

NEW
ADVENTURE
SERIAL—

“THE ROLICKING ROVERS!”

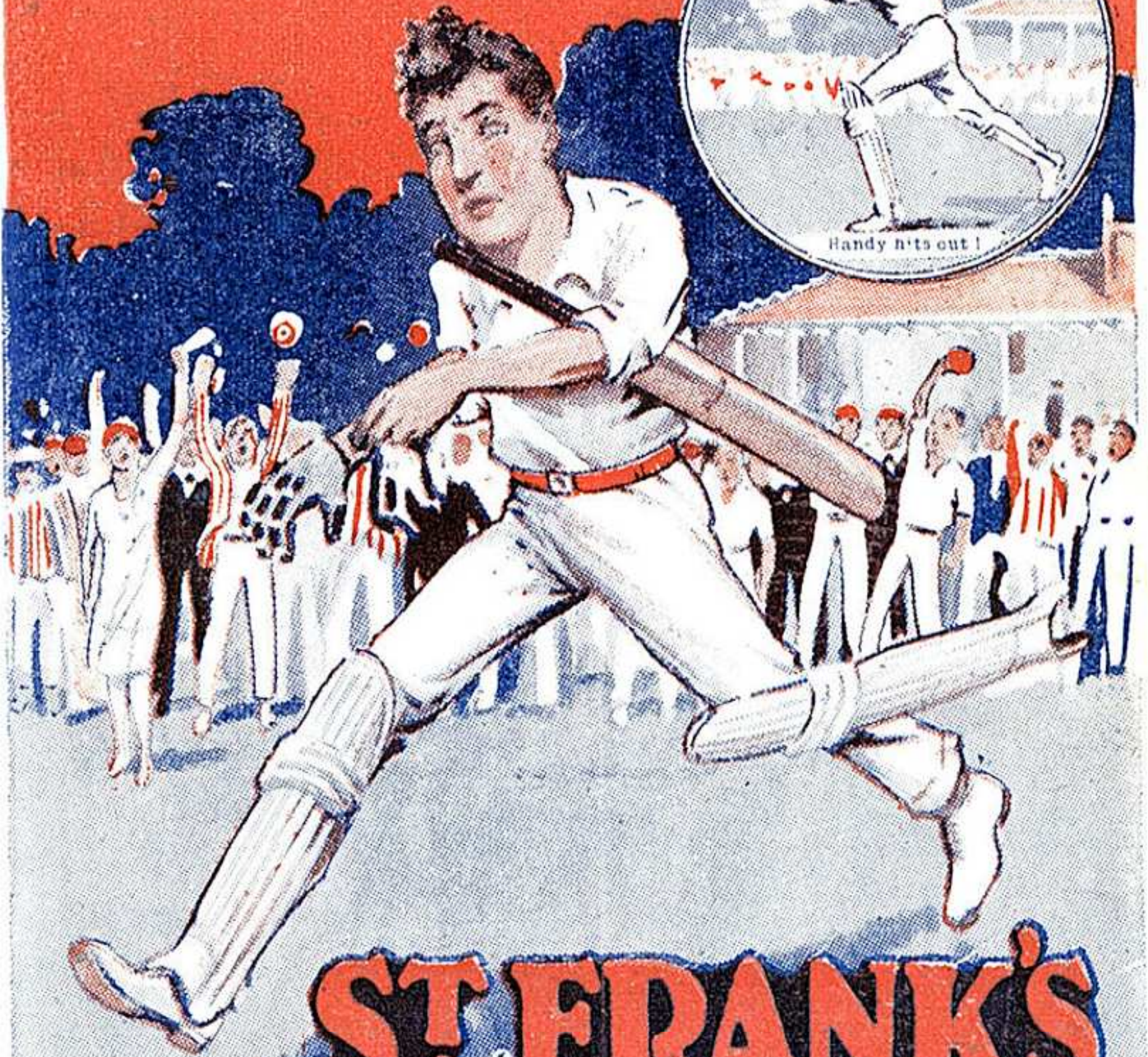
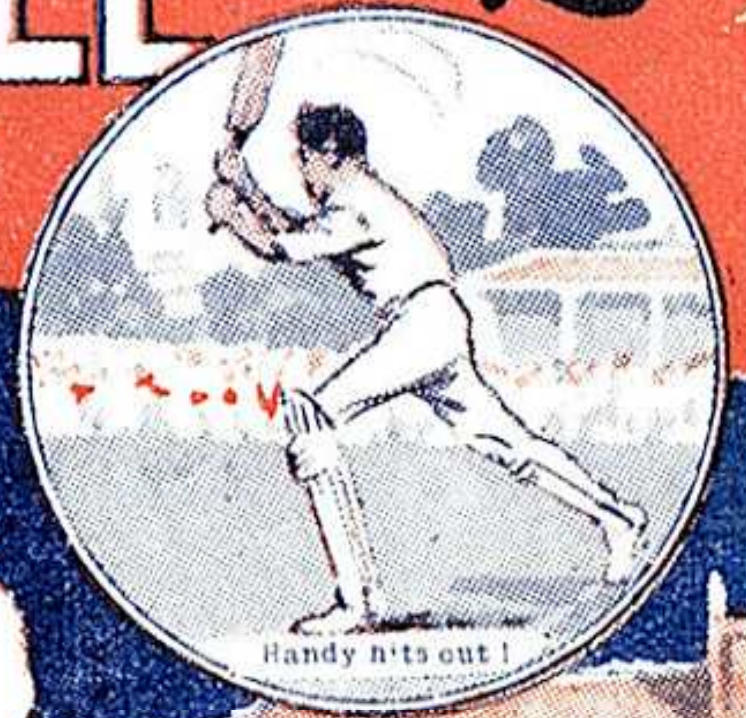
—BEGIN,
THIS
WEEK!

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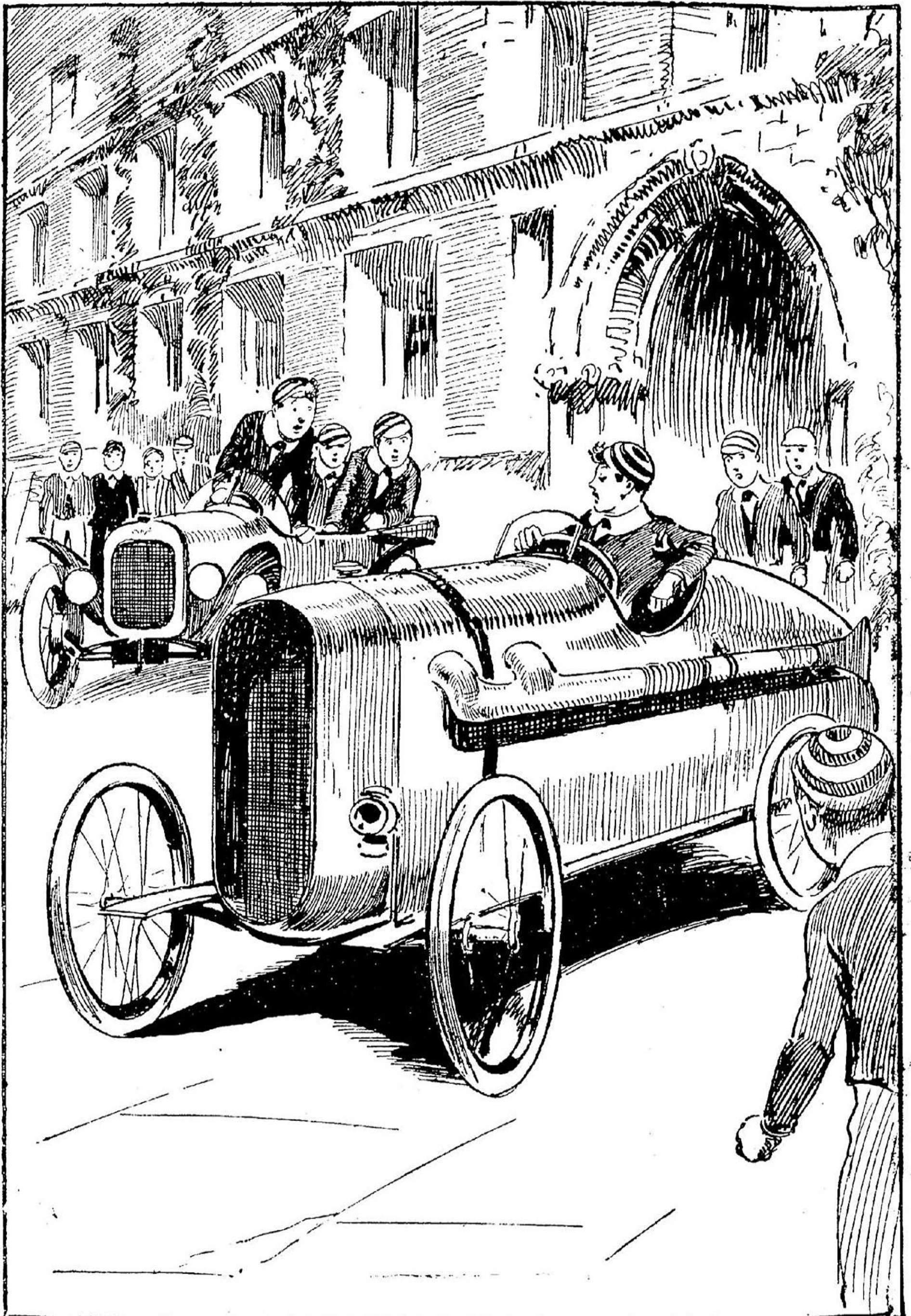
ST. FRANK'S SAVES THE ASHES!

HANDFORTH IN A HURRY!
He's only just in time to save the game for Young England! This rousing Long Complete Story of School Life and Sport is packed with fun and excitement.

New Series No. 9.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 3rd, 1926.



"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Handforth dazedly, as he stared at the big, imposing red car. Willy lounged back in the driving seat, eyeing Handy's little Austin Seven disdainfully. Handy was so surprised that he missed the fact that Willy's car had ordinary bicycle wheels, and that the radiator was formed by a piece of zinc gauze—probably bagged from a pantry window!

ST. FRANK'S SAVES THE ASHES!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Boys of St. Frank's just manage to save the Schoolboy Ashes—and it's Handforth who helps to pull the game through! This stunning long complete yarn is full of fun and sport.

CHAPTER I.

WILLY SPRINGS A SURPRISE.

“BY George! What the——” Edward Oswald Handforth, the famous leader of Study D, stared across the old Triangle of St. Frank's in blank amazement. He was sitting at the wheel of his Austin Seven, and the engine was purring musically.

Afternoon lessons were just over, and Handforth was taking Church and McClure, his bosom chums, for a little joy-ride. An argument as to who should sit beside the driver had delayed the start somewhat.

But now Handforth forgot everything. The expression on his face showed utter bewilderment; his chums, too, were staring with equal astonishment. They were gazing at something weird and wonderful.

“What—what is it?” ejaculated Church breathlessly.

The object had just come into view from behind the gymnasium, where the Triangle was more or less empty. And it had come into view silently and serenely, gliding along with uncanny noiselessness.

In a word, it was a motor-car.

This in itself was not particularly startling. But the car was not only an extraordinary creation, but the cool figure of Willy Handforth was at the wheel. He lounged there as though he had been driving cars all his life.

“Great Scott!” said Edward Oswald indignantly.

