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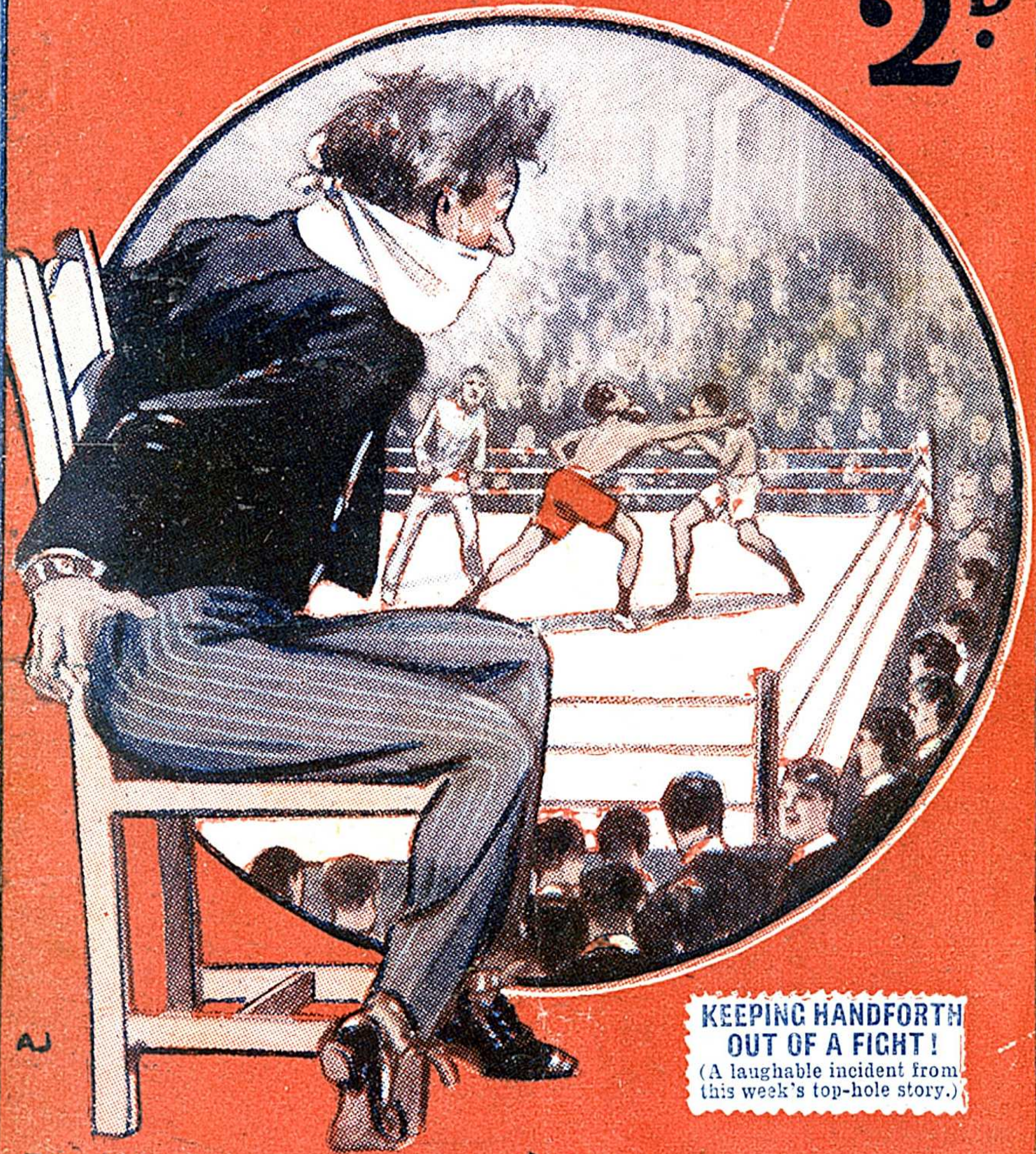
IN THIS WEEK'S YARN!

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**KEEPING HANDFORTH
OUT OF A FIGHT!**
(A laughable incident from
this week's top-hole story.)

HANDFORTH'S BAD DAY!

A ROLICKING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF SPORT AT ST. FRANK'S



Archie Glenthorne gasped as he gazed cautiously into the disordered study. He saw Church, battered and bruised, pick the dazed McClure out of the fender, while Handforth triumphantly looked down on his sparring partners. "What ho!" exclaimed Archie, as he surveyed the debris. "Wreckage and ruin, by gad!"

HANDFORTH'S BAD DAY!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Edward Oswald is well to the fore in this lively long complete story of the first Schoolboy Test Match.

CHAPTER 1.

PREPARING FOR THE FRAY.

THUD! Thud! Thud!
The sound of leather striking against muscle and sinew filled the gymnasium at St. Frank's. Ernest Lawrence, of the Modern House, was putting in some practice with two of his sparring partners. At the moment, John Busterfield Boots, the captain of the Fourth, was in the ring.

"You'll do, Lawrence," grinned Boots, as they paused. "This means honours for the Modern House, sure as a gun. You're a cert. winner of the boxing contest."

"I hope so, anyway," said Ernest Lawrence. "But I shall have to be pretty lively if I'm to whack the Ancient House man."

"Hear, hear!" said a group of Ancient House fellows, round the ring.

"Rats!" said Bob Christine, also of the Modern House. "Can't you fellows be satisfied with getting the honours for the boat-race? Lawrence is going to win the boxing contest. Hamilton doesn't stand a chance."

At the moment, St. Frank's was agog with boxing excitement.

It was the second week of the great Sports Carnival which Fenton, the captain of the school, had announced at the beginning of term. And boxing was the big feature of the week.

For it was Monday to-day, and there was to be the opening bout in the tourney. And on the Wednesday there would be the final—the big match. As if this wasn't enough for one week, Friday would witness the arrival of the

schoolboy Australian Test Match team, to battle with St. Frank's in the first match of the five Tests.

Rather to the concern of Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the Head, the school appeared to be losing its head somewhat. There was an inclination to take these sports too seriously. Even the Housemasters were diplomatically curbing the tendency to carry the enthusiasm to excess.

But the school had come to the conclusion that lessons of all kinds were an intolerable nuisance during the summer term. Surely they could be dispensed with when there were so many important matters to claim their attention?

Although there had been no actual slackness yet, there was a feeling in the Form-rooms that a mere pretence at work would be sufficient. Anything to satisfy the masters until the hour of release came. That was the idea that was gaining ground.

The interest in the boxing was purely junior, and it wasn't exactly a tourney, either. It was a pure Form affair—Remove versus Fourth. Ernest Lawrence was the Fourth Form champion, and recognised as the star boxer of the Junior School.

But there were plenty of Remove fellows who insisted that Dick Hamilton—the ever-popular Nipper—was, if anything, a better boxer. And this big match would settle the point.

But it happened that Edward Oswald Handforth, the volcanic leader of Study D, had something to say in the matter. He had a firm conviction that the Remove had chosen

the wrong champion. Dick Hamilton was pretty good—but he, Handforth, was the genuine article.

So, in order to settle the point definitely, a preliminary bout had been arranged for this evening—a boxing match of six rounds between Nipper and Handforth. The winner would be finally selected as the Ancient House representative—to battle with Lawrence for the Junior boxing honours.

Most of the fellows treated this preliminary match as a joke, and the whole school was chuckling over Handforth's obstinacy. In the meantime, Lawrence and Hamilton were putting in a lot of training for Wednesday's match. For, of course, it was regarded as a settled point that the match would be between these two.

"Just like old Handy, of course, to kick up a lot of fuss, and give Hamilton some extra work," Bob Christine was saying, in the gym. "And they're both doomed to defeat."

"There's nothing else to think," agreed Reggie Pitt, the Junior captain of the West House. "I'm ready to champion Nipper all along the line in most sports, but I think Lawrence will whack him."

"Then you'd better think again, my lad!" smiled Cecil De Valerie, of Study G. "Nipper is going to grab the second lot of honours for the Ancient House. You other fellows will have to look alive."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne, nodding.

The genial ass of the Remove had strolled in to have a look at the proceedings, and to administer the seal of his approval. Archie was supposed to be a slacker, but, in spite of his languid ways, he took a very keen interest in every kind of sport. He was, indeed, a sort of dark horse.

Although the other fellows didn't notice it much, he was going in for a lot of running just now. He had even got into the habit of rising an hour before the required time, and setting off for cross-country trots. Archie was in training. Later on, there would be running races, and, surprisingly enough, Archie had made up his mind to enter.

None of the other fellows had thought of going into training yet—but Archie was sedately preparing. And Phipps, his faithful valet, was an ideal trainer. Indeed, it was Phipps who had first put the idea into Archie's head.

"I mean to say, all this sort of stuff is calculated to make a chappie feel dashed robust and chirpy," declared Archie, beaming upon the boxers. "Hardly in my line, old things, but I can judge good form when I see it, what?"

"Then I suppose you'll admit that Lawrence is a cert.?"

"Good gad, no," replied Archie promptly. "Absolutely not! Greatly as I admire dear old Lawrence, I fear he is doomed to a foul disappointment. Nipper will shove it across him in no slight degree!"

Buster Boots grinned.

"Are you an expert?" he asked, chuckling.

"Well, the fact is, I've made a sort of study of boxing," confessed Archie. "I've seen

Hamilton, too, and you can take it from me that the dear old soul is a solid chunk of muscle. Odds sinews and tendons! I mean to say, the laddie is a somewhat formidable merchant!"

"We're not afraid of him, anyhow," said Bob Christine confidently. "Nipper may be the skipper of the Junior School, and Lawrence isn't anything in particular—but we're safe for the boxing honours in the Modern House."

Archie Glenthorne beamed.

"It isn't always a frightfully good idea to allow these doses of over-confidence to ooze forth," he remarked. "I mean, it's liable to make a chappie frightfully disappointed later on. Take my tip, old chestnuts, and watch your bally step!"

He strolled out, and the Modern House fellows grinned more than ever. They regarded Archie's comments as worthless. But they would have been well advised to take heed.



CHAPTER 2.

HANDFORTH IN TRAINING.

GOOD gad!" — Archie, strolling down the Remove passage in the Ancient House, paused, and his monocle dropped out of his eye. Sinister sounds were proceeding from the interior of Study D. Not that this was anything unusual. When Handforth & Co. were in residence, scarcely any other than sinister sounds were to be heard. But it was somewhat unusual for them to emanate at such an hour as this.

Morning lessons hadn't been over for long, and the gong would soon be sounding for dinner. Archie hesitated, and wondered what he had better do.

Crash! Thud! Crash!

"I mean to say, it sounds as though the good old happy home is being somewhat mutilated!" murmured Archie. "Handy in one of his frightfully frightful moods, by the sound of these murky doings! Ambulances required, and all that sort of stuff!"

Learning from past experience, he took care to stand clear of the portal. The door of Study D had a habit of suddenly flying open, and emitting human debris. Church and McClure frequently came out with the velocity of cannon balls.

For Edward Oswald Handforth, although one of the best fellows in the world, was inclined to be hasty. On the average, he quarrelled violently with his faithful chums about twice a day. Nobody quite knew why Church and McClure stuck him, but in spite of the constant uproars, the chums of Study D were inseparable.

Church and McClure knew their leader better than anybody else in the Remove, and they were willing to put up with his violence for the sake of his many sterling qualities. For Edward Oswald was far more to his chums than anybody else quite realised.

"Hallo, Archie! Anything happened?"

Dick Hamilton emerged from Study C, next door, and looked at the elegant junior inquiringly.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "In fact, judging by the frightful sounds, laddie, I should imagine that a dashed lot has happened! Odds volcanoes and thunderstorms! It's getting worse!"

"Oh, that?" grinned Nipper, nodding towards Study D. "That's nothing. Only Handy in training."

"Good gad!"

"We've had that sort of thing for two days now," explained Dick, chuckling. "Handy's all right, but I'm afraid he is inclined to overdo everything. Unless he's careful, he'll be stale by this evening."

Archie looked thoughtful.

"I take it, old chunk of brawn, that all the muscles and sinews are fit?" he asked. "The good old tissues, what? No flabbiness, or anything of that sort?"

"Thanks, old man, but I never felt fitter," smiled Dick Hamilton. "I put in an hour's training this morning, but I shan't do any more until to-night. I don't think it's wise to be at it all the time."

Archie nodded, and cautiously opened the door of Study D. He stood there, staring.

"What-ho!" he ejaculated. "Wreckage and ruin, by gad!"

"Take that face away!" said Handforth, pausing in his exertions, and pointing.

"Eh?" said Archie. "Which face?"

"That thing!" retorted Handforth. "Your face, my lad! I'm busy! Church, shove those gloves on again—Mac's knocked out! Pick him out of the fender, and let's do something."

Archie staggered out, and closed the door.

Study D was no place for him—and Church and McClure shared exactly the same view, only they hardly dared to mention it. They were quite willing to give their leader a hand, but they felt that there could be too much of a good thing.

Edward Oswald Handforth was practically stripped to his waist, and he was wearing boxing-gloves. His hair was tousled, his face was red; apparently he was ready for hours of this exercise. Church and McClure had been taking him on in turn, and they were feeling worn out.

"Chuck it, Handy!" mumbled McClure, as Church helped him out of the fender. "Training is all right in its place, but you don't need to keep it up from morning till night! You've had enough for to-day!"

"So have I!" murmured Church.

Handforth waved a gloved hand.

"Rats!" he retorted. "I've got to fight Nipper to-night, and I can't afford to take any chances. He's a jolly good boxer, and I don't kid myself that I've got an easy job. So I've got to train until the last minute."

Church groaned, and pulled out his watch.

"It's nearly time for dinner!" he growled.

"Hallo! What the— Here, my watch-glass is all smashed up!"

"You shouldn't wear your waistcoat when you're sparring," retorted Handforth. "I

thought I felt something jolly hard just now."

"Just now!" gurgled McClure. "But you were sparring with me."

He felt hastily for his own watch, but found that it was intact. Church, in the meantime, was mournfully regarding the wreckage of his ticker.

"I'll bet the works are all mangled up!" he said. "This was a present from my uncle, too. It's never gone right since you dropped it in that treacle coffee, Handy. The works seem to stick!"

"Then why bother about it now?" demanded Handforth. "Put the thing down, and shove those gloves on."

"But dinner—"

"Blow dinner!"

"Besides, you've had enough—"

"I ought to know when I've had enough!" growled Handforth. "Any more of your rot, my lad, and I'll start on you as you are! How the dickens can I train if my sparring partners won't obey orders?"

Church pulled the gloves on, and the next minute he and Handforth were in the thick of it. If Handforth had actually confined himself to sparring, his chums wouldn't have minded. But he seemed to enter into these little encounters with the fixed idea of delivering a knock-out. And his chums spent all their time in dodging his powerful thrusts.

Church backed away round the study, and McClure pressed himself into a corner, in order to avoid the whirling arms. Handforth was always thorough. He never tackled anything unless he did it with the full extent of his energy. He seemed to have no sense of proportion.

At the end of five minutes, Church was exhausted.

"Cheese it!" he gasped. "I'm whacked, Handy."

Crash!

Handforth's glove caught him under the chin, and he sat down with a thud.

"You're whacked now!" said Handforth indignantly. "You ass, why didn't you guard yourself? I didn't mean to biff you over!"

But Church slowly sank back, and rested against a chair. He was feeling at peace with the world. Everything was swaying, and he could hear the gentle sounds of distant music.

"Now look what you've done!" said McClure accusingly. "You've knocked him silly! Why the dickens can't you chuck it up, old man? You'll be good for nothing to-night."

The dinner-gong sounded a welcome release at that moment, and McClure breathed a grateful sigh. Church, it seemed, was not so utterly helpless as he had made out. He was on his feet in a second, his gloves were off in another, and he dashed for the door.

"Dinner!" he ejaculated. "Come on, Mac!"

They were off before Handforth could stop them, and he wasn't able to get them alone again until the meal was over. But they needn't have worried themselves; Handforth had thought of another idea.

"Handy, old man, you're looking pale!" said Church, as Handforth strode up to them

in the lobby. "I believe you're going to be ill."

"There's a bleary look in your eye!" said McClure, shaking his head. "It's all because you've been doing too much sparring. Take my advice, and go outside, and loll in the sun. It's the finest thing in the world. You can't beat the sun——"

"You can't spoof me like that," interrupted Handforth tartly. "You want to get out of your duties! I'm ashamed of you! Haven't you got the honour of Study D at heart? Don't you want to see me win the boxing honours in this carnival?"

"Yes, but——"

"You're pretty good chaps, but you make too much fuss over trifles," went on Handforth. "As it happens, I don't want you now. I'm going out for a cross-country run. It's the very thing I need to make my muscles firm."

Church and McClure glanced at one another in alarm. It was quite a hot May day, and the sun was blistering.

"I say, you're not going to drag us out——" began Church.

"Of course he is!" interrupted McClure nastily. "We're coming with you, Handy, old man! We'll change into shorts, and go with you on this trot——"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" interrupted Handforth. "I want to concentrate on steady breathing while I'm running. If you fatheads come with me, I shall have to talk, and that'll ruin the whole plan. So I'm going alone."

"Oh, well, if you really mean it——"

"I do."

"Can't we come, Handy?" they pleaded, in one voice.

"No!" retorted Handforth finally.

He went upstairs to change, congratulating himself upon his firmness. And Church and McClure, in the lobby, shook hands, and congratulated themselves upon their tact and subtlety.

So all three of them were pleased.



CHAPTER 3.

THE KNIGHT ERRANT.

POOR old Ted!"

Handforth minor, of the Third, murmured those sympathetic words as he stood in the shade of an elm tree in the Triangle. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were with him, and the three fags had been busily discussing cricket and a bagful of oranges.

Willy, the Third Form leader, shook his head sorrowfully as his major appeared on the Ancient House steps. Edward Oswald was now in running shorts, and looked very business-like.

"Poor old Ted?" repeated Juicy. "What's the sympathy for?"

"All this trouble for nothing!" explained Willy. "The hopeless chump thinks that he's going to whack Nipper—and he doesn't stand

an earthly chance. Even if he had stood one at first, he's killed it by all this over-training."

"That's the worst of your major," said Chubby Heath. "He never knows when to stop. Look at him now—all dressed up as though he's going for a paper-chase. And there's hardly time for him to get back into Etons again! I can see him getting into trouble for being late in class!"

Willy strolled across, and met Handforth as he was trotting towards the gates.

"Just a minute, Ted, old man," said Willy. "Do you think you're going to whack Nipper this evening?"

"No, I don't," retorted Handforth.

"Eh?"

"I don't think anything about it. I know it!" said Handforth coldly. "Look here, my lad! If you're after one of your usual five bobs, you won't get it! I haven't got any pockets."

Willy grinned.

"I'm not such a duffer as all that," he replied. "But it pains me to see you using yourself up for nothing. What's the good of it? If you want to beat Nipper, you've got to reserve your strength. You'll let heaps of it ooze away if you go running wild across country. Look at you now!" he added, casting a scornful glance at his major's manly form. "Flabby, pale, and sickly-looking! Ted, old man, you're whacked already!"

Handforth took no notice whatever, and marched on. He felt like taking his minor and dropping him in the fountain pool, but a little justifiable act of that sort might be misunderstood by a passing master. Strangely enough, masters never seem to understand that such tactics were absolutely essential where minors were concerned.

Out in the lane, Handforth turned in the direction of Bannington Moor. He didn't want to go to Bellton Village, anyhow, and a short run on the moor would invigorate him. As he ran, he thought of the coming battle.

And he wasn't fooling himself. He knew, in his heart, that his whole attitude was a bluff, and that Dick Hamilton was the only possible champion for the Ancient House.

But he had entered into this contest, and he had to go through with it. If he made any suggestions of backing out, quite a number of fellows would think that he was funky. But he would be glad when it was over, if only to save himself the trouble of this persistent training.

With such thoughts as these in his mind, he approached the Moor View School. And more tender ideas came into his head. He wondered if he would see Irene Manners. She was his particular favourite, although, if it came to that, Doris Berkeley and Winnie Pitt and Mary Summers and most of the other girls were pretty ripping, too.

Somehow, he hoped that none of them would be within sight as he passed. In fact, it might be a good idea to turn back, and take no risks——

And then, at that moment, he trotted round the bend, and found himself practically upon two people who were near the side of the road, just a little distance ahead. Handforth's rubber-shod feet made no sounds as he approached.

He couldn't see who the girl was, for her back was to him. But she had nice hair—rather like Irene's—and she certainly belonged to the Moor View School. She was talking intently to a heavily-built youth of about eighteen or nineteen. The latter was attired in flannels, and was a stranger to Handforth. Certainly not one of the St. Frank's fellows.

"Great pip!" gurgled Handforth abruptly.

He came to a dead halt, staring, for the youth in flannels had suddenly seized the girl in a firm grip. He held her, in spite of her struggles.

And then he kissed her!

She tore herself free, panting heavily, and backed away.

"Oh, you beast!" she exclaimed angrily.

"You—you rotter!"

She ran off like the wind, and the youth burst into a roar of laughter, and turned as if to come towards the village. But he suddenly halted at the sight of Edward Oswald Handforth. The latter was red-hot with anger.

In his own way, Handforth was exceedingly chivalrous, and it made him burn to see any girl treated as this girl had just been treated. He took an instantaneous dislike to the youth in flannels, who was heavily built, and aggressive-looking. Also, he was half as big again as the junior.

"You—you beastly cad!" roared Handforth, striding up.

"What the——"

"What do you mean by insulting that girl like that?" roared Handforth.

The other stared.

"Who? Joan?" he said, flushing. "Why, you infernal young busybody, what's it got to do with you, anyhow?"

"Everything!" bellowed Handforth. "I saw you insult her, and you've got to pay for it. Take that!"

Crash!

The stranger reeled back drunkenly.

"You—you mad young fool!" he panted.

"If you touch me again——"

"I'm going to smash you to a pulp!" snorted Handforth, his rage knowing no bounds. "You can't treat a girl like that in my sight and escape! Not likely! Put up your hands!"

The youth in flannels backed away, his face red with wrath.

"Look here, I don't want to strew you all over the road!" he snapped. "The best thing you can do is to clear off before I thoroughly lose my temper. You're only a kid, anyway, and I don't fight with kids!"

"You're going to fight with me!"

"I tell you——"

"Put 'em up!" hooted Handforth.

Biff!

He landed another heavy blow, and the stranger muttered a curse. He whipped off

his coat, threw it aside, and glanced hastily up and down the lane.

"All right!" he snarled. "You've asked for it! Don't accuse me of forcing this fight! I won't be too hard on you!"

At the same time, he found that Edward Oswald Handforth was no mean opponent. The junior fought fiercely and indignantly. He knew now that the girl was Joan Tarrant—rather a catty sort of girl, and not on very friendly terms with Irene & Co. But she was a girl; she had been insulted, therefore it was up to Handforth to avenge her!

