

A ROLICKING YARN OF THE SECOND SCHOOLBOY TEST MATCH— DON'T MISS IT!

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THE **SLAVES OF ST. FRANK'S!**

A STUNNING LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY!



Study D was in a shocking state of disorder. Church and McClure were doing their lines in the midst of the debris of their hurried meal, while Handforth was drinking tea out of a flower-vase when the girls looked in. Irene Manners stared round the untidy study in amazement. "My goodness!" she exclaimed. "What a mess!"

THE SLAVES OF ST. FRANK'S!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Fun runs fast and furious in this rollicking long complete story of the second Schoolboy Test Match.

CHAPTER 1.

THE MYSTERY OF ST. FRANK'S.

THREE well-set-up juniors walked briskly along the lane from Bellton Village towards St. Frank's. Their unfamiliar caps proclaimed that they did not belong to the famous old school. They were all in flannels, and were evidently in a hurry, if one could judge by their pace.

"They'll have finished tea, of course," said one of them. "I expect we shall find them on the playing-fields, practising like the dickens. It's Monday now—and the match is on Wednesday."

"And the weather looks like being good, too," said one of the others. "I had a look at the barometer this afternoon, and it's set fair."

There was certainly every indication of fine weather.

The May evening was brilliant. It was more like July—a perfect summer's evening, with a sapphire sky, and a clear sunlight which beat down upon the dusty lane. More ideal weather for cricket could scarcely be imagined.

As the three juniors walked up the leafy lane, the atmosphere fairly vibrated with the evening warmth, and there was the insistent humming of insects in the air. Butterflies flitted to and fro, and a gentle breeze did something to relieve the heat.

The three youngsters were Hal Brewster & Co., the leading lights of the River House School. This select academy for young gentlemen was situated further along the River Stowe, a mile or two distant, and was presided over by Dr. Molyneux Hogge. The

River House fellows and the St. Frank's juniors were old rivals in sport.

Hal Brewster and Dave Ascott and Georgie Glynn were of about the same age as the St. Frank's Remove—sturdy, healthy juniors who devoted most of their spare time to sport. And they were keen on cricket. After all, the River House was a comparatively small school—a mere private establishment, and insignificant compared to the great size of St. Frank's. So Dr. Hogge's boys were proud of themselves in having such a fine cricket Eleven. They had done particularly well this season, too.

Brewster & Co., finding themselves in Bellton, thought it would be rather a good idea to pop into St. Frank's, and see their friends before returning home. There were one or two little matters which Brewster wanted to discuss concerning the forthcoming match.

"Rather a pity we didn't come by the towing-path, as usual," remarked Glynn. "We should have hit the playing-fields first, then, and it wouldn't have been necessary to go to St. Frank's at all. The chaps are bound to be practising at full steam."

"Rather," agreed Brewster, nodding. "It would be a sin and a shame to waste an evening like this."

"We're wasting some of it," grinned Ascott.

"Oh, well, we're different," replied Brewster. "We haven't got a big match on Wednesday, like St. Frank's. The second Test Match starts then, and you can bet that St. Frank's will go all out to win. What a brain-wave, you know—this idea of Test Matches."

"Yes, it was Dick Hamilton's, wasn't it?"

asked Glynn, as they approached St. Frank's. "Young England v. Young Australia! England won the first match, but only by the skin of their teeth. They'll have to be pretty keen to win the next."

"Oh, I don't know," said Ascott. "They're in better form now."

"Yes, and so are the Aussies!" retorted Glynn. "You forget that those Australian chaps were practically unknown to one another during the first match. They've been together several times since then—practising for the second Test. They're twice as hot now."

"That's true enough!" agreed Hal Brewster thoughtfully. "Unless St. Frank's has improved a good bit they'll lose this week's match. But you needn't worry—everybody will be on the playing-fields, mark my words."

The River House fellows were discussing the cricket sensation of the season. At least, it was the cricket sensation in the schoolboy world. It was a sensation which had echoed in practically every big public school in the South of England, and one to which the London daily papers had more than once referred to.

It had been Dick Hamilton's suggestion in the first place. The popular junior captain of St. Frank's, knowing the enormous interest that was being taken in the big Test Matches, had thought it an excellent idea to institute a minor series of Test Matches.

In these games St. Frank's was representing England, and Australia was composed of an Eleven of Australian boys, collected together from a number of big schools in the southern counties. It was a real Australian Eleven, too, since every member of it was a native, and was only schooling in England.

There were to be five matches—exactly the same as in the actual Tests. England had won the first, and a tremendous amount of interest was being displayed locally in the second. It would be a two-day match, commencing on the Wednesday. And there was every prospect of a record crowd. For a large number of the country gentry had decided to watch the match. For the first time in the history of St. Frank's, the general public was interesting itself acutely in the schoolboy cricket.

Brewster & Co. were tremendously keen, because their own school were supplying two of the Australian boys. Bayliss major and Bayliss minor, of the River House, were, indeed, two of the most brilliant members of the Aussie team.

"Jolly lucky for us that we had two such ripping players on hand as the Baylisses," said Dave Ascott, as he and his chums drew level with the wall of St. Frank's. "Rex Bayliss is a fair demon, and he's good enough to be in the genuine Australian Eleven—although he's only seventeen."

"Johnny Bayliss is mustard, too," declared Brewster. "He's only fifteen, and nearly as big as his giddy major! The way they've improved during this last week is an eye-opener. I wouldn't have believed it, and I'm

going to give these St. Frank's chaps the tip that they're in for a shock."

Brewster & Co. felt that they had a kind of proprietary interest in the Young Australia Eleven, since their school was supplying two such capable members. And, being such old rivals of St. Frank's, they were naturally keenly eager to see the Aussies win the second Test, if only as a revenge for the opening defeat.

"Hallo! Things seem pretty quiet," went on Brewster, as he and his chums turned into the massive, imposing gateway of the great school. "Well I'm jiggered! Not a soul to be seen!"

"All on the playing-fields," said Glynn. "I thought of that, but I can't hear any shouting, or anything," said Brewster, frowning. "I know they're all here, because this isn't a half-holiday—and, besides, the whole school couldn't be away!"

They stood there, looking across the old Triangle.

The scene was a very peaceful one—and very attractive, too. Immediately in front arose the picturesque bulk of the clock tower, with the wings of the School House on either side. And then, on the left, were the West House and the Ancient House, with the West Tower rearing itself up in the evening sunlight. The old chestnut-trees were stirring their leaves in the slight wind.

"Ruimny!" said Ascott. "Not a sound!" They glanced towards the other side of the Triangle—to the East House and the Modern House. But it was just the same. No indication of life—no hint that these grey, ivy-covered buildings were teeming with school-boy life.

"Let's go and have a look at the playing-fields," suggested Brewster suddenly.

He and his chums were puzzled and mystified. They hadn't expected the Triangle to be crowded, but they had at least anticipated a sign of life. There wasn't even a fag sunning himself on the steps of his own House. In the middle of the Triangle, the fountain was playing somewhat forlornly.

It was well after tea-time—nearly a quarter to six, in fact. At this hour everybody was bound to be out of doors. They couldn't resist such an evening. But when the visitors reached Little Side, they simply stood there, staring blankly.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated George Glynn. "My only topper!" murmured Ascott.

The playing-fields were bare and empty. There was just nobody. Some nets were in position; but of human life there was no indication.

"This," said Brewster, "is uncanny." He was right. It seemed to the three startled River House boys as though some dire tragedy had befallen St. Frank's—as though some mystic power had wafted everybody away, leaving those great buildings empty and deserted.

"Blessed if I can get the hang of this at all!" said Ascott, staring at the others. "Where's everybody? What the dickens has happened to 'em?"

"It's no good asking me," said Hal Brewster. "Let's go along to the Ancient House, and walk inside. It's no good staying here, anyhow. And we thought the playing-fields would be crowded! My hat! What a surprise!"

They retraced their steps and, passing through the West Gateway, they didn't trouble to go back into the Triangle, but skirted the West Square and entered the Ancient House by means of the rear door. Once inside, they paused, glancing at one another again.

"It's like a house of the dead!" muttered Ascott.

This eerie silence was getting on their nerves. The fact that it was broad daylight, and that the sun was streaming in, only seemed to enhance the mysterious nature of the affair.

St. Frank's simply basked listlessly in the evening heat.

Every trace of humanity had apparently been spirited away—for there could be no other explanation. The whole school wouldn't calmly walk out, and leave St. Frank's to itself!

There was a mystery here which had taken Brewster & Co. by complete surprise.

"Shall—shall we have a look into one of the studies?" asked Glynn uncertainly.

"Might as well," replied Brewster. "But I don't see that it'll be much good. My only hat! I'm as puzzled as the dickens! What in the name of all that's rummy can have happened?"



CHAPTER 2.

EXTRAORDINARY!

BREWSTER & CO. felt like walking on tiptoe as they penetrated into the Remove passage—a quarter of the Ancient House that

was very familiar ground to them. As they had entered by the rear door, the first study they came to was Study I, where Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell usually resided.

Brewster cautiously opened the door, and peeped in.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he gasped.

There was such surprise in his tone that his chums crowded near.

"What's up?" breathed Ascott, imagining all manner of horrors.

"They're here!" yelled Brewster.

There was an indignant note in his voice, as though he had been swindled. Craning over his shoulder, his chums caught sight of Fullwood and Russell within. The two Removes were seated at the table—and, wonder of wonders, they were hard at work!

Not merely letter-writing, or anything so simple as that—but sitting there, surrounded by books, and obviously in the throes of acute mental exercise. Their pens were scratching industriously.

"Fullwood!" roared Brewster. "What's the giddy idea?"

Ralph Leslie gave a rapid glance at the clock, and then he waved his hand.

"Go away!" he said curtly.

"Eh?"

"Ten minutes!" said Fullwood.

"What the dickens—"

Whizz!

A book, flung by Clive Russell, shot through the air, and thudded against the doorpost. Brewster & Co. dodged back, and closed the door. They stared at one another in sheer amazement.

"Mad!" panted Glynn. "They weren't doing their prep, surely?"

"Prep, no!" retorted Brewster. "These chaps never do their prep. until late—besides, they don't need all those piles of books for prep!"

"Then what the dickens is the idea?" asked Ascott. "I say, let's have a look in one of the other studies."

"By Jove, yes!"

They moved along to the next door, and looked into Study G. Cecil De Valerie and the youthful Duke of Somerton were in exactly the same state as Fullwood and Russell! Feverishly working, they were seated at their table, their hair ruffled, their eyes rather wild.

"Get out!" roared De Valerie.

"What the—"

"Don't interrupt!"

"But—"

Whizz!

A paste-pot hummed through the air; Brewster & Co. retreated hastily. This was becoming more and more mysterious every moment. The River House fellows halted.

"Surely they're not *all* at work?" gasped Glynn. "Let's have a look on the other side."

They peeped into Study H, and found Ulysses Spencer Adams, the American boy, pacing up and down the room like a fellow demented—with a book held in his hands. He was muttering continuously to himself. Brewster & Co. closed the door.

"They've all gone off their rockers!" said Brewster blankly.

"There's nothing else to think," panted Georgie Glynn. "Did you notice that wild look in Adams' eye? It's a good thing he didn't spot us, or he might have pulled a gun! These American chaps always go about with pistols!"

Brewster grinned.

"Not in real life, you chump!" he said. "You can't judge by the American pictures! I'll bet Adams wouldn't know what to do with a revolver if he found one in his hands! I say, let's have a look at Archie Glenthorne. If he's working—well, it'll be time for the world to end!"

Study E was quite close, and they softly opened the door, and looked in. They stood there, staring dazedly. Archibald Derek Winston Glenthorne, the genial ass of the Remove, was sprawling on his luxurious lounge, a book tightly clasped in his hands, and he was reading it aloud in a monotonous,

feverish way—obviously memorising the words. Alf Brent, his study mate, was seated at the table, with his chin resting on the palms of his hands. And he, too, was intent upon intensive study.

"Help!" gurgled Brewster. "Water, somebody!"

Archie looked across the room with a start. "What-ho!" he said feebly. "I mean to say— Good gad! Visitors, Alf, old thing! Odds manners and etiquette! We've absolutely got to interrupt the old flow for a moment. Welcome, laddies—"

"Eh?" said Brent, looking up. "My hat! Who told you to come here? Clear off!"

"Hold on!" gasped Brewster. "We want to know—"

"We're busy!" rapped out Brent.

"Dash it all, Alf, old darling!" said Archie, scandalised. "I mean to say—guests! Strangers within the gates, what? We can't absolutely ignore them when they trickle in for a cheery word—"

"Outside!" interrupted Brent, pointing at the door. "Can't stop now, you chaps—too busy! Get on with your work, Archie!"

Brewster & Co. didn't feel quite up to continuing the conversation. The very fact that Archie Glenborne was working convinced them that an extraordinary malady had descended upon St. Frank's. It was amazing enough to find the other juniors at work—but it was little short of startling to see Archie intent upon study at this hour of the evening.

"This is the queerest go on record!" said Hal, scratching his head. "I wonder if the seniors are affected by the same germ? Let's go along to the Fifth Form passage and have a look."

They had seen quite enough of the Remove, and it was obviously unnecessary to penetrate any of the other junior studies. So they hurried along to the Fifth Form quarters, and opened the first door. The study happened to belong to William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens. Browne was the captain of the Fifth, and at the moment he was sitting back in his chair, with his feet on the table, reading aloud. Stevens was listening intently.

Brewster & Co. heard a few of the words, and it gave them a bit of a shock to realise that Browne was construing Latin! As a pastime, this seemed to be the final limit in horrors.

"Oh, they're off their rockers!" said Brewster faintly.

Browne glanced across the room.

"Without wishing to be impolite, brothers, I should like you to exclude yourselves forthwith, and close the door," he said severely. "Kindly remember that this is a hive of industry. It is no place for gaping sightseers. Away, base youths!"

"Yes, clear off!" said Stevens. "It's like your nerve to butt in when you're not asked! What was that last bit, Browne?"

The three River House boys closed the door, and reeled off. They were feeling weaker and weaker. As a last resort, they

penetrated the Third Form passage, and located Willy & Co. These cheerful fags—consisting of Handforth minor, Chubby Heath, and Juicy Lemon—were engaged in exactly the same occupation as all the others.

Fags—mere Third Formers!

And at this hour of the evening—actually before six o'clock had struck—they were working at high pressure. Studying! There was something monstrously unreal about the whole business.

Brewster & Co. passed out into the Triangle, feeling that further exploration would be perilous. Some of the other fellows might have better aims with their books. Indeed, Willy Handforth had not hesitated to throw an inkpot at the intruders. And the inkpot, incidentally, had been full.

"This is too much for me," muttered Brewster, wiping his brow. "Either I'm having a nightmare, or St. Frank's has gone off its chump! Would any sane human beings stick indoors on an evening like this—snotting away at lesson books? I ask you!"

"Of course they wouldn't," said Glynn. "They must have eaten something for lunch—something that's turned them crazy! I think we ought to go and call a doctor, or fetch the police!"

"Why not go to the Head?" asked Brewster. "He can't know anything about this insanity. Anyhow, it's impossible to let the thing rest like this. We've got to do something or other."

Ascott scratched his head.

"They didn't seem dotty, you know," he said thoughtfully. "Archie was all right, for instance. He wanted to invite us in. Perhaps there's something on—something special—"

"It's something special right enough," agreed Brewster grimly. "Why, I've never heard of anything like it! The whole school indoors, working! And not under masters, either—but in their own studies!"

"We've only seen the Ancient House," said Glynn.

"That's nothing—the other Houses are bound to be the same, or we should see some of the fellows about," replied Hal. "The whole school, mark you! I'm jiggered if I know what to do."

But at that moment the school clock solemnly chimed out the hour of six. And things began to happen.



CHAPTER 3.

DICK HAMILTON EXPLAINS.

"GREAT Scott!" gurgled Hal Brewster.

The last note of the hour had scarcely died away before an extraordinary change came over the school. First of all, there were sounds—queer, confused sounds from within the Houses. Voices—shouts—and

even cheers. The scuffling of feet, and then something else happened.

From every House issued streams of fellows. Not merely juniors, but seniors as well. A good proportion of them were in flannels, some carrying cricket bats or pads. These set off at the double for the playing fields. The others came charging out, filling up the Triangle, and gathered together in excited knots, talking.

Brewster and his two chums hurried across to the Ancient House steps as the celebrated Handforth & Co. appeared. Church and McClure were looking rather worn out, but Edward Oswald Handforth was full of vigour.

"It's a success, my lads," he was saying enthusiastically. "Only an hour of it, and we've all done wonders! We'll show the Head what we think of his giddy exams!"

Brewster halted.

"I say, you chaps, what's the idea of all this business?" he asked. "Oh, hallo, Dick!" he added, as Dick Hamilton and Tommy Watson, and Sir Montie Tregellis West hurried out. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain."

The Remove captain grinned.

"Been here long?" he asked.

"About ten minutes," replied Brewster.

"We've nearly had about twenty fits. What's the idea of all this jiggery-pokery business?"

"This which?" said Handforth, frowning.

"Well, hang it, you're either mad, or we've been dreaming," said Brewster. "No sane fellow would deliberately stay indoors of a fine evening, and swot away at lesson-books!"

"Are you calling me crazy?" asked Handforth, glaring.

"Look here, old chap—"

"Chuck it, Handy; these fellows can't be blamed for thinking we're dotty," grinned Hamilton. "Come along to Little Side, you chaps, and I'll explain as we go along. No time to stand talking, you know. Every second's precious."

"So it seems," said Glynn pointedly.

They walked along, and Dick Hamilton proceeded to explain. On every side, it seemed as though Bedlam had been suddenly loosened. Everybody seemed to be shouting at once, and there were any amount of high spirits. It was a strange contrast to the recent un-earthly quietness.

"What's the joke?" demanded Brewster.

"I wish we could call it a joke, too," said Hamilton ruefully. "But it isn't—it's more like a tragedy. Haven't you heard the news about our kind-hearted Head's latest?"

"What's he been up to now?"

"Nothing much," snorted Handforth. "He's only told us all that we're mad on sports. Think of it, you know! In the summer term, with cricket at its height—and general sport in progress—the Head comes out with piffle of that sort! He jawed us the other day, and said that we were infected by the sports fever, and it had to stop."

"Oh, these masters!" sighed Brewster.

"If it comes to that, old Hogge isn't much different. Last week he warned us about going too far—and said that we mustn't forget our studies."

"It wouldn't be so bad if Dr. Stafford had let it rest at that," said Dick Hamilton. "But that's not enough for our Head. Before long we're going to have some fearful exams. Special exams, you know, and unless we get a certain percentage of marks we shall either be barred from all sports for the rest of the year, or be sacked. Cheerful outlook, isn't it?"

"But you don't mean it?" ejaculated Brewster, staring.

"Absolutely!" declared Dick. "So the only thing we can do is to swot like mad in our spare time. If we don't do a lot of cramming we shall get kicked out of the school, or barred from sports. I can tell you, we're having a lovely time."

"But—but can't you do something?" asked Ascott blankly.

"Yes—and we're doing it," snorted Handforth. "It's no good kicking, if that's what you mean. The whole school's in the same boat, and there's no chance of a revolt—although I'd lead one like a shot, if some of these other fatheads would follow me!"

"We can't do that, Handy," said Hamilton. "You see, Brewster, we've decided to accept the inevitable—but we're not going to give up any sports. We're going to beat the Head at his own game, and show him that we can rise above this handicap."

The River House boys were impressed.

"I say, what a dirty trick," remarked Glynn. "I mean, with these Test Matches on the go, too—and your sports carnival in full swing. It must be simply awful to do a lot of extra swotting."

"But I can't understand, even now," said Brewster. "How it is that you were all working at the same time—seniors and juniors and everybody?"

"That was Fenton's suggestion."

"Fenton's? The school captain's, you mean?"

"Yes, although it was really Browne, of the Fifth, who thought of the idea," replied Dick. "He had a jaw to the whole school on Saturday, and suggested that we should start on a system from to-day onwards."

"Who, Browne?"

"It was Fenton who spoke to the school, but Browne put him up to it," said Handforth. "The school's made a sort of compact, you know. We're all so jolly wild against the Head that we're all in the thing, heart and soul. A few of the rotters would like to get out of it, I dare say, but they're afraid of. They know what would happen to 'em if they kicked."