This was indeed a crowning shock. Handforth had prided himself upon being the only junior at St. Frank's to own a car, and here was his own minor, a mere fag, bursting into the public gaze at the wheel of one! And it was about twice as big as Handforth's Austin Seven!

“It's—it's Willy!” gasped McClure, staring harder than ever. “Willy with a giddy motor-car! Where did he get it from? And how? By Jingo, I believe it's a home-made one!”

“That's why the young beggar's been so mysterious during this last week,” said Church quickly. “We've hardly seen a sign of him! Haven't you noticed the way he's always dodged off after lessons? And didn't you ask him how he got that red enamel on his bags, Handy?”

But Handforth was speechless. He climbed out of his car and advanced towards the monstrosity. For it was indeed a vehicle of remarkable character. There was a certain rakish look about it which could not be ignored.

Handforth stared at it with goggling eyes. The car was clearly a home-made one, as a close inspection revealed. The design was more or less conventional, but it was no mere toy affair. The two-seater body, brilliantly red with glistening new enamel, rather

favoured the racing style, with a tiny wind-screen and an enormous bonnet.

From one side of this bonnet protruded a huge exhaust-pipe of gleaming copper, and it extended right to the rear of the car, where the outlet was flattened in the orthodox way. The radiator was imposing, and the centre of it, although very business-like, suspiciously resembled zinc gauze of the kind that is used for pantry windows.

The car was clearly brand-new, and it was perhaps only open to criticism on one score.

It was fitted with four bicycle wheels; and these rather detracted from the general effect. In every other respect this novel automobile was of true racing design.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth dazedly.

The red freak came gliding up with such remarkable silence that Edward Oswald was bewildered. Willy nodded to him coolly, bent forward, and pulled a lever with a click. The car came gracefully to a standstill.

"Hallo, Ted!" said Willy genially. "Just off for a spin? I was thinking of taking a run myself, you know."

His major found his voice.

"What—what's this thing?" he roared violently.

"This?" said Willy. "Can't you see? My new bus!"

"Your new what?"

"My latest Silent Two," explained Willy. "Of course, it's not so natty as your Austin Seven, but she's a goer!"

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "But—but— Do you mean to say you've MADE this giddy thing?"

"Why not?" asked Willy. "I don't mind telling you it's the most wonderful car that's ever been invented, and this is the first model. She'll do unlimited mileage on a gallon of juice, and doesn't need any oil at all. She's gearless, silent, and—well, see for yourself!"

Willy bent forward and touched the self-starter. This looked like an electric bell-push on the dashboard, and Handforth heard a faint buzz from the interior of the great bonnet, which was big enough to contain a 500 horse-power racing motor. And instantly the car commenced gliding forward. There was indeed something uncanny in this noiseless propulsion.

Willy, at the wheel, steered his car round the Triangle, plunged through West Arch, and appeared a minute later between the Ancient House and the Junior Wing of the School House. He drew his car to a halt with that same gliding silence.

"As a matter of fact, this is the first time I've taken her out," explained Willy coolly. "I'm just going to try her on the road. So long, you chaps! I might see something of you later on!"

He touched the starter again, and the red car smoothly sped towards the gates, a bluish trail of smoke emerging from the exhaust-pipe. Willy and his latest creation

vanished into the lane. By this time quite a number of other fellows had observed it and were staring in its wake.

"Well, of all the giddy mysteries!" ejaculated Church.

Handforth was keenly sniffing the air.

"That's rummy petrol he's using," he said in astonishment.

"Smells like burnt cotton-wool!" said Reggie Pitt. "Where the dickens did your minor get that contraption from, Handy?"

"He says he made it!" ejaculated Handforth.

"I'm not a bit surprised," said Reggie, shaking his head. "Your minor's capable of anything. But what about his licence? I didn't notice any number-plates on that car."

"He can't hold a driving-licence either," grinned Dick Hamilton. "Handy's got a special one, we know, but the minimum age is seventeen."

"I'm going after him!" roared Handforth in alarm. "He'll kill himself in that fearful thing! And even if he doesn't, he'll get into awful trouble with the police!"

"You'd better let him go his own sweet way, old man," said Dick. "You're far more likely to kill yourself if you go dashing about in chase of him."

"Rats!" shouted Handforth. "Where's my car?"

"I believe it's still standing over by the Ancient House," said Fullwood, glancing round. "It may have dropped down one of these cracks between the paving stones. No, it's still there," he added. "You never know with these Austin Sevens. I thought somebody might have trodden on it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!" chuckled De Valerie. "His glory is fading. No wonder he's wild, when his minor bobs up with a car about twice the size of his own Austin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth, hearing these facetious remarks, was much more eager to chase Willy. He hadn't had a proper look at that car, and he was fairly startled. There was something altogether mysterious about it. And Willy had ventured out upon the public highway minus number plates and driving licence.

"Look out of the way there!" roared Handy.

He fairly hummed towards the gates, and swept out giddily. At that very moment a fair cyclist was passing, and Handforth executed a really brilliant piece of driving in order to avoid her. He was so expert with the Austin Seven that he could perform the most astonishing acrobatics on it.

"My hat! Irene!" he gurgled, pulling up dead.

Irene Manners, of the Moor View School, looking very charming in a pinkish kind of summer frock, jumped from her machine.

"You startled me, Ted," she said reprovingly. "Didn't you promise me that you wouldn't take any risks on that car of yours?"

"But—but this is different," said Hand-

forth breathlessly. "My minor's just gone out on a contraption of his own, and I've got to find him. I say, how about a lift?"

"Splendid!" said Irene. "Thanks awfully!"

"Going to the village?"

"No—Bannington."

"That's ripping," said Handforth, glancing round. "Here, Church, out of it! You, too, Mac!" he added in a fierce whisper. "I can't be bothered with you chaps now."

Church and McClure glared at him, but got out.

"Oh, no!" said Irene firmly. "I'm not coming if——"

"That's all right," interrupted Church carelessly. "Mac and I have got heaps to do, anyhow. In fact, we shall be pleased to get on to Little Side. Hope you find your minor, Handy."

"I'll find him!" said Handforth grimly.

Irene jumped in, and Church took possession of her bicycle, to be called for later. The Austin Seven sped on down the road in the June sunlight. Handforth was unusually quiet, and his fair companion wondered what was the matter. As a rule Edward Oswald had plenty to say—especially to her. And this was the week of the Fourth Schoolboy Test match, too! That all-important game was fixed for Friday and Saturday—and it was Tuesday now.

"What was that about your minor?" asked Irene presently.

"The young beggar has made a car of his own," explained Handforth. "Like his nerve! Trying to show me up, of course. I suppose he got jealous and thought——"

"But why shouldn't he have a car, too?" asked Irene. "And if it's only a home-made one there's no reason why you should object. Your car is a real one, but his is only a toy."

"Toy!" repeated Handforth. "It's twice as big as this one!"

"Oh!" said Irene.

They hummed through Bellton village, but there was no sign of Willy. They had scarcely got a hundred yards past the final cottage when the Austin Seven spluttered ominously, and then rapidly reduced speed. Handforth opened the throttle in vain.

"Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated blankly.

"Anything wrong?" asked Irene, pretending to be unconcerned.

"I—I'm awfully sorry," apologised Handforth, turning red. "I meant to fill up with petrol, and forgot all about it. Awfully sorry," he repeated feebly.

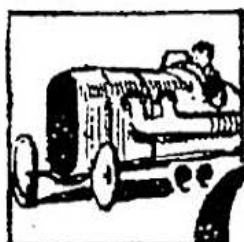
Irene nodded. It was one of Handforth's weaknesses to forget the petrol. He hadn't had his Austin Seven many weeks, but he was always running out of fuel and getting stranded on the highway.

"Want any help?" came a cheery voice from the rear.

They turned and stared. With that same unbelievable silence Willy's car had slid up and braked smoothly to a halt alongside them.

CHAPTER 2.

TROUBLE WITH THE ENGINE.



"H, corks!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"What a strange-looking car!" said Irene, jumping out and looking at Willy's

"latest" with genuine interest. "And does it really go?"

The captain of the Third grew frigid.

"How do you think I got here?" he asked coldly. "My hat! Does it go!"

"Sorry!" said Irene, smiling. "But—but it seems so quiet——"

"That's the engine," explained Willy. "The new Silent Two—the most marvellous engine that the world has ever produced, and that's an absolute fact. I suppose Ted's run out of juice—as usual?"

"I'm afraid he has," said Irene, trying to remain grave.

"In that case, hop in, and I'll take you along," offered Willy obligingly. "Bannington? Right! Jump in!"

"You don't mind, Ted, do you?" asked Irene.

"Not at all," said Handforth thickly.

"I've got to get to Bannington, and it may be quite a long time before you can get some petrol," went on the girl. Besides, I'm

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ever so keen on trying Willy's new car. I'd no idea you could drive, Willy."

"Watch me!" said Willy serenely.

Handforth's expression was bordering on the homicidal as he glared at Willy behind Irene's back. But he dared not reveal his true feelings to her, she being his favourite girl chum.

"And how does it start?" she asked interestedly.

"Nothing more simple," said Willy, pressing the button.

The car glided off with beautiful sweetness, no grinding of gears and no jerking. It moved with the smoothness of an electric brougham. Irene was genuinely astonished.

"My own invention," said Willy carelessly, as they gathered speed. "The Austin Seven's a jolly fine little car, but if you want real comfort— H'm! We're losing speed a bit!" he added anxiously.

They were in fact, just at the foot of a sharp rise, and the car certainly laboured somewhat. The exhaust was still belching blue smoke, and the faint sounds of puffing came from beneath the bonnet. Finally Willy's remarkable car came to a halt altogether, and Irene looked at him with polite inquiry.

"It's all right—something wrong with the engine," said Willy briskly. "I'll soon put it right."

He jumped out and unfastened a catch on the side of the bonnet. He looked in, and appeared to make one or two punches into the works.

"Not so much jibbing, blow you!" he said tensely.

Irene stared—not without reason.

"Are you talking to the engine, Willy?" she asked in surprise.

Willy turned, and his face reddened.

"Just a little habit of mine," he said hastily.

"Rats!" said half the engine. "I'm fed-up with this! We didn't bargain for two of you!"

"I should think not!" panted the other half of the engine in rebellious tones. "It's bad enough to shove you along—"

"Shut up!" hissed Willy. "It's a lady!"

"First time I knew Irene Manners was a lady!" said the first half of the engine scornfully. "She's only one of those Moor View girls!"

Irene jumped out of the car, and a great light dawned upon her. She felt like bursting into a roar of laughter, but she restrained herself. Now she could understand the peculiar silence of this engine!

"Oh!" she said, as she joined Willy. "So that's the explanation!"

The engine—to be more exact, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon of the Third—crouched under the bonnet, hot and perspiring. And Willy, now that all hope was over, grinned with his usual cheerfulness.

"Not bad, eh?" he asked. "But it's like

their nerve to jib just because I took on another passenger!"

"But—but this is terrible!" said Irene.

"How do they breathe properly in that place when the side is closed up?"

"Easily!" replied Willy. "Don't you see that piece of gauze in front of the radiator? They can see where they're going, and they get all the air, too. It's not half bad in there. Plenty of room, and two chaps can send this car humming along as easily as winking. They're lazy, that's all!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Irene.

She gazed closely into the aperture. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon—Willy's bosom chums—were seated side by side. A bar in front of them provided handgrip. Mounted upon two ordinary cycle saddles, their feet rested upon pedals, and the chain-drive was connected direct to the back axle. The whole car, to tell the truth, was made from two bicycles and a large amount of thin sheet aluminium. The steering was quite genuine, and Willy controlled everything from the driving seat.

