woakes	**5**
D. M. Benkenstein	c Ali	b Mahmood	**12**
I. D. Blackwell	not out		**102**
Did not bat: P. Mustard†, G. Onions, L. E. Plunkett, M. E. Claydon, C. D. Thorp			
Extras	(2b, 12lb, 2nb, 3w)		**19**
Total	(4 wickets declared, 89 overs)		**311**

Fall of wickets: 1-104, 2-113, 3-128, 4-141

MCC bowling	**O**	**M**	**R**	**W**
Ali	20	2	69	0
Mahmood	18	3	68	1
Bresnan	25	6	56	2
Woakes	20	2	76	1
Rashid	6	0	28	0

MCC first innings

S. C. Moore	c Mustard	b Thorp	**45**
R. W. T. Key*	c Plunkett	b Thorp	**5**
M. P. Vaughan	c Mustard	b Claydon	**12**
I. R. Bell	c Mustard	b Thorp	**12**
T. Westley	not out		**18**
J. S. Foster	lbw	b Thorp	**4**
A. U. Rashid		b Plunkett	**20**
T. T. Bresnan	lbw	b Onions	**0**
K. Ali	not out		**0**
Did not bat: S. I. Mahmood, C. R. Woakes			
Extras	(3b, 4lb, 2nb, 1w)		**10**
Total	(7 wickets, 47 overs)		**126**

Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-50, 3-76, 4-77, 5-81, 6-124, 7-125

Durham bowling	**O**	**M**	**R**	**W**
Onions	14	2	42	1
Thorp	13	5	15	4
Plunkett	12	2	41	1
Claydon	7	2	14	1
Benkenstein	1	0	7	0

Result: Match drawn