"It's a sort of bond of sympathy," explained Dick Hamilton. "We were all up at six this morning, you know, and put in some sports practice until breakfast-time. Then we swotted hard for half an hour immediately after breakfast. More practice before dinner

—and more swotting after. Then lessons. Tea at half-past four sharp, and a full hour at study from five till six. Now we've got the rest of the evening to ourselves, for practice."

The River House juniors grinned.

"I suppose you couldn't tuck in a few hours of real hard work during the day?" grinned Brewster. "My only hat! You'll never keep it up, you chaps. It'll be too strenuous."

"It's worked all right to-day," said Dick. "You see, the idea is to use every minute of the day in top gear. Life is simply one feverish rush from the moment we get up till the minute we go to bed. Fenton put it to the school, and the school agreed to try the system for a week. If any ass backs out, he'll get scragged."

"Well, it's one way of doing things," admitted Ascott. "But you'll never be alive by the end of the week."

The St. Frank's fellows, however, were convinced that the plan would work. They were still as keen as ever on sports—still mad on sports, according to the headmaster's view. And they were determined not to forsake their original programme.

The Test Matches would go on just the same as ever. The sports carnival would not be interrupted. And the swotting up for the exams. would be done in addition to all the rest. But this was only possible by utilising every moment of the day—and even then the only chance was to work according to a definite system. It was no good leaving it to the fellows to work in their own time. Everything was fixed and tabulated.

"Up at six o'clock every morning, eh?" said Brewster dubiously. "What time do you reckon to be out on the playing fields?"

"By half-past, at the latest."

"Supposing it rains?"

"In that case, we spend the time swotting," explained Dick Hamilton. "So, you see, there's no escape, either way. We've got to be up, and put in the time at one thing or the other. So there's something gained every day. That's the general scheme.

"Take my advice, and go easy," said Brewster, shaking his head. "It's a tall order. In fact, it's too tall. You'll overdo it."

"Think so?"

"No question of it," replied Brewster. "You'll overdo it, and then you'll go to pieces. You'll lose all your form at cricket, or go loony, or something pleasant like that. You can't go the pace without any rest at all, you know."

Handforth snorted.

"Rats!" he said. "There's nothing in it, anyhow. We always used to waste the time—and now we're using it, that's all. And that reminds me that we're wasting some now! You fellows can watch us practising, if you like—but don't keep us here jawing!"

"Sorry," said Brewster. "Go ahead—don't mind us."

"Anything you particularly wanted?" inquired Dick.

"No—we only dropped in to see how you were shaping for the next Test Match," replied Hal. "You have our sympathy. Go ahead with the practice—you can take it from me that you'll need every minute of it."

"What does that mean, exactly?"

"Well, these Australian chaps are absolutely red-hot," replied Brewster grimly. "They were pretty warm during the first match—but you'll hardly know them on Wednesday. They've been together two or three times, and they've got to know one another's play."

"That sounds cheerful," growled Church.

"Our two—Bayliss major and Bayliss minor—are sharp as needles now," continued Brewster. "Rex Bayliss' bowling is simply fearful. Speed, I mean—and trickiness! You fellows had better be prepared for squalls."

Tommy Watson glared.

"You're a nice kind of Jonah, aren't you?" he demanded warmly. "Is this your idea of cheering us up—just when we're fighting against this swotting inquisition? Can't you be a bit chummy?"

"Sorry," grinned Brewster. "But I was only giving you the tip, you know. I thought you might like to know."



CHAPTER 4.

HANDFORTH GETS A NEW IDEA.

THAT night St. Frank's went to bed thoroughly tired out.

It had been the most strenuous day of the term—the majority of the fellows having spent every minute at work. Training, practising, swotting—and all the ordinary lessons and prep. in addition. It had been just one continuous round of feverish activity, with hardly a minute's breathing space.

And there was not much talking in the dormitories after lights out. Most of the boys simply fell off to sleep at once. And there was something unusually gratifying in this pleasant tiredness. One's bed is always sweeter when one is thoroughly worn out.

And it was warm to-night, too—close and stuffy. On such a night as this many of the juniors would have had some difficulty in settling down to sleep. But in their present condition they didn't care a jot about the atmosphere.

The cricketers were particularly satisfied.

Although they had done such a lot of studying on this day, they had also put in more time than usual at the nets. Fenton was delighted with his men, and the whole of St. Frank's was optimistic regarding the second Test Match.

In one of the Remove dormitories, however, two juniors wanted to get to sleep, but couldn't. They were Church and McClure—and Handforth was the reason for their



"I've got an idea!" exclaimed Handforth, as he poked Church in the ribs. "I've got an idea, and you chaps are going to listen to it! What's more, you're not going to sleep until you've heard it!" And he dug his knuckles into Church's ribs once more.

wakefulness. He was sitting on the edge of his own bed, talking to them. If they dared to doze off, he awakened them by the simple process of jabbing them in the ribs.

"Look here, Handy, chuck it!" protested Church, at last. "Why the dickens can't you go to sleep? Aren't you feeling tired?"

"Yes, but there's something important to talk about," said Handforth.

"Leave it till the morning."

"No fear!" said Edward Oswald. "I've got an idea—or the germ of an idea, anyhow. I can't sleep a wink until I've got it out of my system."

McClure yawned.

"But why drag us into it?" he complained bitterly.

"It's about this sports carnival!"

"Blow the sports carnival!"

"The West House collared the swimming honours, so it's up to us to win the next event," continued Handforth. "But what is the next event? That's the question."

He sat there for a minute, thinking deeply.

"Next week we shall be at home," continued Handforth. "It's Whit week, and there'll be a short vac. It's a nuisance, in a way, because it's going to interrupt our sports programme—"

He paused, and glared at his chums. They had both fallen back on their pillows, and were dozing off. He gave them two rapid jabs.

"Hi, chuck it!" yelled Church plaintively.

"You—you rotter!" snorted McClure. "We're tired out, and—"

"I can't help your troubles!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "You've got to listen to me, whether you like it or not. What about the next event in the sports programme? We were going to hold a regular sports day this week—or, rather, two evenings of sport. Hurdles, hundred yards' sprint, obstacle race, high jump, and all that sort of thing. It was all planned."

"Yes, but it's off now," snapped Church. "Didn't Hamilton say so? What with the Test Match, there'll be no time for those sports."

"That's my idea exactly," agreed Handforth. "Why not hold 'em during the holidays—in London. We shouldn't be wasting any time then, and we shouldn't lose the sports, either. Our policy is to use every minute we can, and this is a way of doing it."

"Oh, rather!" said Church sleepily.

"What do you think of the scheme?"

"Scheme?" repeated Church, with a start. "What scheme?"

"About the sports, you ass!"

"Sports?"

"You—you sleepy dummy!" roared Handforth. "I don't believe you've been listening! We've got to hold these races and things

in London, during Whit week. But where? That's the point. Where?"

"Stamford Bridge," mumbled McClure hazily.

"Eh?"

"Stamford Bridge," repeated McClure. "Isn't that where they hold sports meetings and things? I thought you were saying that you'd like to go and see some races during the vac."

"You—you drowsy lunatic!" said Handforth grimly. "Stamford Bridge is the Chelsea Football Club's ground! There's no football at this time of the year, ass!"

"I know that," retorted McClure. "But they have baseball there in the summer, and sports meetings, and things. I must have been dozing, I didn't quite understand what you meant."

Handforth suddenly gave a violent start.

"By George!" he shouted breathlessly.

"Eh?"

Church and McClure sat up, startled.

"Why not?" said their leader, feverishly.

"The very idea! The brain-wave of the century! My sons, I've got it. It's absolutely got the finest wheeze that was ever thought of!"

His eyes were gleaming, and he was quivering from head to foot. Church and McClure were aroused from their sleepy condition. They looked at Edward Oswald in alarm.

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked Church.

"The Chelsea Footer Ground!" said Handforth. "Don't you understand? Why shouldn't we hold our sports there—on Whit Monday?"

"Our sports?" gasped McClure. "Our junior sports?"

"Yes!"

"At Stamford Bridge?"

"Exactly!"

"You're absolutely off your rocker!" yelled his chums.

"Think of the time that'll be saved," went on Handforth excitedly. "We can put in this week at swotting—and use Whit Monday for the ordinary school sports. Don't you see? And if we hold 'em at Stamford Bridge we shall get a huge crowd of the ordinary public there."

Church and McClure simply glared at him.

"It's mad!" said Church. "The whole idea's crazy! For one thing, the Chelsea people won't let us use the ground, and for another, it would cost too much even if they did let us—"

"But we could pay for it," argued Handforth.

"How?"

"Why, by admitting the public, and charging them to come in," explained Edward Oswald. "In fact, we could make a pretty big profit on it, and give all the money to charity, or something. And think of the publicity, too! Wouldn't it be rather ripping to have our sports in London?"

But Church and McClure considered that the whole scheme was outrageously impossible. And Handforth continued to argue. He was so obsessed by the idea that he seemed like talking until the morning. And at last Church and McClure decided to let him have his own way.

"Come to think of it, it's pretty brainy," exclaimed Church. "By Jove, what a chap you are for brilliant ideas, Handy?"

"It's marvellous!" agreed McClure, taking his cue. "Stamford Bridge, eh? It'll be glorious to have our sports there! You tell that idea to Browne, Handy. He'll go mad about it!"

Handforth was greatly gratified.

"I'm glad to find out that you've got some sense, after all," he growled. "I was beginning to give you up as hopeless. So you think it's a topping idea, eh?"

"It's marvellous," said Church. "Can we go to sleep now?"

"You think the plan will work out all right?" asked Handforth.

"Bound to!" declared McClure. "Good-night, Handy!"

"Oh, all right! Go to sleep, if you're so jolly wooden!" snapped their leader. "Anyhow, I've worked you round, and that's something. But don't say a word about this scheme to a soul! I'll keep it mum until tomorrow evening at least."

If Handforth had observed the grin which his chums exchanged, he wouldn't have felt quite so pleased with himself. But they had secured peace at last, and in their present state of sleepiness they would have agreed to anything.



CHAPTER 5.

A LITTLE DOZE.

MOST of the juniors were considerably surprised to find themselves fully refreshed by six o'clock the next morning when Dick Hamilton himself went round in the Ancient House and aroused them. Other stalwarts were engaged in similar duties in the other Houses.

On the previous night the fellows had gone to bed thoroughly whacked, without an ounce of life left in them. They had dreaded the thought of getting up at six o'clock again.

But it was surprising how refreshed they felt now.

They didn't realise that the best sleep of all is that which is obtained when one is thoroughly tired. This morning they were refreshed and invigorated to an extent they had seldom before experienced.

And the morning was glorious, too.

The sun was already shining hotly, and the playing fields were no longer damp from the night's dew. By half-past six the grounds of St. Frank's were alive with seniors and juniors, all as determined as ever to keep up this fierce pace.

Breakfast-time found them hungry and hot, and during morning lessons the day became warmer and warmer. Yesterday there had been a cooling breeze, but to-day it had died down. The sky was cloudless, and the sun beat down with fierce intensity. It was like a day in mid-August.

"Phew! Eighty in the shade!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt as he consulted the big thermometer in the West House lobby after morning school. "No wonder we felt so jolly hot in the Form-room! It must be ninety in there!"

"That's a cheerful outlook for this afternoon!" said Jack Grey, fanning himself with his cap. "We get the sun through the windows all the afternoon, you know. The giddy place will be like an oven. I like fine weather, but this is a bit too much of a good thing."

Pitt was looking rather serious.

"It is!" he agreed. "After a spell in that Form-room again, we shall be melted to a state of exhaustion," he said. "Then what about our swotting hour between five and six? We shan't be fit for it. And we can't allow the plan to go wrong on the second day."

"No, that would be a tragedy," agreed Jack. "And there's practice again to-night, too. Fenton hasn't made his final selection for the Test Eleven to-morrow, so we've got to give a good showing."

"This heat's a corker," said Reggie sadly.

There were plenty of other juniors who were saying the same thing. For the month of May the weather was astonishingly hot, although by no means unusual. And by the time afternoon lessons were due to commence, the sultriness had increased.

There wasn't a breath of wind, and the sun was absolutely pitiless as it burned its way through the blinds of the Remove Form-room. All the windows were wide open, and the door was open, too. But the room was like a hot-house.

Even at any ordinary time the fellows would have been affected.

But to-day they were much more prone to feel drowsy. They had all got up at six o'clock, and they had performed strenuous exercises during every available moment. Hardly any of them had allowed the heat to interfere with the settled programme of the day.

And now that afternoon lessons were due to commence, the effect was showing itself. Afternoon lessons were a necessary evil, but there was no need to exert oneself too much over them. And the Remove felt convinced that Mr. Crowell would be easy.

No master with a spark of humanity within him would insist upon heavy work on such a day. He had been fairly lenient during the morning, but the room had been like an ice-box then compared with what it was now.

Outside, the stones of the Triangle were blisteringly hot. The whole school simmered in the afternoon humidity. And there was no prospect of a thunderstorm either to relieve the heat. It wasn't that kind of weather. It was simply a summer's day without a cooling breeze.

"Now, boys, we shall have to pull ourselves

together," said Mr. Crowell lazily. "I've noticed that one or two of you have been nodding. Under the circumstances, I am ready to excuse you, but you mustn't let it occur again."

"This room's like a conservatory, sir," said Handforth.

"I am afraid it is very hot," agreed Mr. Crowell.

"Couldn't we go outside, sir?" suggested Fullwood. "Why not have lessons in the shade of the shrubbery?"

"An attractive suggestion, Fullwood, but I am afraid it is impracticable," replied Mr. Crowell, shaking his head. "No, we must remain here, hot though it is. Duty is duty, and we must rise above these insignificant trifles."

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth. "I'll tell you what, sir. How about going down into the old monastery vault? It's as cool as a cucumber there, even on the hottest mid-summer's day!"

The very thought of it made Mr. Crowell feel cool for a moment, but he shook his head.

"That suggestion, Handforth, is even more impracticable than Fullwood's," he replied. "We cannot consider any such impossible notions. If any boy chooses, he may remove his jacket. On such a hot day I will allow that concession. But we must set our faces against the heat, and work."

There wasn't a fellow who neglected the opportunity of removing his jacket. Even Archie Glenthorne dispensed with his, and a few minutes later the Remove attempted to get to work.

As the fellows had hoped, Mr. Crowell was very easy. He gave them light work, and left them alone. Sometimes Mr. Crowell could be very sharp and stern, for he was a great believer in discipline. And the present sports fever received no encouragement from him. But to-day was quite an exception, and he could not find it in his heart to insist upon strenuous work.

Perhaps he wanted to save himself, too. For he settled himself comfortably in his own chair, and leaned back, with a book in his hand. The Remove, in the meantime, struggled manfully with the lessons, many of the juniors fighting continuously in order to keep awake.

At the best of times they would have found this difficult. But to-day it was a positive struggle. Almost every fellow in the room felt that it would be impossible to put in that hour at swotting between five and six. There was a limit to human endurance.

Once or twice, Mr. Crowell found himself nodding. He was alarmed, for he considered it an actual crime to doze over his work. On one or two never-to-be-forgotten occasions he had dropped off to sleep on a summer's afternoon, but he had seldom been detected by his boys. And he felt that if he dozed off to-day he would drop into a sound slumber.

And even while he was thinking in this strain, he did doze.

It was very comfortable in his chair. The heat was relaxing, and the hundred-and-one

little sounds of the well-filled room only served to lull him off. He nodded, his book slipped languidly into his lap, and his head sank upon his chest.

Two minutes later, Mr. Crowell was asleep. "Phew! This is getting worse," murmured Church, fanning himself with an exercise-book. "I say, sir, can I pop out for a drink of water?" he added, rising. "Why, what—I say, you chaps, he's fallen asleep!"

"By Jove!" grinned Dick Hamilton. "So he has!"

"Don't disturb him," said Fullwood. "We can take it easy until he wakes up—and that may not be until four o'clock!"

The juniors stretched themselves luxuriously, and lessons were forgotten. Archie Glenthorne was already asleep. He had fallen back in his seat and was peacefully snoring. Not noisily, but soothingly. The rest of the juniors were too languid even to talk.

They just sat in their places, lolling about, and sprawling on their desks. It was an immense relief to know that Mr. Crowell was asleep, for they were enabled to take things very easily.

Then Church dropped off, and McClure dozed immediately afterwards. In the far corner of the room, Forrest & Co. were already indulging in a nap. Handforth felt that it was up to him to wake these sluggards up, but he felt very much of a sluggard himself, and he was asleep in less than two minutes.

Others yawned, and gave themselves up luxuriously to a nap. About the last fellow to drop off was Dick Hamilton. But even he saw no reason why he shouldn't join the others. For a moment he thought of keeping awake, so that he could arouse the Form in case of somebody's approach, or in case Mr. Crowell awoke. In fact, Dick decided definitely upon this course.

And he had no sooner decided upon it than he dozed.

A minute later, the entire Form slumbered. Master and boys were all soundly off.

It was an extraordinary state of affairs—something, in fact, that had never occurred before. And it was partly due to the early hour at which the juniors had arisen, and to the tiring nature of their training. But it was mostly due to the excessive heat.

Mr. Crowell was so soundly off by now that there was practically no fear of his awakening.

The hum of insects sounded drowsily outside, and the blinds flapped idly as the faintest of faint breezes stirred the hot air.



CHAPTER 6.

MR. STOKES UNDERSTANDS.

WARM, sir!"

Mr. Beverley Stokes, the Housemaster of the West House, paused as he heard that remark from Morrow,

of the Sixth. They were in the School House entrance, where it was almost unbearably hot.

"A singularly enlightening remark, Morrow," smiled Mr. Stokes. "I am glad you informed me of the fact. I might not have known otherwise."

Morrow grinned.

"Well, we all say things like that, don't we, sir?" he asked. "I've just come from the Fifth Form-room, and my heart's bleeding. Those poor chaps are fighting like mad to keep themselves awake."

Mr. Stokes nodded.

"I'm not at all surprised," he said. "The heat this afternoon is almost tropical. But I am far more concerned for the Remove. The Fifth is comparatively immune from the afternoon sun, whereas the Remove catches it fully. I was just going along to make a suggestion to Mr. Crowell."

He nodded and walked off, and Morrow waited for a moment before braving the fierceness of the glaring sun outside. The Housemaster arrived at the doorway of the Remove Form-room and paused.

"Upon my soul!" he ejaculated.

He stood there, staring. He had expected to witness a scene of drowsiness, but he had never dreamed that he would discover complete slumber. The Form-room was a perfect picture.

The juniors were sprawling about in their shirt-sleeves, in all sorts of grotesque attitudes. Some were simply lying back, others were sprawling face downwards over their desks, and a few had sagged sideways. But everyone was sound asleep.

"Well, I'm hanged!" muttered Mr. Stokes, pursing his lips.

He crept in and glanced round at Mr. Crowell. The Form-master had been hidden by the blackboard until now, but one glance at him was enough to convince the visitor that he was as sound asleep as his boys.

Mr. Stokes tiptoed back again and stood in the doorway. His first impulse had been to awaken everybody, but he had checked himself in the nick of time. A slightly-amused light came into his eyes. After all, how could they be blamed?

Mr. Stokes' eyes positively twinkled now. He remembered how early these boys had got up, and how strenuously they had been working. And the heat of the room was certainly awful.

Besides, there was Mr. Crowell. Obviously, the Form-master had dozed off unwittingly, and the juniors, finding themselves unwatched, had succumbed to the general lassitude.

Mr. Stokes chuckled to himself and moved off. Far better to do nothing. He took compassion on the Remove, and decided that he would remain in ignorance of the whole incident. It wasn't his business, anyhow. He had only come along to suggest to Mr. Crowell that he should release his boys half an hour before the usual time, but this was even better.

"Just a minute, sir."

Mr. Stokes glanced round. Morrow was still about, and was approaching him. The

Housemaster put a warning finger to his lips, and Morrow halted, looking surprised.

"Anything wrong, sir?" he asked softly. "You may consider it wrong, Morrow, but I am but human, and I think it is very right," smiled Mr. Stokes, in a whisper. "Don't make a sound, but just take a peep into the Remove Form-room."

Puzzled, Morrow obeyed. He took one look, and nearly uttered a loud exclamation in his astonishment. He smothered it in the nick of time, and crept back along the passage.

"Why, they're all asleep, sir, including Mr. Crowell," he grinned.

"Exactly! Do you wonder?"

"By Jove, no, sir!" whispered Morrow. "But don't you think we'd better give Mr. Crowell a gentle shake?"

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Stokes. "It would place him in a most uncomfortable position, and he would feel very self-conscious about it. As for the boys, I have a certain sneaking sympathy for them. I shouldn't like them to get any punishment for this slight lapse. We'd better creep off, and leave them exactly as they are. They'll wake up before four o'clock, never fear. But it will be a lot better if we know nothing about it."