"Sorry, Irene," growled Chubby. "Willy told us he was only going for a run to the village, and we got the wind-up when we found ourselves on the way to Bannington. Besides, this exhaust-box is getting too hot."

"Exhaust-box?" repeated Irene.

"That little contrivance with the fan in front of it," explained Willy. "Must have some smoke, you know. Looks better. Just some smouldering cotton-wool, you know, fanned into life as we go along."

"Oh, my hat!" said Irene, shaking with inward laughter.

"It's working too well!" said Juicy indignantly. "My arm's nearly burnt, and it's getting worse all the time!"

At this moment Handforth came tearing up; he had seen this stoppage from afar, and was gloating with huge enjoyment. So Willy's engine had struck work, too.

"Jolly clever, aren't you?" panted Handforth. "Mine's not the only car to run out of juice. Why, what the— Great pip!" He stared blankly into the interior of the bonnet. "But—but— Where's the engine?"

"There!" said Willy. "You're looking at it! The new Silent Two! Only they've become talkative!"

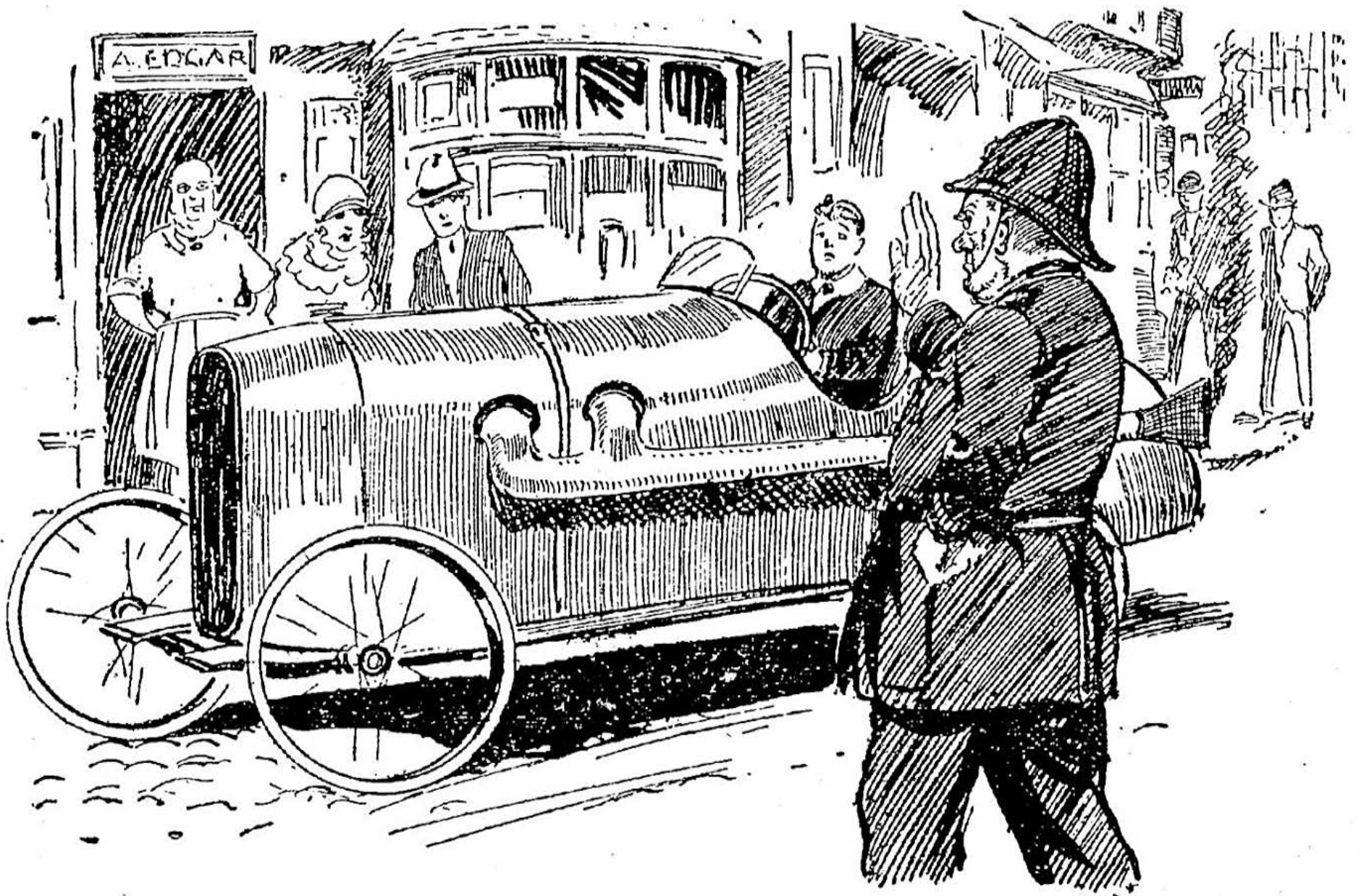
"Wha-a-at?" gurgled Handforth, with a gulp.

"The most marvellous engine in the world," declared Willy. "Tell me of another engine as wonderful as the human one? And if you've ever seen these chaps scoffing squiffy sardines and things, you'd agree that they've got wonderful engines!"

"Why, it's a swindle!" roared Handforth indignantly. "This thing isn't a car at all!"

"Isn't it?" snapped Chubby. "It goes fine, and Juicy and I don't mind taking spells under here. Think of the fun we shall get out of it, too!"

"I'll tell you what," said Willy generously.



"Bust my heyes!" exclaimed P.-c. Sparrow. "A motor-car without no numbers!" He strode out into the road and held up his hand. Willy grinned as he brought the Silent Two to a halt. "Anything wrong?" he asked politely.

"We'll pop back to the cycle shop in the village and get you a can of petrol. How's that?"

"Good man!" said Handforth heartily.

"I dare say you'll find plenty to say to Irene while we're gone," remarked Willy. "You can sit on this stile and—"

"That's enough!" interrupted his major gruffly.

Willy closed the bonnet, warning the engine not to do any more jibbing. He hopped into the driving seat, and the car reversed with surprising dexterity. And then it glided off with its strange silence now explained. After all, there were a good many advantages in an engine of this kind.

But the Silent Two had hardly entered Bellton High Street when P.-c. Sparrow, the village constable, rubbed his eyes and came to life. He had been indulging in a daylight doze outside the George Tavern. But now he gave an official grunt, and his eyes gleamed with battle.

"Bust my heyes!" he ejaculated. "A motor-car without no numbers! Well, I never did see! This'll mean a summons, or my name ain't Sparrow!"

He strode out into the road and held up his hand. Willy grinned to himself, and touched the bell-push. When the car was going, this meant "stop." When the car was at a standstill, it meant "start." The engine ceased its efforts and free-wheeled.

"Anything wrong, constable?" asked Willy politely.

The policeman's eyes narrowed.

"It strikes me as there's a lot wrong, young gent!" he said ominously. "Bust my heyes if this ain't worse than I thought! Why, you ain't no older than twelve or thirteen, I'll be bound!"

"Not a bad guess," said Willy, nodding.

"Let's 'ave a look at your licence," said P.-c. Sparrow, heavily.

"Sorry—haven't got one."

"Ho, you ain't?" said the policeman triumphantly. "Blowed if I didn't think as much! I suppose you know that you ain't entitled to hold a licence? I suppose you know it's agin the law to take this car on the highway without no number-plates? I ain't so sure that it won't mean prison, my lad!"

"Rats!" said Willy coolly. "You can't teach me the law, Dickybird! A licence is only required for a mechanically-propelled vehicle. You'll be pulling up prams next!"

"I don't know nothin' about machinery-compelled vehicles," said the policeman darkly. "I know you're on the high road without no licence. You'll oblige me by giving me your name, young man—AND address!"

"I thought everybody knew I came from St. Frank's," said Willy. "But I suppose I'd better put you straight about this at once. We don't want any bother, and I'm in a hurry. Hi, engine—show yourself!"

The sides of the bonnet opened, and two faces appeared.

"What a pity it isn't the First of April!" chuckled Juicy Lemon.

The constable stared blankly.

"You see, there's no licence required for this car," explained Willy, with bland politeness. "And I don't need a driving licence, either. Officially, it's a toy—but between you and me and the gatepost, we can do our twenty miles an hour with ease. So-long, Dickybird!"

The Silent Two glided off again, and P.-c. Sparrow was so utterly astonished that he was speechless. Indeed, he found it necessary to repair forthwith into the George Tavern in order to obtain a liquid aid to recovery.



CHAPTER 3.

FORREST'S "BOOK."

WILLY obtained the can of petrol, and delivered it to his major. Then, as the engine of the Silent Two was also gasping for juice—in the shape of tea—it was decided that a prompt return should be made to St. Frank's. In any case, this was only a trial run. And Willy's engine was becoming somewhat overheated.

"It's a good thing we've got this gauze in front of the radiator," observed a portion of the engine, as they went homewards. "We get quite a decent breeze in here, and it's not half as bad as you might think."

"Dry up!" said Willy. "No talking while you're under that bonnet."

He was feeling particularly pleased with his first trial, and he was looking very satisfied as the Silent Two glided into the Triangle. There were still a number of juniors about, and they at once surrounded him.

"Look here, Handforth minor, how the dickens did you fake up this car?" demanded Tommy Watson. "What kind of engine have you got? And where's your major? He went out to look for you."

"That's all right," said Willy, standing beside his car. "Ted's gone to Bannington with Irene. Ripping, isn't she? This car, I mean."

"She doesn't look so bad," said Church critically. "But we want to know how she goes."

"I'm an obliging chap," replied Willy. "She's a pretty marvellous car, on the whole. She can do things that no other car in the world can do. For example, I've only got to speak to her, and she'll obey on the instant."

"Don't be a young ass!"

"You don't believe it, eh?" asked Willy.

"Of course we don't!"

"All right—watch!" said Willy calmly. "Forward!"

As he issued the command, the Silent Two, with startling obedience, glided forward on her own. The gathering crowd scattered with sudden alarm. This was beyond all belief!

"Halt!" called Willy sternly.

The car immediately pulled up.

"Reverse!" ordered the inventor.

Without hesitation, the Silent Two reversed.

and only came to a standstill at the command of "Halt!" Willy was highly amused, but the other juniors simply couldn't understand it. To them it seemed impossible.

"There's nobody inside, either!" ejaculated Church, gazing over the edge into the empty seat. "I'm dashed if I can understand—Look here, Willy, how on earth do you control it?"

"Watch!" replied Willy mysteriously. "Watch closely! Forward!"

Instantly the car moved—and butted Bernard Forrest severely in the rear. In fact, it pushed him grimly, much to his startled amazement.

"Call it off!" he howled wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Unfortunately the engine joined in the laugh, and ten seconds later the secret was out—and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were out, too. The crowd tried to look as though it had known the truth all the time—and failed badly.

"We might have known it was some of your rot!" said Church gruffly.

"And the next time you try to be funny, I'll tan you!" said Forrest, glaring. "I suppose you thought it was a great joke to butt me like that, you grinning young apes!"

"Don't take any notice of him," said Willy. "Help me to shove the car in the garage, and we'll go and have tea."

"Young idiots!" snapped Forrest ill-temperedly.