It was rather unfortunate that he should have converted himself into a knight-errant on such a day as this. He would need all his freshness for his tussle with Dick Hamilton. But a detail of that sort never occurred to him, and he sailed whole-heartedly into the fight.



CHAPTER 4.

A SHOCK FOR HANDFORTH.

THREE minutes later, Edward Oswald Handforth was scarcely himself.

He was still fighting, and he was putting up a fine battle. But the other fellow was enormously heavier. He had a much greater reach, and he knew quite a good deal about boxing. Furthermore, he did not spare himself—or Handforth, either.

"Had enough?" he panted, pausing.

"No!" gasped Handforth. "I'm going to slaughter you!"

"Look here, kid, drop your fists, and I'll let you off!" said the other. "I only wanted to teach you a lesson. Why, what—— Confound you, I'll make you pay——"

Handforth was using his famous right again, swinging it round with all the force he could muster. He hardly knew what he was doing, for he was one big ache all over the upper part of his body. His arms were bruised and agonising, his chest felt raw, and his brain was reeling. But he still carried on.

Handforth was a fellow who never gave in until he dropped.

His opponent was merely playing with him, however—not a very surprising fact, considering the difference in size and age, and taking into consideration the fact that the stranger was an expert boxer.

Perhaps this accounted for the stranger's reluctance to strike his junior opponent on the face. Although he had had many opportunities, he hadn't delivered a single blow where Handforth would be visibly marked. He had confined his powerful punches to the body and the arms. And Handforth felt more like a jelly than a human being.

"Will you give in?" panted the stranger, perspiring freely.

"No, blow you!"

The other lost his temper completely.

"All right, then, I've got to settle you

somehow!" he panted. "How do you like the feel of this?"

Crash! Thud! Biff!

Edward Oswald reeled back from the force of those lightning blows, each one delivered with the force of a steam-hammer. He crashed into the dust of the lane, rolled over, and lay stretched in the grass, along the border. He hadn't the strength to rise.

"You asked for it—and you've got it!" growled the burly youth. "Perhaps it'll teach you a lesson not to interfere with things that don't concern you!"

He picked up his coat, flung it on, and strode off. He wasn't entirely free from bruises himself, for Handforth had got home quite a number of devastating blows. This, in fact, was the reason why the stranger had punished him so heavily.

Handforth remained in the grass, dazed, agonised, and half-unconscious. He could hardly feel his arms, and he was fairly certain that his chest was one mass of bruises. And while he was recovering, he heard the sound of girlish laughter, and he sat up in a dazed fright.

"My hat!" he breathed huskily.

To his horror, Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley and Mary Summers were hurrying up the lane from the village, en route for the school. They were coming straight towards him, and had, indeed, seen him already.

"Oh, corks!" groaned the unfortunate Handforth.

To be discovered like this by the very three girls he desired least of all to see him! He fervently wished that the ground would open, and swallow him up. Unfortunately, the ground never indulges in these little tricks. And Handforth remained on the surface, solidly in view.

"Why, Ted, whatever is the matter?" cried Irene, running up.

"Nun-nothing!" gasped Handforth faintly.

He sprang to his feet, or at least, that was his intention. But the agony of moving was so great that he sank back with an involuntary groan. His idea of pretending that he had been just taking a rest was quite ruined.

"Ted," exclaimed Mary, "you're hurt!"

"Not at all!" moaned Handforth. "I—I mean——"

Doris was kneeling beside him, and she could catch a glimpse of his chest through his open running vest. And the bruises were already red, ugly, and fierce. She touched him on the arm, and he winced.

"You've been fighting!" said Doris accusingly.

"Eh?" breathed Handforth. "No. I—I mean, yes! That is to say——"

"And you've been fighting with Herbert, too!" said Irene shrewdly. "We passed him on the road a few minutes ago, the hulking cad, and he was looking flustered and hot. Oh, what a brute to fight a fellow so much younger!"

"Herbert?" repeated Handforth, in horror. "You—you don't mean to say you know him?"

"Of course we know him," said Doris. "He's Joan's brother."

Handforth gave a curious gulping sound.

"Joan's brother!" he shouted thickly.

"Why, yes," said Irene. "Didn't you know?"

It was only by a sheer effort of will-power that Handforth saved himself from fainting clean away. Joan Tarrant's brother!

"He's an awful bounder, you know," said Doris confidentially. "We can't stick him at any price! He's always trying to throw his weight about, and Joan, the cat, loathes him as much as we do. But she likes him to come because he teases us, and because she grabs money out of him."

"Joan's brother!" breathed Handforth faintly. "And—and I fought him because—because—— No wonder he got ratty!"

"Why did you fight him?" asked Mary gently.

Handforth suddenly became indignant.

"Well, how the dickens was I to know?" he asked. "I'd never seen the rotter before, and I suddenly came across him talking to Joan Tarrant in the lane."

"That wasn't a crime, was it?" asked Doris.

"No, but he suddenly grabbed her, held her in his arms, and kissed her!" said Handforth hotly. "I couldn't stand that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three girls broke into a shout of laughter. But Handforth's expression was so pained that they ceased abruptly, and were instantly contrite.

"Sorry, Ted!" murmured Irene. "But—but it struck us as being so ludicrous! Any fellow has a right to kiss his own sister, hasn't he?"

"But how was I to know?" complained Handforth bitterly. "She pulled herself away, and she called him a beast, and ran off!"

"That's just what she would do," explained Doris. "She hates Herbert to kiss her. She says she'd rather be kissed by a Chinaman! That's the way she teases him, you know—and just because of that he's always grabbing her and kissing her! Not that he cares a penny for kissing his own sister, really!"

"Oh, my goodness!" growled Handforth, slowly struggling to his feet. "All that giddy fight for nothing! Why on earth didn't he tell me?"

"Did you give him a chance?" asked Irene, who knew Handforth.

Handforth started. Now that he came to think of it, he hadn't given Herbert Tarrant much of an opportunity of explaining. In fact, he had gone for the fellow bald-headed. Tarrant, in fact, had done his best to explain before starting on the deadly work. If there was one thing that gave Handforth a little relief, it was the knowledge that his opponent had been Joan Tarrant's brother, and not the brother of any other girl. Joan was a little wretch; apparently the family was all alike.

It had been just like Handforth's quixotic nature to precipitate a battle without making



Doris dropped on her knees beside the defeated Handforth. She got a glimpse of red, ugly bruises showing through the opening in his running vest. "You've been fighting!" she exclaimed accusingly. Handforth could only moan; he remained at the side of the road, too dazed and hurt to move.

any inquiries. He was ram-headed in all things, and it never occurred to him to ask questions before he acted.

The girls thoroughly understood his motives, and they were rather inclined to admire him. For, after all, his action had been a chivalrous one.

"I'm afraid you're terribly hurt, Ted," said Irene. "Why don't you let us take you to the brook, just behind this hedge, and we'll bathe your bruises."

Handforth blushed.

"Thanks all the same, but I'm all right," he said uncomfortably. "Besides, I'm only bruised about the shoulders and arms. He had the decency not to biff me in the face, the rotter!"

"Well, we shall have to go!" put in Mary hurriedly. "We shall be late for afternoon lessons."

"My hat, so shall I!" exclaimed Handforth, in alarm.

"Oh, by the way," said Irene, with a sudden concern, "aren't you going to box with Dick to-night?"

"Yes, rather!"

"But you can't!" said Doris quickly. "Don't be silly, Ted! How can you do any boxing with your chest all bruised? And your arms battered about!"

"That's all right," said Handforth carelessly. "A few knocks don't hurt me, you

know. I shan't say anything about this affair, of course. Look here! Don't tell anybody, will you?" he asked quietly.

"We won't breathe a word."

"I mean, the whole blessed school would cackle like anything if they heard this yarn," said Edward Oswald awkwardly. "Me fighting that bounder, you know, because he kissed his own sister! They wouldn't understand the truth like you do, and they'd simply howl! Be sports and keep mum!"

"I should hope we're sports," said Doris promptly. "You can take our word for it, Ted, that we'll keep as quiet as a trio of oysters. Honest injun!"

"Honest injun!" echoed Irene and Mary.

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth gratefully. "You're—you're bricks! And you won't say anything to the other girls either, will you?"

"But didn't Joan see you?"

"No, she'd gone before I spoke to her brother."

"All right; then that's understood," said Irene softly. "Poor old Ted! I'm so sorry, you know. I wish you'd let me do something. I don't mind being late for lessons."

"No, really!" urged Handforth. "Please!"

Irene gave him another smile, and hurried off with the other two girls. They were all three wearing light, summery frocks, and they looked very charming as they tripped

away. Handforth gave a kind of gulp as they disappeared round the bend.

And he suddenly felt weak again. Now that he was alone, his hurts made themselves fully apparent. And he realised that he was pretty well crooked. It was a sheer agony to walk, and every swing of his arms gave him an awful muscular twinge.

But he pulled himself together, and hurried off.



CHAPTER 5.

MR. CROWELL ISN'T SATISFIED.

MR. CROWELL, the master of the Remove, glanced at the clock, he glanced at the door, and then he glanced at a vacant desk.

"Extraordinary!" he said. "Half-an-hour late! I've never known Handforth to act in this strange fashion before. Are you sure you don't know where he is, Church?"

"Haven't any idea, sir," said Church.

"Nor you, McClure?"

"No, sir."

Church and McClure were far more worried than Mr. Crowell. They had half-expected him to be late, but they had never dreamed that he would fail to turn up after a full half-hour had elapsed. Afternoon lessons were in full swing, and still there was no sign of the missing leader of Study D.

"I shall punish him severely when he comes in—unless, of course, the boy has met with some unfortunate mishap," said Mr. Crowell, frowning. "I cannot think of any other explanation. When did any of you boys see him last?"

"I think I saw him last, sir," said Church.

"Well?"

"He was just going out for a trot, sir."

"A trot?"

"He's in training for to-night's boxing contest, sir," explained Church. "He got into his running shorts and went off soon after dinner."

"He should have had more sense," retorted Mr. Crowell sharply. "Not that I expect a great amount of sense from Handforth. It seems to me that these sporting events have had an utterly degenerating effect upon the whole school."

The Remove was silent, coldly opposed to this view.

"Did Handforth say that he would be back in time?" asked Mr. Crowell.

"Yes, sir."

"Then his absence is very remarkable," growled the Form-master. "I detest these disturbances and annoyances. I shall have a serious talk with Fenton. I do not approve of this Sports Carnival. There is scarcely one boy in this Form who is applying himself to work as he should."

"Just like old Crowell!" muttered Tommy Watson. "If somebody annoys him, he veers round on the whole giddy Form! He'll be touchy all the afternoon now, and we shall be lucky to get out of the room safely."

"Watson!" shouted Mr. Crowell.

"Sir!" said Tommy Watson, standing up.

"You were talking, Watson!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take fifty lines, Watson."

"Thank you, sir," said Watson gloomily.

He sat down again, and thought it unnecessary to make any audible comment. But his thoughts regarding Mr. Crowell at that moment were quite beyond the task of framing into words.

The lesson went on, and after about another twenty minutes the door slowly opened, and Handforth peeped in. He made no noise as he opened the door—quite an unusual thing for Edward Oswald. But the circumstances were exceptional. He had changed, and he was looking almost himself. A certain haggard expression was apparent on his face, however, and he was slightly more pale than usual.

The Form spotted him long before Mr. Crowell did. Several juniors made cryptic signs, warning him to go away. Unfortunately, Mr. Crowell looked up, and caught sight of these gymnastics.

"De Valerie!" he snapped. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing, sir!" gasped De Valerie.

"Pitt, why did you make a ridiculous grimace just now?" demanded the Form-master. "Upon my word! It seems to me that there is a deliberate plot afoot to annoy me—"

He suddenly paused, noticing that the door was ajar.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, striding towards it. "Oh!" He had suddenly caught sight of Handforth. "Come in, Handforth!" he invited politely. "You are quite welcome, I am sure."

"Thank you, sir," replied Edward Oswald, in a subdued voice.

He came in, and closed the door.

"Can—can I go to my place, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "Why not? Your place has been vacant for some little time, in fact. I am only too pleased to see that you have condescended to join us this afternoon."

The Form tittered. When Mr. Crowell was pleased to be sarcastic, the Form always felt in duty bound to titter. Besides, it encouraged Mr. Crowell to go ahead.

"Yes, sir, I'm a bit late, aren't I?" said Handforth.

"Really?" asked Mr. Crowell, in surprise. "Good gracious! So you are, Handforth! But why mention such a trifle? Merely fifty minutes."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth.

"But now that we are on the subject, perhaps it would help matters if you obliged with a little explanation," suggested the Form-master. "Don't imagine for a moment that I am pressing you, my boy, but I am naturally interested. Why have you calmly turned up when it is nearly time for the Form to be dismissed?"

"By George! Is it nearly time to go, sir?" asked Handforth, brightening up. "I'd no

idea— Ahem! Sorry, sir! The—the fact is, I've been out."

"Oh! You've been out, Handforth?"

"Yes, sir."

"And may I ask why you have been out?"

"Just for a trot, sir."

"I understood from Church that you had been out for a trot," agreed Mr. Crowell.

"But let us cease this useless waste of time.

Unless you can give me a very satisfactory reason for your prolonged absence, Handforth, I shall be obliged to inflict a very severe punishment."

"Yes, sir."

Handforth seemed quite listless, and he was looking towards his seat longingly—as though he were anxious to sit down. There was a certain droop to his shoulders, too, that his chums could not help noticing. In fact, everybody in the room, except Mr. Crowell, saw that Handforth was not himself.

"I am waiting for your explanation, Handforth," said the Form-master. "You may possibly be aware that you are wasting the time of the entire class, but that, no doubt, is a detail. Wasting time appears to be a matter of indifference to you. You went out for a trot. Why did you not get back here in time for lessons?"

"I was prevented, sir."

"By whom?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

Mr. Crowell frowned.

"Come, come, that won't do!" he said sharply. "I am sorry to press you, Handforth, but I would much rather you did say. You knew perfectly well what time lessons started, and it was your duty to be here in time. Be good enough to explain at once. My patience is not inexhaustible."

"I've got nothing to say, sir."

"Oh, in that case I regret to say that I have," exclaimed Mr. Crowell acidly. "You will be detained in extra lesson for the whole of Wednesday afternoon, Handforth."

Edward Oswald started in alarm.

"Wednesday afternoon, sir!" he gasped. "But—but I've got to play in a House match on Wednesday afternoon. We've got a fixture with the West House!"

"I am very sorry for your team, Handforth, but they must struggle along as best they can without your services," said Mr. Crowell, in his most icy manner. "You are detained in extra lesson for Wednesday afternoon."

"But—but that's not fair, sir!"

"Not fair!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

"Well, I mean, I'm going to put in a good bit of work this afternoon," argued Handforth. "You oughtn't to detain me for any longer than I'm late. That's only square, isn't it? But can't you make it lines, sir?" he added anxiously. "I might get somebody else—I mean, I'd much rather have lines, sir!" he added, with haste.

But Mr. Crowell was adamant. And Edward Oswald Handforth went to his place not only sore in every limb, but with the gloomy prospect of a lost half-holiday before him.

He vaguely wondered if life was really worth living.



CHAPTER 6.

HANDFORTH KEEPS THE SECRET.

IMMEDIATELY the Remove was released, Church and McClure pounced upon their leader like two hungry wolves.

Handforth gave one wild howl.

"You—you fatheads!" he gasped, agonised. "Oh! Oh, corks! Ooooh! You—you jibbering lunatics!"

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Church in amazement.

"We didn't touch you!" panted McClure. "And you in training for a boxing match, too. You ought to be as hard as nails."

"So I am!" retorted Handforth curtly. "And don't ask me any questions, either! I know what your game is, my lads, and I can tell you straight away that I'm not answering any questions. Go and get tea ready!"

"Yes, but look here——"

"Tea!" thundered Handforth.

They all went to Study D together—hurriedly, for Handforth wanted to avoid any questions from the other fellows. He had made up his mind that he wouldn't even tell his chums what had happened. They were an inquisitive pair, anyhow, and he wasn't going to satisfy their curiosity.

"I say, Handy, where the dickens did you get to?" asked Church, as soon as they had closed the door of their study. "Don't bother about the tea—Mac's putting the kettle on now! We got awfully anxious about you, you know, and it's rough luck about Wednesday afternoon——"

"You can't pump me," interrupted Handforth wearily.

He sank back into the easy-chair, and closed his eyes. It was delicious comfort after the hard form in the classroom. It was a relief to be able to relax like this.

Church and McClure were looking at their leader grimly. They had made up their minds that they would get the truth out of him before they had done. They weren't going to be disappointed, or put off with any excuses, either.

"Something happened while you were out," said McClure, turning away from the kettle.

"We're your chums, aren't we?"

"Of course you are."

"We don't want to have any secrets in this study, do we?"

"Not usually," replied Handforth. "But I can't tell you about this business. I don't feel strong enough, for one thing. After that fight I'm all weak and tired."

"Which fight?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting. "I didn't mean a fight—— That is, blow you! Don't ask me any more questions."

"A fight, eh?" breathed Church. "That's why you crumpled up when we grabbed you a little while ago? Why, you must be one mass of bruises."

"I am!" groaned Handforth.

"What!"

"I—I mean——"

"Look here, Handy, you can't keep this up!" snorted McClure. "Who did you fight with? And what the dickens possessed you to get into a mill to-day, of all days? How do you expect to box Nipper this evening?"

Handforth glared.

"Don't I keep telling you I'm not going to tell you anything?" he snorted. "Let's have that cup of tea! I'm dying for it! Wasn't there some embrocation, or something, in the cupboard?"

"I didn't see any," said Church.

"That stuff in the bottle?"

"That wasn't embrocation," said Church. "It was some of Mac's new-fangled hair cream. I thought it was saucé last night, and I put some on my giddy sardines. Chaps who use hair cream ought to be boiled in it!"

"All right, never mind," said Handforth in a tired voice. "It doesn't matter. One of you had better run along to Phipps. He'll give you some. That valet of Archie Glen-thorne's is a marvel—he knows everything. Oooh! My only hat!" he added, as he shifted his position.

Church and McClure were becoming more and more convinced that Handforth had encountered half-a-dozen tramps, or a gipsy encampment.

"I hope you gave the rotters a good hiding!" said Church, baiting the trap.

"There was only one!" replied Handforth incautiously. "A hulking great rotter of about twenty—double my size, too. Joan Tarrant's brother, you know. The rotter nearly killed me—— Eh? You—you inquisitive fatheads! I'm not going to tell you a word! So don't ask me!"

"But you've told us already, old man," said Church gently. "Joan Tarrant's brother half killed you. I've never met the chap, but if he's anything like his sister he's not much good. She's a spiteful little cat, according to all I hear."

"She's a swindle!" snorted Handforth. "Her own brother kisses her, and she calls him a beast, and makes me think—— I—I mean——"

"It's no good—let's have the rest of it," said McClure firmly.

"What?"

"All of it, Handy!" commanded his chums. And for once Edward Oswald Handforth succumbed completely. He was in just that condition when he didn't care whether he spoke or not. The armchair was very comfortable, and when he didn't move he was feeling exceedingly restful. He finally told his chums all about it.

They didn't laugh.

Understanding Handforth as they did, they quite appreciated that he had acted from the best motives. And they were genuinely cut up about that unfortunate encounter. And they were deeply concerned on another subject, too.

"Of course, the fight's off now," said Church, at length. "I'd better go round and tell the chaps not to prepare——"

"Don't you say a word, blow you!" snorted Handforth.

"I shan't explain why you can't box, but it's obviously impossible for you to go to the ring to-night," said Church. "Got that tea, Mac? Good egg! Here you are, Handy, old man. Have a go at this. Now, about the fight. It's off, of course——"

"It's on!" interrupted Handforth fiercely.

"But you're all smashed up——"

"That's only a trifle," said Edward Oswald.

"Have you ever known me to knuckle under? Have you ever known me to give in? Not likely! I've arranged to meet Nipper in a six-round contest, and I'm going through with it. That's final! So don't argue any more!"

"Mac, buzz along to Archie's study, and see if you can get hold of Phipps," said Church briskly. "Ask him for some of his special liniment. Then bring it back here as fast as you can."

Handforth raised no objections to this programme, and within five minutes McClure was back, and the door of Study D was locked.

"Now then, Handy—strip!" commanded Church.

"But look here——"

"Strip!" ordered his chums in one voice.

The general order of things was reversed, and Handforth meekly stripped—at least, down to his waist. And Church and McClure gazed at their leader in utter horror.

"Great Scott!" gasped Church. "You—you ass! You can't go into the ring like that! You're one mass of bruises!"

"You're black and blue!" panted McClure.

Handforth looked down at himself ruefully.

"I do look a bit mottled!" he admitted.

"By George! No wonder my chest feels groggy! My arms, too—I can hardly lift 'em! All the same, I'm not backing out of that contest. Let's try some of that liniment. These bruises will be gone by to-night."

"This isn't the age of miracles!" growled Church. "There's no liniment on earth that could remove those bruises in less than a week! My dear chap, Nipper's only got to give you one tap, and you'll topple over like a tailor's dummy! Be sensible, and chuck it up."

"Not likely!" retorted Handforth obstinately. "In fact, I'm going to whack Nipper to-night. Do you think I can't bear a bit of pain? He might hurt me when he punches, but I can stick it. After the first two or three minutes I shall be numb, too, and I shan't notice it."

They knew how useless it was to argue—since it only strengthened Handforth's determination. And, very gently, they proceeded to rub him. The air of Study D became permeated with pungent odour. And when Handforth put his coat on again he was feeling distinctly better. That liniment of Phipps' was wonderfully soothing stuff.

Half the pain was gone, and his muscles felt more supple. If he had been determined to carry on with the boxing match before, he was now absolutely firm. And his chums might just as well have talked to a solid brick wall.



CHAPTER 7.

NO FIGHT!

THE gymnasium was packed. It was mid-evening, and rain was falling outside—gentle, summer rain which did not promise to be particularly lasting.

Most of the spectators round the ring belonged to the Remove. The Fourth Formers were far more interested in their own champion, and they were saving up their enthusiasm for the Wednesday night—when the main contest would take place. This evening's affair was only a preliminary canter, after all.

But the Remove took the keenest possible interest in it—for it would enable them to form an opinion of Dick Hamilton's prowess. Handforth was quite a good boxer, and he would give Nipper some pretty bouts. So, on every ground, the tussle was worth watching.

William Napoleon Browne, the lanky skipper of the Fifth Form, had consented to act as referee, and everything was all ready by the time Nipper and Handforth arrived. The referee was there, the seconds were prepared with their sponges and towels, and there was a business-like aspect about the ring.

"Come on, Handy!"