"I understand, sir," smiled Morrow. "By jingo, I feel jealous!"

They softly departed, and the Remove slumbered on. It was past three already, and it was not until the clock hands reached a quarter to four that Dick Hamilton roused himself. It was really a fly that did the trick. He yawned, raised his head, and stretched himself. Then he looked round, with a sudden start of remembrance.

"My goodness!" he murmured. "Nearly time for dismissal, and everybody still asleep! Well, I'm jiggered!"

He was feeling very refreshed. That nap had done him a world of good. He wondered what he should do, for he didn't want Mr. Crowell to awaken first, and discover the Form in such a compromising position.

And after such a long snooze Mr. Crowell was liable to awaken very easily now. So Dick pondered for a few moments, and thought the thing out. If possible, it would be better to hoodwink the Form-master into believing that nobody knew of his lapse.

"Wake up, Tommy!" whispered Dick Hamilton, shaking Watson. "Not a word!"

"Eh? Hallo? Where the dickens—"

"Shush, you ass!"

Tommy Watson was soon wide awake, and

so were the other fellows in Dick's immediate neighbourhood. Then the shake was passed on from fellow to fellow throughout the room until all were aroused. And as each one was warned in turn, there was practically no sound.

In any case, Mr. Crowell slumbered throughout the awakening process. And by this time it was five minutes to four. The whole Form was feeling considerably bucked.

The inactivity had cooled them, and the afternoon wasn't quite so hot now, in any case. The temperature had dropped several points during the last hour, and a delightful breeze had sprung up. That sleep, too, had provided the Remove with just the tonic it needed.

The fact that no lessons were done was a matter of no importance whatever. They didn't count, anyhow. It was the cramming for the exam, which was of paramount

urgency. And, having had this refresher, the Remove would be able to carry on with the five-until-six scheme with perfect ease.

"Listen to me, you fellows!" whispered Dick Hamilton. "There's no need for Mr. Crowell to know a thing."

"He'll find we've done no work, you chump!" muttered Handforth.

"Don't you believe it!" grinned Dick.

"After his little sleep all the afternoon, he won't make any close inquiries. Besides, it'll be time for dismissal, and he'll give the order straight away."

"By Jove, that's right!"

"The best thing we can do will be to work hard for a minute.

Carry on briskly, as though we had been at it all the time," chuckled Dick. "Good! That's the way! Now I'll wake him up!"

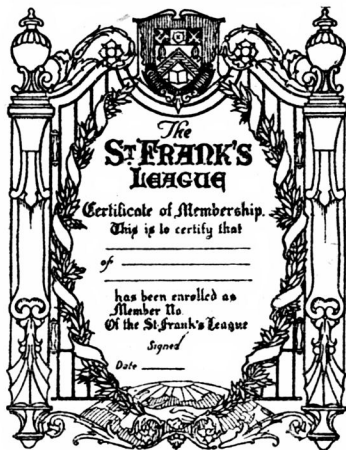
This was easily accomplished by means of a tiny paper pellet. It was a good shot, and it struck Mr. Crowell fairly in the face, just under his left eye. He started, raised his head, and blinked. His book fell with a thud to the floor, and he roused himself thoroughly.

"Good gracious!" he muttered, in alarm.

He knew that he had been asleep. No man can awaken from a sound slumber and not be aware of it. But Mr. Crowell was wide awake now, and one glance at the Form brought him infinite relief. All the juniors were bending over their work, even more industrious than when he had seen them last.

"Thank heaven!" murmured the Form-master gratefully.

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Full details on pages 42 and 43.

He glanced up at the clock, expecting to find the time to be somewhere approaching three. It was just two minutes to four. Mr. Crowell hastily adjusted his glasses, and looked again.

"Upon my soul!" he breathed unsteadily.

He was staggered. He had been asleep for an hour and a half! And the Remove was still at work! In some extraordinary way, they hadn't noticed his slumbers, for if they had they would certainly have taken advantage of the fact.

Outside, the big school clock commenced chiming the hour. Mr. Crowell listened intently. He wanted his ears to verify the evidence of his eyes. The chimes ceased, and four solemn strokes followed.

"Hallo! Four o'clock!" exclaimed Fullwood, glancing up.

"Yes, boys—yes!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell hastily. "Quite so, Fullwood! As you say, four o'clock. Ahem! We have had an excellent afternoon. You may put your books away and dismiss."

"Thank you, sir," said the Remove gleefully.

They donned their jackets, and hurried out in perfect order. In fact, there was something so sedate about them that Mr. Crowell became thoughtful. He was left in the room entirely by himself, and he glanced at the clock again.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured. "I can scarcely believe— And yet, after all, what can I do? I have been asleep for the whole afternoon! What a terrible affair! I dare not ask for any information. H'm! I wonder!" he added slowly. "I wonder!"

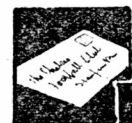
He had a sudden thought, and went to one of the desks. A moment's examination of the afternoon's work enlightened him. He looked at one or two of the other desks, and all doubts were set at rest.

"Dear me!" he breathed. "So that is the truth, eh? Well, I wouldn't have believed it! I certainly did not give my boys credit for such tact as this! I am afraid I have been unduly harsh on occasion."

He smiled quietly to himself, and thoroughly understood.

CHAPTER 7.

WILLY AND BROWNE QUITE
AGREE.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH paused in the Ancient House lobby.

"Buck up, Handy—we've got half an hour out of doors before tea-time," said Church briskly. "Then half an hour for tea, and then an hour's beastly swotting. Don't forget the programme."

"We can't afford to waste time," urged McClure.

But Handforth waved them into silence.

"There's something more important than practice just now," he said firmly. "I am certain to be selected for to-morrow's match, anyhow—and if I do any more practising I

shall only get stale. What about that idea of mine?"

"Which idea?"

"That suggestion I made about Whit Monday."

"Whit Monday?"

"You—you forgetful asses!" snorted Handforth. "Don't you remember me jawing about it last night, in the dormitory? That brain-wave?"

"Oh, that!" said Church, with a dim recollection. "I'd nearly forgotten all about it. You don't mean to say you're going to trot that mouldy idea out again?"

"Mouldy idea!" thundered Handforth.

"Well, it's a bit tall, isn't it?" growled Church. "If we can't hold the general sports this week, we shall have to postpone them until after the Whitsun vac."

"Of course," agreed McClure. "That's the only solution."

"I can't expect to get any support from traitors like you!" said Handforth bitterly. "Fine chums, aren't you? I get a ripping idea, and all you can do is to scoff at it!"

Church and McClure flushed.

"Ask anybody else!" retorted Church. "They'll scoff, too!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"When you chaps hear of something new you just yell at it!" he said tartly. "You haven't got big enough brains to encourage an unconventional idea!"

"All right—see what these chaps say!" snorted McClure.

Cecil De Valerie and Alf Brent and Somerton were just passing, and Church explained the great scheme to them before Handforth could stop him.

"That's what he calls a brain-wave!" concluded Church warmly. "A St. Frank's Sports Day at Stamford Bridge—on a football ground—on Whit Monday! What do you chaps think of it?"

"Rotten!" said De Valerie firmly.

"Awful!" declared Alf Brent.

"Perfectly ghastly!" yawned Somerton.

They passed on, and Handforth glared after them with such ferocity that one almost expected their backs to burst into flames. Church shrugged his shoulders, and smiled in a superior sort of way.

"Well?" he asked carelessly.

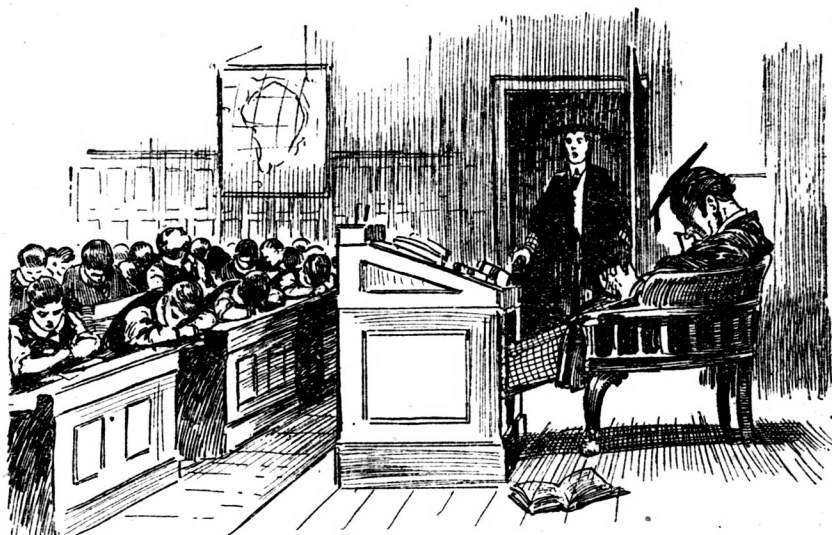
"Those detty lunatics are as bad as you!" hooted Handforth.

"All right—here comes your minor," grinned McClure. "We'll hear what he's got to say. Hi, Willy!"

"Don't you dare—" began Handforth hotly.

But he was too late. McClure was already rattling out the great idea. Willy Handforth listened to it carelessly at first, and then with greater attention. McClure finished on a sarcastic note.

"That's the wonderful wheeze!" he grinned. "Our general sports on Chelsea's football ground—on Bank Holiday! Now, Willy, out with your candid opinion. What do you think of it?"



"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Stokes. The Remove were sprawling about the desks in their shirt-sleeves, all sound asleep; and in his chair Mr. Crowell sat—snoring happily!

"Great!" said Willy promptly.

"What?" gasped McClure.

"Wonderful!" said Willy, extending his hand to his major. "Ted, old man, congrats! Did you think of that all your little self? My dear old spiffer, I didn't think you had it in you! It's the idea of the century!"

"He's mad!" panted Church.

"The young bounder's pulling my leg!" growled Handforth gruffly. "Look here, Willy, any more of this rot—"

"My dear old chap, honour bright!" interrupted Willy.

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"You really think it's good?" he asked eagerly.

"It's so jolly good that we're going straight to Browne!" retorted Willy. "He's the merchant for this scheme. Now, Ted, don't argue! William Napoleon is the one and only organiser for a scheme like this. He'll make it fizz like one o'clock!"

And before Handforth could object, he was dragged forth by his minor to the other side of the Triangle—where William Napoleon Browne was chatting with Fenton and Morrow of the Sixth. All were in flannels, preparatory to going on Big Side.

Church and McClure stood in the Ancient House doorway, gaping. They had never believed for a moment that Willy would uphold their leader's preposterous suggestion. And they felt, even now, that he was spoofing.

"Let's go and listen to this!" suggested Church tensely.

"Browne, old man, my major's got an idea," said Willy, as he halted in front of the Fifth Form skipper.

"This is wondrous news, indeed!" said Browne happily. "I can scarcely believe that Brother Handforth has at last achieved the seeming impossible."

"If you're going to rot—" began Handforth hotly.

"Nay!" interrupted Browne. "But you must forgive a little astonishment on my part. Proceed, Brother Willy. I am fortified. I beseech you, Brothers Fenton and Morrow, to stand by me in this hour of trial."

Willy explained the plan, with a great deal of help from his major. Fenton and Morrow grinned broadly, and shook their heads.

"Impossible!" said Fenton, at length.

"On the contrary, the idea presents possibilities of a bristling nature," declared William Napoleon Browne firmly. "Indeed, I can already see that it is capable of wondrous success. It shall be developed."

"There you are!" said Willy calmly. "I knew that I could trust in old Browne's judgment! Our ideas are identical! I expect we've got more brain than the rest of you chaps," he added wisely.

"From the mouths of babes and sucklings—" murmured Browne.

"Look here, you idiot," interrupted Morrow. "Are you suggesting that this thing can be done? The St. Frank's Junior Sports, on Whit Monday, in London?"

Browne smiled.

"I am not suggesting that it can be done," he replied. "I am merely stating that it shall be done. It is settled. All London will flock to Stamford Bridge on Monday. My only fear is that the ground will not be

large enough to hold all those who wish to see these valiant sportsmen."

"You hopeless ass, that ground holds from sixty to eighty thousand!" shouted Church.

"Alas, a meagre number!" sighed Browne. "But we must put up with it, since I fail to see where there is a bigger enclosure. The Wembley Stadium might suffice, but it is too distant. We desire a central venue."

"It's no good fooling like this, Browne," said Fenton, frowning. "Even if the juniors did hold the sports there, nobody would go to see them."

"That, after all, is a minor point," interrupted Browne. "We will leave the matter of the audience in abeyance for the moment. It is Brother Handforth's suggestion to utilise an enforced day of idleness to some useful purpose. Not merely a brainy scheme, but a brilliant achievement. The sports will be held, and thus there will be more time, upon our return to St. Frank's, to devote to cricket practice and cramming for the exams. I did not imagine that Brother Handforth could produce such scintillating gems."

And Browne, in spite of his flamboyant tone, was really in earnest. He was a fellow who made up his mind quickly—and who let no grass grow under his feet.

Before half an hour had elapsed, a letter was written to the management of the Chelsea Football Club, and it was dispatched forthwith. William Napoleon Browne was a man of action, and it was a moral certainty that the juniors had not heard the last of Handforth's brainwave.



CHAPTER 8.

HANDFORTH AND A HOSEPIPE.

WHAT about it now, my lad?"

Handforth was triumphant as he walked back towards the Ancient House with Church and McClure. It was twenty-past four, so they had decided to have tea at once, and get it over. After all, there was no time to do any cricket practice now.

"Sorry, old man," said Church penitently. "But we didn't see the idea in the right light, somehow. I suppose it's a jolly good one, really."

"Your minor plumped for it," said McClure.

Handforth nodded.

"I didn't think the young beggar had so much common sense," he replied. "But, of course, he's a Handforth—that accounts for it. Blood always tells, you know. And Browne's a clever chap, too."

"I believe he's spoofing," muttered Church. "But, when you come to think of it, perhaps it would be rather a stunning idea to have our Sports Day in London. But it was so jolly unusual, you know. It struck us so suddenly, Handy."

"It's all right—I understand," said Handforth. "You chaps haven't got quick brains like I have—you can't grasp a thing in the

first minute. We'll have everything at Stamford Bridge. They've got a ripping cinder track there, you know, and it's a tremendous size. Lots of sports are held there every summer. So why shouldn't we have a go?"

"There's one thing you've overlooked," said McClure dubiously. "The chances are that the place is booked up for Whit Monday. Not that it would matter much," he added. "We could hold our sports any day in the week."

This was certainly a point, but Handforth refused to admit it.

"Leave it to Browne!" he said airily. "Next to me, he's about the most business-like chap in the school. He's taken over the organising, and so we can trust him to see that everything's done properly. And if he doesn't get the Chelsea ground for Monday, I'll eat my hat."

They had entered the Ancient House lobby by this time, and it was very hot in there. The heat of the sun had been beating upon the Ancient House all the afternoon; by the time the juniors arrived in Study D, they were beginning to perspire. Somebody had left the window closed, and the room was like an oven.

The blind being up, the fierce rays of the sun had been beating in for hours, and the air was suffocating.

"My hat!" breathed Handforth.

He went to the window, and flung it up. But this afforded little or no relief, for the paving-stones outside were burning hot, and sending up radiating waves of heat.

"What a prospect!" groaned Church. "About twenty minutes for tea, and then we shall have to stew in this giddy study until six o'clock, swotting! Somehow, I'm not quite so enthusiastic as I was yesterday!"

"Now, then—no weakening!" frowned Handforth.

But Church was not the only fellow in the Remove who held similar opinions. This hour of work after tea was very fine in theory, but difficult in practice. However, practically everybody was determined to carry on. It was the intense heat which caused many of them to waver.

"Don't you think we'd better have some iced ginger-pop instead of tea?" asked McClure dubiously.

"No jolly fear!" retorted Handforth. "You get the kettle on, and brew the tea! There's nothing like a cup of tea to buck you up. Besides, it's cooling. It seems rummy, but it's a fact. And there's no need for us to frizzle in this atmosphere, either. I'm going to do something. I've got another idea."

"You're full of 'em to-day!" said Church. Handforth made no reply, but strode out. He knew that most of the heat was coming in from the big flagstones outside. They held the heat, and the sun was still beating down upon them. He went to the rear door, and scrutinised the fire hydrant which was fitted close against the wall.

"The very thing!" murmured Handforth.

It struck him that if he soaked the flagstones with cold water the heat would diminish, and the cooling air, entering the study, would have an invigorating effect. It was certainly a sound idea, but Handforth overlooked the fact that the school regulations forbade any interference with the fire-fighting apparatus—except in cases of great urgency.

But such a detail didn't worry Handforth in the least.

He never gave it a thought. He wished to cool those flagstones outside the study window, and here were the means at his hand. It would be simple enough to uncoil the long length of hose, and take it outside into the West Square. Then he could play the water upon the flagstones all along, and benefit the other studies at the same time.

He took the big brass nozzle down from its hook, and turned a tap. It was just as well to have this off before he unscrewed the main hydrant. Then he uncoiled the flat canvas hose, and littered it about the floor. Fortunately—or unfortunately—there was nobody about at the moment to witness these proceedings.

Handforth placed the nozzle on the floor, and decided that it would be just as well to fill the hose with water before he carried it outside.

He gave the wheel of the hydrant a swing round, and turned the water on with about half force. But it was more than sufficient for all needs! The coils of hose on the floor leapt into life, and swung about all over the rear lobby, lashing vigorously.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth, dodging.

And then, with a fearful swish, the water hissed out of the nozzle—for Handforth had turned the tap on, instead of off, as he had imagined. By a fortunate chance, the hose was pointing outside the doorway, and there was no damage caused indoors.

He made a wild grab, secured the nozzle, and swung it up. It was rather unfortunate that Archie Glenthorne should be sauntering in at that moment. The stream of water struck him fairly amidships.

"Good gad!" he gurgled. "Help! S.O.S. I mean to say, what—"

Archie vanished amid a smother of spray. A few minutes before he had been complaining of the heat, but he had no reason to complain of it now. Handforth was wrestling desperately with the hose, but it was getting beyond him. He had never imagined that it would be such a difficult thing to control.

"Oh, my hat!" he panted feverishly.

He swung the nozzle round, and Mr. Pagett, the master of the Fifth, turned the angle to the Ancient House at the exact moment to receive the hurtling stream in the neck. The unfortunate Mr. Pagett almost turned a somersault. He went down, soaked to the skin, startled out of his wits, and utterly bewildered.

"Oh, corks!" groaned Handforth, gulping.

He swung the hose round again, and a

number of juniors in the West House, partaking of tea, were simply pelted with drops of water as the spray hissed through the windows. A series of wild yells sounded.

Handforth didn't quite know how he managed it, but he turned the tap off at last. The hose was still whipping about, and he dashed back into the lobby, and wrenched at the wheel. The writhings subsided.

"Oh, thank goodness!" murmured Edward Oswald.

He went out again, in order to pick up Mr. Pagett's remains—for he had an idea that the Form-master was really hurt. But Mr. Pagett was on his feet—looking more like a drowned rat than a human being, but otherwise unharmed. And his rage knew no bounds. It so happened that Mr. Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, appeared at the same moment.

"You—you wretched boy!" gasped Mr. Pagett. "How—how dare you deliberately drench me in this fashion! Mr. Lee—Mr. Lee! I appeal to you to punish this young idiot with the utmost severity! He is positively dangerous!"

By this time, Church and McClure were on the scene, and their appearance could not have been more inopportune. For Mr. Pagett at once included them in his condemnation.

"It was a trick—a deliberate attempt to assault me!" roared Mr. Pagett. "Not merely an attempt, but an actual assault!"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Pagett, please," said the Housemaster quietly. "I cannot believe that these boys purposely played such a trick. Handforth, what was your idea in interfering with that hose?"

"I—I wanted to cool the flagstones, sir," gasped Handforth.

"You had no intention of playing the water upon Mr. Pagett?"

"Of course not, sir," said Handforth breathlessly. "The giddy thing got out of control, or something. I only turned the wheel a bit, and the hose whipped into life like a snake! Fairly took me off my feet, sir."

"What-ho!" moaned Archie Glenthorne. "Wouldn't it be more correct, laddie, to say that it took Mr. Pagett and me off our feet? Good gad! The old flannels are absolutely ruined!"

Handforth looked dazed.

