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# Past Masters: By H. E. BATES

I DO not suppose there is a footballer who will not remember, till his dying day, the smell of the dressing-room: that frowsy mixture of steam and sweat, liniment and antiseptic, boots and bodies.

It is one of a long list of exciting and urgent smells among which I fancy the odour of racing stables, warm and ammoniated and straw-sweat, has a high place for racing men, and the smell of classrooms, inky, chalk-dusty, new-polished, slightly chemical, a low one for boys.

Whenever I breathe that queer, pungent dressing-room odour, I begin to get nervous and excited, just as my stomach suddenly begins to turn over when I catch the scent of bruised grass on summer afternoons.

I was thinking of all this when I stood for a few minutes, last Wednesday afternoon, in the dressing-rooms at Wembley. I was thinking of the sort of dressing-rooms in which I used to strip out, thirty years ago, when I played football in and about my Midland valleys.

They were the days when, as I recall it, almost every little local team was somehow connected with a pub, a club or a Sunday school. Back tap-rooms with skittle boards. Little varnished doors with panes of coloured glass in dark beer-stale passages. Spittoons on cold red-brick floors. Back classrooms with odours of pew and pine, carbolic and coco-matting. Piles of "Hymns Ancient and Modern" and wall maps of the Lake of Galilee. The scrape of Saturday's coke being shovelled into furnace holes for Sunday's fires and the clatter of football studs echoing over ecclesiastical gratings.

Sometimes, too, a farmyard. A hovel with wagons. Hens clucking out of shadowy nests in mangers. Lofts with rat-gnawed floors and pale chaff clinging like confetti to cobwebbed veils. A stale milkiness,



Watford Football Club Dressing-Room, by H. Andrew Freeth, an entry for the F.A.'s Football and the Fine Arts Competition.

a sharp wind blowing rain through blackthorn thatch. Then, almost always, a walk through stone village streets, sometimes to end up on one of those fields still deep-ridged by S-bend ploughing that used to be common on Midland clay. Raw partisanship. Iron-stone workers ganging up on touch-lines. Gaunt and cranky old ladies threatening wingers and sometimes, as in a painfully remembered case of my own, chasing them with umbrellas evidently snatched from the nearest scarecrow.

Not much of this at Wembley. And yet still, I was glad to see, some of it. The spacious, high-windowed rooms with their semicircle of wall seats are not at all, in some odd way, unlike those of a chapel. And that same undying smell is there: men's bodies, steam, warmth, lint and liniment, boots

and oranges. Perhaps a bit more clinical, more hospital-like, than it used to be; but really, in essence and effect, much the same, still as pungent, still as exciting.

The Continentals, limbering up, prancing to and fro, looked as volatile and high-spirited as a collection of nervous horses. I am not sure whether it is pure accident or a process of in-breeding that has produced in the modern European and South American footballer a type of man whose thighs are like funnels. But no one from these islands, in my experience, has thighs like that. We tend to go bandy-legged, like Matthews and Mortensen, but never, never do we have those thick-topped, funnel-tapering, almost flower-pot thighs.

Altogether there is something much less of the impresario, the operatic, about an English player.

A boy like Quixall, who afterward played so beautifully and with such promise, struck me very much as being the perfect type of young footballer in this country, thick-haired, modest-looking, pleasant rather thoughtful, exactly as Mortensen, canny, bony, spare-faced, is the type of craftsman-professional from the north.

Quixall comes into a football world where players appear sometimes to be treated like chicks in incubators, a world of subsidised works teams and hired coaches and hot showers that I, the youth stripping out behind the blackthorn thatch, never knew. But I could not help reflecting, pleasantly, that Matthews, twenty years his senior, came from that older, simpler, cruder, pubbier world.

The Rest of the World had without any doubt at all the swiftest forward line ever seen in this country: a line of masters; and there was some unhappy running from one or two English defenders. The Yugoslav goalkeeper is reputed to have been at one time a ballet dancer. No one who saw him will argue the point; and no one who saw Matthews could deny, I think, that here was still the most uncannily beautiful player, the greatest past master of them all, or that in Quixall there is, unless I am much mistaken, a new comet in the English sky.

At the end of it all, shattered by that last-second penalty of Ramsey's hammered in with such courage, I thought again of the dressing-rooms. I was glad to have been able to catch again the smell of sweat and steam, lotions and liniments, that is so exciting. It was pleasant to remember back tap-rooms, beer-stale passages, pew and pine, hymn-books and hovels, wind in the blackthorn and the sound of studs on ecclesiastical gratings. And to be able to think, as Mr. Somerset Maugham wrote to me the other day—"Oh! the past!"—but perhaps with not such a sigh.