"Let's see you knock Nipper into next week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is going to be Handy's Waterloo!" grinned Somerton.

"No, he met that this afternoon!" murmured Church, under his breath.

Both he and McClure were very uneasy. They would have told Browne everything if Handforth had not pledged them to silence. And they were in a fever of anxiety regarding their pigheaded leader. He would only get himself into a far worse condition by engaging in this fight.

"Ah, Brother Handforth, I observe that you are all ready for the fray," said Browne, as he glanced at Handforth's long robe. "But what is this? Do I detect a certain weariness in your mien? I fear you are not quite yourself to-night, brother."

"I'm all right, you chump!" retorted Handforth.

"A totally unofficial way of addressing a referee, but we will let it pass," said Browne generously. "I was never one to be too particular. Are we all prepared for this interesting event?"

The timekeeper volunteered the information that he had been ready for some minutes, and various members of the audience went so far as to say that they had been waiting for hours.

"In that case, let us dally no longer," said Browne. "Brothers, on this side we have Battling Handforth, and on the other side we have Nippy Nipper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a prize fight, Browne, you ass!"

Dick Hamilton stripped off his gown, and stood forth in his boxing shorts. He presented a fine figure, full of health, with his flesh firm, and his muscles rippling. Church and McClure, who were Handforth's seconds, regarded Nipper with something very akin to horror.

"He'll eat poor old Handy!" murmured Church, in dismay.

"In one bite!" breathed McClure sadly.

The audience approved of Dick Hamilton entirely. They had seen Ernest Lawrence, and they were all staunchly of the opinion that Dick was the better man. And this evening they would have an opportunity of judging his form.

"We are waiting, Brother Handforth," said Browne pointedly.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Oh, yes! All right."

He slipped off his own robe, and stood forth. William Napoleon Browne looked hard, started, and winced.

"What is this?" he inquired calmly. "Contradict me if I am wrong, Brother Handforth, but surely this mottled appearance is not natural?"

"Oh, it's nothing!"

"Do not tell me that this piebald aspect is a characteristic feature of the Handforths?" asked Browne, in horror. "Unless I am vastly mistaken, your flesh is one murky collection of bruises."

There was a sensation among the spectators.

"I say, look at Handy!"

"Great Scott!"

"The man's black and blue!"

"What the dickens has he been up to?"

"Can't you fatheads keep quiet?" roared Handforth, glaring. "I can be black and blue, I suppose, without you making a song about it? I'm here to box Nipper, so let's get on with it!"

But Dick Hamilton was looking very concerned.

"I say, old man, you can't box in that condition!" he said gravely. "Why, you must have been run over by a steam-roller, or something! My dear man, you're simply in a hopeless condition."

"I tell you I'm not," growled Handforth. "I'm ready to fight."

"One moment, brothers—one moment," interrupted Browne smoothly. "As the presiding genius of this entertainment, let me intervene. In my official capacity as Master of the Ceremonies, I unhesitatingly forbid the banns!"

"Look here, Browne, you ass——"

"In other words, the curfew shall not ring to-night!" said Browne firmly.

"You chump——"

"Under no circumstances can I allow this battered creature to be made the sport of inquisitive youth," said Browne. "I have seen many barnacled hulks in my time, but seldom have I gazed upon such a derelict as this! I am pained beyond description. And surely Brother Handforth must be equally pained."

"I'm ready to fight!" said Handforth doggedly.

"While admiring your noble spirit, I am nevertheless the chairman of this committee," said the referee grimly. "And if I say 'No,' I do not mean 'Maybe.' The contest shall not take place while I live!"

"But I'm up against Nipper to prove who's the best boxer in this House," urged Handforth. "I'm not going to knuckle under without a scrap. I had an accident this afternoon."

"So I imagined," said Browne. "I trust you are going to enlighten us with the details?"

"It was nothing much. I got into a scrap with some chap in the road," growled Handforth, who felt that some sort of explanation was necessary. "The rotter asked for it, so I had to give it to him. He was about four times my size, too."

"One of those Barnum giants, no doubt?" asked Browne kindly. "Quite so, Brother Handforth. I, too, have found them to be a nuisance on our country roads. Without pressing you too closely, I imagine that you engaged in some rude brawl with a passing tramp. I thought better of you, brother, but the damage has been done. And, gentlemen, the fight is off!"

"Is this going to delay the Final, on Wednesday?" asked Buster Boots. "I'm one of Lawrence's seconds, you know, and I understand that the Ancient House champion isn't chosen until these two have had their mill?"

"Have we got to wait till Handy gets well?" asked somebody indignantly.

"Not likely!" roared the crowd.

"Just like Handy to mess things up!"

The audience was thoroughly disappointed, and expressed its feelings in no uncertain terms. But Browne soothed the throng, and turned to Handforth again.

"It appears that this matter is for you to decide, brother," he said. "A postponement might be tiresome, but such a possibility is not entirely out of the question."

"Can't I fight Nipper to-night?" asked Handforth.

"No!" said Browne, with emphasis. "But do not let that fact disturb you. There will be no black mark against your name, Brother Handforth. You are in no fit condition to fight an infant in arms. There will be nothing detrimental against your character if you gracefully retire."

"Oh, well, I'll chuck it up!" said Handforth gruffly. "And as Nipper would have whacked me, I'm willing that he should be put up as the Ancient House champion."

"Let me hear that again, Brother Handforth," said Browne. "Did I actually understand you to say that you would have lost the contest?"

"Yes, of course I should!"

"Well, that's pretty handsome of you, old man," said Nipper.

"Rats!" growled Edward Oswald. "I was obstinate, I suppose, and just wanted to have some sport. But you're the best boxer in

the Ancient House, and everybody knows it. Perhaps it's just as well that I shouldn't have this bout with you to-night."

"It is, indeed," agreed Browne. "We do not wish to see our Brother Handforth consigned to the sanatorium for a prolonged period. And such would have been your fate if you had gone forward with the scheme."

And so the gymnasium emptied itself again, without the contest having taken place. Under the circumstances, there had been no other alternative. Handforth was very much of a wreck.

In the Remove passage of the Ancient House, he grabbed hold of Dick Hamilton's arm.

"There's one thing I forgot," he said. "I'm one of your seconds!"

"Thanks all the same, Handy, but Tregellis-West and Watson——"

"I'm one of your seconds!" insisted Handforth grimly. "I don't care anything about Tregellis-West and Watson! One of them's got to resign! I've been dished out of the fight, but I'm blessed if I'll be dished out of seconding you! That's final!"

Dick Hamilton smiled.

"But, my dear man——"

"Nipper, old boy, pray let me intervene," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West gracefully. "If Handforth is so keen on this, I will willingly stand down. By all means let him be one of your seconds. Begad, we can't do much less for him, can we?"

"Thanks, Montie," said Handforth, nodding. "Now I don't mind about to-night."

He went into Study D, lowered himself gently into the easy-chair, and enjoyed the glorious relaxation of pure comfort. And he was intensely relieved. For he had known, from the very first, that he had been a hopeless optimist ever to think of winning a boxing contest with the Junior skipper.

CHAPTER 8.

WILLY INTERVENES.



WEDNESDAY morning found the eleven fellows who were to play against the Australian schoolboys in the first Test Match posted on the notice-boards.

There had been all sorts of rumours concerning the selected players, but nothing had been definitely known until now. There was a good deal of excitement, particularly in the Ancient House. For the Test Team contained no fewer than five Remove fellows.

The Fourth was utterly disgusted at Edgar Fenton's short-sightedness in leaving out such fellows as Buster Boots and Bob Christine. And the Third thought about sending a deputation to Fenton for daring to leave out Willy Handforth.

The team was as follows: Fenton, Morrow, Browne, Stevens, Phillips, Hamilton, De Valerie, Fullwood, Handforth, Kahn.

Jerry Dodd, of course, while being one of the best cricketers at St. Frank's, was left out of the team because he would figure in the opposing Eleven. He was one of the Australian Test Team, but the only member of it who was not obliged to travel. The fact that he was a St. Frank's fellow made no difference.

These Test Matches were not school contests at all, but a novel innovation among schoolboys for having a minor series of England v. Australia matches.

Edward Oswald Handforth was by no means surprised to find his name on the list, if one could judge by his comments. He seemed to take it as a foregone conclusion. But he actually confided to his own chums, in strict privacy, that he was as pleased as a cat with two tails. He hadn't dared to hope that Fenton would exercise so much common-sense.

This morning, too, Handforth was feeling almost himself.

He still bore traces of that gruelling fight with Herbert Tarrant, but most of the bruises had disappeared, and he was practically fit. Quite fit enough for cricket, at all events. He had a horror that he would be left out of the Test Team because of his recent scrap.

"Nothing to worry about now, my sons," he said to Church and McClure. "Study D is represented in the big match, and that's all that matters. And I can get some practice this afternoon in the match against the West House."

"That's what the game's for," said Church. "I'm in the team, too. By Jove! Only two more days to Friday, and then we shall have the big match."

Scores of other fellows were thinking exactly the same thing, at exactly the same moment. Half the school was only living for Friday to come. And there was the big Junior boxing contest this evening, too. Life was certainly one long round of sporting excitements.

The very instant dinner was over, the fellows swarmed out upon the playing fields. It was a bright day, in spite of one or two showers in the morning. Perhaps there would be further showers during the afternoon, but they weren't likely to be severe enough to cause any stoppage of play.

In the Ancient House v. West House match, Handforth was one of the first fellows to bat, and he soon proved that his bruises were not affecting his form. He was as sturdy as ever, and he was curbing some of his former recklessness.

Lots of fellows were surprised that he had been selected for the big match, but Fenton knew what he was doing. Handforth was a slogger, perhaps, but when he was at the top of his form it was almost impossible to get him out. He had improved greatly of late, too. He had an accurate eye, and that was one of the great secrets of his batting success.

His minor was lounging near the pavilion during the game, watching the batting. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were with

him, as usual. But they seemed to have something on their minds.

"It's no good sticking here, Willy," Chubby was saying. "It'll be tea-time soon, and we haven't got a giddy cent between us. You're not going to have tea in Hall, I suppose?"

"Doorsteps and dishwater!" groaned Juicy Lemon.

"Wait until my major comes out," said Willy smoothly. "It might be a bit of a job to wangle——"

"Oh, indeed! Indeed!"

Willy glanced round, attracted by the concentrated indignation in the voice. He beheld Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remove. Mr. Crowell was looking as black as thunder, and he was staring straight at Edward Oswald Handforth.

"Anything I can do, sir?" asked Morrow, of the Sixth, who happened to be passing.

"Thank you, Morrow, no!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "But I intend to stop this game at once!"

"Stop the game, sir?" asked Morrow, in amazement.

"At least I intend to compel that boy Handforth to come indoors!" stormed Mr. Crowell. "On Monday I distinctly ordered him to attend extra lessons this afternoon. But what does he care about detention?"

"He may have forgotten it, sir."

"Forgotten it!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "Ridiculous, Morrow! Boys do not forget an afternoon's detention so easily. The impudent young scamp has flouted me—deliberately and outrageously flouted my authority! And I won't put up with it!"

"But it'll be awkward to stop the match, sir."

"Awkward or not, I mean to take strong action!" declared Mr. Crowell. "On Monday afternoon Handforth coolly came into the class-room fifty minutes late for lessons, and he must be taught that he cannot play fast and loose in that fashion. I am firm."

Morrow shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, sir—just as you like," he said. "It's only a Junior House match, but it doesn't seem quite the thing to my mind. Wouldn't it be better to report Handforth to his Housemaster? The young beggar deserves a flogging for ignoring detention like this."

"He will get a flogging, Morrow, never fear!" stormed Mr. Crowell.

Morrow went off, as he had no desire to be associated with this high-handed action of the Form-master's. For a moment Mr. Crowell hesitated, and then he found Willy Handforth close beside him.

"Don't, sir," remarked Willy calmly.

"What did you say, Handforth minor?"

"Don't, sir."

"Don't what?"

"My major, you know, sir," said Willy. "He's just set now, and he hasn't deliberately flouted you. He forgot all about that detention."

"Oh, indeed?" said Mr. Crowell, staring.

"I presume this is a prearranged plot? But you cannot pull wool over my eyes——"

"It's not a prearranged plot, sir, and I didn't know anything about it until this minute," interrupted Willy. "That's honour bright, sir."

Mr. Crowell grunted.

"In that case, Handforth minor, I will take your word," he said. "You are one of the really truthful boys in the Junior school."

"My major's another, sir."

"Well, yes, I must confess that Handforth major is straightforward and honourable," admitted Mr. Crowell grudgingly. "At the same time, I cannot countenance this deliberate flouting of authority——"

"Oh, cheese it, sir!"

"What did you say?"

"Cheese it, sir," repeated Willy coolly. "That means chuck it, you know. Ted wouldn't flout your authority. He's forgetful—that's all. And he's so keen on cricket that he never thought of that extra lesson to-day. Why not let bygones be bygones, sir?"

Mr. Crowell was very frigid.

"I was not aware, Handforth minor, that you were your elder brother's champion," he said tartly. "Leave me at once! I don't want to hear any more of your slang."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Crowell was quite nervous. There was something about Willy Handforth which unsettled him. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he was slipping. And he was not the first to experience this sensation in Willy's presence. There was something magnetically compelling in this innocent-looking fag.

"Just a minute, sir," said Willy cheerfully. "Ted's an obstinate beggar, and I'll bet he didn't explain why he was late on Monday."

"No, he persistently refused."

"Just like him," sighed Willy. "As a matter of fact, sir, he had a fearful scrap with a chap about twice his size in the lane, and he was clean knocked out for a time. He crawled back, and didn't say a word."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Crowell thoughtfully. "That certainly puts a different complexion on—— But I've got to teach your major a lesson," he added, hardening. "I won't listen to this talk of yours, young man!"

"Have you seen the May-trees round the Head's garden?" asked Willy. "You can see them fine from this angle. Just over here, sir."

"I have no desire——"

"But they're gorgeous, sir," said Willy persuasively. "And all the flowers, too. And, by the way, what about that new book of yours, sir? I was going to ask you to lend me a copy."

"I was not aware that you are interested in irregular verbs, Handforth minor!"

"Irregular verbs!" echoed Willy enthusiastically. "Why, you ought to see me juggling with 'em, sir! It's all right about my major, isn't it?" he added casually. "Just leave him to me, sir. I'll give him a jawing when he comes out."

Mr. Crowell was thawing rapidly.

"Upon my word, young man, you have an extraordinary way with you!" he growled. "H'm! Perhaps, under the circumstances—— But remember, Willy, I trust that you will not talk of this to your companions?"

"Not a word, sir," said Willy promptly. "Honest injun! Just between ourselves, sir. Our little secret, eh? I always knew you were jolly kind-hearted. It must be ripping to be in the Remove!"

Mr. Crowell went off, feeling quite cheerful with the world in general, and he even felt that he had been absurdly harsh regarding Handforth's lapse. He paused, and became interested in the game.

Willy Handforth returned to his chums, and they regarded him curiously.

"What the dickens have you been jawing to old Crowell about?" asked Juicy.

"Oh, nothing."

"Don't be an ass——"

"Well, the Head's May-trees, then."

"What?"

"And the flowers," said Willy. "By the way, you needn't worry about tea. I shall be able to wangle Ted for some cash all right. It was a bit doubtful before, but now it's a cert."

But Juicy Lemon and Chubby Heath utterly failed to see how Willy had arrived at this conclusion.



CHAPTER 9.

TEN SHILLINGS!

HOW'S that?"

"Out!"

Handforth looked at his wrecked wicket, and grunted.

"That's because I caught sight of my minor just now!" he said disgustedly. "Whenever I see my minor, I get a pain! He always puts me off my stroke."

"Well, you're out," remarked the wicket-keeper genially. "If you can make it anything else, you're welcome!"

Handforth had scored 20 runs, so he was feeling well satisfied as he made his way back to the pavilion. Just before he reached it, he halted in his tracks, his mouth agape, his eyes starting.

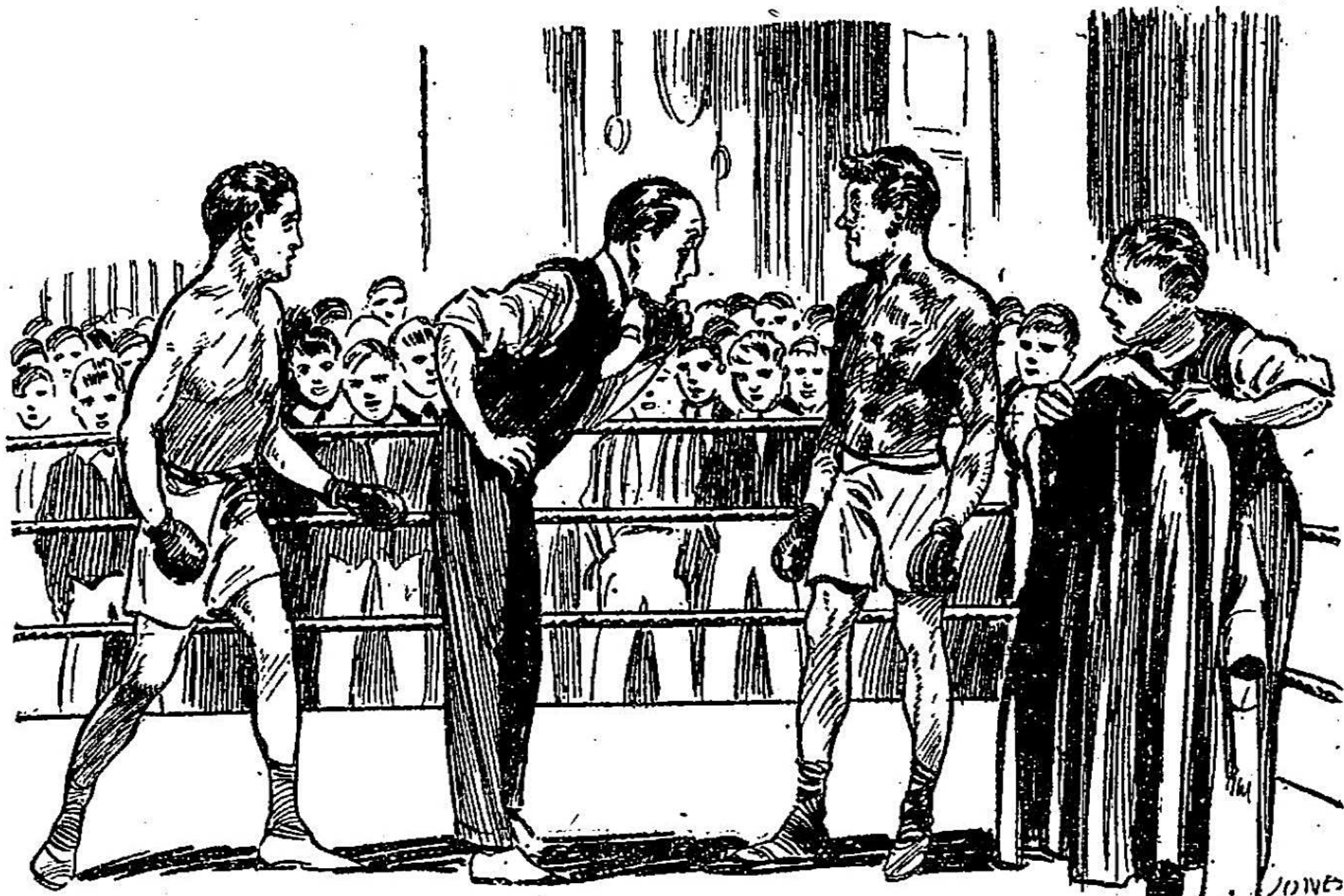
"Great jumping corks!" he gasped blankly. He stood there, aghast.

He had just caught sight of Mr. Crowell—although Mr. Crowell was not looking in his direction. But the sight of the Form-master had brought something vividly to his mind. For, in all truth, Handforth had actually forgotten all about that afternoon's detention.

"Oh, crumbs!" he murmured, with a clutching feeling at his heart. "I've missed extra lesson, and old Crowsfoot is waiting to grab me! This means a flogging—and a gating on the top of it, perhaps."

He was thoroughly startled.

It was no light crime to calmly ignore attendance in extra lesson. And Handforth wondered how on earth he had come to forget



William Napoleon Browne stared blankly at the mass of bruises on Handy's chest. "Correct me if I am wrong, Brother Handforth," he said gravely, "but surely this mottled, piebald appearance is not a characteristic of the Handforths?" "Shut up!" roared Handforth, glaring at him. "I suppose I can be bruised a bit if I like? I'm ready to fight Nipper—let's get on with it!"

it. Probably it was the Test Match enthusiasm. He had been thinking about cricket all day. And there was that fight to-night, too. He hadn't had a minute to bother about Mr. Crowell and his silly impositions.

But Mr. Crowell would have to be faced, and so would the music.

Handforth went into the pavilion with his heart thumping rapidly. As a rule, he would face a situation like this with an equanimity which amounted almost to indifference.

But there was so much at stake this week that he was thoroughly scared.

After all, he would only have missed an unimportant House match by being detained this afternoon. But now, in all probability, he would be debarred from playing in the Test Match! He might be given an impost which would prevent him from seconding Dick Hamilton at the boxing contest!

The whole prospect, in fact, was bristling with horrors.

As he removed his pads, he momentarily expected the arrival of Mr. Crowell. He was not particularly pleased, therefore, when his minor strolled up.

"Spare a minute, Ted?" asked Willy.

"Go away!"

"It's important, old man."

"Nothing's important just now!" breathed Handforth. "At least, nothing that you can tell me— Oh, crumbs! He's coming! Look out, you young ass—"

"Who—Crowell?" said Willy. "You needn't be scared of him."

They were just at the corner of the pavilion, and there was nobody else near them. Mr. Crowell was strolling in their direction. But he paused, and watched the game again. Handforth's heart steadied itself.

"I thought he'd spotted me!" he muttered. "I can't understand why the dickens he doesn't come—he must have seen my wicket go down."

"Of course he did," agreed Willy. "But you needn't be scared of Crowell. He's as tame as a lamb."

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I've squared him."

"Squared him?"

"Exactly. And now you've got to square me," said Willy blandly.

"What the—"

"Ten bob!" said Willy.

"You hopeless young fathead!" hissed his major. "What's all this rot? I was supposed to be in extra lesson this afternoon, and I forgot all about it. Old Crowell's on my track—he's after my giddy blood!"

"Well, isn't it worth ten bob to be as free as the air?" asked Willy. "Mind you, I should have asked you for this ten bob just the same—so don't think I'm demanding hush-money. I tell you, I've squared him."

The words sank into Handforth's brain.

"You've squared Crowell?" he gasped.

"Yes."

"About—about my missing detention?"

"Of course."