His dignity had been offended, and he went indoors in a bad humour. Bernard Forrest was a cad, and his sense of humour was sadly wanting.

"Who's been biting you, Forrest, old man?" asked Gulliver, as Bernard stormed into Study A. "Buck up with that tea, Bell! Just in time."

"That confounded young minor of Handforth's," grunted Forrest, as he sat down. "Fooling about with some contraption of his. The kid's dangerous!"

Gulliver and Bell nodded.

"The best policy is to avoid him," said the latter. "There's something about that little beast which gets on your nerves. He's favoured, too. It makes me sick the way everybody panders to him. Young prig!"

Even if Willy had heard these remarks he would have been unmoved—for he was about the one junior in the Lower School who had no trace of priggishness in his composition. Forrest & Co., on the other hand, were snobs of the most pronounced type.

"Never mind Handforth minor," said Gulliver, as he filled his plate with various pastries, "what about that scheme of yours, Forrest, old man? Weren't you going to tell us about it at tea-time?"

Forrest brightened up somewhat.

"By gad, yes!" he said, nodding. "I'm not fool enough to get upset through that young idiot! My new scheme, eh? I don't mind telling you fellows that it's gilt-edged, and jewelled in every hole."

Gulliver and Bell commenced tea amiably. Bernard Forrest's "gilt-edged" ideas usually

meant unpleasantness for some unfortunate enemy. By reason of their caddishness, the chums of Study A had many enemies. At least, they thought so. Actually, all the decent fellows ignored Forrest & Co. utterly.

"Something against Hamilton?" asked Bell.

"No—nothing like that," replied Forrest. "As a matter of fact, it's about the Test match on Friday."

His chums stared.

"But you're not interested in cricket!" said Gulliver.

"That's just where you make a mistake," retorted Bernard. "I'm so interested in cricket this week that I'm giving it my whole attention. It's the fourth match of the series of five, and England's already lost two. If they lose this next match the Ashes are gone."

"That's true enough," admitted Bell impatiently. "But why should we bother about the silly business? It's so dashed kiddish! Young England v. Young Australia! What a lot of rot!"

The rest of the school, however, did not share Bell's opinion. The idea of playing a series of minor Test matches was regarded as a brain wave. And Dick Hamilton—who had originally mooted the scheme—was generally acknowledged to be a fellow of massive brain-power.

Young England was really the St. Frank's First Eleven, while Young Australia was made up of various native-born Australian seniors and juniors from surrounding schools. The River House contributed two, Helmford another two, Yexford one, Hazelhurst one, and so on. All these boys were keen cricketers, and they had formed an Australian Test Eleven which made a formidable whole. Even Jerry Dodd, of St. Frank's, was playing against his own school in these matches. For they were battles for national honours.

England was in a critical position. After winning the first match of the series, she had lost the following two. Australia only needed to win the next match, and she would have gained the rubber—three certain wins. The final match would thus lose most of its interest, and this match was to be played at Lord's, too!

So there was every incentive for St. Frank's to fight grimly in this fourth match. A win would mean hysterical happiness to the school—and a loss would result in the deepest depression.

Two victories each would be the tally if Young England beat the Australians in the forthcoming match—and then the great fight for the Ashes would take place at Lord's, before a huge crowd of the general public! It was scarcely any wonder that Edgar Fenton, the Captain of the School, was keeping his men grimly and tenaciously with their noses to the grindstone.

There was an added cause for anxiety this week, too. The big exams. would be held on the Wednesday—the next day—and the school would have no time for anything else but intensive study. Cricket would have to be shelved. For these exams. were of vital importance.

The Head, deeming that the school was pay-

ing too much attention to sport, had decided upon some extra severe examinations, his idea being to take the fellows off their sports mania. All boys who failed to obtain a certain percentage of marks would be barred from games completely until the end of the year—or until they had improved their studies.

"What a lot of rot!" repeated Bell cynically. "The real Test matches are mad enough, without St. Frank's butting in with a kiddish imitation!"

"Better not let the other chaps hear you saying that," grinned Gulliver. "Your life wouldn't be worth a brass farthing!"

Bernard Forrest glared at them.

"When you fellows have finished rotting, I've got something to say," he declared. "There's not one chance in a thousand of our chaps winning this next match, and there's a fine opportunity for me to make a book."

"To do which?" asked Bell.

"Make a book."

"What do you mean—make a book?" said Gulliver. "Why make a book when there are plenty of books on the shelf?"

"If you're trying to be funny, you fool, you'll get knocked off that chair!" snapped Forrest sourly. "This week I'm going to open business as a bookmaker. Understand? From this minute onwards I'm a bookie."

CHAPTER 4.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD IS INTERESTED.



G

ULLIVER and Bell grinned.

"That's nothing new, is it?" asked Gulliver. "It won't be the first time you've taken bets."

"But not like this," replied Forrest. "I mean to go the whole hog this week—and rake in a little fortune. Think of the possibilities! The whole school's mad on this game, and there's not one fellow in a hundred who'll admit that Young England might lose. They'll put their shirts on it. I can take bets at any odds I like to mention."

Gulliver looked dubious.

"You'd better go easy, old man," he advised. "If you go too strong you might find yourself in the cart. I'm not so sure that we SHALL lose. Fenton's as hot as mustard on winning."

"He can be as hot as he likes, but the game's a cert for those Australian chaps," said Forrest. "Of course when I take these bets I shall make a proviso that the whole thing's off in the event of rain, or if there's a draw. The punters will simply get their money back."

"Then you won't be very successful," said Bell.

"Don't you believe it," retorted Forrest. "The barometer has never been so high, and all the papers are predicting another fortnight's dry weather. You can be absolutely certain that this game's going to be played in blazing sunshine. And we're going to lose."

"You seem jolly sure."

"I've got good reason to be sure," said Forrest amiably. "What about all the swotting since the last match. The chaps haven't had half the practice they need. And what about the exams. to-morrow? Why, they'll ruin England's chances, alone! And she lost the last game! My dear asses, if I take these bets I'm absolutely on velvet."

"Everybody is saying that we shall win."

"You're a hopeless idiot, Gully," retorted Forrest. "Of course everybody's saying we shall win. It's a case of the—the wish being father to the thought. There's such a lot of enthusiasm going round that the whole school is kidding itself that there is still a chance of winning the Ashes. It's just optimism—but in their hearts the fellows know differently. They wouldn't admit it for worlds, but the feeling's there."

"In that case they won't bet," said Bell, grinning.

"You silly ape, of course they will," snapped Bernard. "In order to keep up this pretence, they'll back England all along the line. I shall offer good odds, too—five to one against."

"You'll be bankrupt if you have to shell out!"

"Five to one against," repeated Forrest coolly. "If a chap hands me a bob I stick to it if Australia wins. But if England wins, I've got to give him five shillings. Why, it'll be cruelty to animals!"

"You'd better go easy——"

"It'll be a shame to take the money," grinned Forrest. "They're so certain of England winning that they'll swarm round me. By going carefully, I reckon to collect between forty and fifty quid before Friday morning. And that'll be mine, my lad—the whole bunch of it!"

His chums stared.

"Fifty quid!" gasped Gulliver. "But—but you howling ass! You can't take a risk like that! You may be certain that Young Australia's going to win, but cricket's the most uncertain game in the world! Do you realise that you'll be liable to whack out two hundred and fifty quid?"

Bernard Forrest was quite calm.

"The chance is so ghostly that it's not even worth considering about," he replied. "When I take these bets, the money's mine! That's the whole joke. The fellows won't see it, but after England's lost they'll be so jolly miserable that they'll forget their little bets, and I shall be O.K."

"They won't forget the bets if England wins!" said Bell, pouring himself out another cup of tea. "And then what will you do? You won't have any capital to pay out with——"

"Don't be an infernal ass!" snapped Forrest, frowning. "I tell you this thing's a cert., and I'm going to make a little fortune. Besides, I've got another idea."

"Oh!" said Gulliver. "Something up your sleeve?"

"Exactly," said Forrest. "Pass the fish-paste, Bell, you greedy glutton! Yes, I've

got something up my sleeve. I suppose you know that Fullwood has been selected for the Test Eleven?"

"Yes, I saw his name on the list," replied Gulliver. "Rather surprising, too, after getting out for a duck in the last match——"

"He's improved no end since then," put in Bell. "He's so jolly hot that Fenton has decided to play him—and De Valerie has been dropped. De Valerie's gone right off colour during this last week."

"It's no good talking to me about cricket form," said Forrest. "All I know is that Fullwood is going to play—and Fullwood's the man we can get at. At one time he was pretty keen on making books himself."

"You're mad!" said Bell, staring. "Fullwood's different now—he's as goody-goody as any of the others. Why, in the old days, when he was our pal—before you came—he was always backing horses and taking bets from other chaps. But he's chucked it all up."

"But a fellow is always liable to slide back a bit—if he's stroked in the right way," replied Forrest cunningly. "I mean to have a shot at him directly after tea. We'll get him out on the river, and put it to him sweetly and gently."

"You'll be simply wasting your time."

"We'll see about that," said Forrest. "Of course, I shall swear him to secrecy, and make the proposition in confidence. That'll seal his lips in case he refuses. And I shall offer him twenty quid for his services."

"What services?" asked Bell blankly.

"Perhaps we can persuade him into playing a rotten game on Friday and Saturday," explained Forrest. "That'll make doubly sure. One man in a team can mess up the whole game. In both innings he can fail, and he can do some rotten fielding. A missed catch has lost many a match."

"But Fullwood won't listen to that sort of stuff!" protested Gulliver. "You can offer him a hundred pounds, and he won't——"

"I happen to know that he's jolly short just now," interrupted Forrest. "And this goody-goody pose of his is only pretence. The other chaps look up to him, and he likes to keep up the fiction. In his heart he's unchanged. And if he can get twenty quid without any of the other fellows guessing things, he'll bite. Just you leave him to me."

"By gad, I believe you're right!" said Bell. "And it would be rather rich if we took old Fully back into the fold, eh? There's always been something missing since he left us."

"Oh, has there?" growled Forrest, glaring. "I've always had an idea that you chaps liked me heaps better than Fullwood. Personally, I don't care a snap for the cad! I just want to make use of him."

After tea, as Forrest & Co. were leisurely strolling towards the boat-house, luck favoured them. For Ralph Leslie Fullwood hove in sight, bat in hand, and flushed with exercise. He hadn't had his tea yet, for he had been hard at work at the nets—glorying in the knowledge that he had been selected for the all-important game.

"Just the chap we wanted to see," said Forrest, walking up. "Feel inclined for half an hour on the river, Fullwood?"

Fullwood halted.

"If it's all the same to you, I feel more inclined for a cup of tea," he replied easily. "Sorry, but there's nothing doing. Besides, although I'm not a particular chap, there's a certain limit, you know."

Forrest grinned; he couldn't afford to be offended.

"Cheese it," he said. "It happens that I've got a decent proposition to put before you, old man. I expect a quarter of an hour will be long enough. It's all to your advantage, too."

"A proposition?" repeated Fullwood curiously.

"A sort of idea," replied Forrest. "I can't explain it here—it's private. If you want to know the truth—if you need a hint—I can tell you confidentially that it's got something to do with Pitt's sister."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood looked grim.

"Confound your nerve!" he said hotly. "I don't like to hear her name on your lips, Forrest. You'd better go easy—"

"I haven't mentioned her name yet," interrupted Forrest tartly. "But if you don't want to hear any more, we'll drop it. Only I thought I'd give you the first opportunity of giving her a surprise. You're rather keen on her—"

"Drop that!" snapped Fullwood.