"But—but I can't understand it," he said. "I distinctly turned the nozzle tap off before I touched the hydrant—"

"You ass, you must have turned it on!" interrupted Church.

"My hat, I suppose I did!"

"Really, Mr. Lee, I cannot understand why you let these boys make such ridiculous excuses!" stormed Mr. Pagett furiously.

"Unhappily, they do not come within my own jurisdiction, and I must therefore appeal to you to pronounce an adequate punishment."

"But it was an accident, sir!" said McClure anxiously.

The Housemaster looked grim.

"Accident or no accident, McClure, I am compelled to inflict a penalty," he said quietly. "You three boys will write five hundred lines each, and deliver them to me before supper this evening!"



CHAPTER 9.

FAIR VISITORS.

HANDFORTH & CO. heard their fate with blank dismay.

Five hundred lines each!

And they had to be delivered before supper! This would mean almost continuous work, and the swotting hour would have to be devoted to the useless task of line writing. And there would be no cricket practice either—and this was the last evening before the Test Match!

Somehow Mr. Pagett seemed to hold a diametrically opposite view to Handforth & Co. They considered that the punishment was outrageous, but Mr. Pagett was positively startled.

"Five hundred lines!" he roared. "But that is ridiculous!"

"Mr. Pagett!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Lee, but—but—" The Fifth Form-master breathed hard. "Really, this sentence is utterly out of all proportion! These reckless young fools might have seriously injured me! Would it not be more fitting to take them before the Headmaster for a flogging?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Pagett," said the Housemaster smoothly. "I am satisfied that your drenching was quite accidental. And I think five hundred lines will convince the boys that they must not interfere with the apparatus."

He walked off, and Mr. Pagett snorted.

"You may count yourselves lucky, young men," he said tartly. "Since your Housemaster has chosen to act so leniently, I have nothing to say. But you are fortunate in not belonging to the Fifth Form!"

"Hold on, sir!" gasped Handforth, taking no notice of Mr. Pagett, and running after the Housemaster. "It was my fault, you know. Church and McClure didn't have anything to do with it—"

"Chuck it, old man!" growled Church, pulling him up. "It's no good. He won't believe that now, and so we'd better take our gruel with you."

"But it's not fair!" snorted Handforth.

"Of course it isn't," agreed Church. "But we're generally lumped together if there's any lines going. It's no good telling Mr. Lee that we didn't know anything about it. He'd give us the lines just the same for not looking after you!"

Handforth was looking thoroughly alarmed.

"But you don't seem to understand," he panted. "What about cricket practice to-morrow? To-morrow's the day for the second Test Match, and we've got to use every minute!"

"There'll be no practice for us, old man," said McClure grimly. "With five hundred lines to do, we shall have our work cut out from now until supper-time. If we get a tremendous hustle on, we might manage to sneak half an hour at the nets, but it'll be a struggle. The main thing is to get tea over quickly."

"By jingo!" said Church. "That reminds me. The kettle will be boiling over! We ought to think ourselves lucky that we're not gated for a fortnight!"

Handforth's chums thought it wise to drop the subject, although their natural instincts urged them to complain bitterly of his rashness. Such a course, however, would only have added to the evening's misfortunes.

So they went back to Study D, ignoring the unfortunate Archie Glenthorne's feeble protests.

The kettle had been boiling over, and there was a puddle of water on the floor. Steam was shooting out of the kettle spout at high pressure.

"Just in time!" said Church briskly.

"Look at all that water!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Look at the mess you've made here! The place is swamped!"

Church turned the gas down and glared.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "You half-drown Archie Glenthorne and Mr. Pagett, you soak the back lobby with about five hundred gallons of water, and then you make a fuss at half-a-pint in the study!"

"Let's get something done!" urged McClure. "No good arguing about water. I'm sick of the sight of it! Where's the teapot? Let's get tea over as quickly as we can, and dash into those rotten lines!"

"You can't make tea with that water," said Handforth curtly.

"Why not?"

"It's been boiling!"

"You fatead! It's got to boil——"

"Unless you catch the kettle the very instant it boils, the tea's no good!" said Handforth firmly. "You can't teach me how to make tea, my lads! Pour all that water away, and boil a fresh lot."

But Church was already pouring the boiling water hissing into the teapot.

"We can't waste time over fads!" he snapped. "If we get any tea at all, we shall be lucky. We'll have a rush meal to-day. Wouldn't be a bad idea to start the lines now, and get ahead with 'em."

Handforth gave it up. He was worried and troubled, and work was the only thing to take his mind off the unhappy events. He knew that he was mainly to blame, but he didn't like to admit it, although he had admitted it freely enough to the Housemaster. Within two minutes Study D was in an awful state of muddle.

It was generally more or less disordered, but now it was shocking.

There was no attempt to have tea properly. Church partook of his out of a basin, McClure used a flower-vasc, and only Handforth had a cup. The bread-and-butter was cut in ungainly hunks, and the table was

generally littered with eatables, intermingled with exercise-books and ink-pots. The sardine tin had been hacked open so hurriedly that the oil was oozing out, and spreading beneath one of Handforth's new lesson books. Fortunately, he wasn't aware of this fact.

The chums of Study D were unusually silent.

Church and McClure accepted the inevitable with stoical fortitude. Long companionship with Handforth had provided them with a great amount of patience. And Edward Oswald himself was more or less stunned by the five-hundred-line imposition. He was in a fever to get down to the writing.

It was five o'clock already, and St. Frank's was uncannily silent, for everybody else, seniors and juniors alike, were sticking to the programme, as outlined by Fenton.

Hard swotting for the exams was in progress. There were only one or two backsliders, and these took care not to advertise their slackness. Upon the whole, the school was doing nobly.

But in Study D there were no thoughts of swotting.

Tea was late, and there were these frightful lines to be done. Handforth & Co. would have been wiser if they had finished tea first. But they were in such a hurry that they started their lines while they were still feeding. And even the best-written lines are not greatly improved by tea stains and occasional splashes of sardine oil.

And in the midst of this muddle—just as Handforth was absently drinking out of McClure's flower-vase—the door softly opened, and three faces looked in. But the juniors were unaware of this fact, for their backs were towards the door, and the newcomers had stolen up softly, as befitted such a solemn occasion as this swotting hour.

"My goodness!" breathed one of the visitors.

She was Irene Manners, of the Moor View School, and her companions were Doris Berkeley and Mary Summers. All three were looking cool and charming in the lightest of brightly-coloured summer frocks. It was really amazing how cool these girls looked amid such heat.

"Something squiffy about this tea," remarked Handforth, setting down the vase.

"You ass, that's mine!" growled McClure, looking up.

"Then why the dickens don't you keep it over your side?" demanded Handforth. "Great Scott! It tastes like cabbage water! Did you wash that vase out before you shoved the tea in it?"

"There wasn't time to bother about fads!" retorted McClure shortly.

"You—you howling ass!" roared Handforth, spluttering. "There were some dead flowers in that vase this morning!"

"You needn't worry," snapped McClure. "I tipped them out!"

"But you didn't wash—" Handforth paused, and a startled expression came into his eyes.

Out of the corner of his vision he had just caught a glimpse of three faces in the doorway. They were three very pretty faces, but at the moment they were rather expressive of horror. Irene & Co. were gazing in dread at that improvised teacup.

"My hat!" gurgled Handforth, leaping up. "Quick, you chaps! Shove these things away! Make the study tidy—"

"Too late!" laughed Irene, walking in. "Hallo, you chaps! No, don't bother to get up. Don't disturb yourselves. This is no time for formalities. We only popped in to ask about to-morrow's match."

"We forgot about your special cramming hour until we were indoors," explained Mary. "But then we couldn't resist taking just a peep."

"And I think we'd better bunk," said Doris hastily. "One peep's enough for me, anyhow!"

"Oh, I say!" gasped Handforth. "This—isn't usual, you know. You've caught us on the hop!"

He and his chums were thoroughly startled. The girls generally gave a little warning before they arrived, and this enabled the juniors to get things shipshape. Under no circumstances could Study D look worse than it looked at the moment. It was in an awful condition.

Irene glanced at her chums, and they nodded. It would be an act of discretion to retreat quietly. Clearly, this was no occasion for the entertaining of visitors.

"We didn't mean to stay, anyhow," said Irene softly. "Don't apologise for the study, Ted. We understand."

"Perfectly," said the other two girls. "It's—it's old Pagett's fault really," panted Handforth, in desperation. "If it hadn't been for him—"

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Pages 42 & 43



"Hallo! What's this?" interrupted Mary Summers, gazing over Church's shoulder. "Lines! I thought you were supposed to be studying for the examinations?"

Handforth & Co. groaned.

"We've dished this evening," explained Handforth gloomily. "We've got five hundred lines each to do, and they'll take us all the evening. We shan't even get half-an-hour at the nets! And it's our last chance before the Test Match!"



CHAPTER 10.

A SPORTING OFFER.

ORIS BERKELEY looked severe.

"Five hundred lines!" she said, with twinkling eyes. "You must have

done something perfectly dreadful to get an impot like that!"

"Perhaps we'd better not make inquiries," said Mary discreetly.

"It might be painful," murmured Irene.

But Handforth was red with indignation.

"We don't mind who knows," he exclaimed.

"We just happened to soak old Pagett—and our Housemaster gave us five hundred lines each! These chaps had nothing to do with it, either!"

"You soaked him?" repeated Irene curiously. "Is that English or American? In America, I think soaking a fellow means smashing him up, doesn't it? That's what I heard from Adams—"

"No, we soaked old Pagett with water," interrupted Handforth sadly. "Quite an accident, you know. I was cooling the stoves with one of the fire hoses, and old Pagett got in the way. The old chump was drenched! And then the Housemaster comes along, and has the nerve to give us five hundred lines each!"

Irene & Co. tried hard not to smile.

"I think we'll be going," said Doris gently.

"Wait a minute," interrupted Irene, contracting her pretty brows. "Five hundred lines, eh? And I suppose they've got to be delivered this evening?"

"Yes."

"And you're dying to get out to the nets?"

"There's not a chance," sighed Church.

"And we've got nothing on our programme for this evening," went on Irene thoughtfully. "Girls, what about it?"

Doris and Mary looked at her.

"You mean—" asked Doris.

"They'd never know the difference," said Irene, nodding.

Handforth was looking puzzled.

"I can't understand this," he said gruffly. "Who'd never know the difference? And what was that about a programme?"

"I say, it couldn't be done!" burst out Church, whose wits were quicker. "It's jolly decent of you girls to offer, but we couldn't think of it. I mean, there's a limit, you know!"

"Besides," said McClure, "Mr. Lee would know in a tick!"

"Know what?" asked Handforth blankly. "What's the idea of all this double Dutch? You—you don't mean— By George! Are you girls offering to do our lines?"

Irene nodded.

"We'll come back at six o'clock promptly," she replied, in brisk tones. "Until then, you can get on with your cramming. We'll take over the study at six, and you can spend the rest of the evening at the nets while we're writing the lines."

"I say, what a lark!" chuckled Doris.

"Lark!" gasped Church. "Writing lines?"

"Well, think of how we shall spoof your Housemaster!" smiled Mary. "I don't suppose we like writing lines any more than you do, but this is a special occasion. And it's a pity if we can't do something to help you chaps out of a hole. I'm game, anyhow."

"Rather!" agreed Doris. "It's settled."

Handforth & Co. were staggered. Not only were they grateful for this sporting offer—for it meant freedom for them—but they were startled by the daring nature of it. And it struck them as being impossible.

"It's—it's jolly decent of you, girls, but—but— Oh, well, I mean, it couldn't be done!" exclaimed Handforth awkwardly. "In the first place, we couldn't think of taking advantage of you like that. Besides, the game wouldn't work. You couldn't write the lines like us."

Doris glanced at Handforth's preliminary efforts.

"We should try to avoid the tea stains, anyway," she murmured. "And I don't think our handwriting is much worse than yours, Ted. As for taking advantage of us, we made the offer. So don't be silly."

"Worse!" repeated Handforth, referring to the handwriting. "That's just it! Your fists are so jolly good that Mr. Lee would spot the difference in a minute. Besides, anybody can tell a girl's handwriting. We should only get into worse trouble than ever—and might involve you, too."

"Rats!" said Irene firmly. "You don't know what we can do, my lad! We'll start all over again, and use what you've done to copy from. And if Mr. Lee tells the difference he'll be a magician. Just leave this to us. Chuck these lines, and get on with your swotting. We'll be back here at six sharp."

"But look here—"

"That's settled!" added Irene sweetly. "So long!"

They passed out and gently closed the door. Handforth & Co. looked at one another in rather a scared sort of way.

"It's no good arguing with girls; they won't listen!" groaned Handforth. "Besides, it isn't the thing. But, my hat, what an un-holy mess! We daren't let them do our lines. Old Lee will think we've improved too much. Our handwriting isn't a quarter so good as those girls! Irene's fist, anyhow, is too marvellous for words!"

Church and McClure grinned.

"She's going to copy yours, Handy, so you needn't worry about that," said Church. "I think it's a topping idea, and those girls are real bricks for suggesting it. I always knew they were sportsmen, but this beats everything! Let's get busy!"

"But I tell you it can't be done," argued Handforth obstinately. "There's all sorts of things to think about. We can't impose on the girls in this way, you know. Letting them write five hundred giddy lines is an awful nerve."

"But they offered to!" said Church.

"And they seemed to like the idea," added McClure, in astonishment.

"Besides, what about Lee?" went on Handforth. "Even if he doesn't spot the hand-writing—and we don't have miracles nowadays—he's bound to spot us."

"Us?"

"We can't be in two places at once, can we?" growled Handforth, frowning. "If he sees us on Little Side, he'll know that we're not writing the lines. The girls didn't think of that! Then he'll get the lines, and we shall all be in the cart."

"Rot!" said Church. "Anyhow, the girls have offered to help us, and I'm not going to refuse. We should be awful rotters if we turned them down, and I think we can trust Mr. Lee to be sporty. The chances are he won't spot us outside, and he'll never question the lines when he gets them. These masters only give our lines a glance, and then tear 'em up!"

Handforth nodded.

"That's what makes me wild," he said indignantly. "We'll spend hours over an impot, and then we'll see it turn up in front of our eyes. I mean, all that effort wasted!"

Handforth failed to appreciate that an impot is merely a proof of an accomplished task. And, once delivered, it is far safer destroyed. Undestroyed impots have a curious habit sometimes of being used again. It is only careless masters who throw lines intact into the waste-paper basket.

"Well, let's clear up this mess!" said McClure practically.

They had lost their appetite for tea, and in less than five minutes Study D was looking almost tidy, although one might have had a fit if one had glanced into the cupboards. Outwardly, at least, the apartment was respectable.

And Handforth & Co., resigning themselves to the inevitable—not a very great effort—proceeded with their special studying. A great load was off their minds, although they still had an uncomfortable feeling that the whole business was a bit "thick."

Promptly at six o'clock St. Frank's became alive. Before the last chime had sounded, the fellows were shooting out of the various Houses, intent upon the more serious work of the evening. For the school was still more or less sports mad, and cricket and kindred pastimes were regarded as the chief features of the term.

Handforth & Co. put their books away with alacrity, and by this time Edward Oswald was

full of enthusiasm for Irene's idea. Cricket practice was now immediately possible, and this thought alone was enough to dissipate all unpleasant ideas of line writing. But the girls hadn't turned up, and an appalling thought came to Handforth.

"I say, suppose they were spoofing us?" he asked, startled.

"You ass!" said Church, staring.

"These girls get up to just as many japes as we do," argued Handforth anxiously. "They'd probably think it a great lark to spoof us— Oh, I don't know, though," he added, shaking his head. "They wouldn't play a trick like that. It would be an awful frost—"

The door opened, and Irene & Co. marched in.

"All ready?" asked Irene Manners. "Goo! You chaps can clear off as soon as you like."

"Yes, but look here—"

"This is our study for this evening!" interrupted Doris firmly. "You get outside to your cricket, and don't argue! We'll have these lines polished off long before eight o'clock."

"But you've got to get back for calling-over—"

"Rats!" interrupted Mary. "We've got a special permit. Come on, girls—push the beggars out! If we don't, they'll keep arguing until further orders! We can't have our time wasted like this."

Handforth & Co. were hustled out of the study, the door was firmly closed, and the key was turned in the lock.



CHAPTER 11.

QUITE SUCCESSFUL.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, the genial captain of the Fifth Form, thoughtfully licked the end of his pencil.

"I take it, Brother Fenton, that I now have your permission to proceed with the good work? You will surely allow me to adorn this page with the illustrious name of Brother Handforth?"

Fenton of the Sixth nodded.

"Yes, put him down," he replied. "By Jove, he's in slashing form this evening, Browne! I wonder how he'll deal with this one— Great Scott! Look at that! The fourth boundary in succession!"

Fenton and Browne were in the Junior Pavilion, watching the Remove cricketers at work. It was nearly seven o'clock now, and Edward Oswald Handforth was performing a few wonders. Against the trickiest bowling that St. Frank's could offer, he was batting with superb confidence and judgment. For Handforth it was an unusually finished display—for his batting was generally marred by recklessness of the most foolhardy type.

"He's improving," declared Fenton, with enthusiasm. "If he plays like this to-morrow,

he'll be worth his weight in gold! And even those Australians haven't got any better bowlers than Kahn or yourself."

"Such compliments as these are apt to disturb me, Brother Fenton," said Browne, shaking his head. "Kindly curb this very natural tendency to appraise my ability at its true worth. But you are possibly overlooking the fact that Brother Dodd is at the moment bowling? And he is one of these Australian giants we must face on the morrow. Brother Handforth, apparently, is filled with the laudable intention of hurling Brother Dodd to the boundary every time."

Perhaps there was a special reason for Handforth's surprising brilliance. After anticipating an evening indoors, and now finding himself with the willow in his hand, he was like a giant unleashed. The very spirit of freedom was apparent in his exuberant display.

Church and McClure were similarly affected, and their gratitude towards Irene & Co. grew as they thought of their own liberty, and realised how the girls must be furiously at work. Church was even more glad than McClure, for Church had a wild hope of being selected for the Test Match.

It was almost a forlorn chance, but there was never any telling. His batting had greatly improved recently, and he was one of the best fieldsmen in the Ancient House Eleven. At cover point he was supreme, and in the House matches he had more than once attracted Fenton's approving eye.

But his name was not on the list for the morrow's match.

He wasn't quite good enough. His batting was still somewhat slow—not that this, alone, was a bar. His judgment was uncertain, and he was too prone to lift the leather. Faced by a really determined bowler, he was not likely to last for more than two or three overs, no matter how much he "stonewalled."

But Church was trying—and it was the triers who reaped the reward sooner or later. He would still have three opportunities to figure in one of the big matches, for there were to be five in the series.

Edgar Fenton had got his team practically complete. But it was lucky, indeed, that the Moor View girls had come to Handforth & Co.'s rescue. For one of the seniors would certainly have had Handforth's place in the Eleven but for the latter's surprising display now.

Indeed, Fenton had already prepared his list, having come to the conclusion that this particular senior was indispensable. Fenton tried to be strictly impartial, but it must be confessed that he was slightly biased in favour of the senior cricketers. Too many juniors in the team brought forth many bitter comments from the senior school.

But the captain was determined to select his Eleven on merit—and merit alone. And, seeing Handforth now, he could do nothing but scratch one of the names out, and write Handforth's instead. Without question, his form was better than the other fellow's.

And Fenton knew how necessary it was to



The Housemaster gravely examined the impots, one after the stood trembling, and they trembled still more as Mr. Paget—something strange about this? I am not satisfied! I have much too neatly written!" Handforth gulped; did old

use none but the best. If the rumours concerning the Australians were to be believed, the representatives of Young Australia were now invincible. Already they were being spoken of as "the red-hot Aussies," and it was reported that, as a team, they were the most wonderful schoolboy combination that had ever been formed. With true Colonial enthusiasm they were going all out to win the "schoolboy Ashes."