"You spoofing young bounder," growled

Handforth. "You couldn't square Crowell if you tried for twenty years! He's as hard as nails. He wouldn't shift an inch. A steam-roller wouldn't move him. If anybody could get at his heart with a chisel, he could chip chunks out of it!"

Willy grinned.

"In that case, I didn't do so badly," he said cheerfully. "I wish you wouldn't be so dense, Ted. How many more times have I got to tell you that everything's all serene? Ten bob, please. And if you don't pay up, I can easily have another chat with Mr. Crowell," he added casually. "It'll only take me about ten seconds to undo everything I've done."

At this moment Mr. Crowell himself came nearer. He caught sight of Handforth, and hesitated for a moment. Then he strolled on towards the pavilion. Edward Oswald clutched at anything within reach.

"Look out!" he muttered. "Now for it!"

Even now he couldn't believe that his minor had been telling him the truth. Mr. Crowell came up, and nodded. He nodded quite amiably. Handforth managed to conjure up a sickly sort of smile.

"Good—good-afternoon, sir!" he said faintly.

"Good-afternoon, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "So you made 20 runs, eh? Quite good."

"Yes, sir, I—I suppose it's not so bad."

"Your minor has explained your forgetfulness regarding to-day's detention, Handforth, and I have decided to overlook the matter," continued Mr. Crowell, with a friendly smile. "But I hope you will not be so careless again. Who is that boy batting now?" he added, pointing.

"Fullwood, sir," said Willy.

"Ah, yes, of course—I shall have to have my glasses seen to," said Mr. Crowell, preparing to stroll off. "Quite a good game, boys. Let us hope that we have excellent weather like this for the Test Match on Friday."

He nodded, and Handforth fell back weakly.

"There you are!" said Willy. "All done by kindness, too!"

"Willy, my son, this isn't a ten-bob matter!" said Handforth, in a burst of relief and generosity. "What are you—a conjurer, or what? Here you are—take this quid! You deserve it! I'm saved! How the dickens do you manage to perform these miracles?"

"They're not miracles at all," grinned Willy. "There's one little tiny thing required, Ted."

"What's that?"

"Tact," said Willy. "You've only got to treat these masters tactfully, and you can make 'em eat out of your hand! If I liked to put my mind to it, I'd have old Crowell following me about within a week!"

Willy went off, and joined his own chums again—they were getting very impatient, and the game wasn't attracting them much. They gazed at Willy with hope in their eyes.

"Any luck?" they asked, in one voice.

"How do you like the colour of this?" said Willy calmly.

"A quid!" they gurgled. "Oh, my hat! Willy; my son, you're not human!"

They went off to the school-shop together, and Edward Oswald Handforth found Church and McClure, and related the incident with bated breath. He was so impressed by it, in fact, that he had almost forgotten the match, and was quite surprised when he found that he was required to go out into the field while the West House batted.

The West House won the match, but as it was an unimportant fixture, the Ancient House didn't mind much. It finished up rather late, and the boxing contest would be happening almost at once.

Handforth was soon bustling about, important and active. As Nipper's principal second, he threw his weight about considerably. And now that he had definitely abandoned all claims to being the champion boxer of the Ancient House, he whole-heartedly supported Nipper. The very suggestion that Ernest Lawrence might win the match amused him exceedingly.

"You Fourth Form chaps are just dreaming!" he said tartly. "Hamilton's the boxing champion of the Junior School, and don't you forget it! He's going to knock spots off your old candidate."

Buster Boots grinned.

"We're quite ready to hear that sort of bluff from you Remove fatheads," he said coolly. "When it comes to a matter of boxing, you've got to apply to the Fourth!"

"We'll soon remove that idea," said Handforth promptly.

Boots fainted clean away at this feeble joke, and many other pleasantries of a like character were indulged in.

The contest itself was being staged in the big Lecture Hall—for the gymnasium was altogether too small to hold the big crowd that was anxious to see it. And Mr. Clifford, the sports-master, had decided to referee the match. There was every indication of an exciting hour's sport.



CHAPTER 10.

HANDFORTH GETS EXCITED!

THE Lecture Hall hummed and buzzed with animation. The electric lights gleamed, and the ring was brilliantly illuminated. The

two schoolboy boxers were already in their corners, and Handforth was hovering about his principal, with free advice.

"Now, don't forget—watch his left!" he was saying. "Take my tip, Nipper, old son, and keep your guard high. You've only got to follow my tips, and you'll simply wipe him up!"

"Thanks all the same, but——"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "You listen to me! I'm your second, and a boxer is supposed to take advice from his seconds. If you let Lawrence get under your guard, you'll find him a terror. And mind the clinches."

"Chuck it, Handy!" protested Tommy Watson. "I'm one of Nipper's seconds, too, don't forget. You don't want to monopolise the entire conversation, I suppose?"

But as Nipper was taking little or no notice of Handforth's advice, no great harm was done. In the opposite corner, Ernest Lawrence was ready for the fray. There was nothing to choose between these two sturdy boxers. They were almost of the same weight, and their reach was similar to a fraction. A better-matched pair could scarcely have been found.

"All ready?" asked Mr. Clifford.

"Think so, sir."

"Seconds out of the ring!"

"Come on, Handy," said Watson briskly.

"Eh?"

"Seconds out of the ring, you ass," said Tommy.

"Of all the rot!" said Handforth. "Why should I get out— But I suppose I had better humour the ref.!"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," chuckled Dick.

A few moments later everything was ready for the start. There was nothing grim about this encounter—but it lost none of its interest on this account. It was a sporting contest, pure and simple, and every member of the audience was on tiptoe to see his own particular favourite gain the honours.

"Time!"

The gong sounded, and Hamilton and Lawrence were at it. The opening moments were tense, but not particularly dramatic. The pair were sparring for an opening, and it was Lawrence who made the first definite move.

With a lightning-like side-step, he swung round, and brought his right up. But Nipper's guard was there, and the attempt was ineffectual.

"Good man!" roared Handforth. "That's the style! Watch him, Nipper—and don't forget that left of his! That's the way! Good! Now then, use your feet a bit more. Fine—fine!"

"Dry up, you chump!" murmured Watson. "You'll put him off!"

"Eh?"

"You mustn't yell like that——"

"I'll yell as much as I like!" retorted Handforth. "I'll yell— Hi! Look out there, Nipper! By George, he nearly got you that time! Break away—break away!"

Handforth was so excited that he was nearly half over the ropes, and he continued to shout encouragement to Nipper. Mr. Clifford took absolutely no notice, for his attention was concentrated upon the boxers.

The pair were going at it in a more business-like fashion now, and there was scarcely a pin to choose between them. Both were skilled in the science of the art, and, purely as an exhibition, the match was a joy to behold.

"Keep it up, Nipper—you're whacking him hollow!" chuckled Handforth. "My hat! That footwork! Look at it, you chaps!"

"Sit down, Handy!"

"Don't you want anybody else to see, you fathead?"

"Sit down!"

Handforth turned, and glared at the section of the audience immediately behind him.

"Go and eat coke!" he replied politely. "If you don't like to sit there, go and find another place. I'm Nipper's second, and I'm going to encourage him as much as I like."

There was no arguing with this aggressive spirit—and there was no question of moving to another part of the hall—since every inch of space was filled. The unfortunate fellows in Handforth's rear were only obtaining a scrappy view of the encounter.

"Time!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Lawrence!"

"Keep it up, Hamilton—you've got him taped!"

Nipper came to his corner, and Handforth fairly fell upon him. He jammed a water-loaded sponge into Nipper's face, and half-drowned him. Then he commenced massaging with such energy that the unfortunate Ancient House champion was nearly hurled through the ropes.

"Steady, you ass!" gurgled Nipper.

"It's all right—leave it to me!" said Handforth. "I know exactly what to do—and I'll have you as fresh as paint for the next round."

He rubbed fiercely, and made a curious hissing noise with his mouth, as though he were a groom attending a horse. In the midst of it, Mr. Clifford came over, and looked at Handforth severely.

"Not so much of your comments, my lad, in the next round," he said. "Simmer down, Handforth—simmer down! Unless you can behave yourself, I shall have to do something drastic. Hamilton doesn't want any of your advice while he's in the ring."

Dong-g-g!

The gong sounded for the next round, and Handforth was unable to reply to Mr. Clifford as he had desired. The two boxers leapt into the centre of the ring again, and were soon at it at top speed. There was nothing brutal about this match—but something, on the other hand, exhilaratingly exciting. And Handforth completely forgot Mr. Clifford's injunctions.

"Sit down, Handy!" yelled a dozen voices, as he bobbed up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Watson, can't you keep that fathead down?"

Watson, who was crouching at the corner, well out of range of the spectators, glanced round at the ringside seats. Church and McClure were near by, and Handforth was so intensely interested in the match that he was hanging through the ropes. There seemed to be an imminent possibility of him joining in the fight itself.

"Lend us a hand!" muttered Watson grimly.

Church and McClure felt compelled to comply, since Handforth was their own particular chum. They wondered why on earth Nipper had ever consented to Edward Oswald being one of his seconds.

"Come on, Handy!" said three grim voices, in unison.

With a sudden jerk, Handforth was yanked back, and forced into one of the seats. He was held there like in a vice.

"You—you fatheads!" he gasped. "Lemme go! Take that, Church, you fathead!"

Crash!

"Oh, corks!" groaned Church.

Handforth lashed out right and left, and there were two boxing contests at once. The juniors might as well have tried to hold a wild tiger. Handforth leapt up again, and clung to the ropes.

"Good!" he roared. "You've got him now, Nipper! That's the way— Whoa! Steady there—steady! Look out!"

He fairly let himself go as Nipper seemed in danger of a direct upper-cut. But the Ancient House champion's guard was perfection itself, and Lawrence was discovering that every one of his wiles was anticipated—every move he made was countered and checked.

"Time!"

The second round was over, and, so far as the spectators could see, the honours were slightly in favour of Nipper.

Again Handforth plunged the sponge into the unfortunate Dick's face, and this time he was so thoroughly excited that Nipper toppled clean over backwards, and all but vanished through the ropes and over the side of the ring.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't get so excited!" said Handforth warningly. "There's no need to throw yourself about like that, Nipper."

Dick struggled back again.

"You—you crazy lunatic!" he gasped. "Are you my second, or do you think this is a wrestling match? Cool down, you fathead!"

Mr. Clifford came over again.

"You'd better understand, Handforth, that your actions are prejudicing the match," he said sharply. "If there is any more of it after this round, I shall have no alternative but to disqualify your principal without further warning."

Handforth gaped.

"But—but—" he began.

"I mean it!" said the referee curtly. "Hang it all, Handforth, I don't like to be sharp like this, but it's a bit too thick! So please understand! Any more shouting and gesticulating, and I shall award the contest to Lawrence. And there'll be no appeal!"

He walked away, and Handforth gave a gulp.

"So for goodness' sake choke yourself up, Handy," pleaded Nipper. "You wouldn't like me to be disqualified, would you? There's only one safe course—keep absolutely quiet."

Handforth nodded

"All right!" he said hoarsely. "I'll remember!"



CHAPTER 11.

TIED UP!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was thoroughly scared.

It took an enormous amount to penetrate his thick hide. But Mr. Clifford had penetrated

it now. If Handforth's own fate had been in the balance, he would have been quite indifferent. But the very thought of prejudicing Nipper's chances horrified him.

"Don't forget, old man!" breathed Watson. "Clifford's thoroughly ratty, and I don't wonder at it. You've got to keep cool."

"I—I'll sit down in one of the ring-side seats," murmured Handforth. "I'll be safer there. But it's a bit thick, bottling me up! I've never been corked before!"

"Time!"

The next round started, and at the very first exchange, Handforth was on his feet, yelling. He had forgotten every word about that warning. A boxing match always bereft him of his wits.

"That's all wrong, Nipper!" he shouted tensely. "Look out, you ass—move aside there! Don't give him a chance of—"

"Handy!" begged Watson, with tears in his eyes.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Oh! You mean— Great pip! Sorry! I'd forgotten!"

He froze up instantly, and sank back into his seat. Church and McClure took care to sit on either side. They were ready to grapple with him at the first sign of another outburst.

The match was progressing so well that there was scarcely anybody who could grumble. Remove and Fourth alike were satisfied. There was nothing whatever to choose between the two combatants.

Handforth was suffering agonies.

Remembering how necessary it was to restrain himself, he held himself in his seat, and clenched his teeth. But now a new danger arose. Finding it impossible to give vent to his advice, he automatically enacted the thrusts which he desired Nipper to give.

Swish!

Something shot past McClure's face. He started back with a gasp. Handforth's left had nearly caught him a terrific swipe. There was a fierce, concentrated expression on Edward Oswald's face, and he hadn't the faintest idea that he was using his fists.

Crash!

Church, on the other side, caught Handforth's right on the side of his head, and he toppled to the floor with a devastating thud. He picked himself up, dazed and dizzy.

"Who—who kicked me on the ear?" he gurgled.

"It's Handy!" hissed McClure, in alarm. "The fathead's gone dotty! Look at him! Grab him, for goodness' sake!"

With a sudden swing, Handforth twirled round, biffed Watson over with a well-directed upper-cut, and floored Cecil De Valerie at the same moment. Fellows were strewn all round him, and he didn't know anything about it. His face was growing redder and redder, and his gaze was fixed fascinatedly upon the boxers.

"Now then—all together!" panted McClure.

This sort of thing was getting altogether too thick, and everybody within reach flung themselves upon Handforth, bore him to the floor, and he simply vanished. There was a

series of gurgling splutters, a few gasps, and Handforth apparently ceased to be.

As a matter of fact, about six fellows were all over him, sitting on him, and he wasn't allowed to get up until the round was over. But when the gong sounded, he was released, and he staggered to his feet drunkenly.

"Who's won?" he demanded frantically.

"You—you hopeless cuckoo!" snorted Church, rubbing his ear. "You nearly brained me two minutes ago, and if you start those tricks again, these chaps are going to chuck you out."

"Chuck me out?" asked Handforth, looking round.

"Yes, chuck you out!" roared a dozen voices. "We're fed up with you!"

"Come on, Handy—do you call yourself a second?" snorted Watson, from the ring. "Where's that sponge? My hat! Somebody's got the sponge!"

Handforth discovered it in his pocket, having thrust it there unconsciously—three parts full of water. One side of him was drenched, and he hadn't known anything about it.

"Everything O.K., Nipper?" he asked breathlessly. "By George! I nearly exploded just now. It's a bit thick, being forced to keep quiet!"

"Quiet!" echoed Nipper. "I thought you'd been having a boxing tournament of your own. Watson tells me there are about a dozen wounded down there, anyhow. Hadn't you better go out for a breath of fresh air during the next round?"

"I'm all right—but I can't bear to see you making such bloomers!" said Handforth earnestly. "Six times during that last round you were nearly knocked out!"

"You chump, I was only feinting," grinned Nipper.

"That's rummy," said Handforth. "I was nearly fainting, too."

"Time!"

During the next round, Handforth actually behaved himself. He sat there without biffing anybody, and he didn't utter a sound. He just watched silently and intently.

But there were several good reasons for this. In the first place, some thoughtful genius had strapped his feet and his arms to the chair, while four fellows stood ready to pounce on him if he attempted to struggle. And, in order to make quite certain, a handkerchief was wrapped round his mouth. The only thing that Handforth could do was watch.

But his changing expressions were pitiful to behold. Unable to move, unable to speak, he was on the point of bursting a blood-vessel about three times. And when the round came to an end he was far more exhausted than either of the boxers.

And so the contest went on. Now that Handforth was being dealt with effectively, all those in his rear could see, and he was only released in order to perform his duties as a second. But even in these he failed towards the end, for he was more or less beaten. The rough treatment he had received

at the hands of his immediate neighbours had thoroughly exhausted him.

Round after round took place, each one packed with a hundred thrills. Sometimes it seemed that Lawrence was gaining the ascendancy. Then it would be Nipper who forced the pace, and compelled the Modern House champion to give ground. The honours of the match fluctuated continuously. And there wasn't a single moment throughout the match which wasn't worth watching. The boxing was of the highest possible order—brainy, scientific, and a real delight to watch.

In the end, as many fellows had predicted, Mr. Clifford pronounced a draw. It was honours even. They would be equally divided between the two Houses. Ernest Lawrence and Dick Hamilton were each as good as the other.

"That's topping, old man," said Dick, as he shook hands afterwards. "A ripping match, eh?"

"Fine!" agreed Lawrence breathlessly. "Hamilton, old son, I didn't think you were so jolly hot. In future, I shan't be quite so conceited."

Nipper smiled at this—and for an obvious reason. For he could imagine no fellow less conceited than the unassuming Lawrence. As for the crowds of juniors, they cheered the champions to the echo, and considered that the evening had been a jolly good one.

A number of enthusiasts thought it a good idea to grab Handforth, carry him outside, and dip him in the fountain pool. As they explained, he certainly needed something to cool him down. And he got it!

CHAPTER 12.

AT "WORK"!



JERRY DODD let out a wild, fiendish whoop.

"Coo-ee!" he called. "Here they come! This is bosker! Australia for ever!

Hurrah!"

It was Friday morning, and the Australian Test Team had just arrived. A smart motor-coach had driven into the Triangle, and a swarm of Removites and Fourth Formers swept round it to welcome the Aussie visitors. That motor-coach had made a tour round of all the schools, collecting a fellow here, two there, and so on.

"Jolly pleased to welcome you to St. Frank's," exclaimed Fenton heartily, as he shook hands with the Australian Test Team. "Whatever else happens, I think we can promise you a pretty good game."

"That's what we came for, so let the best side win," said the Aussie captain—a tall, good-looking senior from Redcliffe College, named Beaton. He was supposed to be the best player in the team, and he was certainly a good captain, since he was one of the Redcliffe House skippers.

The morning was dull and chilly, and there were lowering clouds. Everybody had been

predicting downpours, and numbers of pessimists were convinced that rain would fall in torrents before eleven-thirty.

But nothing of this catastrophic sort happened. On the contrary, the weather cleared a bit, and there were one or two glimpses of blue sky. But by this time the school had retired into the class-rooms for morning lessons—and lessons were regarded as a perfectly disgraceful imposition. Everybody felt that the Head was utterly heartless to insist upon school work on such an important occasion as a Test Match.

But the Head looked at it from a different angle. The match would go on just the same, whether there were any spectators or not. The school would have lots of chances of watching after morning lessons were over, and after school finished for the day.

Australia won the toss, and Beaton elected to bat. At this period there were no spectators round the ropes, and Big Side was looking deserted and raw. During the first half-hour of a big school match there is generally a feeling of isolation in the air. Possibly the absence of spectators has something to do with this sensation.

In the Form-rooms, the fellows were all on the jump. Even the seniors were affected by the general fever. As Chambers, of the Fifth, pointed out, the Head might just as well have granted a holiday, because nobody did any work, and lots of tempers were lost.

There was one Form-room which possessed an unique advantage. This fortunate apartment belonged to the Third Form. It was presided over by Mr. Suncliffe—and it so happened that Mr. Suncliffe was a master who took a keen and acute interest in cricket.

One wouldn't have thought so to look at Mr. Suncliffe, for he was very weedy. He didn't play himself, but that made no difference to his interest. He avidly seized upon evening papers, in order to discover the latest scores in all the big county games. He had frequently been known to cycle to Bannington, in order to ascertain the closing scores. And during the holidays he spent most of his time at either Lord's or the Oval. Some of the Third Formers firmly believed that Mr. Suncliffe camped in the pavilions all night.

It was Mr. Suncliffe's Form-room which possessed an unique advantage. From the windows of this apartment the score-board could be plainly seen! And this was not all. The wicket itself was visible—at a distance, no doubt, but it was certainly visible.

That morning, Mr. Suncliffe made a busy pretence of work. He was greatly interested in this schoolboy Test Match, and he was one of the few masters who held that a whole holiday wouldn't have done the boys any harm. But Mr. Suncliffe was a strict disciplinarian, and duty was duty.

"Now, boys, I can fully understand your impatience to be out of doors this morning, but we must curb ourselves," he said firmly. "And remember that the time will pass much more quickly if we work hard. There is nothing like hard work to speed the fleeting minutes."



The blade of Handforth's bat flashed in the sunshine as he drove the ball. A loud and joyous roar of delight rose from all round the ground as the ball struck the schoolboy.

"No, sir," said Willy. "I suppose they've started by now, haven't they? It's just after half-past eleven—"

"No doubt—no doubt," said Mr. Suncliffe gruffly. "But we mustn't—"

"I wonder who won the toss, sir?"

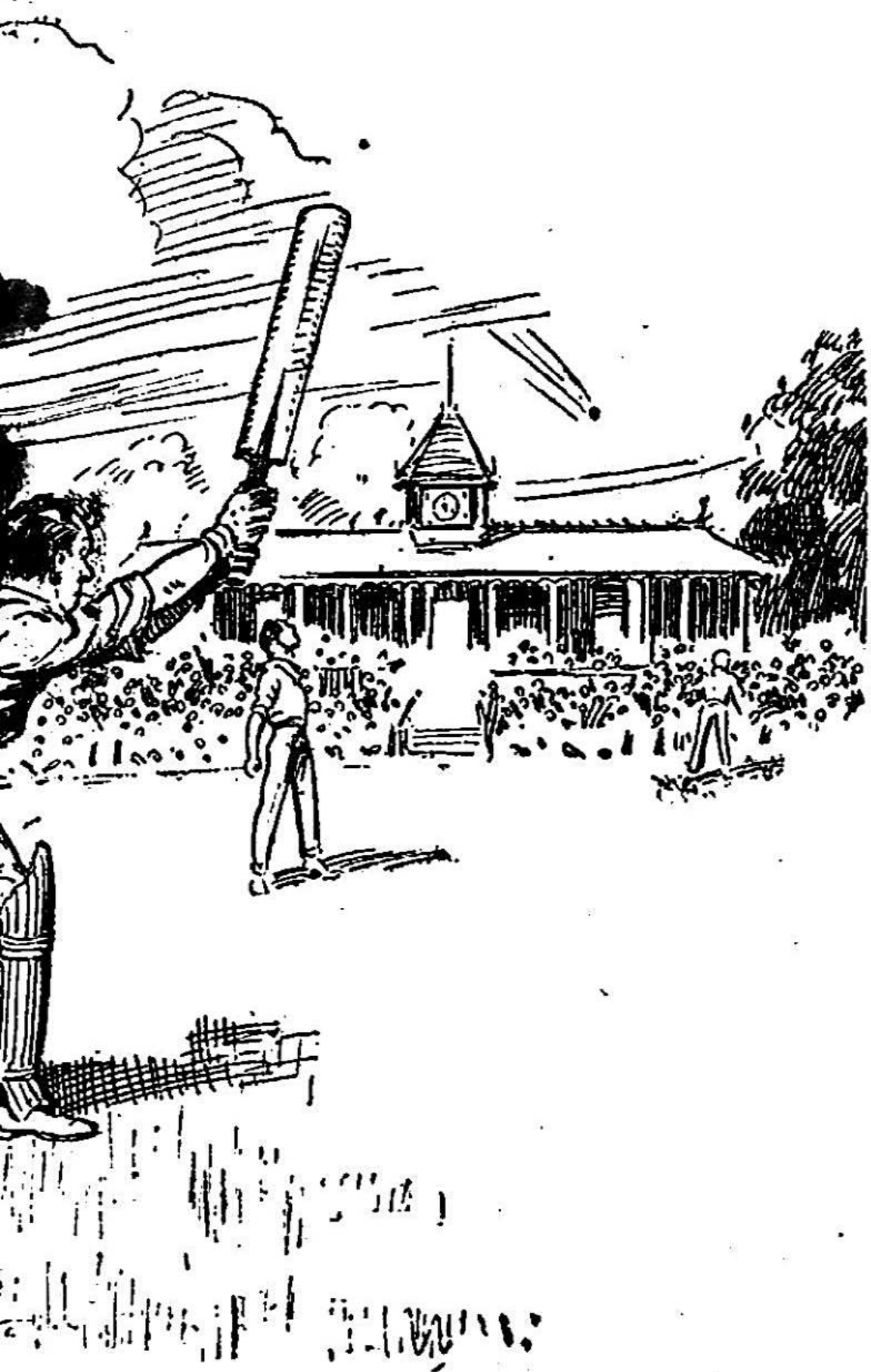
"Ah, yes, to be sure," said the Form-master. "Much depends upon that. With rain threatening, it might be of the highest importance. Ahem! This won't do, Handforth minor. This won't do! You must not distract my attention like this!"