He stood there, frowning, his curiosity awakened. What on earth did Bernard Forrest mean? He couldn't very well leave the matter in its present unsatisfactory state. It only took him a moment to make up his mind.

"All right," he said gruffly, "I'll come with you."

"There's nothing I'd like better," replied Fullwood promptly. "But if you've got any dirty trickery to suggest—"

"Don't be in such an infernal hurry," interrupted Forrest. "Before I say anything further, I want to tell you that this is purely confidential. Understand? I want your word that you'll treat it as private."

"You can keep on wanting!" retorted Fullwood smoothly. "I'm not making any compacts with you, Forrest, and if you're telling me something in confidence it's your concern. If I want to speak about it to anybody I shall speak. So you can tell me or not—just as you like!"

Forrest bit his lip. He hadn't expected his would-be dupe to be quite so indifferent as this. Gulliver and Bell were trying to look unconcerned, but they were clearly indicating their thoughts. "I told you so" was written all over their faces. And Forrest frowned.

"But this business is very private—" he began.

"All right, go ahead!" said Fullwood. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to explain things instead of wasting time? You're going to show me how to make twenty quid? That's fine! I happen to be broke at the moment, so nothing could fit in better."

Fullwood had a sudden idea. He was deeply suspicious of Bernard Forrest, and he was inwardly resentful. The conviction was upon him that these cads were about to propose some unsavoury plan. And it hurt him deeply to realise that they thought him capable of falling for it. His whole character had so utterly changed of late that he rather prided himself that his past was forgotten—dead. All the decent fellows, at least, treated him on an equal footing, and took his honour and integrity for granted.

But Forrest & Co.—the fools!—still believed that he was a cad at heart. Well, it might be quite a good idea to lead them on. He wanted to hear what this precious scheme was. And by pretending to be sympathetic he would probably get all the details. But he didn't swear himself to secrecy. He wasn't quite such an ass as that.

"Yes," he went on thoughtfully, "I'm broke. Twenty quid, eh? I'd be willing to do quite a lot of things to get twenty quid, Forrest."

Forrest shot a glance of triumph at his chums, and felt easier in mind. Fullwood's mood changed, too. Now that he had definitely decided to lead Forrest on, he immediately commenced acting his part. He assumed an air of interested attention, but he did not make the mistake of appearing too eager.

"Well, there's nothing much in the suggestion," said Forrest. "As far as you're concerned, there'll be absolutely nothing to do."

"And I'm to get twenty quid for doing nothing?"

"Exactly."

"This sounds like a dream—but go on," said Fullwood amusedly.

"Well, you've been chosen for the Test



CHAPTER 5.

FULLWOOD ENJOYS HIMSELF.

THE boat glided lazily with the current. The River Stowe was very charming at this point, with the June sunlight percolating through the foliage of the overhanging trees. The boat was a comfortable one, too, with soft cushions and plenty of space. Bernard Forrest and Fullwood lounged in the stern, and Bell was lazily pulling at the oars.

"Well, what's the great scheme?" asked Fullwood smoothly.

"To begin with, you'd better forget that bit about Pitt's sister," smiled Forrest. "I only said that just to get you in the boat. Wasn't a bad stunt, was it?"

"You confounded fraud!" said Fullwood hotly. "If that's the kind of trickery you're capable of, I'll get ashore—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Forrest. "Don't get huffy, you ass—this thing's important. How would you like to make twenty quid for yourself?"

match, haven't you?" asked the leader of Study A. "You're playing for St. Frank's against these Australian chaps on Friday. That's definitely settled, isn't it?"

"Definitely."

"Fullwood, old man, what's the good of fighting against hopeless odds?" asked Forrest persuasively. "You know as well as I do that England doesn't stand an earthly chance."

"She'll have a pretty hard fight," admitted Ralph Leslie.

"A harder fight than she can manage," declared Forrest. "As that's the case, you won't be letting your side down if you play—well, badly. It won't make any difference to you, but it might make a difference to me."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Fullwood maintained his air of calmness. Was it possible that Bernard Forrest was hinting that he should be treacherous to his side? Could Forrest really believe that he could dupe him into acting the traitor? Fullwood wanted to smash his fist into Forrest's face and pitch him into the river. But it was just as well to be sure first.

"If we lose the match it won't hurt me personally, of course," he said slowly. "At least, I shall only be disappointed like the rest of the fellows."

"But you'll admit that Australia is certain to win?"

"I'll admit nothing of the sort."

"But, my dear man, it's obvious!" protested Forrest. "Those Aussies have been practising continuously, and they're in tip-top form. But St. Frank's is completely off colour."

"As I said before, we shall have a fight for it," declared Fullwood. "But the St. Frank's eleven isn't in such a rocky state as you imagine, Forrest. But we needn't continue the subject. What's that you said about playing badly?"

"Well, I've got a bit of a scheme on," said Forrest vaguely. "It would be worth my while to hand you twenty quid if you lost your wicket for about two or three runs in the first innings, and for a duck in the second. And you might fumble any catches that came your way, and be a bit slow in returning the ball when you're fielding generally."

Gulliver and Bell prepared for trouble. Bernard Forrest had come out with the scheme bluntly and plainly now. He thought it was best to do so, for hints weren't of much use.

Fullwood sat there thoughtfully, frowning slightly, considering the matter. And Forrest breathed more freely. He was right. This chap hadn't altered his nature, as most of the other fellows assumed.

Forrest didn't know that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was keeping his fists down by a sheer effort of will-power. He didn't know that Fullwood was fairly itching to hurl himself into battle. But this was the actual truth. Fullwood had two reasons for being hotly enraged.

Firstly, if ever a fellow deserved smashing,

Forrest deserved it. Secondly, this very proposition was a slur upon Fullwood's character. Bernard Forrest actually believed that he could entice a member of the St. Frank's first eleven from his duty to the team!

The poor, pitiful fool! The unscrupulous young blackguard! It was rather a wonder that Fullwood didn't disfigure his face on the spot. Only the bitterness in Fullwood's heart averted this catastrophe. Rank, startling bitterness. Even now, after all this time, some people were ready to believe that he was still a conscienceless cad!

While Forrest & Co. thought that their companion was considering the proposition, Fullwood was actually living in the past. He remembered how he had fought against his other self—that self which had made him commit actions which he now regarded with loathing. He remembered his struggle against the school's prejudice, and he had always thought that he had emerged victoriously. For many weeks now he had assured himself that he was accepted as a fellow of decent and honourable conduct.

Yet Forrest & Co. believed it possible that he could return to his former discreditable ways!

It was a shock for Fullwood, and he was rather stunned by it. He remembered Forrest's reference to Reggie Pitt's sister, too. By Jove, it was really Winnie who had started him on the right road! Winnie's interest in him had awakened his finer points, and her friendship had finally killed those traits which had formerly made him such an outsider. By Jove, what would she think if he ever showed any signs of backsliding? Why, for her friendship alone he would keep himself decent. And in every other way he was learning that true happiness only came by taking the straight road.

And these cads—these unmitigated rotters

"Well?" asked Forrest casually.

"Eh?" said Fullwood, with a start. "Oh, yes! I think you've put it bluntly enough, Forrest. What you want me to do is to sell the game, eh? Sell it for twenty quid!"

Forrest flushed.

"No need to put it like that!" he growled. "There's no question of selling the game. We're bound to lose against those Aussies, whether you play badly or not. That's just the whole point."

"If we're bound to lose, why are you generous enough to offer me twenty pounds?"

"Oh, well, there's nothing like making doubly sure," said Forrest hastily. "I'll give you ten quid now—if we shake hands on the deal—and ten quid after the game."

Bernard Forrest had already made up his mind that Fullwood would never see the colour of that second tenner. For after the game it would be impossible for him to explain what he had done, and when he demanded his money he simply wouldn't get it. Forrest was not troubled with any scruples.

"But what's the exact idea?" asked Full-

wood bluntly. "No, I don't want a cigarette, thanks. You know I don't smoke."

Forrest withdrew the proffered case.

"You used to smoke," he said, with a slight sneer.

"I used to do all sorts of things," replied Fullwood. "Perhaps I shall do all sorts of things again."

"The things" which Fullwood meant were not quite the things which Forrest understood him to mean. But this was a little tangle which would very shortly be straightened out.

The cads of Study A all lighted their cigarettes, and Fullwood lolled back on his cushions while the boat drifted peacefully downstream.

"That's the way I like you to speak," said Forrest eagerly. "Good man! Now we can get to business, eh?"



CHAPTER 6.

AN UNEXPECTED CATASTROPHE.

IRENE MANNERS, of the Moor View School, chuckled gleefully as she settled herself in the stern of the graceful little canoe.

"Well, of all the nerve!" said Winnie Pitt indignantly. "You've calmly settled yourself there, and I'm supposed to do all the paddling, eh?"

"It's wonderful exercise," smiled Irene.

"All right, we won't fight about it, but you've got to paddle back," said Winnie. "And that's where I've got you. It's much easier paddling with the current, old girl!"

"You artful bounder!" said Irene, with a start.

The two Moor View girls were just off for a half-hour on the river. It was certainly a delightful evening for canoeing, and both girls were looking charming in their tennis frocks and school blazers. They were hatless, and their bobbed hair was shimmering in the sunlight—Irene's golden, and Winnie's dark and wavy.

"I do hope St. Frank's wins this next Test match," said Winnie, as she plied her paddle. "Reggie's in the team, you know, and he's going to throw himself in the river or something if his team loses. That's how he was talking last night, anyhow."

"Ted's pretty desperate, too," nodded Irene. "I've never seen a fellow so enthusiastic. He won't even dream of the possibility of the Australians winning."

"Ralph's just the same," said Winnie brightly. "I say, isn't it ripping? I never hoped that Ralph would play in this fourth Test match—after he had been dropped in the others, too. I'm sure he'll make a wonderful score, Irene."

"Of course you're sure," chuckled Irene. "You couldn't imagine Ralph doing anything else, could you?"

Winnie flushed.

"Well, you're just the same about Ted," she said challengingly. "I've told Ralph that I'm sure he'll do splendidly. Hallo! Look out! Some of the fellows, I believe."

The canoe had just glided noiselessly round a bend, and a boat was in sight. The girls looked at it with interest, and recognised Forrest & Co. at once. And then Winnie started and turned rather pale.

"Oh!" she murmured, nearly dropping her paddle.

There was a fourth fellow in the boat—Ralph! She couldn't possibly fail to recognise him, and he was evidently on the friendliest possible terms with these cads!

"That's the way I like you to speak!" came Forrest's voice across the still water, with a note of eagerness in it. "Good man! Now we can get to business, eh?"

"As soon as you like," replied Ralph Leslie Fullwood languidly. "In fact, the sooner I get to business the better!"

"By Gad!" said Gulliver. "It's like old times!"

"Rather!" agreed Bell enthusiastically. "Hallo, what—"

He had just caught sight of the gliding canoe, and stared at it. The girls were smoothly floating past on the current, and they had both heard every word of the last few moments' conversation. A haze of smoke was hovering over that boat, too, and Winnie could see the cigarettes in two of the juniors' mouths. She could hardly be blamed for assuming that Fullwood was smoking, too. And it was only possible for her to put one construction on the words she had unwittingly overheard. How could she possibly guess that Fullwood was merely egging these rascals on?