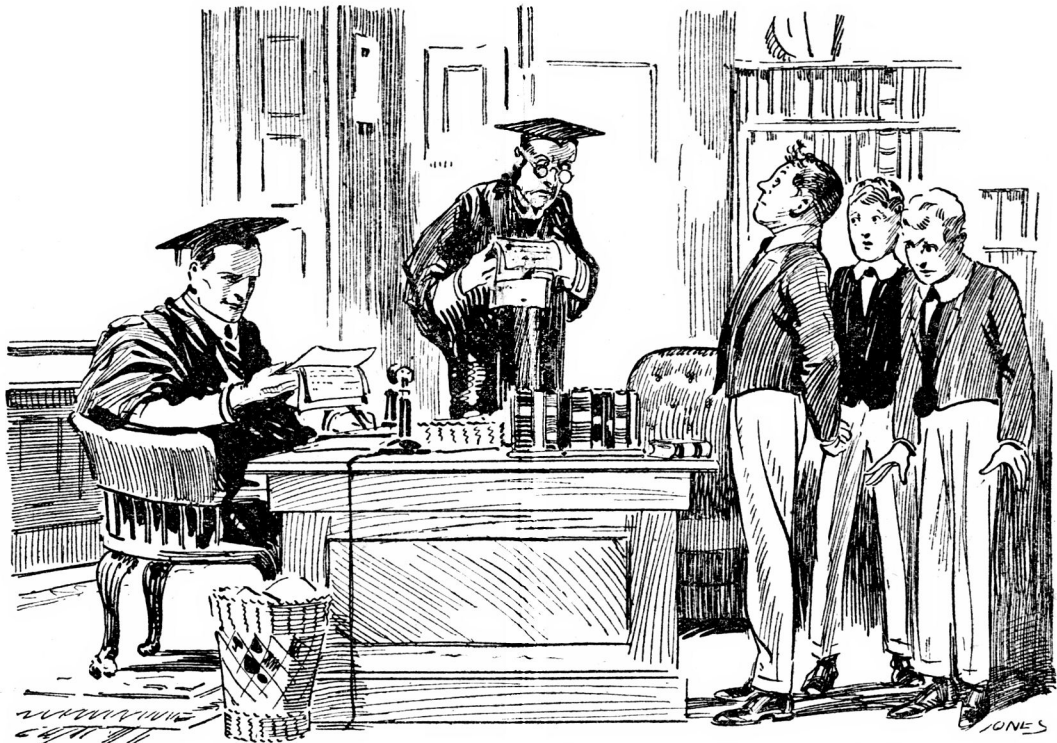
"By George, I'm feeling fit this evening!" said Handforth joyously, as he marched to the pavilion, later. "Hallo! There's Fenton! I say, Fenton, any chance for me to-morrow?"

He waited anxiously for the captain's reply, for he had heard from several quarters that his name was not on the new list.

"You'll play," replied Fenton, nodding. "Thanks awfully!" said Handforth eagerly. "I was half afraid—"

"As a matter of fact, I had another name down—I don't want to mention who it was, or it might lead to unpleasantness," said Fenton diplomatically. "But after seeing you just now I've put you down instead."

"Incidentally," said Browne, "you might



The Housemaster gravely examined the impots, one after the other. Handy put on a bold front ; behind him Church and McClure stood trembling, and they trembled still more as Mr. Pagett—taking the impots from their Housemaster—said : “ Surely there is something strange about this ? I am not satisfied ! I have an impression that there has been some trickery—these lines are much too neatly written ! ” Handforth gulped ; did old Pagett suspect that the Moor View girls had done those impots ?



Handy put on a bold front; behind him Church and McClure impots from their Housemaster—said: "Surely there is no reason that there has been some trickery—these lines are suspicious that the Moor View girls had done those impots?"

bear in mind that Brother Fenton has acted entirely upon my advice."

"Any—any chance for me yet, Fenton?" asked Church breathlessly.

"Afraid not, old man," replied Fenton. "But stick to it, you know. According to the way you're shaping, you'll probably get a look in later on."

Church smiled gamely through his disappointment.

"You mean in one of the Tests?" he asked breathlessly.

"I'm making no promises—but if you keep on improving as you've improved during the past fortnight, you'll be in the running," replied Fenton cautiously. "By the way, does Mr. Lee want you fellows?" he added.

"Mr. Lee!" echoed Handforth & Co. blankly.

"Do I detect a sinister note of alarm, brothers?" asked Browne gently. "Have no fear. I am on the spot."

"Anyway, it's your affair," laughed Fenton. "But I happened to notice Mr. Lee gazing at you pretty closely five minutes

ago. He's still hovering about somewhere, I believe."

"In that case, brothers, would it not be advisable to discreetly retreat?" asked Browne. "I can well understand—Alas! Too late! Brother Lee approaches, and there is no escape."

Handforth & Co. tried to look innocent and unconcerned as the Housemaster walked up. He gave them an inquiring glance.

"Let me congratulate you upon your display, Handforth," he said smoothly. "Your batting is better than ever."

"Oh, rather, sir—I mean, thank you, sir," gasped Handforth.

"I don't like to remind you of unpleasant subjects at such a moment, but you may remember a little matter of an imposition," continued Mr. Lee. "I trust this has not been overlooked, boys?"

The chums of Study D pulled themselves together.

"Rather not, sir," said Handforth promptly. "You'll have them before supper, sir."

"The whole five hundred, sir," added Church. "They'll all be delivered exactly as you ordered. Nothing to worry about, sir."

"I have never credited you with magical powers, boys, but perhaps I am unaware of your true capabilities," said the Housemaster drily. "I will wait until supper-time before saying anything further. But I would like to remind you that Mr. Pagett will be very unwilling to accept any excuses—and I rather fancy that he will be anxious to see those lines delivered."

He walked off, and Handforth & Co. looked at one another rather dubiously.

"I knew it!" muttered Edward Oswald. "There'll be the dickens to pay."

"Old Lee's smelling a rat already! He'll have eyes like a hawk when we take those lines in! We can't spoof him—he knows we haven't had time to do the lines, and there's bound to be a shindy. Great pip! He may stop me playing in the match to-morrow."

Church grunted.

"Optimist!" he said tartly. "In any case, if the girls hadn't done our lines you wouldn't have been in the team at all—so you'll be no worse off, whatever happens."

In the meantime, the Housemaster was looking rather thoughtful as he crossed the Triangle. He was very suspicious about these lines, but he couldn't quite understand why Handforth & Co. had been so certain of their prompt delivery—although, of course, every Housemaster knows that deputies are sometimes secured for the writing of lines—and every Housemaster finds it diplomatic to possess a blind eye now and again.

Just as Mr. Lee was passing the window of Study D, he glanced sideways through the open casement. It seemed, indeed, as though he deliberately went out of his way by walking across the West Square.

He caught a brief glimpse of three heads bent hard over their work—and they were not exactly the kind of heads one would expect to see in a junior schoolboy study.

One was fair, another was dark and curly, and the third delightfully chestnut, with enchanting curls about the ears.

"O-ho!" murmured the Housemaster, with an inward chuckle.

It took him about a tenth of a second to appreciate the position. He knew those heads well—particularly the chestnut head, for during the last term Mary Summers had been a visitor in the West House. She was the niece of Mr. Stokes, the Housemaster.

No inquiries were needed. No thought on the matter was called for. Handforth & Co. were on the playing-fields, and three girls were hard at work in Handforth & Co.'s study. Two and two always make four.



CHAPTER 12.

THE THIRD FORM CONSPIRATORS.

TAP, tap, tap.

It was just after eight, and Handforth & Co. were standing outside the door of Study D. One trial had told them that the door was still locked, and they rapped gently upon the panels.

It was opened at once, and Handforth & Co. stared.

"My hat!" they ejaculated, in one voice.

Irene had opened the door, but the other two girls were busily dusting the bookcase, and Study D was looking strangely different. Everything was tidy and neat, and the whole apartment was spotless.

"Just clearing up a bit," explained Irene. "You fellows are so jolly careless, you know. We couldn't go away, leaving everything in such an awful muddle. And there's something else!" she added grimly.

Handforth & Co. looked apprehensive.

"Who's responsible for this?" demanded Mary coldly.

She pointed an accusing finger into the open cupboard, and Handforth & Co. winced. That cupboard was certainly in an awful condition.

"We—we— That is, you see, we were in such a rush!" gasped Handforth. "We haven't had any time for days, if it comes to that—"

Irene & Co. broke into laughter.

"All right—we'll forgive you," chuckled Irene. "We guessed the reason, but you're jolly lucky to get off so lightly. Go away for another twenty minutes and leave us to complete the good work."

"But—but the lines!" gasped Handforth. "Mr. Lee's waiting for them, you know! You—you don't mean to say you've forgotten—"

"Oh, the lines?" interrupted Irene care-

lessly. "Here they are—all ready. Perhaps you'd better take them straight away."

Handforth & Co. gazed dazedly at the impots. They had been hurriedly written, it is true, but they were so much neater than their own usual efforts that they handled them almost reverently. And they were uncannily akin to their own work. Although the handwriting was cleaner and neater and blotless, the resemblance was striking. The girls had copied the characteristic originals very cleverly.

"My only hat!" breathed Church. "This—this is marvellous! I might have written these myself, only they're so jolly good!"

"Same here," exclaimed Church, staring at his own impot. "This is my fist to a tee, except for the absence of blots and things. I say, you girls are wonders! How the dickens did you manage it?"

"Look at mine!" gasped Handforth.

"I did those," smiled Irene. "I'm not going to apologise for the blots, Ted—I did them deliberately, you know. I thought Mr. Lee might smell a rat if there weren't any blots at all. I've seen some of your impots before," she added gently. "And we can't expect too much of these Housemasters."

"Why, they're marvellous!" ejaculated Handforth breathlessly. "You don't call these things blots, do you?"

"Well, anyway, go and hand them in," laughed Irene. "We're awfully curious to know what Mr. Lee says. But don't come back for twenty minutes."

Handforth & Co. went off, and Mary Summers looked doubtful.

"Of course, Mr. Lee won't be spoofed, you know," she said.

"Of course he won't—but he's a bit of a brick," said Irene. "And what does he care as long as he gets the lines? I believe he spotted us when he went by the window—but that only makes it all the better."

The clams of Study D, in the meantime, presented themselves before their Housemaster, and he gravely examined the impots, one after the other. As he had hinted, Mr. Pagett was on the spot—intent upon seeing that those lines were duly delivered. The juniors waited with bold fronts, but with trembling interiors.

"Well, Mr. Pagett, there is nothing to complain of here," said the Housemaster smoothly. "These lines are executed very creditably."

"H'm! I am glad you are satisfied, sir!" granted Mr. Pagett.

"Let me congratulate you, boys, upon this excellent performance," continued Mr. Lee, looking at the juniors with twinkling eyes. "I do not pretend to know how you have accomplished such wonders, but necessity is a powerful driving force. These impositions are quite satisfactory, and you may go."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" gasped Handforth & Co.

They fled, and Mr. Pagett frowned suspiciously.

"Surely there is something strange about this?" he asked, as his companion ripped the

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impots to shreds. "I am not satisfied, Mr. Lee. I have an impression that there has been some trickery—these lines are much too neatly written!"

"That is not for us to question, Mr. Pagett," said the Housemaster smoothly. "The lines have been delivered, and they are excellently performed. I see no reason to make any inquiries, or to discuss the matter further. If you are not satisfied, I am very sorry."

Outside, Handforth and his chums were congratulating themselves.

"Spoofed him!" gurgled Edward Oswald. "By Jove, those girls are regular top-holers! We've had our practice, and I'm in the Test Eleven! And old Lee is completely diddled!"

"Don't you believe it," said Church. "He knew!"

"Of course he knew," agreed McClure. "But he's a sportsman to the finger-tips, and pretended to notice nothing. I say, what luck!"

The incident had not only ended satisfactorily, but Irene & Co. had completed their evening's Good Samaritan act by converting Study D from chaos to order. Handforth & Co. found it impossible to express their thanks.

"Rats!" smiled Irene. "We're Girl Guides, aren't we?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, Girl Guides are just like Boy Scouts—they're supposed to go about doing good actions!" said Irene laughingly. "This is ours for to-day! So if you trot out any more of your thanks, we'll get wild. If you're feeling particularly energetic, you can stroll home with us."

"By George, rather!" said Handforth eagerly.

But here Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt had something to say. Meeting them outside, they promptly joined the party, and Church and McClure discreetly found that they had an urgent appointment elsewhere. Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt were rather keen on Mary Summers and Doris Berkeley respectively. So the evening was ending up well for all concerned.

Church and McClure's appointment proved to be no more pressing than a cold meeting with two ice-cream wafers in the school shop. The place was already occupied by several groups, and one of these groups consisted of Willy Handforth & Co., of the Third. They were in a far corner, and were apparently deep in the machinations of a plot. But it must be confessed that Willy had only kept his chums glued to the subject by constant visits to the counter.

"It's all settled, then?" he was saying. "Now, don't forget—I'll start the ball rolling, and you chaps must carry on in the order we've arranged. And don't overdo it. He'll smell a rat like a shot if you do."

The Third Form group consisted not merely of Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, but Owen minor and Dicky Jones and Tommy Hobbs were there. The lesser lights of the

Third had not been admitted, as Willy felt that they could not be trusted to carry the project out successfully.

Ten minutes later Mr. Suncliffe went out into the Triangle for his usual evening stroll. Mr. Suncliffe was the unfortunate gentleman who had charge of the Third Form, and there was a certain haggard look about him which told its own story. It was an habitual expression, and did not indicate that he was unwell. Long experience of the Third, possibly, had gradually reduced Mr. Suncliffe to this state. His was a task that none could envy.

"Evening, sir," said a cheery voice.

Mr. Suncliffe turned, and looked down.

"Is it really necessary for you to bid me good-evening, Handforth minor?" he asked. "I have passed you at least six times within the last half-hour. I trust there is no ulterior motive in this politeness?"

"Ulterior motive, sir?" echoed Willy, in surprise. "I was just thinking what a lovely evening it is. Fine prospects for to-morrow, sir."

"To-morrow?" said the Form-master, with assumed innocence.

"The first day of the Test Match, sir."

"Oh, yes, to be sure," said Mr. Suncliffe.

"But I am afraid you regard these Test Matches with far too much enthusiasm, my boy. We are here—as the headmaster himself has recently pointed out—for the purpose of studying. You must learn to curb this craze for cricket."

Willy tried hard not to grin. If Mr. Austin Suncliffe had one weakness during the summer months, it was cricket. He lived for it. Even at this very moment he was waiting for one of the page-boys to return from the village with the close of play scores. For the Form-master was as greatly interested in the county championship as he was in the school games. The Third was speculating what would actually happen when the real Test Matches between England and Australia came off. They had an impression that it would be necessary to tie Mr. Suncliffe down with ropes.

"I don't know that you can call it a craze, sir," said Willy, shaking his head. "After all, we shouldn't be in our right minds if we didn't take an interest in cricket. And that's not being crazy, is it, sir?"

"We need not discuss the matter, Handforth minor," replied Mr. Suncliffe, who generally felt himself getting out of his depth after a few minutes' conversation with the leader of the Third. "It will be as well if we do not argue on these subjects."

"They're a bit trying, aren't they, sir," said Willy. "Feeling well to-night, sir?" he added casually.

"Thank you, I'm feeling perfectly well, young man."

"H'm! Rummy!" murmured Willy, eyeing Mr. Suncliffe with concern.

"What do you mean, Handforth minor?"

"Nothing, sir, only you look a bit squiffy."

"A bit what?" demanded the Form-master.

"Well, you know, sir—not quite yourself,"

explained Willy. "I thought perhaps you were feeling the strain a bit. This heat, you know, sir. There's a worn-out look on your face, sir."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Suncliffe, with a start. "I have never felt better. Don't be ridiculous, Handforth minor! And as for cricket, I forbid you to discuss—" He broke off, and his eyes lighted up. "Ah, the newspaper!"

He went off with such a speed towards the gates that he nearly broke into a run. And for the next five minutes he stood there, poring over the stop press news.

Finally he came indoors, and happened to come across Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon in the lobby. They regarded him anxiously.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Chubby Heath quickly.

"Wrong?" repeated Mr. Suncliffe. "Wrong with what?"

"We thought you weren't looking quite— Oh, well, perhaps we're wrong, sir," said Juicy, shaking his head. "Good-night, sir."

Mr. Suncliffe passed on, frowning. But he was rather startled when three or four other members of his class inquired concernedly about his health. He went off to his own study, with a doubt or two in his mind. And in the meantime Willy & Co. held council.

"It didn't work," Chubby was saying gloomily.

"Of course it didn't!" snorted Owen minor. "We didn't lay it on enough."

"My sons, the foundation is laid—and that's enough for to-night," declared Willy firmly. "Now, don't forget—hard work to-morrow morning, and good behaviour. Thursday morning is our aim, and there's nothing like preparing well in advance."

"Yes, but—"

"But nothing!" interrupted Willy. "A few more hints to old Sunny to-morrow—the vaguest of suggestions, mind you—and then the big onslaught on Thursday morning. My sons, he'll crumple up like a pricked balloon!"



CHAPTER 13.

A SHOCK FOR ENGLAND.

So far as St. Frank's was concerned, Wednesday and Thursday were the only two days of the week that really mattered. All the other days simply had to be endured.

It was the occasion of the second Test Match of the Young England v. Young Australia series, and although nothing vital depended upon this fixture, there was an enormous amount of interest taken in it. England had won the first Test, and England meant to win the second if such a thing was humanly possible. There was nothing like obtaining a good lead.

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cricketers, for the next day broke fine and hot. In fact, there was every promise of another blazing day. Every member of the Eleven was up at six o'clock, and a good many other fellows turned out, too. The playing fields were alive long before breakfast.

When the school itself turned out, there were regular processions of wisecracks strolling down to inspect the pitch, and to comment upon the possibilities of the day. All big matches this season were extended over two days, and this meant some really fine cricketing opportunities.

The school as a whole felt considerably annoyed because these special days were not set aside as whole holidays. Nobody could quite understand the Head's attitude, but it was a fact that he allowed no differences to be made. The Eleven, naturally, missed lessons, since play began at eleven-thirty, but the rest of the school had to work as usual.

Fortunately it was a half-holiday, so nobody minded much to-day. They wouldn't miss much, for play didn't start until after morning interval, and everybody would be out before the match was an hour old. And during that first hour there was no likelihood of any sensations. The first hour of a big match is generally slow and tedious.

As Willy Handforth had had the foresight to prepare for, it was the following day that mattered, when there was not even a half-holiday. Mr. Suncliffe was unaware of the innocent little plot that was being hatched against him. Willy had no compunction in engineering this scheme, for, as he pointed out, Mr. Suncliffe himself would gain the most benefit of all.

The fellows started morning school without much excitement. The fact that no cricket was being played calmed them, and allowed them to devote their minds to lessons. Mr. Suncliffe was particularly delighted with the Third, for he had scarcely any trouble at all.

But he was rather worried by the fact that most of his boys inquired concernedly and respectfully after his health. They seemed to detect something amiss with him, although Mr. Suncliffe was feeling unusually robust. But this insidious treatment was having a slow and sure effect. Before morning interval Mr. Suncliffe was not feeling quite so chirpy. A conviction was stealing upon him that there must be something in these repeated inquiries.

Obviously there could be no trickery afoot, for the Third was on its very best behaviour, and doing its utmost to please him. A sure sign, decided Mr. Suncliffe, that his Form felt sympathetic, and was anxious to spare him. There was something very deep about this plot of Willy's.

Fortunately, the Australians were on full view during interval, having arrived shortly before. They were a fine set of fellows, about two-thirds of them being seniors. They belonged to various big public schools within a fifty-mile radius of St. Frank's. Two came from quite near by—from the River House School. Another merely from Bannington.

The rest usually played for their school Elevens at Helmsford or Barcliffe or Hazlehurst. For these special Test Matches, however, the Australians considered themselves a unity. Jerry Dodd, of the Remove, under this influence, played for his country rather than his school. During one of these matches he was no longer a St. Frank's fellow, but an Australian. In other words, he was an Australian first and a St. Frank's fellow afterwards.

By eleven twenty-five everything was ready. Fenton was a punctual skipper, and always liked to start a match, weather permitting, at the exact minute. And the weather certainly permitted to-day, for it was hot and cloudless.

England won the toss—a circumstance which somehow got round the school in about five minutes, much to the disturbance of the various Form-masters. Nobody could tell how these things got round. St. Frank's felt that everything was well. This meant that England would bat first, and with the wicket in fine condition it was a big advantage.

The England team was exactly the same as in the first Test, with the exception of one man: Fenton, Morrow, Wilson, Browne, Stevens, Phillips, Hamilton, De Valerie, Pitt, Handforth, Kahn. Ralph Leslie Fullwood was dropped, and Wilson of the Sixth was included. Fullwood was still good, but Wilson had so greatly improved that Fenton had chosen wisely. And the St. Frank's captain was rather worried about so many juniors being in the team.

As usual, Fenton and Morrow opened the England innings, after Beaton, the Australian captain, had led his men out on to the field. At this period, of course, there were practically no spectators.

This was rather a pity, for there were sensations at the very start.