He turned to the blackboard, and set himself to work. And Willy, taking advantage of this splendid opportunity, leapt upon his desk, and gazed through the window. He could see the score-board, and he could detect two figures at the wickets. A lanky figure in white was bowling.

"My hat!" muttered Willy tensely.

"Who's in?" hissed Chubby Heath.

"Don't be mean, Willy!" breathed Dicky Jones. "Who's won the toss?"



at the ball, putting all his strength into the hit. A thunder-ent sailing over the pavilion. It was the biggest hit of the Match!

Mr. Suncliffe turned from the blackboard, and started.

"Handforth minor!" he thundered.

Willy jumped down and looked meek.

"Australia's won the toss, sir," he announced eagerly.

"Indeed! I—I mean— Really, Handforth!" snapped Mr. Suncliffe. "If I catch you standing upon your desk again I shall cane you. Did you happen to see who was bowling?"

"Browne, sir."

"I thought Fenton would put Browne on early," said Mr. Suncliffe, nodding. "It is rather a pity that we lost the toss. I fear—H'm! Now, where were we? Come, boys, we must settle ourselves to hard work!"

The lesson was geography, and Mr. Suncliffe suddenly picked up a book, and his eyes gleamed. He set the Form a task, and paced up and down the room, making comments from his own book.

It was quite a good idea. As he turned,

at the end of each pacing, he was at the window, and he was just tall enough to steal a glance outside to the score-board—the figures of which were clearly visible to the keen eyes of the fags, but somewhat hazy to Mr. Suncliffe.

"Anybody out yet, sir?" asked Willy, as Mr. Suncliffe took one of his swift looks.

"Not yet," said the Form-master. "At least, I don't think so— Splendid—splendid! A boundary, I believe!"

"Who's bowling now, sir?" asked a dozen voices.

"Kahn, I think," said Mr. Suncliffe. "Yes, I am sure— No, it may possibly be Hamilton—"

"Yes, it's Kahn, sir," said Willy, jumping on his desk. "And look at the score! Twenty-six already. Twenty-six for nil!"

"Nonsense," said Mr. Suncliffe. "There are only 16 runs scored. I can distinctly see—"

He turned, and started.

"Must I tell you again, Handforth minor?" he asked sharply. "I won't have this looseness in the middle of work! How dare you disobey my orders in this fashion?"

Work went on for perhaps five minutes, and Mr. Suncliffe, by sheer will power, never once went near the window. The Third was busy, and complete silence reigned. It was broken by the distant sound of clapping. Mr. Suncliffe reached the window in two rapid strides.

"Somebody is out!" he said excitedly.

"My hat!" ejaculated Chubby Heath. "Who is it, sir?"

"Beaton, I believe—the Australian captain!" said the Form-master. "I can't quite make out the number of the bowler on the board—"

"Number 2, sir—that's Browne!" yelled Willy.

"I thought so," beamed Mr. Suncliffe. "Browne is undoubtedly a clever bowler. I have always thought so."

"He's a corker, sir."

"Precisely—precisely," said Mr. Suncliffe, coming to himself. "But how many more times must I tell you that this sort of thing won't do? Are we learning geography, or are we discussing cricket? Handforth minor, take twenty lines for disobedience."

"Yes, sir," said Willy, grinning.

He knew well enough that he would not be expected to deliver those lines, but Mr. Suncliffe was compelled to do something in order to save his face.

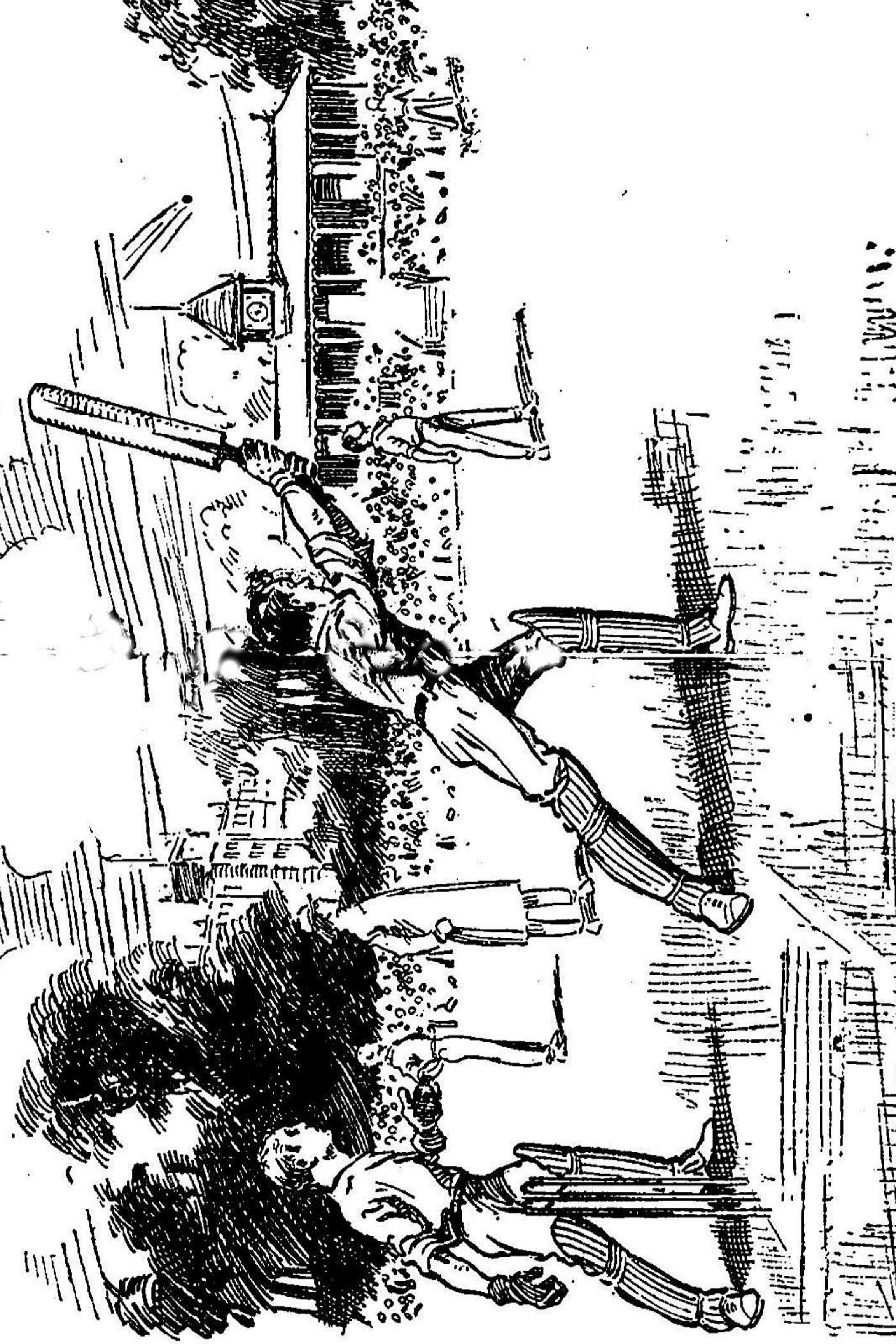
Once again the Third tried to settle itself to work.



CHAPTER 13.

NEARLY OUT OF HAND.

M R. SUNCLIFFE stilled any twinges of conscience by assuring himself that the Third had done quite a lot of work prior to eleven-thirty, and there was only a comparatively short time to go before the official time of



release would come. Still, lessons were the main thing.

Out on Big Side, the match was shaking down.

One or two prefects had come out, and were in the pavilion. And they could tell that Australia was a strong team. The opening men, at all events, were first-class cricketers.

One of the Bayliss brothers was in now, from the River House School. He and a tall Australian from Helmford were settling down to a partnership which looked likely to produce quick scoring.

But William Napoleon Browne was out for mischief. He was bowling from the pavilion end, and this was distinctly one of his best days. Like all bowlers, Browne had good days and bad days. Sometimes he couldn't take a wicket for love or money, and at other times he was utterly deadly.

He had just dismissed Beaton, and Bayliss was his next victim. And it had seemed that the two batsmen were settling down. The ball hadn't seemed dangerous at all. It curled under Bayliss' bat, and flicked off the bails.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

And the score stood at 37—2.

This was distinctly good, and it was distinctly better a minute later, for with Browne's very next delivery he took another wicket. It was exactly the same kind of ball, and the same thing happened. Off went the bails, and back went the Australian batsman to the pavilion.

In the Third-Form room the excitement was intense.

"Browne's going to do the hat-trick, sir!" shouted Willy.

"Don't get excited, boys—don't get excited!" panted Mr. Suncliffe, who was as excited as any of them. "Upon my soul! What's the score?"

"Thirty-seven for three, sir!" exclaimed Chubby Heath.

"Why, this is wonderful!" said Mr. Suncliffe. "I had no hope that we should do so well. Boys—boys! What is this? How dare you leave your seats in this way! I can't allow it!"

"Next man in, sir!"

"And Browne's going to do the hat-trick, sir!"

Mr. Suncliffe tried hard to keep himself from the window, but it was humanly impossible. He stared out, and could see the new batsman thumping his willow upon the pitch. Browne was getting ready to deliver the fifth ball of that particular over.

"Here he goes, sir!" breathed Willy.

"Hush! Hush!" whispered Mr. Suncliffe tensely.

He was so engrossed that he was entirely

unaware of the fact that the entire Form was crowding at the three windows, climbing on the top of one another's shoulders in order to get a clear view. At least three fellows were actually clutching at Mr. Suncliffe.

Browne took his run, and down went the ball.

Everybody held their breath. Round came the bat, and there was a faint click. The leather sped away across the green.

A long sigh went up in the Third Form-room.

"He didn't do it, sir," said Willy regretfully. "Still, he took two wickets——"

"What—what on earth——"

Mr. Suncliffe caught in his breath. Expecting to find the Form in its usual place, he was startled when he saw that the windows were packed with humanity and the desks empty.

"Boys!" he thundered.

There was a wild scramble, and the Third resumed its seats.

"Good gracious!" panted Mr. Suncliffe. "What next?"

"He might take another wicket, sir," said Willy.

"I am not referring to cricket!" shouted the Form-master. "I absolutely forbid you to say another word regarding this game. And if I catch any boy near the windows again, I will cane him! Understand! I will not be defied in this way! Make no reference whatever to cricket!"

The Form said nothing, and work went on again.

"You might come and have a look at my map, sir," said Willy, after a few moments. "I'm not quite sure that I've got it right."

"Certainly," said Mr. Suncliffe.

He examined the map critically, but he was listening at the same time, for just then some further clapping had sounded from the distance.

"It's a bit wrong at this corner, isn't it, sir?" asked Willy. "This bulge seems to go a bit wrong. Any chance of Australia being all out by tea-time, sir?" he added casually.

"I should think it is very probable," replied the Form-master. "With three wickets down already—— Ahem! This map, eh? Splendid, Handforth minor! I congratulate you upon your excellent workmanship."

"But you're looking at the atlas, sir," explained Willy. "I didn't draw that."

Mr. Suncliffe started.

"No, no, to be sure!" he said hastily. "Don't bother me with these trifles! What is the time? H'm! Another ten minutes! There is just a chance that another wicket will fall——"

"What's that, sir?" asked Chubby Heath excitedly.

"Eh? What's what?"

"Didn't you hear a yell——"

"I absolutely refuse to take any notice of exterior yells, Heath," interrupted Mr. Suncliffe firmly. "There has been enough of this playing at work. Confine yourselves to the lesson."

ANSWERS

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In order to remove himself from temptation, Mr. Suncliffe sat down at his desk. Willy Handforth turned all sorts of ideas over in his mind. He was wondering how he could persuade Mr. Suncliffe to let the Form out at once. And just then a distinct cheer sounded.

"Somebody else out!" breathed Owen minor.

"Sounded like a catch!" exclaimed Willy, dashing to the window.

"Handforth minor, come back at once!"

"It's a catch, sir!" announced Willy.

"Really? Who——" Mr. Suncliffe reached the window rapidly. "Yes, I believe you are right. This is extraordinary! We are doing splendidly, boys, and there seems to be every chance of winning. Who is that with the ball, Heath?"

"Fullwood made the catch, sir."

"Nonsense! It is Hamilton."

"No, sir—Fullwood."

"Don't contradict me, sir!" said Mr. Suncliffe angrily. "I tell you the boy is Hamilton. Are you trying to tell me I don't know one boy from another? You are getting altogether too impudent!"

"I've got a pair of binoculars in my desk, sir," put in Gates, from the other side of the room.

"Binoculars!" shouted Mr. Suncliffe. "Then good gracious, why didn't you say so before? We will soon settle this point, Heath! Absurd boy, Gates! Why couldn't you bring these out?"

"I—I thought you'd be angry, sir," said Gates nervously.

Mr. Suncliffe seized the binoculars, flung the window open, and grunted.

"H'm! The boy does appear to be Fullwood, after all," he said grudgingly. "I can see the score-board splendidly now! Fifty-four for four. Dear me! If the tail collapses, there will be a very small total."

"Can I have those glasses, sir?" asked Gates. "I can't see all this distance——"

"You are not supposed to see, Gates," retorted Mr. Suncliffe. "I shall confiscate these binoculars until lessons are over. It will teach you not to bring them into the Form-room again! Fifty-four for four, eh? Surely our fellows will do much better than that?"

"They couldn't do much worse, sir," remarked Willy.

Once again work proceeded, but it was only a pretence, at the best. Even Mr. Suncliffe was aware of this, but he stifled his qualms by assuring himself that this sort of excitement was perfectly healthy. There ought to be no restrictions regarding cricket. The headmaster was quite right to curtail such sports as swimming and running, and other useless exercises. But cricket was on a totally different plane, and should be recognised as such.

Outside, the members of the England team were feeling exceedingly happy. Edgar Fenton was joyful, and he urged Browne to keep on bowling. Not that Browne needed much urging, although, of course, the strain was

rather severe. But he didn't want to rest just yet.

Things were going so well that Fenton didn't wish to interfere with anybody. However, at this point two of the Australians made a stand. Not that such a stand wasn't to be expected. The pair became set, and the runs mounted much more quickly than before. And even Browne made no impression. His bowling, indeed, appeared to be welcomed. The batsmen scored freely from it.

But there could be no denying that the game was going very well from England's point of view.



CHAPTER 14.

WELL CAUGHT!

GREAT Scott!" Willy Handforth made that ejaculation in the Third Form-room, just when Mr. Suncliffe had got his boys quiet for once. The Form-master looked up and frowned.

"What is it, Handforth minor?"

"Look at the clock, sir!" said Willy. "We've forgotten all about the time! We ought to have dismissed five minutes ago!"

Mr. Suncliffe started violently.

"Good gracious, what an extraordinary thing!" he ejaculated. "You appear to be right, Handforth minor. Boys, you may dismiss."

"Thank you, sir!" yelled the Third.

They tore out so speedily that Mr. Suncliffe himself was caught in the jam, for the Form-master had tried to get out first. The Third swept out of the School House, and no time was lost in dashing off to Big Side. Curiously enough, Mr. Suncliffe never thought of looking up at the clock in the tower. But if he had considered for a moment, he would realise that something was wrong, or the other Forms would have been out, too.

"Worked it, my sons!" grinned Willy, as he indicated the clock. "We're out ten minutes before time! That's what comes of putting the clock on a quarter of an hour."

"I thought he was going to find out, and send us all back!" panted Chubby. "My hat, it was a narrow escape!"

"Don't you believe it!" grinned Willy coolly. "Do you think we don't know our old bar of Sunlight? He's so jolly eager to see the cricket himself that he doesn't care what the clock says."

"The marvellous thing is that he didn't spot you working the dodge!" said Juicy Lemon. "Right in front of his giddy eyes, too!"

Willy had seized a moment, about half an hour earlier, to nip upon Mr. Suncliffe's desk, reach up, and swing the hand of the clock round. At the moment, Mr. Suncliffe had been searching for something in the cupboard, and had noticed nothing wrong. And now the Third had gained its freedom.

"We'll think of another dodge for this afternoon," said Willy confidently. "Leave it to me, my lads, and I'll guarantee that we know every move of the game as it goes along. It's easy enough to work old Sunny if you rub him the right way."

The stand of the two Australians was still in progress when the Third stood round the ground. They were grimly determined to put a different complexion on the game. Already the score was 78-4.

And soon afterwards the rest of the school came hurrying out, and the match began to brighten up considerably. It made a big difference with a crowd looking on. The Australians seemed to welcome it, for they opened out strongly. And the louder the cheering, the more brilliant the play.

At the luncheon interval another wicket had fallen, and the score was 133-5.

"Upon the whole, it's jolly good," said Nipper, as he and the other members of the St. Frank's First Eleven came off the field. "If we can only keep this rate up, we'll have them all out by the middle of the afternoon."

"Ripping!" said Tommy Watson. "Then we shall see you fellows batting after tea. By jingo, I'll bet there'll be a crowd round the ground! These Australians are pretty hot stuff."

"They'll get better than this," declared Nipper. "The team hasn't played together

before, you know, and they're strangers, more or less. That's really a handicap for them. They'll be a lot more dangerous in the next Test."

The Australians were entertained to luncheon by Fenton at a special spread in the Ancient House. They were a fine set of fellows, and they were all as keen as mustard on the match.

No time was wasted, for, after an interval which lasted less than three-quarters of an hour, the First Eleven—officially called England for these Test Matches—took the field again.

Hussi Kahn, the Indian junior, and Nipper were the first two bowlers, and for five or ten minutes nothing happened. The score mounted rapidly. Then came a period of luck for St. Frank's. Two of the visitors left in rapid succession, and another only scored 4 before he was dismissed also.

The game was growing exciting now. 162 for eight.

"Good old England!"

"You'll soon have the Aussies out now!"

"Rather!"

The game went on, and the crowd stood round anxiously. They were expecting the bell to go every minute to take them back into the hateful class-rooms. The feeling of antagonism towards study was growing. On such an occasion as this it was little short of criminal to continue with lessons.

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The spectators enjoyed one splendid catch just before they were obliged to go in, and Edward Oswald Handforth was the hero of the occasion. One of the Australians made a tremendous knock, and it seemed certain that the leather was going to the boundary. But Handforth, in long field, started running.

"It's no good—he'll never do it!"

"Impossible!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"It's yours, old man—it's yours!"

"No fear! He can't get there in time!"

All these shouts happened at once, and Handforth didn't even hear them. His eye was on the ball, and he ran madly. And at the last second, with the ball falling well within the boundary line, he hurled himself upwards and forwards, his right hand outstretched.

Click!

The ball touched his fingers. He gripped it, and stumbled forward at the same moment. A groan went up. Handforth reeled over, but he maintained his grip on the ball, and held it. The next second he sent it soaring aloft.

"Oh, well caught!"

"Out, by jingo!"

"Hurrah!"

"That's just about wiped the Aussies up!" chuckled Willy. "I never thought my major could run like that, you know. It only shows what you can do when you try! Let's hope England does a bit better, anyhow."

Soon afterwards the school was obliged to go in, and the Third Form found that Mr. Suncliffe was not quite so easy this afternoon. At least, he didn't seem to be to start with. He confined himself to the lesson, and threatened any boy with a heavy imposition if he dared to look out of the window.

"Raining, sir," remarked Willy, after a while.

"Raining!" exclaimed Mr. Suncliffe, with a start. "This will be unfortunate if it turns out to be a serious downpour. But we are not interested in anything outside this room, boys," he added grimly.

And he apparently meant it, and the Third felt considerably swindled.

Outside, the shower proved to be fairly heavy—at least for a minute or two. Then it ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The wind was rising, however, and many weather prophets were predicting a soaking wet day on the morrow. This would ruin everything, of course, for to-morrow, if the weather kept fine, would be the most interesting day of the two.

Just before three, after a brief stoppage on account of the rain, Australia was all out, and their total amounted to 203.

It wasn't particularly formidable. But perhaps these Aussies were better bowlers than batsmen. Jerry Dodd, at all events, was a fair demon, and if there were any more like him there was a chance of the game proving even more exciting than it now promised to be.



CHAPTER 15.

ENGLAND AT THE WICKET.

FENTON and Morrow opened for England.

They started very cautiously, and for the first fifteen minutes scarcely any runs were scored. Australia in the field looked a capable, business-like lot. Considering that the combination was a new one, they shaped exceedingly well. Beaton was a clever captain, too. He placed his field cunningly, and both Fenton and Morrow found it difficult to obtain runs.

Two of the senior Australian boys were bowling. One was a fast bowler, with a peculiarly difficult delivery. And the other, by way of contrast, was slow. It seemed a perfectly easy matter to deal with his deliveries, but they were actually very tricky. Fenton was reluctant to hit at anything to start with. He knew the importance of a good first-wicket stand. But Morrow succumbed to the slow bowler after the score had reached the modest total of 9. And five minutes after Morrow had departed, Stevens left. Browne now joined Fenton, and things began to liven up.

For William Napoleon Browne was a quicker batsman than the skipper, and he gained a grip on the bowling after a very short time at the wicket. And once he fairly opened out, he scored freely.