It wasn't merely the words either, it was the whole appearance of this affair. Fullwood was plainly on the best of terms with Forrest & Co., and they were all lounging idly in a boat smoking. And they were obviously plotting something, too. It was a great shock for Winnie. She had pictured Fullwood at the nets strenuously practising for the coming game.

Fullwood himself caught sight of the girls a second after Bell had done so. It was a huge shock for him, too. He turned pale, and was utterly confused.

He had only accompanied these rotters in order to probe their baseness, and hadn't thought of the possibility of Winnie coming along. He hastily raised his cap.

"Hallo!" he said eagerly. "I didn't know—"

He broke off, freshly startled. For Winnie not merely ignored him, but she gave her head an angry toss and looked the other way. She plied her paddle vigorously, and the canoe sped onwards. It was the cut direct, and from the one girl that Fullwood most admired!

"I say!" he gasped, swinging round. "Winnie! Just a minute, you know. This isn't—" He broke off again, realising the

futility of his words, for the canoe was out of earshot. "Hang!" he muttered. "Hang and confound!"

"No need to get wild," grinned Forrest. "These girls are all the same——"

"Take that grin off your face!" roared Fullwood violently.

The grin vanished.

"Steady!" gasped Forrest. "What on earth——"

"She—she thought that I was hobnobbing with you cads!" ejaculated Fullwood hoarsely. "She thought—— By Gad! She believes that I've gone back to—— You—you——"

He broke off, realising that he was mainly to blame. He had been a fool for pandering to his curiosity in the first place. But Forrest and these others were proposing a dirty act of treachery, and he made up his mind that they should receive the reward they deserved.

"Get to the bank!" he snapped, glaring at Bell.

"Hang it all——"

"Get to the bank!" thundered Fullwood dangerously.

Bell was so scared that he shipped an oarful of water all over Gulliver, and the boat rammed its nose into the reeds amid general confusion. Bernard Forrest was standing up now, vaguely uneasy. He had an idea that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was angry. The change in him was startlingly abrupt, and he was red with fury.

He leapt ashore, and Forrest followed. The others jumped out of the boat, too, and stood round staring with alarm.

"What's come over you, Fully?" asked Forrest. "I thought we were going to discuss that little scheme——"

"You—you miserable fools!" panted Fullwood. "Great Scott! Did you think for a minute that I meant it? Are you mad enough to believe that I was in earnest?"

"But, confound you——"

"I wouldn't have anything to do with your filthy trickery for a million!" roared Fullwood, flinging off his blazer. "I was only leading you on—trying to find out the extent of your rottenness! Betting, eh? Trying to bribe me to sell the game so that you can win your dirty bets? Put up your hands, you blackguard!"

Forrest backed away in genuine alarm. It was a stunning blow to learn that Fullwood had only fooled him. And he was frightened, too. There was every indication that Ralph Leslie meant business.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "I—I didn't mean——"

"If you don't put 'em up in one second I'll smash you!" shouted Fullwood thickly. "I've given you warning!"

"But I tell you I didn't mean——"

Crash!

Fullwood's left came round with devastating force, and Bernard Forrest feebly attempted to guard himself. He failed. He received that punch on the mouth, and went hurtling

over backwards with terrific force. Gulliver and Bell turned to flee.

"No, you don't!" panted Fullwood. "You're all in this together, and you're all going to——"

"Smash him!" snarled Forrest, leaping to his feet. "On him, you fools! We're three against one! We can wipe him up!"

It sounded good, and Gulliver and Bell made a fierce attack. A minute later they were exceedingly sorry for themselves. Fullwood was in such a blinding rage that these three were no match for him.

Crash! Thud! Biff!

With bewildering rapidity Fullwood's fists lashed out. Right—left—right—left! And every punch went home. Forrest & Co. fairly howled, and within that short period they were transformed.

Forrest's mouth was bleeding, and he was booked for a black eye. Gulliver's nose was tapped, and Bell was reeling about with an ear which would ultimately become thick. They were hurt in other ways, too.

"You—you toads!" gasped Fullwood furiously.

Crash!

A final blow ended the battle. Forrest got it on the nose this time, and he lost his balance, staggering backwards blindly. He collided with Gulliver; they sagged towards the river bank, and they fell in as one. With a terrific splash they disappeared below the surface, and came up spluttering desperately.

"Good!" panted Fullwood. "That was an unrehearsed effect, but it couldn't have been better. Take my advice, and sink! That's all you're worth!"

He turned on his heel and strode away—satisfied in one respect, but greatly alarmed in another. He didn't even glance round to watch Forrest & Co. crawling limply out of the shallows.

His mind was filled with one thought. At all costs, he had to find Winnie Pitt, and explain matters!



CHAPTER 7.

LEAVE IT TO HANDY!

THE more Fullwood thought of the situation, the more he worried.

Of course, there was really nothing in the affair, and he buoyed himself up with the hope that Winnie would accept his explanation. Yet he had to confess that appearances had been very much against him. It would be rather awkward to explain that he had been merely pretending. Still, it had to be done, and he would have to trust the girl to credit his statement.

Winnie had had a great influence over Fullwood ever since he had changed. He had been willing to go to any length in order to maintain her good opinion. And now this tragedy had occurred! Of all people on this earth, she had been the one to see him in a situation which looked positively conclusive.



A final blow ended the battle. Forrest got the full weight of Fullwood's fist on his nose, and he staggered blindly backwards. He collided with Gulliver, and with a terrific splash they toppled over the bank into the river. "Take my advice, and sink!" growled Fullwood. "That's all you're worth!" Then he turned on his heel and strode hurriedly away.

But he didn't regret his action.

He had discovered the trend of Bernard Forrest's game, and he would be able to warn quite a number of fellows of Forrest's intentions. He had also had the satisfaction of thrashing the cads. His knuckles were still sore, and he was looking dishevelled generally.

He didn't quite know how to find Winnie. Perhaps it would be better to go straight to the Moor View School, and wait. But that would be awkward. She might not be back for some time, and he was wanted at the nets. Fenton would ask all sorts of pertinent questions if he failed to turn up, and he might even lose his place in the Eleven. Fenton wasn't the kind of fellow to put up with any slackness at a time like this.

In this quandary, he was delighted to see two figures in the distance as he rounded a clump of willows. Winnie Pitt and Irene Manners had pulled their canoe into the bank, and were now sitting on the grass. He easily guessed that they were discussing him.

"Thank goodness!" he muttered, as he broke into a run.

The two girls saw him at the same moment, and quickly jumped to their feet. But before they could get back into the canoe, Fullwood had come breathlessly up.

"I say, Winnie!" he panted. "Just a minute——"

She turned upon him coldly.

"I'd rather you didn't use my first name, if you please," she said, with flashing eyes.

"And I don't want to speak to you again, either."

"Oh, but I say!" protested Fullwood. "You don't understand——"

"I understand quite sufficiently."

"You don't!" said Fullwood. "Look here, Winnie, the whole thing was different to what you thought. For goodness' sake let me put this right! We don't want any misunderstandings."

"I've got two eyes, and I couldn't help using them," replied the girl. "And I've got two ears, too. So you'll only make matters worse if you try to explain something that CAN'T be explained."

"It CAN!" persisted Fullwood desperately. "Just listen for one minute——"

She turned her back on him, and Irene caught her arm.

"Only a minute, Win!" she murmured. "Perhaps there's something we don't know about. Give him a chance!"

"Thanks, Irene," said Fullwood quietly.

"It's no good," said Winnie, turning again. "For a long time now I've thought that you had thrown those cads over. I'm not trying to preach to you, Ralph. You can choose your own friends. But please remember that I'm terribly disappointed, and that I'd rather not speak to you again."

She walked off, and Fullwood clenched his fists. Irene started to say something, but ran after her girl chum. And matters were complicated just then by the appearance of Doris Berkeley and Marjorie Temple. They didn't

come near Fullwood, but stopped talking with the other two girls.

"My hat! What a mess!" muttered Fullwood miserably.

Winnie's condemnation had cut him to the quick, not merely because it was undeserved, but because it hurt so deeply. She had such a good opinion of him, and now it was shattered. And a few words of explanation would put things right. But would they? Fullwood began to doubt if he would be believed, even if he explained the whole position.

At least, he could put it to the test. He ran up to the four girls, and faced Winnie. Irene and the other two were looking alarmed.

"It can't be true!" Doris was saying.

"It's not true," put in Fullwood quietly. "Those cads were trying to get me to do something shady, and I simply went with them to encourage them. I wanted to hear their proposition, and pretended to be interested. That's the whole truth."

"And I suppose you had to smoke, too?" asked Winnie.

"But I wasn't smoking!" denied Fullwood warmly.

"Well, anyhow, you can't deny that you were on very friendly terms with those other three," said Winnie coldly. "Why, I even heard what you said. You wanted to get to business, and there was some reference to old times—"

"When I said that I wanted to get to business, I meant that I was itching to punch their faces," explained Fullwood desperately.

But even as he made this statement he realised how thin it sounded. It was perfectly true, however—although Forrest & Co. had not accepted the real purport of the remark. And how could Winnie believe this flimsy explanation, in face of what she had actually seen and heard?

That was the worst of it. If the girl had been angry and unreasonable, Fullwood might have felt less alarmed. But he knew that she was justified in believing the worst. The thing had looked pretty awful. And this was especially the case, when Fullwood's earlier record was brought into consideration. Ralph Leslie was bitterly realising that one's past is always liable to crop up.

"Please, Ralph, will you let the matter end here?" asked Winnie quietly. "This—this wrangling is dreadful. And it won't do any good, either. It's—it's hateful to seem priggish, and it's not my business whom you make friends with. Perhaps those other boys aren't really bad, and if you've made them your chums, why should I criticise? But please don't speak of this again."

Fullwood breathed hard.

"Hang it, I can't let you think these things!" he burst out. "I tell you it's a misunderstanding. You're coming over to tea to-morrow—"

"I'm sorry," interrupted Winnie, "but I shan't be able to."

Her manner was cold, and she turned aside. Before Fullwood could think of anything further to say, she and the other girls went off.

He was left standing there, pale and troubled.

"It's no good," he muttered. "I might as well talk to a brick wall! And I can't blame her, either. My hat, what a mess!"

In spite of his misery, the call of duty was strong, and he knew how important it was to get back to the nets. He would have to dismiss this unfortunate affair for the time being, or he would be right off form. Even now he was afraid that he would spoil his chances for the big match.

He hurried back to St. Frank's, and was entering the playing-fields when he met Handforth. The leader of Study D was looking particularly pleased with himself. Willy's motor-car had proved a fiasco, and he had had the satisfaction of taking Irene to Bannington and back.

"Hallo, where did you spring from?" asked Handforth genially.

"Just come from the river," grunted Fullwood.

"Seen anything of Irene?" asked Handforth. "She was going on the river in a canoe, with Winnie, after we got back—Hallo! What on earth's the matter? Have you been fighting or something?"

"Had a bit of trouble with Forrest and those other cads."

"Good man," said Handforth heartily. "I'll bet you made them feel the rough side of your knuckles! But there's something else, isn't there?" he asked, staring. "You're looking as miserable as sin!"

"Oh, it's nothing," muttered Fullwood.

"That's a fib—and you know it!"

"Yes, I suppose it is a fib," admitted Fullwood slowly. "It's something pretty big. Handy. But you wouldn't understand—and I don't want to bother you with my troubles, anyhow. Thanks all the same, old man."

Handforth was a fellow of aggressive action. He grabbed Ralph Leslie, swung him round, and held him firmly.