When the school came out there was a rush for Big Side, and everybody was feeling happy in the knowledge that St. Frank's was batting—until the score-board was seen. Church and McClure, dashing out with a crowd of others, halted and stared.

"Rot!" gasped Church. "There's some mistake!"

"Twenty-seven for four!" ejaculated Tommy Watson. "Who's been messing about with the score?"

"Look!" roared McClure. "There goes De Valerie's wicket!"

"Oh, my hat! And he's only scored 3!"

"That makes it 27 for five!" groaned Church. "I say, what's happened? Just when we thought England was going to set up a huge first innings total, they fail!"

A wave of consternation went completely through the school. 27-5! It seemed incredible. Fenton, 8! Morrow, 5! Wilson, 2! Browne, 7 not out! Stevens, nil! And 2 for a bye!

There was something staggeringly awful about this.

Everybody had expected to find Fenton and Morrow batting steadily, and working up a big first wicket partnership. But, by the look

of things, England was simply falling to pieces. And the weather was perfect, and the wicket all in favour of the batsmen!

"But—but I can't understand it!" groaned Jack Grey. "What's the matter with the fat-heads?"

"Just look at the bowling, and then you'll understand," said Fullwood grimly. "By gad, they said these Australians were red-hot—and they are! They've improved out of all recognition, too! They're simply demons!"

"And our chaps, of course, are handicapped by all this rotten swotting," said Church indignantly. "That's the real cause of this collapse! They haven't had enough practice—and these Aussies have been practising all the time."

There was a great deal of truth in this statement. In fact, it was the crux of the whole situation. Lack of practice was telling in no uncertain way.

And worse was to follow.

By lunch-time England was completely out, and the total score was 63! This was not merely ghastly, but positively horrible. Browne had done his best, and Dick Hamilton and he had made a bit of a stand, but the others had failed. Edward Oswald Handforth, much to his amazement, had been caught out by the very first ball that was delivered to him. He hadn't had a chance to settle down, and Fenton's last hope had gone.

"Of course, this kills the whole game!" groaned the skipper as the last wicket fell. "The Aussies will make a big score, and we shall be whacked by an innings or more. I hoped for something better than this."

Browne nodded.

"We can do nothing but confess that the outlook is murky," he agreed. "Courage, Brother Fenton, is the watchword. Determination is another watchword. Let them burn themselves into our beings, for nothing else will suffice now. Courage and determination! We are, I am afraid, up against it."



CHAPTER 14.

THE RED-HOT AUSSIES.

HOWEVER, the failure of the earlier batsmen undoubtedly had a big effect upon the morale of the tail. Nothing is more devastating to a team than to see its opening men skittled out one after the other.

Confidence goes, and the batsmen go to the wicket in a state of uncertainty and nervousness. Their whole play is affected, and they seldom get a chance of revealing their normal form.

St. Frank's had failed mainly because of their early disasters, and the root cause of the trouble was lack of practice. There were many long faces during the luncheon interval that day, and a kind of gloom had fallen over the entire school.

One of the most miserable persons of all

was Mr. Suncliffe, and he was really beginning to feel that he was ill. Again, various members of Willy Handforth's famous "Co." had casually inquired after his health, and this insistent wearing-down policy was having its effect. Coupled with the St. Frank's failure, the whole situation was telling heavily upon Mr. Suncliffe.

"I cannot help thinking that the Headmaster is directly responsible for this fiasco, Mr. Stokes," he said, as he stood chatting with the Housemaster of the West House just before the resumption of play. "I totally disagree with this insistence upon heavy examinations. A task is thrust upon the school which the school resents."

"There is a certain amount of truth in what you say, Mr. Suncliffe, but if I know anything of boys they will rise above such difficulties," replied Mr. Stokes. "In a way, the Head's decision has put them on their mettle. They must give full time to their studies, and gain sports honours in addition."

"H'm! I am not so sure—I am not so sure," grunted Mr. Suncliffe sourly. "There is such a thing as expecting too much, Mr. Stokes. To-day's affair is an ugly indication of what might follow. Good heavens, the three succeeding Tests will simply turn out to be farcical absurdities! Even this one promises to end up as a mere joke!"

"I do not think it would be wise, Mr. Suncliffe, to advertise these sentiments of yours among the boys," said Mr. Stokes drily. "And it might not be healthy if they reached the Headmaster's ears either. You are a cricket enthusiast, and you naturally feel very strongly on the point—but the game isn't over yet."

Mr. Suncliffe gave a gloomy nod.

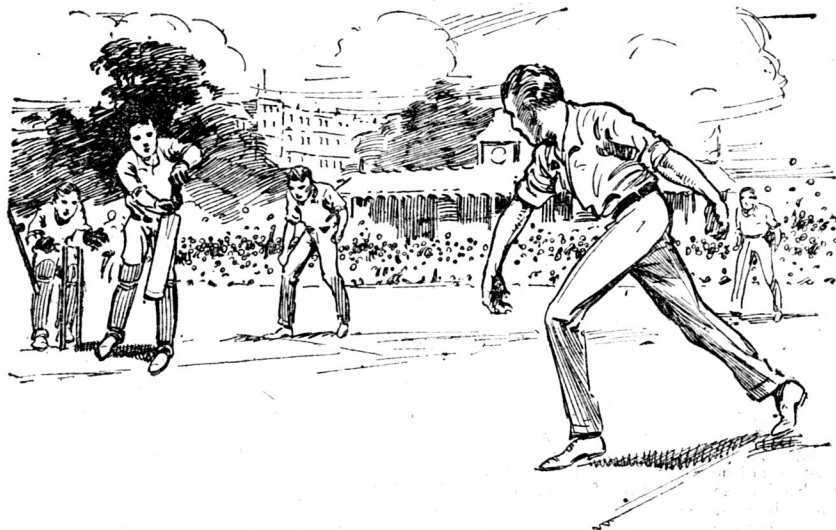
"No, unfortunately," he replied. "We have yet to see the home team trodden underfoot by these victorious Australians! There is no chance now—not a shadow of one!"

"But even if we are beaten, the honours will be even—"

"Good gracious, I am not so foolish as to expect a win every time!" interrupted Mr. Suncliffe impatiently. "There is nothing I love better than a close fight. A walk-over is never worth watching. It is this ignominious collapse which upsets me so much. If there were any possibility of a close fight, I would be in very different spirits."

And Mr. Suncliffe's attitude was, on the whole, an index of the whole school's feelings. Everybody was exasperated because the Australians would now ride roughshod to the end of the game, and win hands down. A thrilling fight would have been worth watching, even if the Aussies won. They were sportsmen at St. Frank's, and took a loss gamely. But it was rather disgusting when the end of the match was a foregone conclusion.

As everybody had expected, Beaton, the Australian captain, went in with one of his colleagues, and settled down to a grim first wicket partnership. The 50 went up before Browne's bowling broke the spell. But even this seemed a mere flash in the pan.



Browne sent the leather hurtling down the pitch, while the watching crowd held its breath. "Out!" A stump went dancing merrily over the grass—knocked clean out of the ground! Browne had done the hat-trick against the Australians in the second Schoolboy Test Match!

For by the tea interval the Australians were still going strong, and only three wickets had fallen. The exact score was 102—5. And several of the best Australian bats had yet to go in.

"I doubt if we shall get the beggars out to-day," said Fenton dubiously at tea-time. "Even if we do there'll be a huge deficit, and we shall have an almost hopeless task to-morrow."

"Yes, things look pretty black," admitted Morrow gloomily.

"Even Browne can't attain his usual form," said Dick Hamilton. "He's not bowling half so good as he mostly does."

William Napoleon Browne shook his head.

"Allow me to correct you, Brother Hamilton," he said smoothly. "Without wishing to boast, I would like to place it upon record that my bowling is as devastating as ever. But these batsmen are, in the vernacular, corkers. They appear to know my wiles and tricks at every turn. It is a sad day for bowlers."

"Why not give Pitt a chance at the bowling?" suggested Dick. "You haven't tried him yet, Fenton, and he's a first-class man, you know."

"I've tried everything," growled Fenton.

But when the game recommenced, it was noticed that Reggie Pitt was put on to bowl from the pavilion end. The Aussie batsmen looked cool and calm; indeed, there was almost an air of superiority about them. There was no attempt to swank, but they could not help assuming an indefinable attitude of confidence.

But this was rudely shattered a moment later.

Reggie Pitt's first ball was very innocent-looking, but it completely deceived the batsman. He slashed it to the boundary. At least, that was his intention. But somehow it rose, and the next second it was in Fenton's tight grip.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Good old Reggie!"

A little interest was awakened, and the game was watched with feverish anxiety, intermingled with a dull sensation of depression. Pitt was successful again fifteen minutes afterwards, and another wicket fell. The score now stood 137—5, but there was no chance of a collapse.

There was not much wrong with the bowling, but the Australians simply proceeded to pile up the runs steadily, coolly, and brilliantly. Now and again there was a cheer as a wicket fell. But the total crept up, and it was almost with a feeling of relief that the day's play ended.

By dogged effort England had succeeded in getting the Australians out. The total was 213, exactly 150 more than England had made. This was an ugly deficit to face on the morrow. Under the circumstances, the St. Frank's team had done exceedingly well, for 213 was not a crushing total. It only seemed crushing in comparison to 63.

"Of course, there's not an earthly chance for us," growled Handforth that night. "Even if we make 200 we shall be nowhere. Those

giddy Aussies will only need to get 51 to win the game!"

"Oh, well, it's no good crying over spilt milk," said Church brightly. "Thank goodness this isn't a critical game. Imagine how awful it would be if the rubber depended on it!"

But this was only a false way of cheering himself up, for at heart he was as unhappy as any of the others. And the morrow was faced with apprehension.

CHAPTER 15.

MR. SUNCLIFFE FALLS INTO THE TRAP.



FURTHER gloom was occasioned in the morning by the fact that a thunder-storm had broken during the night. Only a small one, it is true, but there had been a swift flood of rain. And, although it was brilliantly fine now, the wicket was showing signs of deterioration.

"It's quite sticky in places," said Dick Hamilton as he inspected it with a number of other Remove fellows. "My hat! We only got 63 on a perfect wicket yesterday. What are we going to get on this?"

"We shall be all out for about 5!" said Handforth hopelessly.

"My dear chap, we've got to get at least 151 to escape an innings defeat," said Pitt. "Dash it all, let's force the Aussies in again, for goodness' sake! We can't let them off as lightly as that!"

"There's not a chance in a thousand!" said De Valerie.

Browne, who had come up, was looking shocked.

"What are these strange sounds which smite my ears?" he asked severely. "Alack, brothers, have I heard aright?"

"Chuck it, Browne!"

"Have I heard well and truly?" said Browne. "Is this the spirit that wins battles against fearful odds? Always remember, brothers, that if we expect defeat we shall get defeat. Let us enter into this herculean struggle with a determination to win."

"Browne's right," said Dick Hamilton, nodding. "We've got to make up our minds to fight like grim death. Confidence is everything. And isn't there something big in the idea of fighting against heavy odds?"

Browne worked hard, and before the start of play that day he succeeded in instilling a surprising amount of confidence into the team. Strictly speaking, this was Fenton's task, but Browne was the better fellow for the job. He had an irresistible way with him.

That morning Mr. Suncliffe heard nothing about his imaginary illness, although, as a matter of fact, he was looking far from well. He took such a great interest in cricket that he was affected by the conditions. And work in the Third Form-room started glumly.

Willy Handforth & Co. had practically given up their little plot in disgust. What was there to scheme for, anyhow? What possible interest could there be in watching the game? England would be all out again before lunch, and the match would be over.

So, even after the morning interval, very little interest was taken in the game. St. Frank's looked upon it as a foregone conclusion that there was no trace of hope.

About ten minutes before morning school was over, Willy Handforth ventured to gaze out of the window of the Third Form-room. This was the only apartment in the School House which had a clear view of Big Side. And Mr. Suncliffe usually had a hard task, during a cricket match, to keep his boys to their work. This morning they had scarcely troubled him.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Willy blankly.

"Handforth minor," said Mr. Suncliffe, glancing up, "what is the meaning of that ridiculous expression?"

"The score, sir——"

"Never mind the score!" snapped Mr. Suncliffe, wincing. "We have no desire to learn of these tragic details. You are going to tell us, no doubt, that we have already lost nine wickets for 10 runs."

"No, sir," retorted Willy. "The score stands at 53!"

Mr. Suncliffe started.

"Fifty-three already!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Impossible!"

"And no wickets down, sir!" shouted Willy.

"Fifty-three for no wickets!" gasped Mr. Suncliffe. "What ridiculous nonsense!"

He tried hard to control himself, but it was impossible. He dashed to the window and stared out. The Third had experienced this sort of thing before, and they knew that Mr. Suncliffe was easy to deal with once he became really interested in the game. Crowds of fags flew to the windows.

"He's right, sir!" yelled Chubby Heath. "There it is—53 for nil! Fenton and Morrow! I say, they're making a fine stand on that rotten wicket!"

"It's time to dismiss, sir!" panted Willy.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Suncliffe. "Splendid! We will go out and see exactly how the game stands. This is an amazing surprise. It almost makes me hope that there is a chance—— But we mustn't be too optimistic."

Regardless of the fact that there were still seven minutes to run, the Third swept out, and Mr. Suncliffe didn't even know that he had released his Form before the time. The fags were wildly excited as they raced to the cricket field, and they stood round breathlessly.

The whole aspect of the game had changed.

Anything seemed possible now. Fenton and Morrow were fixtures, and although the Australian bowling was as good as ever, nothing seemed to shift England's opening pair. They were desperate, and they were batting cautiously but brilliantly. And now that they were set, they were opening out, too.

TOPPING STORIES!

“HANDFORTH THE MARTYR!”

Handy tied to the stake!

Some of the fellows feel like burning him and making a real job of it!

Handy has had an idea, and—as usual!—he has gone the whole hog with it.

Nobody minds Handy and his ideas, but it's a bit thick when he rushes around destroying other fellows' property!

Cameras, watches, fountain-pens, shoes, penknives—Handy smashes them all!

Read about it in next Wednesday's rousing long complete yarn of the St. Frank's Empire Day sports at Stamford Bridge.

Don't miss

“THE CASE OF THE BLACK COBRA!”

Nelson Lee and Nipper solve another thrilling mystery. This exciting yarn is complete in next week's issue.



Handy's Empire Day strafe! Handy keeps things moving in next week's lively story. Look out for this cover!

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!

Such a beginning, of course, had an enormously encouraging effect upon the morale of the team as a whole. A bad start would probably have meant another complete collapse. But a stubborn first wicket stand was calculated to put spirit into the entire Eleven.

The school was wildly excited when the truth got round. Others were watching, too. There were plenty of visitors there, including Irene & Co., and a whole contingent from the River House School. When the luncheon interval arrived, the partnership was still unbroken, and the score stood at 94, Fenton having contributed no less than 63 of these runs off his own bat. He was a fine skipper, and he was emerging splendidly in a difficult situation.

“Good old Fenton!”

“Hurrah!”

“Ninety-four, and no wickets down!” chuckled Willy Handforth. “My sons, we've got a chance! Now, don't forget! Old Sunny's looking awfully bad! That stunt of

ours is going to be worked this afternoon. We've got to see the rest of this match!”

“Do you think he'll be diddled?” asked Chubby breathlessly.

“My dear chap, it's a cert.,” replied Willy. “He's just in the right mood. But we mustn't do a thing until after luncheon.”

And as soon as the meal was over, while the whole school was animatedly discussing the changed situation, Willy & Co. made their final plans. At all costs, they had to see the match now. It was in such a critical state that they couldn't possibly sit at lessons during the afternoon.

About five minutes before the bell was due to ring, Willy happened to meet Mr. Suncliffe in the Ancient House lobby. He started violently, and uttered a sharp cry.

“Is—is anything the matter, sir?” he asked breathlessly.

The Form-master frowned.

“The matter with whom?” he asked coldly.

“But don't you know, sir?” panted Willy.

“Your face, sir! Don't you know?”

“My—my face!” ejaculated Mr. Suncliffe.

"It must be all this anxiety, sir," exclaimed Willy, gazing at the master in horror. "I say, sir, you'd better see a doctor, or go to bed! Didn't we tell you yesterday that there was something wrong? I'm awfully sorry, sir. I was half-afraid you'd have a collapse."

"Collapse!" repeated Mr. Suncliffe curtly. "Nonsense! Make no mistake, Handforth minor, I am well aware of your tricks. Enough of this foolishness?"

"But listen, sir——"

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" snapped Mr. Suncliffe grimly.

He walked away, and met Tommy Hobbs down the passage. Hobbs was a quiet junior, and not given to the weakness of japing. But he looked at Mr. Suncliffe with a startled expression, and backed away.

"Is anything the matter, Hobbs?" asked the Form-master angrily.

"Oh, your face, sir!" muttered Hobbs. "It—it frightens me! Aren't you ill, sir? Please, sir, shall I run off and tell a prefect to telephone for Dr. Brett?"

"You young idiot——" began Mr. Suncliffe, making a grab.

But Tommy Hobbs bolted, apparently scared out of his wits. And less than a minute later Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon turned the corner, and continued their light-hearted chatter. At the same moment apparently they caught sight of Mr. Suncliffe, and they both halted in their tracks.

"Great Scott!" breathed Chubby Heath, aghast.

"You said it would come!" breathed Juicy hoarsely.

"Boys," thundered Mr. Suncliffe, "what is the matter?"

"It's all right, sir. Don't excite yourself!" exclaimed Chubby in an urgent voice. "It's the worst thing you can do. And it's nearly time for lessons, too," he added anxiously.

"There goes the bell!" muttered Juicy Lemon.

"You can't work this afternoon, sir," said Chubby, in alarm. "You can't take the Form, sir! Is it just feverishness, or something worse? One of my cousins went all red in the face once, and the next thing we knew he was in hospital! Please see a doctor, sir."

Mr. Suncliffe strode off without a word. He was beginning to have an uneasy feeling that there must be something really wrong with him, after all. Otherwise, why should all these boys notice something peculiar about him? He wasn't feeling particularly well, anyhow, and there was certainly a flushed sensation about his face. For the moment, Mr. Suncliffe overlooked the fact that it was a very hot afternoon.

He went to his study, and gazed at his reflection in the mirror.

"Good gracious!" he muttered, in alarm.

Imagination goes a long way, and when it is assisted by a number of vague hints, it can accomplish a lot. Mr. Suncliffe happened to be a bit of a faddist regarding his health, and he had a weakness for patent

medicines. He thought he looked quite ill as he gazed at himself.

"There is certainly something wrong with me," he told himself. "I had really no idea—— And yet——"

He broke off, took a deep breath, and made his way outside. He felt much better in the open air—probably because there was nothing whatever the matter with him. He braced himself and marched into the School House, and entered the Third Form-room.

Willy Handforth and half-a-dozen other fags rushed forward, and pulled Mr. Suncliffe's chair nearer. There was something significant about this.

"Quick!" panted Willy. "Help him down!"

Before Mr. Suncliffe could expostulate, the fags literally forced him into the chair, and Willy snatched up a glass of water. He held it to Mr. Suncliffe's lips.

"Just a sip, sir," he said pressingly.

"But—but this—is ridiculous!" spluttered the Form-master weakly. "Really, boys, there is no necessity for all this fuss! Perhaps I am not quite so well as usual, but you need not be concerned——"

"Oh, sir!" said the Third, in one voice.

"It's the open air you want, sir," said Willy firmly. "Goodness knows what'll happen if you stay in this stuffy room all the afternoon! Take my advice, sir, and get out into the breeze."

"Why not watch the cricket, sir?" asked Chubby. "That'll do you good!"

"The cricket!" murmured Mr. Suncliffe longingly. "Certainly not," he added, with a start. "I must attend to my duties——"

"You can't take the risk, sir," urged Willy. "We can get along with a prefect for this afternoon. We shall miss you, sir, but you must have the fresh air. Chubby, rush along and fetch a prefect."

"Right!" said Chubby promptly.

He dashed off, and while Mr. Suncliffe was still protesting he returned with Payne, of the Sixth. Payne was an East House senior, and the stoutest fellow in the Senior School. He was even bigger than Fatty Little; but, of course, older. He was one of the best-tempered fellows imaginable.

"Here he is!" said Chubby breathlessly. "You think we'd better send for Dr. Brett, Payne?"

"Really, Payne——" began Mr. Suncliffe feebly.

"I say, sir!" exclaimed the prefect, staring. "I say, you know! You can't take the Form this afternoon. You'll have to get out in the open air."