When the school came out, after lessons were over, Browne and Fenton were still in partnership, and the score was mounting nicely. At the tea interval there was still no change. But afterwards Fenton was caught, and there was plenty of bright cricket to follow.

Nipper did exceedingly well, carrying his bat out, after an hour's work, for a sound 22. And De Valerie showed up quite well, and Reggie Pitt proved his value to the side. Fullwood, however, met with bad luck, and suffered the misfortune of being stumped after he had scored only 2 runs.

By mid-evening, England was nearly all out, and an intermittent drizzle had set in. It wasn't exactly rain, but there was an increasing wind, and there were little flurries of the disconcerting drizzle.

Play went on, and the spectators had the satisfaction of seeing the Australian score equalled, and beaten. But not by many. For the First Eleven was all out for 215.

And it was decided that play should cease for the day—although there was still a good half-hour left. But the rain was getting stronger, and the wind developing into a gale.

"Just our luck!" grunted Handforth. "We've got 'em properly whacked, and now it's going to pour! I'll bet it'll come down in sheets to-morrow."

"Oh, it's bound to," said Church dismally.

There were many anxious missions out of doors that night before bed-time. The Australians did not go back to their various schools, of course, but were accommodated

in two or three of the spare dormitories in various Houses.

Just before bed-time a regular rain storm occurred.

Just as everybody had predicted, the night settled down to the accompaniment of pouring, persistent rain. And every hope of the game being finished went by the board.

"Oh, well, that's one of the beauties of cricket!" said Fenton. "We can never tell what kind of weather we're going to get. Let's be jolly thankful that we've gained the lead on the first innings. That's something, anyhow."

"As you say, Brother Fenton, it is certainly something," agreed Browne. "But it is by no means a satisfactory state of affairs. Let us venture forth, and inspect the stormy skies. I am renowned as something of a prophet."

"It's no good inspecting the skies," growled Stevens. "We shall have to abandon the game. The pitch will be like a morass to-morrow."

Stevens was the only fellow who elected to go out with Browne, and they emerged from the Ancient House, and stood on the steps.

There was nothing in the aspect of the sky to cheer anybody except a duck. The clouds were low, the wind was whistling round the angles of the buildings, and the rain was steady.

"Awful!" said Stevens, with a grunt.

Browne pointed away towards the recent sunset. There was still a trace of a reddish glow in the sky.

"Splendid, Brother Horace!" beamed Browne. "You have doubtless heard the old saw? 'Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning—red sky at night, shepherd's delight.' You will observe a certain ruddy tinge in the West, so let us delight."

"We're not shepherds!" grunted Stevens.

"A minor detail," declared Browne. "I go to bed happy, Brother Horace. We must take no notice of the weather conditions at the moment. When one is anxious about cricket, one is always apt to regard a slight shower as a flood. There has been but little rain so far."

"Don't you worry about that—there's plenty coming," put in Handforth, who had come out with Church and McClure to make the regular ten-minute inspection. "What a rotten shame! Dished during the very first Test Match! What's the good of making any giddy fixtures at all?"

The school went to bed soon afterwards, to the accompaniment of a buffeting wind and with the sound of raindrops on the windows. An air of gloom had descended upon all and sundry. Quite a number of juniors couldn't get to sleep because of the load on their minds. But in the end all dropped off, and their last waking recollections were those of rain—rain—persistent rain.

Whether the matter was on Handforth's mind—or whether a late snack in Study D had anything to do with it, he awoke in the early hours. He was aware of pains in the interior. He rolled over in bed, and gradually awoke to full consciousness.

"Those giddy sardines!" he muttered. "I told Church they were squiffy, but the fat-head said they weren't! I shouldn't be surprised if I've got ptomaine poisoning."

He got out of bed and drank about a pint of water—for Handforth was one of those fellows who regarded water as a cure for all ills. Then he suddenly started and listened.

There was no wind—no rain.

It was getting light, too, and he saw, by McClure's watch on the dressing-table, that it was a few minutes after four o'clock. At St. Frank's, all the juniors occupied small dormitories—three fellows, on the average, in each.

"The match!" gasped Handforth abruptly.

He had suddenly remembered, and he dashed to the casement window, and flung it wide open. A waft of cool, fresh air assailed him. The sky was cloudless, and the dawn was as perfect as any dawn could be. There wasn't a trace of the overnight wind and rain.

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth excitedly.

Church sat up in bed, alarmed.

"What's wrong?" he asked, staring round wildly.

"Wrong!" roared Handforth. "You mean what's right? Come and have a look at the sky, my lad! It's as clear as a bell, and we shall be able to finish the match, after all."

Church grunted. Not being a member of the team, and not being fully awake, his enthusiasm for cricket was at a low ebb. He bestowed a bleary glare upon his leader.

"You lunatic!" he growled. "Haven't you got more sense than to wake a fellow in the middle of the night and bawl about the weather?"

"But the match——"

"Blow the match!" snorted Church, snuggling down again.

Handforth wasted no further time on his unappreciative chum. He tore out of the dormitory, and in another minute he was shaking Nipper by the shoulder. Nipper awoke on the instant.

"It's a glorious morning!" panted Handforth. "All the clouds have gone, and there's not a breath of wind——"

"What about it?" asked Dick Hamilton.

"I knew that ten minutes ago—but I'm not dashing about the House, disturbing everybody's sleep. Go back to bed, you maniac, and get some sleep."

But Handforth was too enthusiastic to take any notice of a sensible suggestion of that sort. He went from dormitory to dormitory, waking everybody up. But after he had had about four pillows flung at him he lost some of his ardour. And when a couple of boots were included in the missiles, to say nothing of a hairbrush, he concluded that these idiots weren't worth bothering about.

So he went back to bed, pulled the clothes over him, and decided that he wouldn't have another wink of sleep. He would lay there, and watch the sun rise. It was ridiculous to think of sleep when so much depended upon the weather.

And having come to this decision, the next thing he heard was the rising-bell.



The Third Form Boys clambered on top of one another as they crowded to the windows to get a view of the Test Match. Mr. Suncliffe stared from the empty desks to the struggling fags. "Boys!" he thundered.

The sun was beating through the dormitory windows powerfully, and the morning was hot and clear. It is very doubtful if the school had ever got up so quickly as it got up that morning. Practically everybody had one idea in mind—to be the first out to inspect the wicket.

Naturally, it was still very damp, but there was no fear of the game being abandoned. Wise judges, however, shook their heads dubiously, and had many stories to tell of soaked wickets with a hot sun on them. There was going to be some tricky play on that pitch!



CHAPTER 16.

GOOD OLD HANDY!

AUSTRALIA'S second innings opened sensationally.

Promptly at eleven-thirty play began, for the sun had dried Big Side so effectively that there was no reason to delay the start. The school was at work, of course, but the fellows at least had the consolation of knowing that to-day was a half-holiday, and that they would be able to see the better part of the day's play.

In the very first over that morning, two of the best Australian batsmen were dismissed. The wicket was certainly tricky! Browne, bowling, found that he could do some wonderful work, but he had an uncomfortable idea that the Australian bowlers would be able to do some uncomfortable work, too.

The wicket would probably be better when it was England's turn to bat, but it would be exceedingly rough.

A surprise awaited the school when it trooped out—for the figures on the score-board were startling. Australia, 63—6. Six wickets down, and all the best men out! And before the luncheon interval arrived, the Aussies were completely dismissed and they hadn't made a century between the lot of them; 98 was the exact score.

It wasn't exactly a collapse, but it was next door to it.

St. Frank's chuckled gleefully. This was the way to put it across them!

"By Jove, we've got the beggars absolutely whacked!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "Only 87 to win! Can we make 87, my sons?"

"Rather!"

"It'll be as easy as shelling peas!"

"The first Test Match is going to be a giddy walk-over!"

William Napoleon Browne, who happened to overhear these remarks, paused, and wagged an admonishing finger.

"While sharing this optimistic view to a certain extent, let me warn you that it is never wise to take anything for granted," he said. "England is determined to win—and, with myself included in the team, I fail to see how she can lose. But, alas, I cannot be at both wickets together. I am dependent upon others, or I would safely assure you of our ultimate success."

Browne's warning was remembered later.

After luncheon a surprising number of people turned up. Half the River House

School came along. Contingents arrived from Bannington Grammar School, from Helmford, from Yexford. The local townspeople—the inhabitants of Bannington—had got wind of the Test Match, and poured in.

The paddocks near the playing-fields resembled car parks, with scores of motor-cars lined up there. At St. Frank's, anybody was free to come in and watch the games. Strangers were always welcomed. And this afternoon the space round Big Side was taxed to its uttermost.

When play was resumed for the afternoon there must have been thousands watching, and this was surely an index of what might be expected later—when the other Test Matches were played. So far, the news was only known locally. Several of the London papers had made reference to the "Young England v. Young Australia" Test Matches, but there was no actual enthusiasm. Locally the interest was at fever pitch.

And this spirit inevitably communicated itself to the school.

The fellows were more than ever convinced that this was the term of all terms for sport, and that lessons should be reduced to a minimum. It was rather a dangerous idea to get about. But it was certainly growing in strength and power. And St. Frank's was liable to lose its head.

For the moment, however, the Test Match gripped everybody.

There seemed to be no reasonable doubt that England was in for an easy victory. With only 87 runs to get to win, and with the best part of the day in which to do it, it seemed like child's play. But if the Australian second innings had started sensationally, so did England start sensationally.

Jerry Dodd was one of the opening bowlers, and he was merciless. The fact that he was bowling against his own schoolfellows made no difference. He was bowling for Australia, and he was keen that Australia should win. In the very first over Jerry took three wickets.

And in the four following overs three other men were skittled out like ninepins. And the score stood at 23! Six wickets for 23 runs was appalling, and the St. Frank's crowds watched with agonised anxiety. Their jubilation had abruptly turned to consternation.

For, with such an easy task, it seemed as though England was to lose the match, after all. Browne, true to his word—although he had only been joking in his usual way—kept his own end up. Man after man went out, and a groan went up when everybody said "last man in!"

The score stood at 47. Still 40 runs to be obtained to win—and the fall of another wicket would mean the loss of the match. It seemed absolutely impossible—particularly as Handforth was last man in. His recklessness was proverbial, and on such a tricky wicket as this he would fail to last a single over.

"It's all up, England!"

"Australia wins!"

There was a dead silence, however, when Handforth received his first ball. And there

was a gasp of delight, mingled with dismay, when he swung his bat round, and lashed out fiercely.

Clack!

The leather sped to the boundary, beyond the reach of any fieldsmen. Thirty-six to win! But with Handforth sloshing out at the very first ball, there seemed little or no chance. It happened to be the last ball of the over, and Browne now had the bowling.

He was cautious, but he did not allow his cautiousness to cramp his usual bold style. During that over he delighted the crowd by scoring a pair of pretty twos, a boundary, and another two. And then it was Handforth's turn again.

"Now it's all over!" said Nipper anxiously.

"Bound to be," muttered Fenton. "I wish I'd sent Handforth in earlier, now—he's a fine man for slogging, but he'll give me heart failure at a time like this. One blunder—"

"Look at that!" gasped Morrow.

Edward Oswald was as cool as ice, and he didn't seem to care a straw. One might have thought that he had a whole string of batsmen to follow him. He swung his bat round, and the leather soared high. For a horrifying second, the St. Frank's crowd thought it was a catch. But Handforth knew better than that. The ball descended well beyond the reach of any of the Australian fieldsmen.

At the end of the next over the excitement was at fever pitch.

The expected hadn't happened—the two batsmen were still in. And England's score stood at 72!

It was indeed a period of acute suspense.

Only 15 runs needed to win!

"Handy, old man, if you love us, be careful!" pleaded Church, in agony.

"For goodness' sake, don't slog!" moaned McClure.

Willy chuckled.

"You might as well ask Ted not to breathe!" he said. "But you needn't worry. I can feel it in my bones that we're going to win. And if my major doesn't score the winning hit, I'm a Hottentot!"

"Look out! Here it comes!" said Church. "You watch his middle stump go flying!"

Jerry Dodd was bowling, and he put all the cunning he knew into that delivery. Handforth took no notice of McClure's advice—supposing it had reached him by mental telepathy—and slogged for all he was worth.

"Oh!"

A gasp of horror went up. It was a catch—a difficult one, but absolutely a catch. The batsmen were running, and a pall of utter silence had fallen upon the spectators. The leather fell with a smack into the hands of the speeding fieldsmen.

"Help!" moaned Nipper, shutting his eyes.

"He's dropped it!"

A perfect howl went up, and Nipper opened his eyes again. And it was a fact. The leather was in the grass, and there was still time to breathe. And four runs had been added to the score! Nobody could blame that

COMING NEXT WEEK!

"THE FOLLY OF ST. FRANK'S!"

Trouble—cartloads of it!

Mr. Crowell breathing fire and brimstone!

The Head telling everybody off right and left and instituting drastic punishments!

And Handforth?

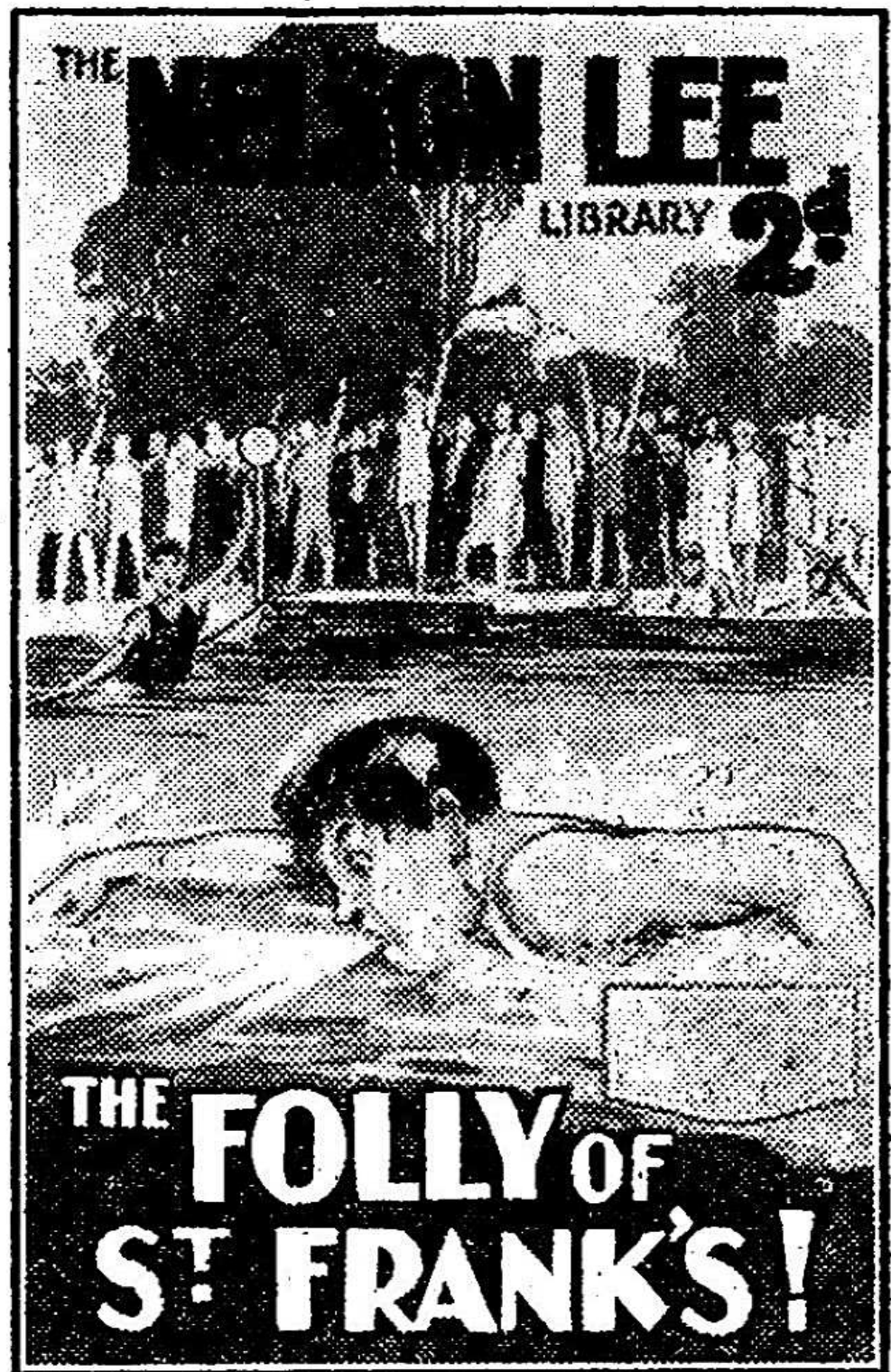
He's in it, too, right up to his neck!

You'll thoroughly enjoy next week's stunning long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's—"the sports maniacs," as Mr. Crowell called them!

Look out for

"THE MYSTERY OF THE CHINESE VASE!"

Another thrilling detective-adventure story, featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper; complete in next Wednesday's issue.



Look out for this cover on the bookstalls next Wednesday.

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

Australian junior for dropping the ball, for it had been a well-nigh impossible catch, with the sun utterly blinding him.

Browne had the bowling again now, and another of his little pats sent the leather away for two more. Then he stole a single, and the score-board showed that only 8 more runs were required.

"We'll never do it—it's impossible!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt. "These things always happen at the last minute, just when we're beginning to fool ourselves that we stand a chance. You watch Handy come out."

But Handforth finished the over without scoring—and without taking any chances. Which proved that he only lashed at balls which were safe.

During the next agonising over, Browne snicked the leather through the slips for two

more, and followed this up by a hit to mid-on, which just missed the fieldsman's outstretched fingers as it rolled in the grass. Two more! And then a single. Only three to win! And Handforth had the bowling.

The leather came down, and Handforth's bat swung round in the sunshine.

Clack!

It was about the biggest swipe of the match—and the school, with a thunderous roar of delight, caught a glimpse of the ball dropping beyond the pavilion. A six!

The game was over—and England had won!

After that St. Frank's went mad for about an hour, and there was every kind of enthusiasm. The first Test Match in the great series had been won by England—but with no dishonour to Australia, for it had been a win with a hair's-breadth margin!

YOUR EDITOR'S CORNER.

MAKING A START.

Isn't it queer how difficult it is to get started sometimes? I have been sitting at my desk for ten minutes now, wondering how I can commence this weekly chat to you fellows. There are a thousand things that I should like to tell you, but the space at my disposal is so limited that it is difficult to decide just where to begin.

Probably you have experienced exactly the same sort of thing. Take cricket, for instance. Don't the first few runs come slowly? But once you are set—once you get started—they usually come with a rush. Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks tells me that he is like that with the St. Frank's stories; particularly does he find it hard to get going with a new series. But once the first few chapters have been written, then the yarns fairly bubble along.

BETTER AND BETTER.

This new sports series is going to be about the best thing that he has ever given us, and next week's yarn, "THE FOLLY OF ST. FRANK'S!" is even better than this week's tale. The stories which follow it are better still, but you'll be discovering this for yourselves later on!

What with such topping stories and the enlargement of the old paper, I think I can safely claim that the NELSON LEE LIBRARY is better than it has ever been before, and the St. Frank's League is certain to get a big fillip in consequence of it.

TRUNCHEONS!

Here's a strange query from a Chester reader. He wants to know if a policeman carries a truncheon, and, if he does, where does he carry it?

I don't know why my Chester chum makes this inquiry. Perhaps he wants to know which is the safest side on which to dodge a bobby! Actually I expect it is just curiosity, because a truncheon is a fairly hefty-looking affair, and it certainly is marvellous where the policeman manages to tuck it away.

As a matter of fact, a constable on duty always carries a truncheon, and it slips into a special pocket in the right leg of his trousers. The pocket ends just above the

knee, so that the truncheon doesn't interfere if the policeman needs to run. The whole thing is so neatly tucked away that it cannot be seen, and it is not surprising that my Chester reader wants to know about it.

FOLLY!

And now, to return to next Wednesday's story, "THE FOLLY OF ST. FRANK'S!" Handforth & Co. are well in the midst of everything that happens, and the whole Remove get it thoroughly in the neck. In fact, the whole of the school itself is thoroughly shaken up—and it takes something to disturb St. Frank's!

The cause of the trouble is—sport! Too much sport!

It really is rather foolish to allow pastimes to interfere with work, but one cannot help sympathising with the Remove. Who would want to keep his nose grinding on a Form-room desk when the sun is shining outside,

when there's boating and swimming and cricket to indulge in? That's why Mr. Crowell found the Remove rather—shall we say "difficult"? Anyway, he had to bring the Head into it.

Taking it all round, "THE FOLLY OF ST. FRANK'S!" is the sort of yarn which, from long experience, I have discovered to be just

the kind you most enjoy, so look out for it!

Nelson Lee and Nipper will once again be to the fore in another complete detective story, "THE MYSTERY OF THE CHINESE VASE!" This is a real thriller.

PAGE 41!

On Page 41 of this issue you will find a long and interesting letter from the Chief Officer of the St. Frank's League; on Page 40 is the League Application Form.

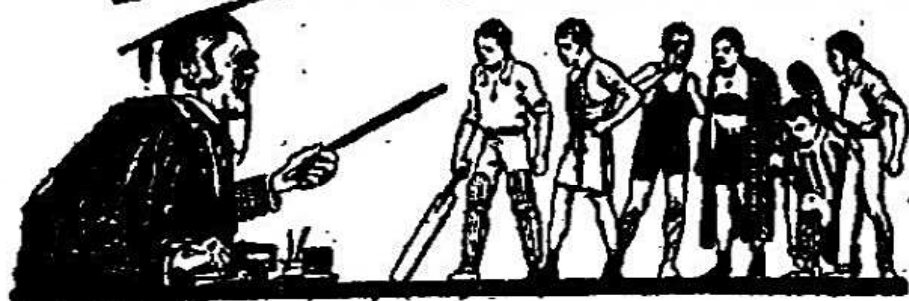
If you haven't yet joined the League—now is your chance! On the bottom of Page 40 you will find a short list giving some of the advantages of joining the League, and I don't think you want anything better than this issue itself to obtain the single introduction which you need to make you a member.

Anyhow, the Chief Officer's Chat will prove interesting to you, whether you belong to the League or not.

Don't forget to read it—Page 41!

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

THE FOLLY OF ST. FRANK'S!



The Case of . . .

THE STOLEN MESSENGER!

A stirring detective-adventure yarn featuring NELSON LEE and NIPPER. This is the second story of a new series relating their thrilling experiences on Special Cases undertaken during holidays or on emergency leave from St. Frank's.



CHAPTER 1.

WHERE IS NELSON LEE?

"NIPPER, I want you to come at once to— Ah-h-h!"

Nipper listened aghast as the guv'nor's voice dropped to a choking sob. In the same second he heard a crash—then utter silence!

"Hallo, guv'nor!" he yelled into the telephone. "Where are you? Why don't you answer? Hallo! Hallo!"