"Now then—out with it!" he snapped. "None of this rot! What's the trouble? Anything to do with cash? If you're short, I've got plenty of tin. Just say the word, and—"

"No, no—it's not money," muttered Fullwood.

"Worrying about the exams.?"

"Of course not."

"Afraid you'll be chucked out of the Eleven before Friday?"

"Don't be an ass!" growled Fullwood.

"It's nothing to do with money, or cricket, or anything. There's been a misunderstanding, that's all. Winnie thinks— Oh, hang! Can't you dry up? I didn't mean to say—"

"Winnie, eh?" interrupted Handforth shrewdly. "A bit of a bother, I suppose? You ass! I've had the same troubles! These girls are all the same—they never understand a chap! As a matter of fact, I've had my whack at the nets, and I'm going up to the Moor View School soon—"

"You are?" put in Fullwood eagerly.

"Of course I am!" said Handforth. "Just tell me what the trouble is, and I'll smooth everything out! Rely upon me, old man! If

there's any matter of tact that needs handling—"

"That's just it," growled Fullwood. "I'm not so jolly sure of your tact, Handy! You're a good old scout, but you might make things worse."

"If you're asking for a black eye—"

"Don't be touchy, you ass!" said Fullwood. "But you know what girls are—especially when they get on the high horse. Winnie thinks I'm a cad, and if you go and make excuses for me—"

"Excuses?" interrupted Handforth, staring. "What the dickens have you been up to?"

"Nothing, I tell you!" roared Fullwood. "Great Scott! Are you ging to misunderstand me now? And I've got to be at the nets, too! I can't stop here jawing— Oh, I suppose I'd better tell you!"

He did so, and Handforth listened with changing expressions. He became red and angry when he heard of Bernard Forrest's proposition; he became alarmed when Fullwood described how the canoe had glided up; and he beamed joyously as he heard of Forrest & Co.'s fate.

"Fully, you're one of us!" he said heartily. "By George! So you smashed 'em up generally, and tipped 'em all into the river, eh? Good! It's a pity I wasn't there to help—"

"Never mind about them, interrupted Fullwood. "It's Winnie I'm worrying about."

"Winnie?" grinned Handforth lightly. "Why, you chump, leave that to me! I'll explain the whole thing, and you can go ahead with your practice without a trace of worry. When it's a matter of explaining things, I'm a master hand!"

And Handforth was so full of enthusiasm, and he spoke with such confidence, that Ralph Leslie Fullwood went to the nets with a light heart.



CHAPTER 8.

HANDY, THE PEACEMAKER!

"O H, sorry, Win!"

Mary Summers paused in the doorway of Winnie Pitt's study, at the Moor View School. Mary had just come in, having been over to tea with some friends in the neighbourhood. She found Winnie sitting near the open window, with a handkerchief in her hand. And her eyes were looking so suspiciously moist that Mary wondered.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" she asked tentatively. "I believe you've been crying, Winnie."

"Yes, a bit," admitted Winnie, rather taken aback. "It's nothing, Mary."

Irene came in just then, and gave Mary a nod.

"I shouldn't bother about her now," she said softly. "Had a bit of adust-up with Ralph Fullwood. Of course, she couldn't do anything else—after what happened. I'm only wondering if he was telling us the truth."

"A row?" asked Mary, pained. "Oh, but why? You and he were such friends, Winnie."

"Come to my study, and I'll tell you about it," said Irene, taking Mary's arm. "You don't mind, Win, do you? It's only fair to tell Mary everything. She's bound to hear from the others, anyhow."

Winnie tried to smile.

"It's all ridiculous," she protested. "I mean, it's a storm in a teacup. Anybody might think that Ralph was somebody important. I rather liked him, I'll admit, but there's no need to make a fuss over it. Now that I've found him out I shall know what to do in future."

"Found him out!" echoed Mary. "But Ralph's a good sort! He's playing in this next match—"

Irene gently took her out, and closed the door. And Winnie, who felt that she had been perfectly ridiculous in shedding tears, glanced at her reflection in the mirror, and mentally decided that she looked a fright. This was a libel, for, in spite of her reddened eyes, she was quite charming. She didn't like to admit, even to herself, how miserable she felt.

Discovering Fullwood with the Study A cads had given her a big shock, and, although she tried to be just, it seemed impossible to her that Ralph Leslie's explanation could be truthful. It was so palpably thin—just the thing he would say to excuse himself. The evidence of her own eyes and ears were far more conclusive.

She heard a swish of wheels outside on the gravel, and glanced out of the window. A smart little Austin Seven had driven in, and had just come to a halt. Edward Oswald Handforth was hopping out, and there was a fixed, determined light in his eye. Handforth, the peacemaker, had arrived!

Unfortunately, Handforth had decided that brusque measures were necessary. It was no good being gentle with a girl who believed such silly rot about a decent chap like Fullwood! Hadn't Handforth himself believed Fullwood's story without question? Then why shouldn't she?

Violet Watson was just coming out of the porch as Handforth strode up, and she paused to greet him.

"Where's Pitt's sister?" asked Handforth fiercely.

"Well, you needn't bark at me!" said Violet, with indignation.

"Sorry! I didn't mean to!" said Handforth, turning red. "But I'm here on important business, and—"

"You'll find Winnie in her study," interrupted Violet coldly. "But you mustn't go in without permission from Miss Bond. You know how particular she is—"

"Irene's told Miss Bond that I'm coming, and there's no time to bother, anyhow," interrupted Handforth firmly. "Which is Pitt's sister's study?"

"The third on the left down the passage."

"Thanks!"

Handforth's manner was still curt and grim.

He felt that he was doing well—that he was adopting exactly the right tactics. It didn't strike him that it was rather thick to barge into a girl's school for the express purpose of treating Winnie Pitt to a fatherly word of advice.

A few discreet words, and an earnest explanation of the simple facts would probably have made all the difference to Winnie—who was already wondering if she hadn't made a mistake. But no girl of fifteen would submit to a lordly lecture from a boy of her own age.

Handforth strode purposefully down the passage, and tapped upon the door of Winnie's study. Winnie thought that somebody was using a coal-hammer on the panels—for Handy's idea of a tap was unique. He nearly caused the panels to bulge inwards.

"Come in!" cried Winnie, in alarm. "What ever is the matter?"

Handforth flung the door open and stalked in. He was so intent upon his purpose that he forgot to remove his cap—an unforgivable sin in a girl's study.

"Oh, there you are!" he said, eyeing Winnie severely. "Good! I've just come here to explain things about Fullwood. Don't you think it's a bit steep to condemn the poor chap without any hearing?"

"Did Ralph ask you to come?" asked Winnie coldly.

"Of course he didn't, but——"

"Don't you think it would be polite if you took your cap off?"

Handforth grabbed at it, apologising awkwardly, and in his confusion he sat down on Winnie's crochet-work. However, he arose with singular speed, gave a wild gasp, and extracted the steel crochet-hook from his anatomy.

"My hat!" he panted. "I—I didn't see— Sorry! Hallo, it's dropped on the floor. Blessed if I can understand why you lumber up the study with this silky cotton stuff."

He picked up Winnie's crochet, failing to observe that he was treading on the end of the cotton, and several inches of the work became swiftly unravelled. He gazed at it in alarm, and in attempting to mend matters, he merely unravelled another few inches.

"Give that to me!" cried Winnie angrily. "Oh, look what you've done! It took me hours to make up that pattern, too!"

"Pattern?" repeated Handforth blankly. "It looks all the same to me! I thought these things were made on a sewing-machine! You don't mean to say you do it all by hand? What a giddy waste of time!"

"Will you get out of this room?" asked Winnie hotly. "I didn't ask you to come here, and it's like your cheek——"

"Hold on!" gasped Handforth. "About Fullwood, you know. You've treated him pretty badly. If you'll listen to me for two minutes I'll explain exactly why he was with those cads, and then I want you to give me a note, so that I can prove to Fullwood that you're keen on him again."

"Keen on him!" repeated Winnie breathlessly.

"Well, you know—sweet," said Handforth blunderingly. "You two have always been a bit spocny—— I—I mean, whenever Fully hears your name he generally goes sort of soft. I suppose you look the same when you hear his name. But that's only natural. And if you haven't got enough faith in your own friend, it's a pity! You ought to be boiled—— Er, Sorry! That is to say, you ought——"

"Oh, this is too bad!" exclaimed Winnie, flushing deeply. "How—how dare you!"

"How dare I what?" asked Handforth, who hadn't the faintest idea that he had said anything wrong. "And what are you getting so hot about? Don't I keep telling you that Fullwood is a fine chap?"

"And I suppose you stick up for him?" asked Winnie fiercely.

"Rather!"

"You agree with what he did?"

"I should say I do!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "I only wish I had been with them at the same time. There's nothing I'd have loved better than to join in the fun!"

Cross purposes again! Winnie thought that Handforth was referring to the lounging in the boat—but Handforth was thinking of the scrap.

"I don't want to hear another word!" said Winnie, going to the door, and pulling it open. "If you don't go away, Handforth, I shall call Miss Bond. You're just as bad as Ralph! Have you become friendly with Forrest, too?"

"Friendly with Forrest?" asked Irene, who was passing down the passage. "Why, Ted, I didn't know you were here!"

"I'm just ticking Winnie off," explained Handforth. "She's so jolly obstinate that I can hardly get a word in edgeways. I wish you would have a go, Irene!"

"Oh, it's no good," said Winnie helplessly. "Everything seems to be getting worse, Renie. Ted agrees with everything that Ralph did, and I believe he's just as bad!"



CHAPTER 9.

THE FATAL DAY.

IRENE MANNERS⁴ opened her eyes wide.

"But—but I don't understand!" she said.

"Surely Ted doesn't think that Ralph was right in doing what he did? We saw him with our own eyes, and we all know very well that——"

"Yes, but you were all wrong!" interrupted Handforth. "It's just like you girls to get hold of the wrong end of the stick! My sister's just the same. You can talk until you're blue in the face, and she's as obstinate and pigheaded as ever!"

"Oh!" cried Winnie angrily.

"So we're obstinate and pigheaded?" asked Irene, adopting her chilliest manner.

"If you've only come here to make a quarrel, Ted, I think you'd better go. It's quite obvious that you're just as bad as Ralph. So it'll help matters a lot if you don't speak to me again!"

Handforth was so aghast that he blundered again.

"You're mad!" he roared in his excitement. "You're clean dotty! Why, you silly asses, I'll——"

He broke off, horrified. For the moment he had used the terms that he hourly employed at St. Frank's, for habit is a slave. Then he suddenly came to earth, and gave a wild gulp.

"Sorry!" he gasped. "I—I didn't mean—— Oh, my goodness!"

"I'm ashamed of you, Ted," said Irene coldly. "I thought you had better manners than this! You come here like a bull in a china shop, and insult all of us! And you won't make matters any better by trying to explain. We know all about Ralph, and we think even less of him for asking you to come here——"

"He didn't ask me!" denied Handforth. "I offered——"

"Well, you only made yourself look ridiculous, and I don't want to speak to you!" interrupted Irene angrily. "I'm not going to be called pigheaded by you, or anybody else."

"I—I didn't mean——"

"Will you go out, or shall we hustle you out?" asked Irene. "It wouldn't look very dignified, would it—a great big fellow like you being driven out by us girls?"