"You—you really think——"

"Not a doubt of it, sir," interrupted Payne firmly. "Take a deck chair, and sit in the shade somewhere. I'll look after the Form, sir. Leave these youngsters to me. We don't want you laid up, sir."

And Mr. Suncliffe, now thoroughly convinced that he was in need of fresh air—and cricket—succumbed to the persuasions and went. He could hardly credit that a prefect

would be a party to any trickery. Besides, he was as keen as a boy to see the continuation of the match.

Once he had gone, Willy grinned.

"What did I tell you?" he chuckled. "Now then, Payne, you've got to be a sport, you know. There's plenty of room at these windows, and we won't make a sound. You can buzz off, or stay here—just as you like. I'll give you my word of honour that the Third won't make any disturbance or leave the class-room."

Payne grinned.

"I should get the sack if the Head heard about this, but we're all human, after all," he said. "When a match gets to this stage, there's a limit to a chap's endurance. You can get to the windows—but be cautious."

"Good old Payne!" chuckled the Third.

Payne himself was only too glad to deputise for Mr. Suncliffe. For this enabled him to stroll off and see the match. Otherwise, he would have been compelled to remain in the Sixth Form-room with the rest. And he knew that he could take Willy Handforth's word.

For that afternoon, at least, Mr. Suncliffe and his class were supremely happy. And their efforts were not wasted, for the game was indeed in a vital state.



CHAPTER 16.

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE.

PAYNE, of the Sixth, arrived unobtrusively on Big Side, taking great care to avoid being spotted by Mr. Suncliffe. He found some excitement at once, for play had only just recommenced, and Fenton was out.

Wilson was unlucky, and was stumped in his first over. But during that over Morrow managed to send the century up, and a roar of cheering announced this fact to the impatient school.

And then Browne went in, and continued the good work. It was some twenty minutes before Morrow left, to be cheered lustily for his splendid innings. The score mounted up quickly. The runs were coming fast, and the St. Frank's batsmen were going all out.

Browne scored 35 before he was caught in the slips, and soon afterwards another man was bowled. For a little time, it seemed as though a second collapse was at hand. But Dick Hamilton and Handforth delighted the crowd by settling down and making a stand.

Although the school itself was at lessons—or presumably at lessons—there were plenty of spectators. For these Test Matches had aroused considerable local interest, and quite a number of people had come from Bannington, to say nothing of contingents from the various schools from which the Australian cricketers had been drawn.

Dick Hamilton and Handforth continued their stand, and it only needed twenty minutes to tea-time before Hamilton was run out, with 52 runs to his credit. Handforth was still batting magnificently. His reckless

slugging was just the type of batting that was needed in these circumstances. Runs were wanted, and he was getting them.

But the remaining batsmen succumbed to the Australian bowling. And the innings closed just before tea-time, Handforth having made 47 not out. And the total score, by a curious chance, was exactly 300. Truly a fine performance. The Australians were not only compelled to bat again, but they required over 150 to win the match.

There was a chance!

By this time the whole school was out, and excitement ran at fever pitch. England had done so gloriously to-day that everybody was talking of a sensational finish to the match. "The Red-hot Aussies" were looking rather grim now, but they were still full of confidence.

But in spite of the school's high hopes, there was a limit to Young England's endurance. Most of the Eleven had worked so strenuously that they had tired themselves. And the effects of this were soon apparent in the field. Lack of fielding practice was also obvious.

During the first hour there were no less than two missed catches, and the fielding, on the whole, was far below the usual standard. The bowling, however, was tricky, particularly on such a worn wicket as this. Browne, Fenton, and Kahn used all their wiles, but the wickets fell slowly.

With only an hour left for play, the score-boards showed the uncomfortable total of 107—4. St. Frank's had lost its excitement now, and the game was watched with tense interest. There seemed little doubt that the visitors had won.

And then came another of those sensational periods.

Browne was bowling, and it was the fourth ball of the over. There was something particularly stinging about that delivery. It was one of William Napoleon's specials, and the batsman lost sight of it for a flash. The next thing he knew was that his leg stump was sagging sideways.

"Out!"

"We're getting on!" exclaimed Church tensely. "Hundred and seven for five. They only want about 43 to win. Come along, Browne! Let's have some more of those beauties!"

The next Australian came in. Then Browne sent down the next ball. It broke awkwardly, and appeared to be going wide. The batsman made no attempt to touch it, but he slightly misjudged the length, and it turned out to be another of those wicked leg breaks.

Crash!

Again the leg stump sagged sideways, and the balls went flying.

"How's that?" yelled a hundred voices.

"Out, by jingo!"

"Good old Napoleon!"

"Hurrah!"

"Come along, Browne! What about the hat trick?" roared Fullwood. "Let's have another one like that, and the thing's done!"

(Continued on page 43.)

YOUR EDITOR'S CORNER.

A WIRELESS ENTHUSIAST!

I SUPPOSE you try to make your paper popular?" inquires T. W., who lives in South Africa. "Well, why don't you have a page or two on wireless?"

Well, come to that, why don't we? T. W. isn't the first to ask that question, because the Old Paper numbers quite a lot of wireless enthusiasts among its readers.

All right, T. W., suppose that next week I cut Mr. Brooks' story down by a couple of pages, and fill up with some wireless articles, that would suit you nicely, wouldn't it? Of course it would. But what a terrific howl would go up from all the other fellows who are not so interested in wireless!

Besides, this is hardly the time of year for wireless. I think that the cricket articles which I am giving you at the moment are much more suitable—and so do hundreds of readers, judging from the letters I am getting.

However, when winter comes along I will remember your suggestion, and will see what can be done. In the meantime, if you want to read a really good wireless paper, try "Popular Wireless." It is published weekly, and costs threepence.

COMING!

I think I mentioned last week that "Between Ourselves"

would reappear very shortly. Mr. Brooks is busy on this feature, and has promised to send it along as soon as he can. At the moment, he is very busy on the extra-special St. Frank's stories that he is giving you, and hasn't much time to spare on anything else.

In any case—as I think I have already mentioned—he is personally replying to all letters sent to him. As he gets a whole stack of them every morning, you fellows are keeping him very fully occupied, without anything else!

I cannot definitely promise "Between Ourselves" for next week, but it will appear as soon after that as possible.

A LONG KICK!

"What is the longest kick that has ever been made on a football field?" asks J. R. (Bolton) The longest kick that can be made on a football field is from one end to the

other, isn't it? Probably J. R. could have worked that out for himself!

However, here is an item of interest which may not involve the longest kick on record, but it certainly does tell of the football world's most wonderful goal. In 1904, when Manchester City were playing Sunderland, the City's goalkeeper, Charlie Williams, scored a goal! He kicked the ball from his own goal area, it soared down the field, and eventually landed in Sunderland's net! A pretty long kick that, and let's hope it will satisfy J. R.'s bump of curiosity!

THE OLDEST PUBLIC SCHOOL.

P. B. Y.—also, oddly enough of Bolton—wants to know which is the oldest public school in England. He thinks Rugby is, and I am sorry to have to tell him that he is wrong!

The oldest public school, P. B. Y., is Winchester, and it was founded in 1387—well over five hundred years ago!—by William of Wykeham. In the very early days, the Winchester boys used to have a very rough time. They had to sleep on straw strewn on the hard floor! All that, of course, has been altered since those Spartan days!

HANDY'S HALO!

And now a few words about next Wednesday's big

story, "HANDFORTH THE MARTYR!" The St. Frank's juniors determine to hold their Whit Monday sports on Chelsea Football Ground, at Stamford Bridge.

Also, as it is Empire Day, Edward Oswald Handforth gets the Empire spirit, and he gets it in no uncertain fashion! It is Handy's nature to do things thoroughly, and he gets an idea that no one ought to have anything that has not been made within the British Empire.

When his ideas are not accepted, Handy makes himself a nuisance—and he gets chained to the stake! Chained to the stake because of his ideas—a martyr!

No, they don't burn him! Forrest & Co. would have liked to do it, but they don't. However, there is a whole heap of fun in this fine yarn. Edwy Scarles Brooks has put his best into it, and when you start reading it next Wednesday, the very first chapter will tell you that you are in for a good time!



THE WRAITH OF THE RIVER!

A
Stirring
Complete
Story.



*Nelson Lee and
Nipper in
another exciting
yarn of mystery
and adventure.*

CHAPTER I.

THE THURSDAY THEFTS.

YES, this is Nelson Lee speaking. Who is that?"

The face of the detective wore a frown of annoyance, as he stood with the telephone receiver pressed to his ear. It was after midnight, he was tired out, and the last thing he wanted was to take on fresh work at that hour.

"Speak louder, please; I cannot hear you," he called again. "Yes, Garside's Pickle Works— What! Another burglary? Yes, I'll come round at once, Mr. Garside! I'll be with you in a few minutes."

Nipper, half-asleep in a big armchair, had suddenly started up at the mention of the burglaries alongside the Thames. All London had been talking for a month past of a series of outrages against shops and factories, and it was a queer feature of the thefts that they had happened on a Thursday night in every case.

"Gosh, gov'nor, so we're going to be dragged into the hunt for the 'wraith of the river' at last!" Nipper exclaimed gleefully. "There's been four cribs cracked in the last month, and the police haven't found a clue—just because they were too proud to ask me to give them a hand, eh?"

Nelson Lee hooked up the instrument, and made a grab for his boots.

"And we'll try and do without Nipper's help again," he snapped. "There's no need for both of us to lose a night's sleep over this job! Call a taxi, then off you go to bed, young 'un."

But Nipper only grinned as he jumped for the door.

"Now, gov'nor, 't isn't likely I'll let you go out alone at this time of night," he said. "You get into your No. 9's, and I'll have a taxi round in a jiffy."

Nipper got his way, and was sitting con-

tentedly beside the gov'nor when the car raced along White Horse Lane and arrived at Garside's factory twenty minutes later.

The gates were wide open, and the office building was all lit up. The car had hardly come to a standstill when a tall, white-bearded man crossed the pavement and grasped Nelson Lee's hand.

"Sorry to drag you out, Mr. Lee," he said. "But come along to the cashier's office—we've a queer tale to tell you." He led the way through a big outer office, and opened the door of an inner room marked "Private." "This is my cashier. Now, Bland, tell Mr. Lee your story, just as you told it to me."

The cashier was sitting with his elbows on a table, his head on his hands. He looked up as the great detective's name was mentioned, and his white face and trembling limbs showed how shaken he was.

"There isn't much to tell you, Mr. Lee," he said, in a weak voice. "I was making up the men's wages, as I always do on Thursday evening, when I suddenly felt that I was choking. I rushed for the door, but tumbled over before I could reach it. The next thing I remember was that Mr. Garside was bending over me, with his flask to my lips."

"And the cash for the week's wages—about fifty-five pounds—had vanished!" Mr. Garside said.

"I see the door has been forced with a chisel," Nelson Lee said. "You are sure you heard no sound before you felt that choking sensation?"

"No—and I've been very wide-awake for anything unusual, after all the burglaries in this district," Bland replied.

"And the windows have not been tampered with," Mr. Garside said. "Only last week I had steel screens fixed to every window in the place, and burglar alarms fitted to all doors and windows. Yet, for all the precautions I've taken, we've been robbed as easily as our neighbours, and Ryan—the night

watchman—cannot find a trace of how the fellow got in or out of the building."

"We'd better have Ryan here," Nelson Lee said tersely.

"He's having a run round the factory, then coming back here to report," Garside said. Then he added, as steps sounded in the outer office: "Ah, that'll be him now. Come in, Ryan—come in!"

A grizzled, broad-shouldered fellow stepped into the room, and stood nervously near the door.

"Now, Ryan, tell Mr. Lee how you came to find Mr. Bland to-night," Garside ordered.

"Well, sir, 'twas this way," Ryan began. "Mister Bland puts the money in the little envelopes every Thursday night, an' generally clears off about ten o'clock. When it got to eleven to-night, an' I couldn't 'ear a sound, I came through the big office an' saw this door 'ad been burst open. I found Mister Bland curled up on th' floor, so I telephoned to th' boss' house an' asked 'im to come as quick as 'e could."

"Hallo, guv'nor, here's a speaking-tube off its hook," Nipper suddenly broke in.

"Oh, yes," Bland exclaimed casually. "I thought I heard the whistle blow, but when I called through the tube there was no answer, and I must have forgotten to hook it up again."

"Was that long before you felt the choking sensation?" Nelson Lee demanded.

"It was soon after I locked the door and started work," Bland answered. "In fact, I thought Mr. Garside was still in his room, and that he wished to speak to me."

"No, I was away earlier than usual to-night," Garside said. "You see, Mr. Lee, the tube runs from my office to this room—an old-fashioned affair, but one that saves me running downstairs a dozen times a day."

Evidently neither of the men attached much importance to the speaking-tube, but Nipper had an idea that the thing had played a very real part in the night's happenings. He lifted the mouthpiece to his nostrils, and was puzzling over a faint smell of lilac that seemed to cling to it, when he heard a quickly smothered cough come through the tube!

He guessed instantly that someone must be listening to every word spoken in Bland's office, and he knew that if he tried to warn the guv'nor of his find, the first word would scare the unseen eavesdropper away.

Quietly dropping the tube, he glanced to the table and saw that the guv'nor was again questioning Ryan, and that none of them were paying any attention to his movements. Crossing the room, he bent as if to examine the broken door—then slipped through, and crept like a shadow along the outer office.

In a far corner he found a winding stairway, and tiptoed lightly to the upper floor. Creeping along a passage, he came to a glass-pannelled door, and his first cautious peep showed him the shadowy outline of a man standing near the window—motionless, and with his head bent!

As his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, Nipper saw that the fellow had an

ear pressed to the end of the speaking-tube. There was no doubt but that he was listening to every word spoken in the office below—and how he must be chuckling over Bland's casual explanation of the unhooked tube!

Every now and then the thin beam of an electric torch he held flashed round the room, and Nipper saw that another door opened out of the place. It stood wide open, and would probably form a handy line of retreat if danger threatened from those below.

"Gosh!" Nipper muttered. "I'm beginning to see what has happened. The beggar got in during the daytime, and hid in some quiet place until he was alone with Bland. But he hasn't found it as easy to get out—what with all the burglar alarms, and Ryan prowling about the place. Crikey! What trick's he up to now?"

To Nipper's amazement, the fellow had laid the tube down and taken a big quart bottle from his pocket; for a moment he flashed the torch on the bottle, and, as far as Nipper could see, the bottle was quite empty! But the unknown appeared satisfied with his inspection, for he again lifted the tube and began to tilt the bottle into the mouthpiece!

Without understanding the fellow's game, Nipper was sure that his curious actions meant some danger to those in the room below! It was no time for caution, no time to think of the risk he ran—he simply yelled a warning, in the hope it might reach his guv'nor. Then he tore open the door and sprang at the mysterious intruder!

Quick though Nipper was, the other had dropped the tube almost before the lad had the door well open. Whirling round, he flung the bottle straight at Nipper's head, and then streaked through the opposite door like a hunted fox!

As Nipper dodged, the heavy missile hit the wall and splintered to a thousand fragments. The pungent scent of lilac instantly filled the room, and he got just one sniff that made his senses whirl. Without knowing that he had escaped a terrible danger, he crossed the room in three swift strides and plunged into a brick-lined tunnel!

It was blindingly dark in the place, and for a time he had to grope his way at crawling pace. Then suddenly the darkness lifted, and he emerged to the huge shed that formed Garside's factory.

Helped by the moon, now faintly lighting up a score of windows, Nipper saw that he was standing at the head of a rickety stairway and looking down on a machine-filled space in which a dozen men could easily hide.

"I might as well go on, though," he thought. "If the fellow's trying to find a way out, he's bound to show a light sooner or later—then I'll have him fixed."

Running down the steps, the youngster began to poke about in the maze of the driving-belts, vats and engines that littered the concrete floor. For a time he seemed to have the place to himself—then, from far ahead, he heard the clink of metal striking



Nipper struggled madly with Sharkey for possession of the iron bar. The barge gave a tremendous heave, and both were pitched backwards—tripping overboard into the water!

metal, and saw a pencil of light stabbing the darkness.

The torch was doused in a moment, but Nipper had the spot marked, and made directly forward. He had hardly taken ten steps, however, when three great arc-lamps suddenly flared overhead, and he heard Watchman Ryan bellowing behind him!

"There's th' spalpeen—tryin' to sneak off by the entry door!" Ryan yelled. "Come on, boss—we've got him!"

Twenty yards ahead, Nipper saw a fellow dressed in a rough blue jersey, working frenziedly at the bar and bolt of a strongly built door. At the same instant the thief spotted the lad; the man saw that he could never get the door open in time, and sprang up the steps of a gallery that ran round the four walls of the shed.

Then, while Nipper was still panting in the rear, he saw Ryan and the thief meet midway along the gallery. Ryan, with a yell of rage, lashed out with clenched fist; but, with amazing quickness, the other jumped to the wall, lifted a foot and toppled the watchman clean off the flimsy gallery!

With a howl that ended in a gurgle, Ryan took a clean header into a vinegar-filled vat—saving himself from a broken neck, but swallowing enough of the sour stuff to last him a lifetime.

The thief did not pause to watch the result of his desperate stratagem. Nipper was scarcely ten yards behind him, and Nelson Lee had suddenly appeared at the office end of the shed, when the fellow threw himself

over the gallery edge, swarmed like a monkey down a wooden support post, and rushed headlong for the door that meant his only chance of escape!

For a single instant Nipper gasped and watched the fellow's amazing agility with admiration; then, racing back the way he had come, he fairly flew along the gallery in an effort to reach the door before the other could open it.

But he was still a score of strides away when the thief dropped the last bar and tore the door open—and Nipper, ignoring the gov'nor's warning shout, raced for the doorway and shot out into the open!

In the light from the factory, he glimpsed a broken-down, mud-covered car, with engine running. One step he took towards the thing, then a shadow seemed to spring from the factory wall; and a stunning blow descended on his head! A blinding light flashed before his eyes, and he fell face forward into the arms of the man he had tried so hard to capture!

CHAPTER 2.

NIPPER'S FIGHT FOR LIFE!

NIPPER'S first waking thought was that Mrs. Jones, the gov'nor's house-keeper, was banging on the door and calling him down to breakfast. Then, with a groan, he realised that he was aboard some vessel, with the "lan, lap" of water

close to his head, and the wheezy grunt of an engine not far away.

It was pitch black in the place where he lay, and it took the lad some time to understand that he was in a ship's hold. He was aching in every limb, and tried to move, only to find that he was tied hand and foot, and that a rag prevented him from uttering anything louder than a grunt.

He was wretchedly hungry, and reckoned that hours must have passed since he had been brought aboard. He was beginning to wonder if his gaolers meant to starve him, when the rumble of voices sounded in his ear.

For a moment he thought that he must be dreaming. But the voices continued to mumble, and at length he guessed that he was lying close to a bulkhead, and that only thin matchwood separated him from the speakers.

"One of the boards must have broken adrift," he thought. "If only I can wriggle my nut a bit closer, I'll be able to hear what's going on."

By crooking his knees and digging his elbows hard into the floor-boards, he managed to get his head right up against the partition. A cold draught of air told him that there was an actual hole in the boarding—and now, every word came as clearly as if he was in the cabin with the speakers.

"It's no good you carryin' on, Larson," came a growling voice. "If we'd left th' kid there he'd seen enough to blow the gaff on our game—an' I've no wish to spend th' next five years in th' clink, even if you have."

"An' I say you're a block-headed muddler," Larson growled. "It's all right you pinchin' th' kid, Sharkey, but d'you think this 'ere Nelson Lee'll leave us alone, after what we done to him?"

"Bah! Nelson Lee'll never know anything about it," Sharkey sneered. "Our game's played out—last night's business showed us that plain enough. We've had a good run, cully, but now we're cuttin' away—an' we're goin' to hide every trace that can connect us with the Stepney wraith, as they calls it."

"What d'you mean?" Larson demanded. "Yer can't keep th' kid hidden for ever, an' you can't keep his mouth shut, either. What are you hintin' at? Let's 'ave it straight!"

Sharkey chuckled in a way that made Nipper shiver.

"I'll tell yer what I'm hintin' at," he said hoarsely. "The old barge we're on has had her day—she ought to ha' been broken up years ago. But she's on her last trip now, Larson—in two hours we'll be off Tilbury, an' in deep water—an' that's where she dives to th' bottom!"

There was a dead silence in the cabin for many seconds, and, when Larson answered, it was in a frightened whisper that barely reached Nipper's strained hearing.