But not a sound came from the distant instrument. Only when the operator told Nipper that the call could not possibly be traced did he realise how helpless he was.

"Gosh! The guv'nor's in trouble somewhere, and I've no idea what case took him out this afternoon!" he groaned.

For a moment his forehead crinkled in a frown, then he dashed from the room and invaded Mrs. Jones' kitchen quarters like a whirlwind.

"Now, 'aven't I told you before," the buxom housekeeper began, "I won't 'ave you a-coming trapesing in here—"

"Never mind that, Mrs. Jones," Nipper panted. "The guv'nor was telephoning a second ago—he's hurt badly, by the sound of him. Do you know where he rushed off to while I was out this afternoon? Did anybody ring him up?"

The urgency in Nipper's voice told Mrs. Jones that he was in deadly earnest, and that, for once, he was not taking a rise out of her, as he so often did.

"A party did 'phone 'im, Master Nipper," she admitted. "I remembers that, 'cos I was dustin' the insultin'-room an' 'e came in—"

"Did you hear what he said?" Nipper interrupted. "Did you hear any names mentioned?"

"I 'eard 'im say, 'Yes—yes, Mr. 'Odd!'" she began, then shook her head in doubt. "No, it wasn't 'Odd—it was Rodd! That was it."

"Anything else?" Nipper demanded.

"Yes—somethin' about stones, though what 'e meant was more—"

But Nipper wasn't waiting—he was already streaking back to the consulting-room. In a frenzy of haste, he tore down a directory and

began feverishly scanning its closely printed pages.

"Rodd—stones! That means jewels, of course," he muttered. "Yes, here we are: Aaron Rodd, jeweller, Bond Street!"

He was out of the house before the plump housekeeper had ceased shaking her head over his mad behaviour. Five minutes later he raced down lamp-lit Bond Street, and quickly found the jeweller's premises—a tiny shop, but one that only the very rich could afford to patronise.

"I want Mr. Rodd at once, please," Nipper panted, almost before the door had opened to his touch.

The important little salesman behind the glittering counter-cases smiled at the lad's cool cheek.

"Mr. Rodd can only be seen by appointment," he said, in a superior way. "May I ask your business?"

"You may not!" Nipper snapped. "You go and tell your boss I'm from Mr. Nelson Lee, and—"

A velvet curtain behind the salesman was whisked aside, and a plump-faced man beckoned Nipper into his private office. Only when the door was closed and Nipper seated did Mr. Aaron Rodd ask the lad his business.

"The guv'nor's hurt, sir, and I want to find out where he is," Nipper said, all in one breath; then, seeing the jeweller's bewildered frown, Nipper told of Nelson Lee's telephone call and its startling sequel.

"But how can I help you?" Mr. Rodd protested. "He left here hours ago. Even if an accident has happened to him, how can you possibly expect me to tell you where he is?"

"He's out on some business of yours, Mr. Rodd," Nipper answered sharply. "I ferreted your name from the housekeeper—she heard Mr. Lee mention it on the 'phone. There's only one way to trace him, that's for you to tell me why you called him in—to let me try and follow where you sent him."

Mr. Rodd frowned, and he was silent for many seconds.

"If I hesitate, it is because I don't like admitting that I have been robbed of valuables belonging to another person—that I have betrayed a trust," he said at last. "I can tell you little of Mr. Lee's movements—"

except that he left here to hunt for John Ellidge and the jewels he has stolen."

"That's something, anyway," Nipper answered quickly. "But who is John Ellidge, sir, and what *has* he stolen?"

"Ellidge, my lad, was my confidential messenger," Mr. Rodd said sourly. "This morning he disappeared with a £4,000 necklace—and I must produce that necklace to-morrow, or declare myself a defaulter!"

"And it's now 8 p.m., and the gov'nor's got to be traced first!" Nipper gasped. "But if he was after the necklace, Mr. Rodd, my job in finding him might bring us up with Ellidge, so tell me what this messenger of yours has been doing, sir."

"Six days ago, Lady Irene Pargrave brought me a diamond necklace—rose-tinted stones, of which the smallest was missing," Mr. Rodd explained. "Stones of that colour are remarkably scarce, but I promised to replace and match the missing gem in time for Lady Pargrave to wear the necklace at the State ball to-morrow evening."

"And Ellidge has got away with the lot?" Nipper asked.

"By a remarkably clever scheme, he has," the jeweller admitted. "This morning's post brought a letter from Lady Pargrave, asking that the necklace should be sent to her house, in Brighton, by special messenger travelling on the four-thirty train. I wondered at her change of plan, but never thought to question it—and Ellidge left here with the necklace soon after four o'clock."

"But it was only ten minutes past when you 'phoned the gov'nor," Nipper protested. Mr. Rodd smiled sourly.

"Ellidge had not been gone five minutes when a call came from Lady Pargrave, asking me if I had yet matched the missing stone," he said. "You can imagine my amazement!" He mopped his damp forehead, as if the words brought back the shock all over again. "I rang off as quickly as I could, 'phoned Mr. Lee to meet me at Victoria Station, and hurried round there as fast as a taxi could take me."

"And what happened, sir?" Nipper asked.

"Nothing," Mr. Rodd answered shortly. "I searched the four-thirty, carriage by carriage. I could hardly yet believe that Ellidge had swindled me in such a bare-faced fashion!" He sighed, and shook his head. "Mr. Lee dashed into the station just as the train drew out—but never a sign of Ellidge did we see!"

"You've trusted Ellidge with valuables before to-day, of course?" Nipper asked.

"Nearly every day this five years past," Mr. Rodd answered. "I'd have trusted him with my life—the scoundrel! And yet, I ought to have seen what was coming—he gave me hints enough!"

Nipper stared.

"He's been saying for weeks past that somebody was following him—that somebody had got to know he was in the habit of carrying a fortune in his breast-pocket," the jeweller continued, and he laughed mirthlessly. "He's been waiting his chance to get his hand on something really big—knowing that I'd sooner pay than drag the police in

and admit that I was unable to guard my customers' treasures."

But Nipper was hardly listening. His thoughts were full of Nelson Lee and the terribly significant "Ah-h-h!" of his telephone call.

"The gov'nor would almost certainly make for Ellidge's 'digs' first," Nipper muttered. "Where does this man of yours live, sir?"

"Mayrick Mansions, Victoria," Mr. Rodd answered. "But the police ought to be told, now that Mr. Lee——"

"You leave the police alone—until to-morrow morning, anyway!" Nipper exclaimed, making for the door. "The gov'nor's helped the police many a time, but he'd never forgive me if they were called in to help him."

"I was thinking more of the Pargrave necklace than of Mr. Lee," the jeweller replied drily.

But Nipper was already speeding for the street—and the necklace was certainly *not* taking first place in *his* thoughts!

CHAPTER 2.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

MAYRICK MANSIONS proved to be an old-fashioned house let off in flats. A brass plate on the hall doorway told Nipper that John Ellidge lived on the third floor, and, racing up the stairs, he was astonished to find that Ellidge's door stood wide open, and that the room was brilliantly lighted!

Creeping cautiously down the passage, Nipper could hear someone moving about, and, as he drew near the door, the smell of cigar smoke showed that whoever was within was certainly making no secret of his presence.

Could John Ellidge have returned? It seemed impossible. Yet who else would dare to trespass in the place so soon after the thief had run away?

Whilst Nipper hung back, debating the problem, a bent form suddenly darkened the doorway and peered uncertainly down the ill-lit lobby.

"Ah, I thought I heard someone!" the fellow said in a husky wheeze. "Don't stand there—come in, come in!"

It now dawned on Nipper that the door had been left open for the very purpose of hearing anyone approaching down the passage. He knew that he might quite easily be walking into a trap; but he must either go forward, or give up the search for the gov'nor right away. His first quick glance showed a comfortably furnished living-room, and, through a wide-open door, a small bed-room that contained nothing but a narrow camp-bed.

"Well, sir, if these are Mr. Ellidge's rooms——" Nipper began, as if in doubt.

"They are; but John's not here, confound him!" the old chap wheezed, standing aside for Nipper to enter. "Here he goes inviting his Uncle Dean down, bringing him all the

way from Sunderland to come and see London Town. Then he isn't here to meet me—leaves me to do what I like, and not a word left in excuse."

He stood looking at Nipper, his pale face in strong contrast to the black that clothed him from head to foot. In place of a collar, a black silk scarf was bound tightly round his neck.

He was puffing jerkily at a newly lighted cigar, and his beady eyes were darting nervous little glances at the lad.

"That's too bad, sir," Nipper said. "It's a long——"

He broke off suddenly. The man was staring at him in a queer fashion, and, abruptly, he stepped nearer the lad. His manner changed, and his beady eyes glinted as he hissed:

"Who are you—what d'you want here?"

Nipper gave back stare for stare. He knew that Dean had guessed who he was and why he had come to these rooms.

"I'll tell you what I want, mister," he said quietly. "I want to know what you've done with Nelson Lee—and I'm not leaving this place until I find out!"

Dean's lips bared in a sneering grin.

"Well, if that isn't rich," he snarled. "There hasn't been a soul in this room—Nelson Lee's never been near the place, you young fool!"

"That's a lie!" Nipper snapped. "Mr. Dean, you might have fooled me, only you've forgotten to remove the band from the cigar you are smoking!"

"What d'you mean?" the man gasped, sudden fear leaping to his eyes. "I don't know what you're talking about—but I tell you there's been no Nelson Lee in this room!"

"Then how do you come to be smoking one of his cigars?" Nipper demanded. His hand shot out, and he snatched the burning leaf from Dean's fingers. "I thought so—a Ramon Ardillo! Queer that you smoke the same brand as the gov'nor, seeing he has them specially imported for his own use!"

Dean wasted no more time in argument—there was really nothing he could say. With a bitter yell, he launched himself straight at Nipper.

Nipper lashed out as the man sprang at him. The thud of his fist echoed across the room as Nipper got home on his jaw; Dean's head jerked sharply backwards, and, as if lifted by springs, he crashed across the heavy table!

For a second Dean lay there, then he rolled off the table, staggered, recovered, and snatched up a heavy poker! He was already between Nipper and the door, but, as if that was not bad enough, the window was suddenly flung open and an evil-faced ruffian, with the chest development of a gorilla, sprang into the room.

"Another of 'em, mate?" the fellow rasped hoarsely. "Lemme get at 'im—I'll put 'im to sleep!"

Nipper hadn't the slightest doubt but that he would. He took one glance at the ungainly brute, realised that he was nicely trapped, and acted with lightning speed.

Snatching up a chair, he flung it hard at the legs of the newcomer. Then, turning in a flash, he saw Dean creeping to lock the door, and, ramming the table forward with all his weight behind it, Nipper pinned the man hard against the wall!

With a scream of pain, Dean flung the poker straight at Nipper's head. But the lad anticipated the move by a second, dodged, and wrenched the door violently open.

Like a marathon winner he raced down the passage and took the first flights of steps four at a time. Other doors were already opening and startled faces appearing, but Nipper guessed that the murderous ruffians would not dare to attempt an open pursuit. What tale they would tell the startled flat-dwellers he neither knew nor cared. But he was quite certain that these vicious crooks had some

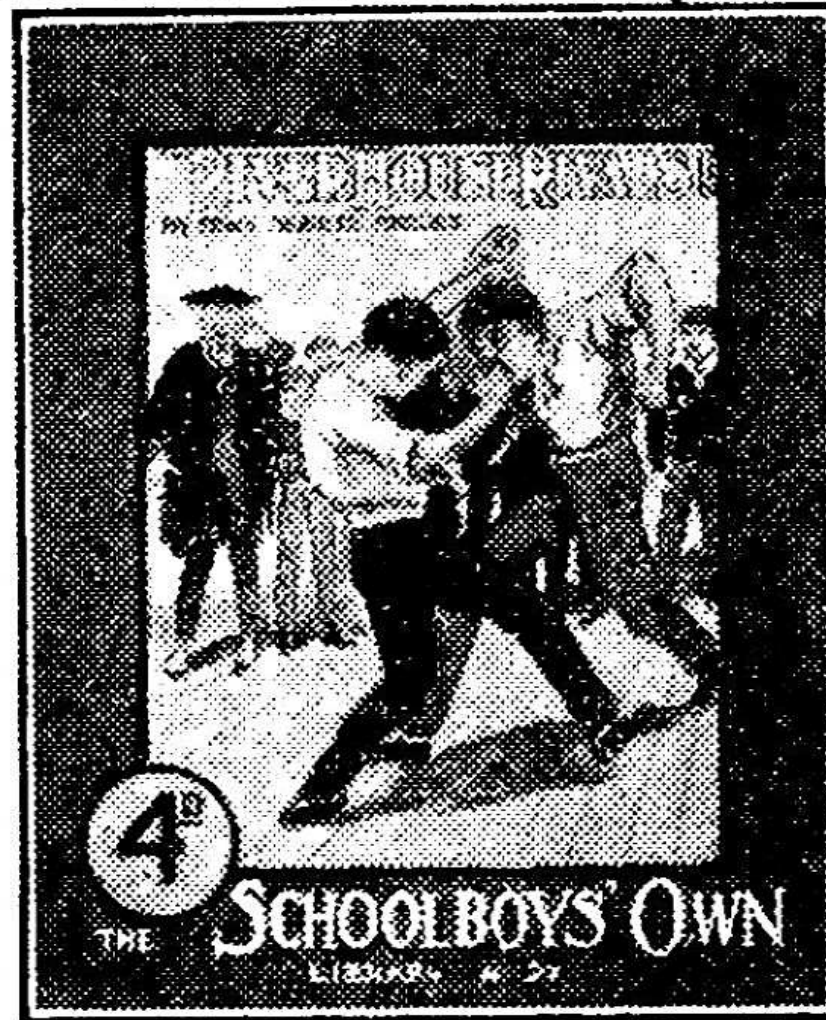
vital reason for occupying Ellidge's rooms, and that the only way he could help the gov'nor was to get outside Mayrick Mansions with a whole skin and a clear head.

CHAPTER 3.

NIPPER TAKES CHANCES!

A DOZEN startling thoughts were buzzing in Nipper's head as he dodged past a sleepy hall-porter and gained the street. He began to doubt Ellidge's guilt. Was it possible that the jeweller's messenger really had been followed and put out of the way? In that case, it was more than likely that Dean was occupying the rooms with the sole object of searching them—and he could only be searching for the stolen necklace!

A TIP-TOP YARN!



This rousing long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's—
"THE RIVER HOUSE RIVALS!"
 —will be on sale on Friday, May 7th.
DON'T MISS IT!

Again, there was Dean's denial that Nelson Lee had visited the place, and the man's mad rage when Nipper had proved him a liar. If any other proof were needed, the sudden appearance of Dean's ugly partner showed that he had been listening and waiting to trap the lad—and the brute's plain hint that he had already put someone "to sleep" could only mean the gov'nor or Ellidge.

"Gosh!" Nipper suddenly grinned. "If that gorilla-man was able to spy on me from a window fifty feet above the ground, it's worth finding out how he did it. He carries a jolly sight too much beef to be a cat burglar, and I'm thinking these back premises'll be more interesting than the front."

Hurrying to the wide alley that lay along the back of the buildings, Nipper stopped when he judged that he must be somewhere opposite Ellidge's rooms.

To a lad as nimble as he, the climbing of the eight-foot-wall between the alley and the back of the mansions was a simple matter. A run, a jump and a heave, and he was on top of the rough brick and peering into the darkness of what seemed to be a neglected garden. There was not a sound or movement from below, so Nipper dropped without hesitation and groped his way towards the buildings whose lighted windows showed which tenants were at home and which away.

"Now, that big brute wouldn't try any spout-climbing tricks," Nipper mused, as he felt his way along the damp brickwork. "He's either had a good strong ladder, or—Oh, crumbs!" He chuckled a little as he blundered headlong into cold ironwork. "Well, if I'm not the prize jabberwock! I'd clean forgotten that these flats are bound to have an outside fire-escape!"

Stepping back from the building, Nipper could now make out the iron stairway clamped to the wall and rising until it was lost in the darkness overhead. Now that his eyes were growing accustomed to the gloom, he could see a narrow hand-railed balcony running below the windows of each floor.

There was not a soul in sight when Nipper started to climb the iron stairway. He had to pass several lighted windows, but the luck was with him and he reached the third-floor balcony in safety. Then, creeping up and down, he saw that several windows carried heavy curtains that hid the view from the balcony; and he was beginning to despair of ever finding Ellidge's room when the husky voice of Dean came faintly to his ears.

In a moment Nipper was down on hands and knees, and soon found that the sounds issued through a cracked pane at the bottom of the framework. A little piece of glass was missing, and, by placing his ear against the hole, he could make out every word that was spoken.

"I've had enough of fooling about, Kedder," Dean was saying savagely. "That little beast might have howled us out quite easily! If he has any idea that Ellidge is

being searched for, he might even be telling the police at this very moment!"

"I ain't in love with the place meself," Kedder said hoarsely. "The shiners must be here somewheres—why not make Ellidge open 'is mouth, in th' way I've asked you to do till I'm tired?"

"You're a cold-blooded beast," Dean answered. "But you're right, Kedder, it's gettin' too hot in this place. Come on, pull him out an' let's get it over!"

Nipper listened in amazement. His keen eyes had searched every hole and corner of the room, and he could have sworn there was no place in which a man could have been hidden. He could hear the two crooks moving away from the window, and, with a sudden resolve, he felt for his penknife. Inserting the blade through the hole at which he had listened, he managed to lift the curtain sufficient to see what was going on within.

Dean and Kedder were bending over a huge, old-fashioned ottoman couch that rested against the opposite wall. Even as Nipper took his first glimpse, they were raising the hinged seat, and in another moment they had dragged a bound and gagged man from its box-like interior!

"Now, Ellidge, we've wasted enough time on you," Dean snarled, as they callously dropped the man to the floor. "D'you intend to tell us where you've hidden those stones, or d'you not?"

Ellidge shook his head bravely and glared in defiance at the men who bent over him.

"Then you leave 'im to me," Kedder growled. "I've a way of makin' fellers speak—I've done it afore, on better plucked 'uns than this. Ever 'eard of a hot singe?" he leered, pushing Dean aside and bringing out a box of matches. "Yer ain't, eh? Well, I'll show yer what it is—an' yer can nod yer 'ead when you've 'ad enough!"

The sight that followed made Nipper grit his teeth with rage. He saw Kedder strike a match and hold the flame so close to Ellidge's head that the hair sizzled and the scalp must have been severely burnt.

The blood rushed to the poor fellow's face, and he writhed in helpless agony. Kedder grinned, ran his hand up and down the singed hair to prevent it from flaming—and applied the match still closer!

The sight was too much for Nipper. With a blind rage that killed all thought of caution, he sprang to his feet, smashed the window open with a single kick, and crashed his way through the broken framework!

"You rotter!" he yelled, springing across the room and slamming out at the hand that still held the charred match. "I'll make you suffer for this——"

But Nipper was fated to suffer first. Whilst still on his knees, Kedder lurched forward, grabbed the lad by the legs and pulled with a strength that lifted Nipper clean off his feet. Even as Nipper's mouth opened to yell for help, Dean's bunched fist rammed into his face, and the disaster was complete!



Nipper rammed the table forward, with all his weight behind it, pinning the crook against the wall!

CHAPTER 4.

KEDDER MEETS HIS MATCH.

IN seconds only, Nipper was tied and gagged as securely as the man he had tried to help; propped in a sitting position against the wall, he glared back at his captors in open contempt.

"Drop those curtains back in place, Dean," Kedder ordered, in a low growl. "Now, young 'un, this is the second time ye've butted in to what doesn't concern you!"

He knelt in front of Nipper, his gross face within six inches of the lad's.

"So yer didn't like th' little treat I was givin' Ellidge, did yer?" he sneered. "I was only persuadin' 'im to answer a little question—yer know that, don't yer?" His coarse hand shot out, and a great finger and thumb twisted Nipper's ear with the force of a monkey-wrench. "Well, me lad, 'e's goin' to answer it now—an' you're goin' to be the thing that'll make 'im!"

"What d'you mean, Kedder?" Dean whispered. "I ain't standing for anything that'll land us in—"

"You get out o' me road—this is a man's job!" the huge brute snarled. He elbowed Dean contemptuously aside, and turned on Ellidge with a leer. "You've stuck it well, so far. But me patience is finished—are yer goin' to tell me where them shinners is, yer stubborn fool?"

John Ellidge glared back a defiance that brought Kedder near to madness.

"All right, me brave lad," he sneered. "Then we'll see what the kid thinks o' yer kindness."

So that Ellidge would miss nothing of the

agony he intended for the lad, Kedder propped the messenger up and dragged him to Nipper's side. Then, quickly tearing off Nipper's shoes and socks, he rattled the match-box in front of Ellidge's eyes.

"Learnt this little trick in Rio," he sneered. "Yer put a light under a feller's toes—it 'urts like billy-o, an' 'e can't put a foot to th' ground fer months after. You watch now, an' see th' young 'un squirm, just 'cos you won't open yer mouth."

He struck a match and slowly lowered it to Nipper's foot. He was playing with fiendish cleverness on Ellidge's feelings, and there was not the slightest doubt that he meant to carry out the programme exactly as he had stated. The flame was actually within an inch of the lad's bared foot when a stifled moan from the messenger made Kedder again turn his head—to see Ellidge nodding submission and accepting defeat.

"Y'mean it?" Kedder snarled scowlingly. "Yer mean you'll tell us where you've hidden that diamond necklace?"

"Of course he means it," Dean said quickly. He came closer to Ellidge. "He's not safe, Kedder isn't—so you'd better not try any tricks, as he's warned you! You'll not try to yell now, if I loosen the pad from your mouth?"

Ellidge shook his head, ignoring the violent signals that Nipper was making for him to stick it out. And Kedder, scowlingly distrustful, stood over the messenger, with his huge fist suggestively clenched, whilst his partner in crime loosened the gag a scant half-inch.

"Now, Ellidge, rip it out," Kedder ordered. "Where's the stones—quick?"

Ellidge's throat worked painfully, and he made an effort to speak.

"False bars—firegrate!" he whispered faintly, at last.

"Lummy, we'd ha' looked for a week!" Kedder grunted truthfully.

Then, to Nipper's unbounded astonishment, Kedder fiddled about with the bars for a moment, lifted them out one by one, and began unscrewing a cunning cap that fitted over each end.

Ellidge himself had fallen weakly back, and Dean was watching his pal's movements with eager anticipation. The first and second of the hollow bars were peered into and proved empty. As he viciously twisted at the third and last bar, Kedder's scowl became almost murderous.

Then, with a snarl of fury, he flung the bar at the semi-conscious man.

"So ye'd dare to double-cross me, after all?" he hissed. "Tell me where those stones are, or I'll put you—"

"T-they were there—I can't tell you a-any more," the man gasped.

"Then, if yer won't—" Kedder began, and stopped abruptly as the curtain was whipped aside.

"Now, Kedder, do be reasonable. The poor fellow has told you all he can—and don't come a step nearer!"

The huge brute had dropped Ellidge as if the messenger had bitten him. He was on his feet in a second, ready to give battle; but his courage failed when he saw a wicked automatic pointing straight between his eyes—and saw who held it!

As for Nipper, he was trying to yell with joy, though his gagged mouth merely uttered a series of gurgling sounds. Still, that didn't matter; his face was one huge grin as he stared at the set features of Nelson Lee—and the grizzled, grim-looking fellow who stood a foot behind him!

"No, Dean, keep away from that door if you value your skin," the detective advised. "Make yourself useful, for once—free those fellows, and be quick about it!"

The order was rapped out so authoritatively that Dean jumped to obey like a whipped cur. But Kedder, made of sterner stuff, was crouching forward.

"So I didn't 'it you 'ard enough, Nelson Lee!" he snarled. "If ever I 'as th' chance again—"

His enormous fist suddenly shot out with all the weight of his body behind it. But the head he aimed at flicked aside like a lightning flash, and, as he lurched forward, Lee's left took him behind the ear and crashed him to the boards with a force that shook the room. Before he could attempt to rise, both Lee and his companion had piled on his back and steel bracelets had snapped on his wrists.

The heart had quite gone out of Dean, and he never as much as murmured when Nipper trussed him up with his own discarded ropes. Then Ellidge was attended to, and Nelson Lee introduced his companion as Inspector Redfern, of Scotland Yard.

"It was quite fortunate that I remembered that you lived in Mayrick Mansions,

Redfern," the detective smiled. "I was hardly in shape for tackling these two beauties on my own, and it's lucky for Nipper's sake that we arrived when we did."

"I'm still in the dark as to what this business means," Redfern grunted. "I know Kedder of old, but I'd like to hear what shady game he's been up to this time?"

"And I'd like to know what you mean, guv'nor, by giving me the fright of my life with that telephone call!" Nipper grinned.

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled. "We'll hear what Mr. Ellidge says, first," he suggested. "After all, he has been the cause of the trouble."

John Ellidge groaned. "Mr. Rodd will have told you that I started off with Lady Pargrave's necklace in my pocket," he said. "The letter asking for it to be sent to Brighton was a forgery, though I had no idea of that until I guessed I was being shadowed, soon after I left the shop. That fellow you call Dean was following me—I'd seen him before, and suspected his game."

"But why did you turn in here to hide the jewels?" Nelson Lee asked.

"The house was near, and I knew they'd never let me get back to the shop," Ellidge answered. "I'd had those hollow bars made to hide any stones I might have to keep overnight; I often arrive back from Amsterdam with diamonds long after the shop is closed. Fearing I was cornered this time, I made a sudden break for the house, hid the necklace in that bottom bar, and was just making for the telephone to warn Rodd, when that great brute broke in by the window."

"An' if Dean 'adn't been so chicken-hearted I'd 'a' 'ad the secret outer yer long ago!" Kedder growled.

"But the necklace wasn't there," Nipper cried. Then, suddenly, he stared at the guv'nor, and grinned. "I believe you've got 'em, guv'nor!" he exclaimed.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I had them—for about five seconds," he admitted. Then, seeing the blank look in Ellidge's face, he added: "They're quite safe, but I had better explain exactly what happened. After listening to Mr. Rodd's story, I came here looking upon you as a thief. The moment I entered this room I noticed that no fire had ever been lit in your grate. That set me examining the fireplace more closely, and it was not long before I hit upon the secret of your hollow bars! I found the necklace, of course; but that only convinced me more than ever that you were the thief, and that you must come back for your plunder sooner or later."

"And all the time I was lying on this couch, unable to make a sound, and nearly choked for want of air," Ellidge said ruefully.

"It was unfortunate for you that my eyes turned, first of all, to your firegrate," Lee agreed. "I can see now that when I suddenly entered the room, these beauties we've caught must have been searching your bedroom. I was 'phoning Nipper to come and take the necklace to Rodd, when I heard a

step behind me and was struck down almost before I could turn my head."

Nipper winked at the ceiling.

"Some heads can stand anything," he murmured.

"It took me some time to get over Kedder's knock-out," Lee continued. "When I did recover, I found myself tied up hand and foot and lying in a dirty attic. I managed to get rid of the rope eventually—thought of Redfern, and lost no time in getting to him."

"But, I say, gov'nor," Nipper protested, "your life story's very interesting, but the necklace is still missing!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Kedder was drinking tea, Nipper—actually drinking tea!" he said. "I had one second to decide, and if you'll look in the teapot—"

But Nipper was already hauling out the stones—wet, but unharmed; Lee had dropped them into the teapot just before he was struck down!

The pot had formed a safe enough hiding-place, and the stones had been within arm's-length of the crooks all the time!

Nipper wiped them dry on his handkerchief, then he set himself to the very pleasant task of helping Inspector Redfern get the two crooks safely under lock and key.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday's detective yarn is entitled: "THE MYSTERY OF THE CHINESE VASE!" The vase was a huge affair, tremendously heavy, and Nipper didn't know what was in it—nor did Nelson Lee. How they solved the mystery forms a most exciting yarn—read all about it next week.)

HINTS TO HIKERS!

And if you don't know what "hiking" is, this cheerful article will tell you!

ARE you fond of walking, fresh air, and the country? If so, try hiking. Never heard of it? Well, to put it briefly, it is the term given to exploring the countryside—with your house and food on your back!

That sounds, perhaps, like hard work. Actually, however, if you set the right way about it, you will find that it is one of the most enjoyable ways of spending a day, or a week-end, or longer, that you have ever experienced. Give it a trial, and you'll wonder why on earth you never went hiking before.

Now, having made up your mind to give this recipe for happiness and health a test, persuade a pal to accompany you. Yank out a map of your district, and, presuming that your first dose of hiking is to last from Saturday afternoon until Sunday night, select a circular route which you feel you can manage without getting blistered feet, and which is well off the beaten track. You want to forget trains, buses and main roads during the trip.

WHAT TO CARRY.

Here is a list of the necessary equipment. Of course, as you are going with a pal, you can share some of the items.

Mackintosh (light-weight, if possible), sweater or jersey, billy-can or mess-tin (expensive ones cost only a few pence), knife, fork, and spoon, soap in case, toothbrush, comb, mirror, towel, rubber slippers, ground sheet—most essential, this!—small tent or bivvy-sheet, bootlace—as a "spare," and for tying up the tent, blankets (two usually sufficient), pyjamas (really a luxury when hiking), candle, matches, food, small first-aid set, notebook, pencil, map, change of stockings, and—if you're willing to put up with its weight—a camera.

All these items must be carried in a ruck-sack, which you can buy or make, and which hangs on your back by means of shoulder-

straps. To avoid friction on your shoulders, see that the ruck-sack point of suspension is over your backbone. That is, the two straps should be connected to a ring in the top centre of the ruck-sack—not to the sides.

A QUESTION OF WEIGHT.

If your ruck-sack, when loaded, weighs twenty pounds or more, you must dispense with some of the luxuries or substitute light for heavy articles. A pack containing additional luxuries should not weigh more than seventeen pounds—unless you are a Samson.

Rest during the hot part of the day, and leave your cooking for morning and evening only. A cold midday lunch is best.

Get permission before pitching your tent on private ground; and leave it as tidy—or even tidier—than you found it.

GREEN TENTS ARE BEST.

If you purchase a hike tent instead of making one, inform the shopkeeper that the weight must not exceed three and a half pounds. Do not necessarily buy the first he shows you. Get him to open it out, so that you can thoroughly examine it.

A green tent is preferable to a white, as the sun's rays are then absorbed by the material, thus keeping the air within quite cool. Another advantage of the green tent is that insects are not attracted to it as they are in the case of white.

A most important point to remember is that push-buttons—similar to those on some gloves—are most unserviceable in camp. While pitching the tent you often find yourself standing on the edges. And if you happen to stand on the push-buttons, they are flattened immediately. Ordinary buttons and buttonholes are much to be preferred.

Drink very little when on the hike. If you get very thirsty, suck a tomato or a clean pebble. Sweets will make your throat drier than ever.

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 36.

SECTION A	READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.
	<p>I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me.</p>
SECTION B	MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.
	<p>I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.</p>
SECTION C	NEW READER'S DECLARATION.
	<p>I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."</p>
<p>(FULL NAME)</p>	
<p>(ADDRESS)</p>	

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the

form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for $\frac{1}{2}$ d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

(All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.)

MY first job this week is to tell numerous friends that a further list of O. O.'s will be issued shortly, thus bringing our register up-to-date. I am also busy on the big Badge subject. It is not the prospective Badge that is big, of course. I intend that little emblem of membership of our topping League to be small and to the point, a regular Multum in Parvo, just room for our slogan, Wisdom and Boldness, which we take in Latin as "Consilio et Animis."

A Birmingham member—namely, R. Terry, 24, Ryland Street, Ladywood, Birmingham, says he wants to have an O. O. nearer than two miles. What is he to do? Well, Organising Officers don't spring out of the ground, nor do they grow on every bush, but my Brum chum can carry on for the League by collecting a few chums together and telling them what the League can do and is doing. In answer to this correspondent's question, the official organ of the S. F. L. is the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and the Editor is always right on the spot to answer queries and assist.

A LONELY LAD!

A New Zealand friend tells me the League has bucked him up considerably. "I came out here under a farming scheme, and have to serve five years in order to get the hang of the work. At first I was lonely enough, but as luck would have it, a fellow on the next station to mine turned out to be a reader of the N. L. L. That made us chummy, and we are working to get up a club. This is a first-rate country, but not many fellows to know. That's why I am glad to get a few correspondents."

This is the holiday season, or, at least, the start of it. Everybody is talking about camping, or hiking, or biking, or a fishing trip. A Glasgow reader asks me how he is to make a packsheets waterproof, as he is making preparations for a jaunt. That is simple enough. Paint the material with linseed oil, and when dry, go over it with a solution of alum.

THE LOST BIKE!

Bad luck this, and no error! A Worcester-shire chum says he left his bike at the edge of a wood while he went hunting for a special type of beetle. He captured the nimble Coleop, but, alas, when he got back to his jigger—well, if you take me, he did not get back to his bike! Some annexer had bolted with the machine. What was the victim to do? There was, and is, only one course open. Foot it to the next village and inform the police. The particulars will be circularised. There is nobody I detest more than the bike thief. It is the meanest theft out.

As you all know, I am glad to give the hospitality of my Chat corner to all questions, complaints, suggestions, and so forth. It is a rum thing, perhaps, to go round the world asking for complaints. But grouses—or is the plural grice? I give it up!—show keenness, and keenness means getting a move on. And the more we compare notes and trot in new ideas, the better will it be for everybody.

HOLIDAYS!

A great many questions have reached me about holidays and how to take them. That

seems simple. Take them whenever circs. permit. A Warwickshire reader tells me he and his pal think of exploring the lesser-known districts of Warwickshire. There is wonderful country in the neighbourhood of Stratford and Shuttery which has not changed a bit since the days when William Shakespeare strolled about the lanes looking for some idea he had lost, and long before that, too!

One of the best holidays I have heard of in a quiet way was one taken last year by a couple of friends on the great canal which links up Sussex, Hants and Middlesex with the Midlands and the North. There were comfortable quarters on a barge, and the cost was little enough. Nobody who had not made the experiment could imagine the novelty and interest of seeing the Old Country from the point of view of the inland waterways. Sometimes you get reminded of Holland. It is a real eye-opener.

SHANKS' PONY!

The walking tour is hard to beat. I am not going to suggest that two pals on a tramping holiday with knapsacks, and the world before them, will do more than have a pleasant holiday. That is what they are out to get. But there is something else to it as well. For instance, a couple of congenial spirits see life at a new angle, and it is in such circumstances that jolly notions pop in. There are all kinds of possibilities and opportunities in such a jaunt. I know one case where a fellow on tramp for his own pleasure put up at a big farm, and stayed a few days. The farmer liked him so well—the cut of his jib and all that—that the visitor was asked to remain on at a good wage. As the prospects were better than what he was doing in town, he froze on to a good thing, and has never regretted it.

But such things come in the exceptional class. We were thinking of the holiday with that good mount, Shanks' pony as companion. It is the way to find the best country. The walker has the footpaths. He may be able to make good little sketches of what he sees, or he can snap them with his camera. If he is interested in history, he can drop in at some of the old-world places and look at the ancient towns where bygone worthies lived—and fought!

SPANISH!

This is great! A Kennington chum asks me how to learn Spanish. He is keen on the lingo of the Grandees and the Dons of nut-brown Iberia. (N.B.—This is what the poets dub Spain.) Spanish is a fairly easy language as languages go—and they do go if you don't practise them! I studied Spanish with a Gibraltese, and found it fascinating. A little guide, or a short course of conversational lessons, will soon pave the way to a working knowledge of the tongue. My chum will be able to say "No tengo dinero" with the best, but I hope he won't have any occasion to use the phrase, since it signifies "I have no cash." Colloquial Spanish presents no difficulty, but if you go deeper you come plumb on a tribe of ancient words from the Moorish, and they are fair twisters. I give you my word, though mighty interesting—as the old salt said of the submarines.

CRICKET PRACTICE

A helpful chat on how to make the most of work at the nets and half-hours of fielding practice.

A LOT of fuss is made about net practice, and young cricketers' mouths are made to water every year by pictures in the papers of famous men or famous coaches at the nets. Or perhaps if you live near a club sufficiently aristocratic to boast nets, you go and eat out your hearts with envy as you stand admiring.

But if you haven't nets yourself you don't need to be too despondent about it, for they are very much overrated luxuries, and often do more harm than good. It is well known that some of the best cricketers nowadays don't care much for them, and the lads whose pitch is nothing more than a piece of waste ground may get more useful experience—if they go the right way about it—than any amount of net practice would give them.

The main thing against nets is that they encourage slogging; the youngster who is practising batting should never slog, but should concentrate on timing and judging the ball, so that he can meet it with just the right stroke. Many a stroke that the batsman thinks is good is really weak, because in an open field the ball would be caught. The man with the bat goes merrily on, probably making himself proficient in certain strokes, only to find out when the actual games come along that he is caught early in every innings. This means that, besides letting his side down, his practice has been wasted, and he has to start all over again.

Another weakness of nets is that they don't allow of fielding practice. Some cricketers, I know, don't consider this necessary, but you have only got to think how much the success of such teams as Yorkshire and Sussex depends on their fine fielding, and to think of the difference that a missed catch may make to a match to realise how important it is. How often have you read in the paper, "Jones, who made a valuable 72, was missed when he was only 3"? If Jones' 72 has helped his side to win, and the other side was your favourite team, what have you thought? In the first heat of your wrath, you've probably felt like choking the unlucky man who missed the catch. And as a dropped catch may lose a match, so many a brilliant one saves it!

WONDERFUL CATCHES!

Look at those two unforgettable catches that Bill Hitch made when Surrey were playing Middlesex in 1921. Did you see the match? You remember how a Middlesex batsman was swiping a ball from Fender to leg for a 4, when, to his utter amazement, he found that Hitch had caught him out by practically picking the ball off his bat. It was a wonderfully plucky thing to do, for if the Surrey man had missed at such close range—well, "Billitch's" cricketing days would probably have been over! At the same time, it was a triumph of skill in field-

ing, for it was the fielder's perfect knowledge of Fender's bowling that enabled him to know with just what stroke the batsman would play that particular ball. The other catch was one of those that nobody seems to do quite like Bill Hitch. It was a fine hit—the ball was travelling—a boundary this, you said. Then you gasped as an arm that seemed to be yards long shot out—and another "life" at the wicket was ended. You can say what you like about fielding not being important, but, even from a merely spectacular point of view, catches like that are every bit as fine to watch as the cleverest hat-tricks and the most stylish centuries.

VITAL FIELDING.

If you are keen on cricket, but don't seem to have the ability either to bat or bowl well, has it ever occurred to you to make yourself indispensable to the team by virtue of excellent fielding? It's worth trying, and you'll enjoy it and get just as many thrills as if you could do big things with the bat or the ball. One thing worth considering is that whilst one fault or weakness may end a batsman's innings almost before he's started, the fielder's "life" goes on all the time, and a mistake can be retrieved.

For practice in catching, several of you should throw the ball to one another as hard as you can and at varying heights. The most difficult ball to catch is the one that comes to you shoulder-high, and you should particularly practise this. It is no good throwing the ball into the air and catching it, as it is very seldom a real "skier" comes your way in a game.

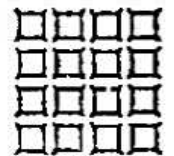
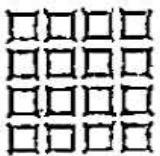
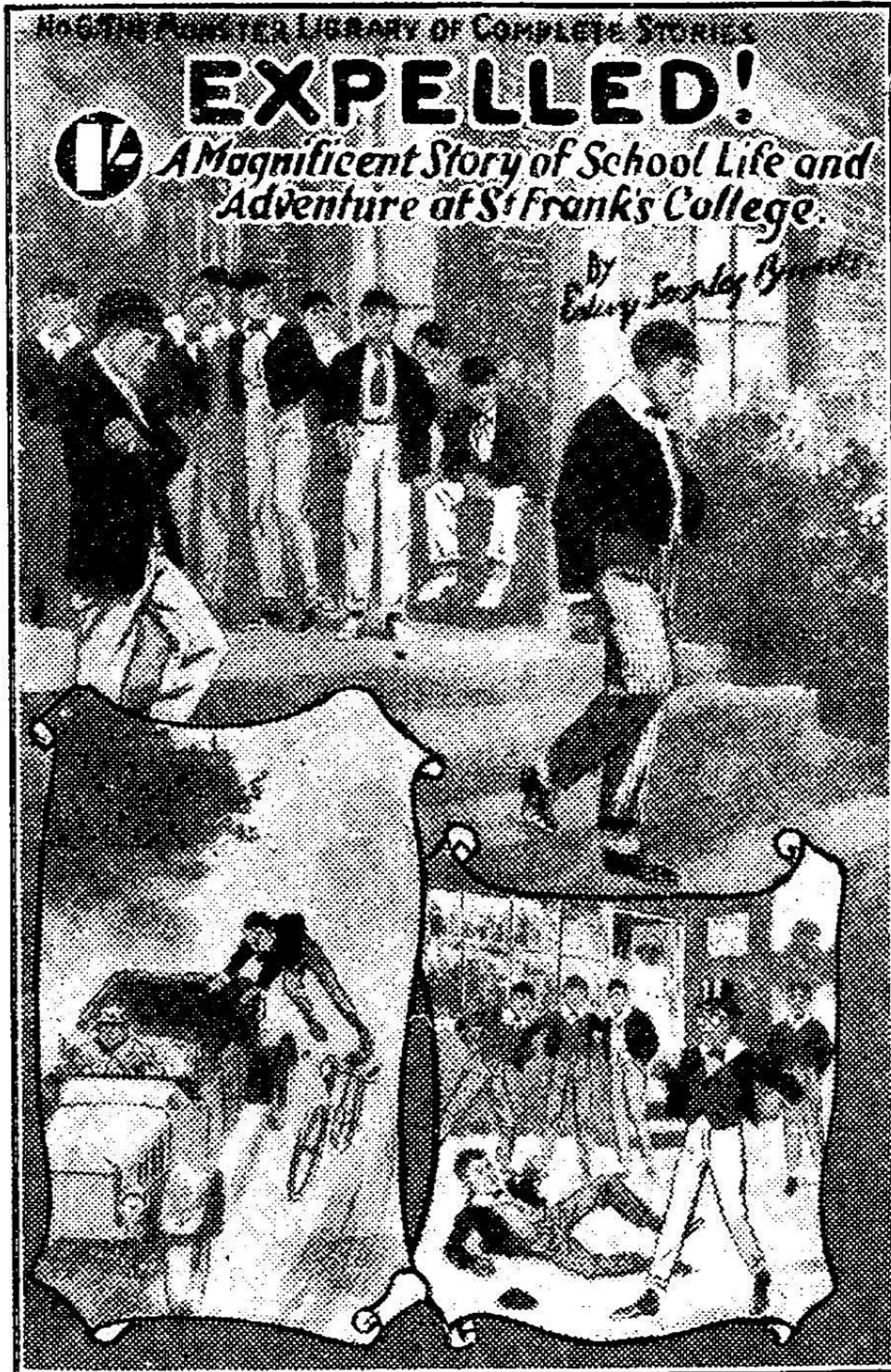
This sort of practice doesn't teach you anything new, and the most valuable experience is gained by fielding whilst the bowler and batsman are practising.

Try yourself in every position, so that you get used to every kind of ball, and never miss an opportunity of attempting a catch. If there aren't sufficient players to fill all the regular positions in the field, you can manage without men on the leg-side and mid-on, but have a fielder at mid-off, cover-point, and behind the wicket.

Catching is only part of the art of fielding. Vitally necessary to good cricket is smart work in the field—neat picking up of the ball, quick returning, and accurate throwing. How often one sees lads' games spoilt by faulty throwing-in that wastes time and gives away runs. If every fielder took a pride in his fielding, there wouldn't be these ragged edges, and the games would be much brighter. Learn to pick up the ball and return it with as few movements as possible—for the best way of doing this you cannot do better than spend a day at a county match, and keep your eyes on the fielding. If that doesn't make you a believer in the importance of fielding in the game of cricket, nothing will.

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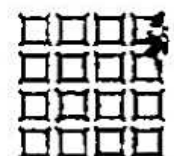
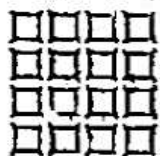
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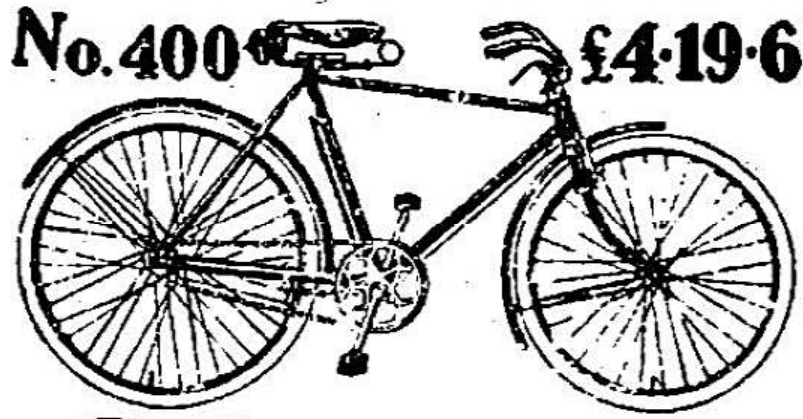
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