"And th' kid—you mean to leave 'im on board?" he stammered.

"Well, we ain't goin' to take 'im off afore she sinks!" And Sharkey chuckled ghoulishly.

"But suppose they ever raise 'er up again,"

Larson asked. "Suppose they lift an' float 'er—think what they'll find in th' hold!"

"Suppose nothing!" Sharkey snorted. "Who's goin' to pay for liftin' this rotten old tub? Why, it'd cost ten times 'er price to salvage 'er—don't be a fool, Larson!"

"But I'd always 'ave the fear of it on me," Larson stammered. "I can't stand for it, Sharkey—I won't let you do it!"

"Won't you?" Sharkey snarled. "You'll not interfere—else there's two of you as'll take a sleep in Thames mud afore mornin'! Then he laughed gently, as if trying to win the other round to reason. "What's come over you, Larson? You're not goin' to let a spym' kid stand 'tween you an' liberty?"

"Well, I don't like it," Larson protested weakly. "I don't mind shuttin' 'is mouth—but I'm not in love with the way you want to do it."

"It's the way it's goin' to be done," Sharkey snapped. "Better come on deck, else we'll 'ave Gissing comin' to see what all th' talk's about."

"I don't like it—" Larson again mumbled, but the scraping of chairs prevented Nipper from hearing anything more, and the tramp of heavy feet climbing on deck told him that the discussion had ended.

"Gosh! Two hours to live!" The terrible thought hammered in Nipper's brain. Two hours to live—and then to be drowned like a caged rat!

"If only I could get these beastly ropes loose," Nipper mumbled through his gag. "If only I could have a fighting chance—"

He strained and twisted at the bonds until they cut deep into his flesh, and only gave up when he was panting and exhausted.

Then a new idea came to him. The hold must be empty, or he would not be lying on the flooring boards. No sooner had that thought come to him than he began to roll over and over, his hands groping for anything that might help to cut or break the ropes that made him so utterly helpless.

He rolled the full length of the hold and picked up many bruises before he met anything to bar his slow and clumsy movements. Then, in a corner of the black place, he bumped into a pile of the barge's gear—first, a pile of mooring ropes, then a long wooden shaft that rapped him sharply over the head as he knocked into it.

"Crikey, but I'm finding it to-night!" he groaned, then gasped as he felt the cold touch of metal against his cheek. "Gosh! I believe I've tumbled on a boathook! I wonder now—if only I can get it firmly fixed, and get my wrists near the hook—"

He wasted no more time in idle thought. Twisting and turning until he could grasp the pole, he worked the long handle between his tied legs, then strained his body until the end of the pole was tilted by the pile of mooring ropes. Another exhausting struggle brought the pointed hook between his wrists, and, by gripping the haft firmly with his knees, he found he had the thing fixed as in a vice!

But that was only the beginning of a night-mare struggle. He jabbed his bound wrists down on the sharp point until his flesh was raw and bleeding, he sawed away at the things until his muscles ached and the agony of cramp brought gasps from his muffled mouth!

When at last he was losing hope and beginning to admit defeat, the first strand parted and gave him the courage to battle on.

But another full hour passed before he finally snapped the last frayed strand and tore the rope from his raw wrists. For a time he was forced to rest, though he knew that every minute made his danger greater.

Then, as the blood coursed back to his cramped limbs, he tore the suffocating rag from his face, and attacked the rope that gripped his legs. Another moment and he climbed stiffly to his feet, staggered, and leaned weakly against the rocking hull.

"Rouse up, old son!" he muttered, working a wry grin to his face. "Unless you get on deck before the scuttling act begins, you'll be booked just as sure as if those blinking ropes were still on you." He bent and groped and felt about on the boards. "Now, where's that blessed boathook?"

CHAPTER 3.

THE RAT BREAKS OUT!

GROPING his way back to the bulkhead, Nipper listened carefully until sure the cabin was unoccupied. Running a hand along the base of the partition, he soon found the hole at which he had previously listened, and guessed by its gnawed edges that rats had been busy making a path from hold to cabin.

"And I've got to follow your lead, me lads, and make the hole bigger," he grinned. "There's two toughs to face when I get on deck—but the first job is to break my way out of this nifty place."

That proved to be easier than he expected. Pushing the haft of the boathook through the hole, he heaved upwards, and the crazy partition ripped away like rotten matchwood. The tearing crash of breaking wood sounded loud enough, to Nipper, to have roused an alarm from end to end of the barge; but when he forced his way into the little cabin and heard the uncanny whine of the wind, he guessed that any noise he made would never be heard by those on deck.

Keeping a firm hold on the boathook, he stealthily climbed the upright ladder. Shel-

tered by the companion hood, he ventured a cautious peep along the deck, and saw one moody-looking fellow seated on the tarpaulin hatch cover.

The barge was now rolling and dipping her snub nose into angry little waves, and the first glimmer of dawn was showing overhead. As if this hint of daylight was an awaited signal, a hoarse bellow sounded from the stern of the boat.

"Now then, Larson, jump up and get a hand on this 'ere wheel," came in Sharkey's voice. "More lively, man—it'll be full day in ten minutes, and th' ole tub's got to be bitin' Thames mud by that time!"

Nipper ducked out of sight until the mate had tramped heavily past the companion and had joined his sour-tongued skipper.

"What about Gissing?" Larson asked moodily. "You ain't goin' to leave him

below, same as th' kid, are you?"

"Oh, he'll jump for th' deck soon's his feet begin to get wet!" Sharkey sniggered. "E can't ask questions then—you tell him a lump o' driftwood's hit us, if he does." There came a shuffling of feet, as the wheel changed hands. Then: "Keep 'er well out from the shore. I'll 'ave that keel-board opened out in two ticks."

Nipper knew that if the brutal skipper caught him below he would be chok'd into silence in a minute. In the open he could make a fight of sorts, and, as Sharkey's legs appeared in front of the companion, Nipper jabbed the spike he carried hard into the fellow's ribs.

With a howl that was more fright than pain, Sharkey jumped a yard into the air and fell across the hatch, and Nipper, taking advantage of his momentary panic, slipped out on the open deck and raced along to the bow.

"Come on, Larson!" Sharkey howled, scrambling to his feet and glaring about for a weapon. "Th' kid's free! He's broken a way out—an' e' knows too much!"

Even in the half-light, Nipper recognised the scowling brute as the thief who had escaped from Garside's factory. The fellow had pounced on a three-foot iron bar and was now creeping along the unrailed deck.

To make matters worse, the weak-kneed mate had obeyed Sharkey's orders and was advancing along the off side of the hatch. For a moment the lad thought of jumping overboard, but realised in time that he could never race a steam barge, and that a tap on the head would quickly end his struggles.

TRAPPED!

Through the deepening gloom, Nipper could just make out the wicked-looking head of the black cobra as it poked out of the broken lid. . . . A moment later, its sinuous length shot clear, and Nipper heard the scrape of its tough skin on the floor. It hissed viciously, then slid towards him as he jumped back to the locked door!

Locked in with a snake—one touch of its poisonous fangs means death!

How can Nipper escape?

Read all about it in next Wednesday's exciting detective-adventure story:

"THE CASE OF THE BLACK COBRA!"

NEXT WEEK!

So, making the best of a bad job, he jabbed viciously at Sharkey the instant the fellow drew near him, then raced down on Larson's side, with the boathook pointing straight at the mate's chest.

With a yelp of fear, Larson jumped on the covered hatch. He flung his arms up as the untended barge gave a sickening lurch, and, by ill-chance, he grabbed and held on Nipper's weapon!

"Hang on to it!" Sharkey howled. "Keep a hold, Larson—we've got 'im!"

Nipper gave a frenzied tug at the thing, but Larson now had both hands on the shaft, and was grinning wickedly at the lad's efforts. He was pulling—pulling with the strength of a bull—and when Nipper suddenly released his hold, he staggered back across the hatch and nearly pitched overboard.

But Nipper never gave him a second glance. He whirled round, dodged a murderous blow from Sharkey's iron bar, and crashed his fist full on to the brute's jaw. Sharkey grunted, and was lifting the bar when Nipper sprang in like a terrier!

Somehow he got both hands on the bar just above Sharkey's fists, and held on like a limpet. In that moment the barge gave another tremendous heave, and Nipper's full weight was flung against the fellow. For an instant they swayed, then both pitched backwards into the water!

Down—down—down, until Nipper thought they must be diving through the river's bed! A thousand lights seemed to be flashing in front of the youngster's eyes, and he felt as if a rope was tight-knotted round his chest! Sharkey's hand had dropped away from the bar—and Nipper did not know, as yet, that the great bullet-head had crashed on the hatch combing and that the murderous sprayer was as harmless as a toy terrier.

Then he felt himself rising, kept his last remnant of sense with a tremendous effort, and was gasping deep gulps of air a second later. Flicking the water from his eyes, he was almost blinded by a blue glare; but, as his mind cleared, he saw that a motor-launch was racing swiftly towards him—its searchlight never swerving from his bobbing head, a figure leaning dangerously forward over the bows, with arms outstretched.

Another moment and the boat was alongside, and strong hands were under his armpits. Then—and Nipper half thought that he was dreaming—the voice of his gov'nor struck sharply on his ears!

"Don't struggle—you're all right now, young 'un!" Nelson Lee cried, more feeling in his voice than Nipper ever remembered before. "Hang on—we'll have you aboard in a tick."

"Save Sharkey!" Nipper gasped. "Dunno where he is—"

"He's at the end of your fist," Nelson Lee answered—and that was the first knowledge Nipper had that a great dead weight was hanging on to his arm. "Come on, Casey, the lad's done—get hold of that brute and haul him aboard!"

But it was Nelson Lee who pulled Nipper from the muddy old Thames and carefully wrapped him in a thick rug. For a time the lad lay back with closed eyes—then he felt the gov'nor's flask at his lips, and sat up with a wry face.

Nelson Lee replaced the flask in his pocket, but firmly refused to answer a single one of Nipper's questions. He rushed the youngster back to Gray's Inn Road and to bed, left him in Mrs. Jones' capable hands throughout the day, and only visited him with nightfall.

It was then that Nipper heard how Engineer Gissing—who had no knowledge of Sharkey and Larson's crookedness—had sprung on deck and kept the mate busy whilst he was fighting the unequal duel with Sharkey.

"But they'll do no more harm this next few years, young 'un," Nelson Lee smiled. "They're both in Charles Street lock-up at this moment, and it will be many a long day before they see the Thames again."

"It beats me how you came to get on their track so quickly, gov'nor," Nipper said. "There's about eight million people in London—and it took you about two ticks to find the two you wanted."

"Rather more than that," the famous detective replied, his eyes twinkling. "But I had a lot to go on—the fact that every burglary had taken place on a Thursday told me that our crackman was only in Stepney on that one night each week."

"Um—and because all the cribs Sharkey cracked were near the Regent's Canal Dock, you began to hunt for a lighterman," Nipper reasoned shrewdly.

"And soon found the right one," Nelson Lee said drily. "The dock gateman told me that most Tilbury barges make only one round trip each week. Then he added the information that Sharkey's boat usually arrived Thursday, and had only left an hour before I came on the scene. That ended my inquiries, and sent me hurrying off to rouse out the nearest police launch."

"Well, I could hardly have done better myself," Nipper murmured modestly. "But what was in that bottle Sharkey flung at me—it looked empty, but the room stank with the scent of lilac when it burst?"

"It was filled with carbon-monoxide, one of the most deadly poison-gases known," Nelson Lee replied. "When Bland spoke through the tube in his office, Sharkey must have poured a quantity of the vapour into the tube—that accounted for Bland's fainting fit, and made the theft easy."

"Gosh!" Nipper gasped. "And Watchman Ryan's prowling about stopped Sharkey getting away—and I nearly got a quart of the lilac stuff in my face!" He thought over that narrow escape for a moment, then grinned. "But I'm thinking Skipper Sharkey'll say things the next time he niffs lilac."

THE END.

(Next Week's clever story of NELSON LEE and NIPPER—"THE CASE OF THE BLACK COBRA!"—will keep you thrilled from beginning to end.)

BUDDING BATSMEN!

Getting runs is the aim of every batsman! This article gives many helpful hints.

THE glamour of cricket hangs round the batsman, and if you can do mighty things with the willow the admiration of your chums is a sure thing.

If you aren't a good player now, there's no cause to be downhearted. Some of the best batsmen have been made, not born, and there is no reason why, if you train yourself in the way you should go, you shouldn't make yourself into a good batsman. The only essentials are a quick eye and quick movements of the hands; some people would add of the feet as well, and certainly good footwork is a feature of the best batting. The rest can be acquired with pains and practice.

The best advice one can give is to make a study of batting—to look upon each innings as a lesson, each ball as a part of the lesson, to be understood and eventually mastered. Don't be content because you have hit a ball and made runs. Aim at hitting each ball the *right* way, then you're less likely to find you've missed it altogether. It is the novice who slogs, or attempts to slog, everything that comes along. The seasoned player suits the stroke to the ball.

THE THREE RULES.

For success in batting, there are three main rules which every young cricketer should grasp and follow out right from the beginning. The first—which is always to keep the elbow up and play a straight bat—cannot be too much emphasised. Of course, there are some strokes—the cut and the pull, for instance—which are not made with a straight bat; but for all defensive, and for many real scoring strokes, the bat must be held absolutely straight.

The second rule is to keep your eye on the ball. From the moment the bowler commences to run, watch his hand! All the time up to the moment of hitting it, watch the ball! Only by doing so can you hope accurately to judge the pace, length, and swerve. Never jump to conclusions about how the ball is going to pitch, and how it will break; follow it all the time, and don't make up your mind about the stroke you are going to play until the ball is delivered.

The third rule is never to move the right leg away from the wicket—that is, in the direction of short leg. Some of the greatest batsmen of the past have held that under no circumstances should the right leg be moved at all; but this theory is generally discounted nowadays, and photographs prove that even these veterans did not always carry it out in practice.

Such great batsmen as Ranjitsinhji, Victor Trumper, C. B. Fry, A. C. Maclaren, F. S. Jackson, and P. F. Warner all moved the right foot in making some strokes, and in playing back you are going to hamper

yourself unless you move your right foot. The foot should always be moved in the direction of the wicket, not away from it.

AT THE WICKET.

As every lad should find out for himself which is the best way for him to stand at the wicket, no rules can be laid down. But you can take it as a general rule that the way that comes most natural and easiest to you is the best way. The usual way is to stand with the left foot forward, just outside the popping crease, pointing either to the bowler or to mid-off, and the right foot just inside the crease. The left shoulder and elbow should be well forward, but not so far forward that you can't see the bowler with both eyes. In getting yourself into this position, don't assume that it is always correct, and never to be changed; for, if you do you will probably become stiff—and, above all things, you cannot afford to be stiff at cricket. All the muscles should work loosely and naturally, and movements should be easy.

THE BEST STANCE.

Some great batsmen are not very greatly in favour of the "left shoulder forward" stance, but the majority uphold it; certainly for the young cricketer it is the safest way. The danger lies in keeping the shoulder so far forward that it is pointing across the wicket to the off, which means that you cannot possibly have a full view of every ball that comes down. But if you avoid this mistake, you will find it easier to play with the left shoulder forward than to stand facing the bowler.

Of course, a good deal depends on the bowler. Admittedly, if the balls he is sending down are inclined to break from the leg, you will have to face forward to get a sufficiently clear view of the ball. But you will be wise not to vary too much from the left-shoulder-forward stance.

You will have to reckon with the bowler again when you are deciding whether to have all your weight on the right foot, or to have it equally balanced on both. The old idea was in favour of equal balance, but nowadays batsmen prefer to have the weight chiefly on the right leg. To tackle fast bowling the weight should be thrown back, but for playing slow balls you may find it easier to keep the weight forward.

NERVOUSNESS.

This is the great handicap of inexperienced batsmen. Nervousness does not necessarily mean funk, fear for your own skin, but fear lest you let down your side—bungle a stroke, hit your own wicket, knock up a weak catch, or commit any of the little slips that cut short the innings of a batsman.

Don't worry! If you are doing your best, you can do no more. Believe in yourself—confidence is the sportsman's best friend!

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 38.
SECTION
A
READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

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.

SECTION
B
MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

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.

SECTION
C
NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

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 Id., 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, Lond., E.C.4.)

HOW goes it with the League? The answer is that things are progressing in every way all over the country.

Of course, it stands to reason that you cannot jump into a fully-working organisation like the S.F.L., with branches and ramifications everywhere, all in a tearing hurry. It takes time. But we are going ahead, steadily and invincibly. Shoals of letters reach me from all parts. I welcome them all, and reply to them all.

A word, here, to some fellows who send me questions for which they want answers by return. I would reply on the instant with pleasure, but sometimes the address is missing, or there is just the name of the town. That is not enough. It is like writing to:

Mr. John Brown,
Friday Night,
Manchester.

The postman, grand and indefatigable fellow though he is, cannot accomplish miracles, even if the Post Office does now and again find addresses by some process of magic only known to itself. So write in the address with full details, and oblige me!

THE SLAVES OF ST. FRANK'S

(Continued from page 33.)

"That hat trick, Browne!"

From all sides of the ground came the shouts, but William Napoleon Browne took no notice. He was chatting quietly with Fenton and Morrow, waiting for the next batsman to come out. Hat tricks are by no means uncommon, but St. Frank's did not often see them. And it was rather too much to expect when so much depended upon it.

A hush fell over the ground when the new batsman took guard. Then Browne prepared for his run—for the last ball of the over.

"This is awful!" moaned Willy.

"I'm going to shut my eyes!" whispered Chubby Heath. "Tell me when it's over!"

Browne took his run, and the leather shot down the pitch. Nobody exactly knew how it happened—the new man least of all—but a fraction of a second later a stump was dancing merrily across the grass, and everybody appeared to go mad at once.

"Hurrah!"

"Out!"

"He's done it!" roared Fullwood. "Three cheers for Browne!"

It was certainly the hat trick—and William Napoleon Browne had covered himself with glory. The game was almost painful to watch now. There seemed a chance—a sporting chance that St. Frank's could win. The score stood 107-7. With just a little luck, the game was in England's hands.

THE HELPING HAND.

My postbag shows me plenty of things. It proves the value of the League, and what a real help it is all round—this band of good comrades, intent on doing their bit to help the other fellow. One important fact is the readiness of members who live in districts where no O.O. has yet been appointed to weigh in and act as Organising Officer. It is up to any member to work the oracle this way, and he shows real loyalty to the League by doing so.

Such a member has had his certificate. He is really keen on making the League an influence in his neighbourhood. He rallies his friends together, and says: "Let's get going and form a club. We are out to help fellows, and make the League an organisation which can be appealed to for aid in sport, hobbies, and work!" Such a member who sets the ball rolling can find himself in possession of the Bronze Medal at once, for he has only to introduce six of his chums who have come to his help. He can then take up the full duties of an O.O., if he has time.

A GIFT FOR MAKING CHUMS.

You will see it is a question of showing initiative. I know some friends of the League are very fortunately placed. Others have it in them to make chums—it's a gift with them! Many of the recently-appointed O.O.s have done wonders. They have a carte blanche to act as they think best in the interests of the League, and the grass has not grown under their feet.

But the Australians showed their mettle, too.

Grimly, tenaciously, they carried on the struggle, determined at all costs to win this match—a match which had seemed a mere walk over. But England, in spite of insufficient practice, was giving the visitors a fierce fight.

The runs mounted, but there were no more sensations. And the inevitable happened. Within five minutes of the time fixed for close of play, Australia knocked up the winning hit, and England was beaten. But it had been a close battle, for the Australians won by merely one wicket. And yet, on the previous evening, they had expected to be the complete victors before lunch.

"You gave us a fine game, you fellows," said Beaton heartily.

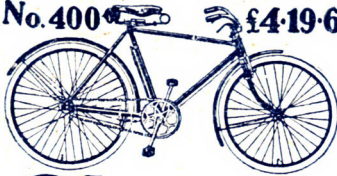
"A close one, too," laughed Fenton. "This is the kind of cricket I like, the kind that seems almost too good to be true. Well, it's a fine result. We've won one each out of the five."

"Honours even," grinned Jerry Dodd. "Let's hope we have as good a match in the third Test. This one was bonzer!"

But before that date the brief Whitsuntide holidays would intervene, and there would be no lack of excitement. For the St. Frank's sports carnival was still in full swing, and there were destined to be some lively doings in London Town.

THE END.

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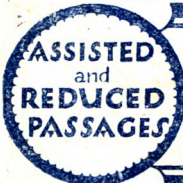
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