Handforth, in great distress, vainly attempted to do what he should have done at first—explain Fullwood's unfortunate position in its true light. Naturally, the girls wouldn't listen to him now, and they flatly refused to let him talk. They were really annoyed, Irene particularly. She was afraid that Miss Bond would come along and punish them all. For Handforth had been making quite a commotion.

In the end he was obliged to leave with the whole affair in a far more unsatisfactory state than it had been at first. Winnie was still bad friends with Fullwood, and Irene had told Handy that she didn't want to speak to him again! Handforth was so miserable that he walked half-way back to St. Frank's before he remembered that he had left his Austin behind. So he had to retrace his steps and get it.

Fullwood was waiting in the Ancient House lobby, cricket practice being over. Most of the fellows were now hard at work in their studies—fiercely swotting up for the last time before exams.

"Well?" he asked eagerly.

"It's no good," said Handforth, glaring. "I told you what girls are! I warned you that I shouldn't be able to do any good——"

"What!" snorted Fullwood. "You told me that you would put everything right, you hopeless chump! What an idiot I was

to let you go! I'll bet you've made things twice as bad!"

Handforth laughed bitterly.

"It wouldn't matter if they were only twice as bad," he groaned. "They're fifty times as bad! Irene's finished with me now!"

"I'm not a bit surprised," said Fullwood tartly. "You're such a blundering ass that I suppose you made a hash of the whole business? Didn't you tell Winnie——"

"I told her everything, but she never wants to see you again," growled Handforth. "And Irene ticked me off, and pushed me out! The whole thing's awful! We're both in the cart! It wouldn't matter if we were really guilty, but I hate these misunderstandings. Goodness knows when the girls will speak to us again!"

Fullwood shrugged his shoulders and went back to Study 1, where Clive Russell, the Canadian junior, discreetly confined himself to his work. He knew the facts, but he needed no telling that Handforth's efforts had met with disaster.

And this affair, arising from such a trivial cause, developed into a surprisingly big disaster—for Handforth and Fullwood. That evening they couldn't concentrate on their swotting, and even their sleep was affected. In consequence of this they awoke on the morning of the fatal day, heavy and depressed.

The whole school was sitting for these exams., and it was therefore to be a day of concentrated work. And as such a lot depended upon the result, seniors and juniors alike were determined to put forth their best efforts. Nobody could afford to be half-hearted to-day!

As the exams. were quite special, they would all be over on this one day, and it was generally believed that the results would be known by the Friday morning—the first day of the Test Match. So it would be one long continuous period of stress and anxiety.

Handforth and Fullwood were therefore handicapped. They needed all their wits about them to apply themselves to their task with the necessary amount of concentration. And yet, when they commenced this eventful day, their thoughts were filled with the happenings of yesterday.

Everybody else was forgetful of cricket, of sports, of pleasure. The only hope of success was to plunge headlong into the intricate work, and think of nothing else.

But many times during the morning Handforth and Fullwood strayed. They lost grip, and then remembered, with a sudden start, that there is no quarter when sitting for an examination. A certain amount of time for one subject—and then the opportunity has gone for ever. When a fellow lags in an examination, he cannot make up for lost time later in the day. He is judged by the results of the hour.

Handforth was a greater culprit than Full-

wood. For the latter thrust his unhappiness aside by the afternoon, and managed to apply his wits in the right direction. But poor old Edward Oswald was so harrassed that he made a hopeless mess of everything. He wasn't a particularly brilliant scholar at the best of times, although he had made certain of muddling through these exams. As it was, his prospects were murky.

It wasn't that Handforth and Fullwood had any silly feelings with regard to Irene and Winnie. They were just good friends. It cut them to the quick, however, to think they should have lost the girls' respect.

Winnie believed that Fullwood was a cad—that he had been backsliding. And Irene had come to the conclusion that Handforth upheld him. Edward Oswald's activities of the previous evening, alone, had been sufficient for Irene to "cut" him!

It wasn't until the evening, when the exams. were all over, that Handforth's gloom really asserted itself. And then he fairly descended into a slough of despond, and sat huddled up in the study easy-chair, staring moodily in front of him.

Church and McClure could do nothing. They questioned him in vain, receiving only grunts in reply. They were both alarmed and unhappy—for they knew how absent-minded Handforth had been during the day, and they were fearful of the consequences.

"He's done for himself now," said Church, shaking his head. "He won't get ten marks out of a hundred, and that'll mean the chopper! He'll be debarred from all sports and games!"

"I'm not sure he won't be sacked!" said McClure miserably.

Handforth sat there, heedless.

"Let's get out of here," muttered Church. "Let's go and see how Fullwood's getting on. I don't believe he'll get many more marks than Handy! They're both in the same boat. And all because of those girls! It's enough to make a chap sick, all this fuss over a couple of silly girls!"

They found Fullwood in the Common-room, tucked away in a corner, all by himself, pretending to read a magazine. He wasn't showing his inner feelings in the same way as Handforth, but he was obviously unhappy.

"Yes, I'm afraid things are very bad," he admitted, when Handforth's chums questioned him. "Now that it's too late, I realise that I've been an idiot. But I couldn't get the hang of these exams. to-day. I expect I shall fail."

"Well, Handy's about twice as bad," said McClure, with a long face. "I say, is it worth while? About those girls, I mean—"

"Oh, shut up!" grunted Fullwood.

"Can't we do something?" asked Church. "Anything's better than this torture. We're mainly concerned about Handy, of course. If you could suggest anything—"

"Yes, I'll suggest something," interrupted Fullwood grimly. "Take a tip from me, my lad, and don't try and do any peacemaking!

Look at Handforth's horrid example, and learn by it."

"Yes, but we should act more tactfully."

"All the same, don't try it," warned Fullwood. "It's bad enough to deal with the chaps, but you've got to be so jolly careful with girls. For goodness' sake let the thing rest. I dare say it'll all come right in time."

"In time!" groaned McClure. "What's the good of that? To-day's Wednesday, and the Test match is the day after to-morrow! Handy won't be fit for anything, except the lunatic asylum!"

"Cheer up!" said Fullwood, with his usual irony. "We were dished out of our half-holiday over these exams., but we're getting it on Friday instead. There's always something to look forward to in this world!"

CHAPTER 10.

THE INEVITABLE.



RALPH LESLIE FULL-

WOOD kept to his resolve, and made no attempt to go near the Moor View School, or have any com-

munication with Winnie Pitt. He strongly advised Handforth to follow his example with regard to Irene—and Handforth, for once, agreed that it was a good idea.

As a matter of fact, they were both deeply hurt.

By the following day their misery had gone, and they were now merely resentful. It was a bit hard that the girls could think such beastly things of them. One day, perhaps, they would be sorry. It was far better to adopt an air of indifference, and forget the whole business.

But this was easier said than done, particularly as the girls made no attempt to come near St. Frank's. Willy obligingly offered to try his own hand at peacemaking—and he would probably have been successful—but his offer was curtly declined.

By this time Forrest & Co. had more or less recovered, and were themselves again, except for some facial traces of Fullwood's fistic prowess. But Bernard Forrest was in the most amiable of tempers.

Handforth and Fullwood made a very poor showing in a practice match that day, and lots of fellows were predicting that they would be dropped out of the Test team on the morrow. Their form had deteriorated tremendously, and Fenton would never allow them to play. Forrest, on the strength of this, was doubly convinced of Young Australia's third successive win, and he was making far more bets than he had even hoped for. So far as he was concerned, everything was going beautifully.

But he received a bit of a jar in the evening, for both Fullwood and Handforth, alive to the fact that they were in danger of losing their places, suddenly found their form again. They were now in a state of semi-fear, lest they should be dropped—and at the nets, in

a final trial, with Fenton looking on, they made certain of their places. Handforth not only slogged with all his usual force—he fairly let himself go. He was grim and desperate, and he gave a display that pleased Fenton highly. Fullwood showed fine form, too, and they were both feeling happy when they went to bed that night.

"We're safe for the game, anyway," said Fullwood contentedly. "I've heard that the exam. results won't be published until Saturday—and, even if we've come a hopeless mucker, they can't bar us from the game, once we've started play."

"Thank goodness for that," said Handforth.

But another shock came on the morrow—directly after prayers. St. Frank's was feeling serenely joyous, for this was a kind of gala day—a half-holiday with a Test match on the programme. And the weather was behaving itself in strict accordance with the prophet's predictions. It was hot and sunny, without any prospect of rain.

The headmaster made a brief announcement from the platform, and the school listened placidly. The exams. were over, the tense anxiety had gone, and the whole of St. Frank's was feeling lazily serene.

The Head made a few comments on the big match, and wished the school luck in its big battle. Then he announced that a certain number of boys had failed very noticeably in the exams, and he proposed to post a list of the names in each House later in the morning.

However, on the whole, he was delighted with the school's performance, and was convinced that the exams. had been a great success. He was quite certain that he had been fully justified in his programme, and was only sorry that a certain percentage of boys had failed to obtain the necessary marks. Naturally, these boys would be strictly forbidden to partake of any sports.

The whole test had been applied with the object of subduing the mania for games, and, consequently, those boys who failed would be obliged to attend study until their standard of knowledge had reached the average. Under no circumstances would any members of this minority be allowed to elude the order. And, moreover, it was in force from that moment.

It is scarcely necessary to add that Fullwood and Handforth were in several kinds of a funk, but their period of suspense was not long. The lists were up almost at once, and their own names were there! But for the fact that they were surrounded by other fellows, they could have sat down and cried.

After their good work last night at the nets—after Fenton had definitely selected them—they were now barred from playing by the Head!

And it was all the more galling because their swotting had been genuine—they were well able to obtain the necessary marks. Without any question, their quarrel with Irene and Winnie was solely responsible for this tragedy.

Handforth was simply bowled over.

"But—but this is all rot!" he said despair-

ingly. "It's mad! Fully and I could have passed under ordinary circs.—"

"It's no good, old man," said Fullwood quietly. "Don't get excited. It's our own fault entirely, and we've only got ourselves to blame."

"Hear, hear!" said Dick Hamilton warmly. "You two ought to have had more sense than to worry over trifles."

"Trifles!" roared Handforth. "How would you like it if Mary Summers cut you dead, and thought all sorts of horrible things about you? Wouldn't you worry? Is that what you call a trifle?"

"Well, of course, I should feel it," admitted Dick. "Perhaps I might be a bit upset, too—"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "You'd have made a mess of the exams., too! We ought to go to the Head—"

"He won't make any exceptions," groaned Church.

"But we're chosen for this Test match," said Handforth eagerly. "Surely, he'll let that stand? He won't mess the team up, and make it impossible for England to win? What can Fenton do without ME?"

Dick Hamilton shook his head.

"The Head's not going to listen to anything like that, old man," he said gently. "A rule is a rule. And I dare say Fenton will find a couple of men to take your places—without jeopardising the game, either. You can't tell the Head that you've failed in the exams. because of two girls, can you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared round at the callous juniors who laughed.

"Yes, you can cackle!" he grunted. "What do you care? I suppose we shall have to attend morning lessons with the rest of the chaps now. Oh, my hat! What a life!"

They went and reported to Fenton, and the school captain looked grave.

"Rough luck, young 'uns," he said. "You can't play, of course."

"But we're fit, aren't we?" asked Handforth fiercely.

"Yes. I shall be sorry to lose you—"

"Then why not go to the Head, and ask him if he can make a concession?" suggested Fullwood. "Hang it, the proper results aren't published yet. Nobody knows how many marks they've got. It's not fair to bar us until the results are properly out."

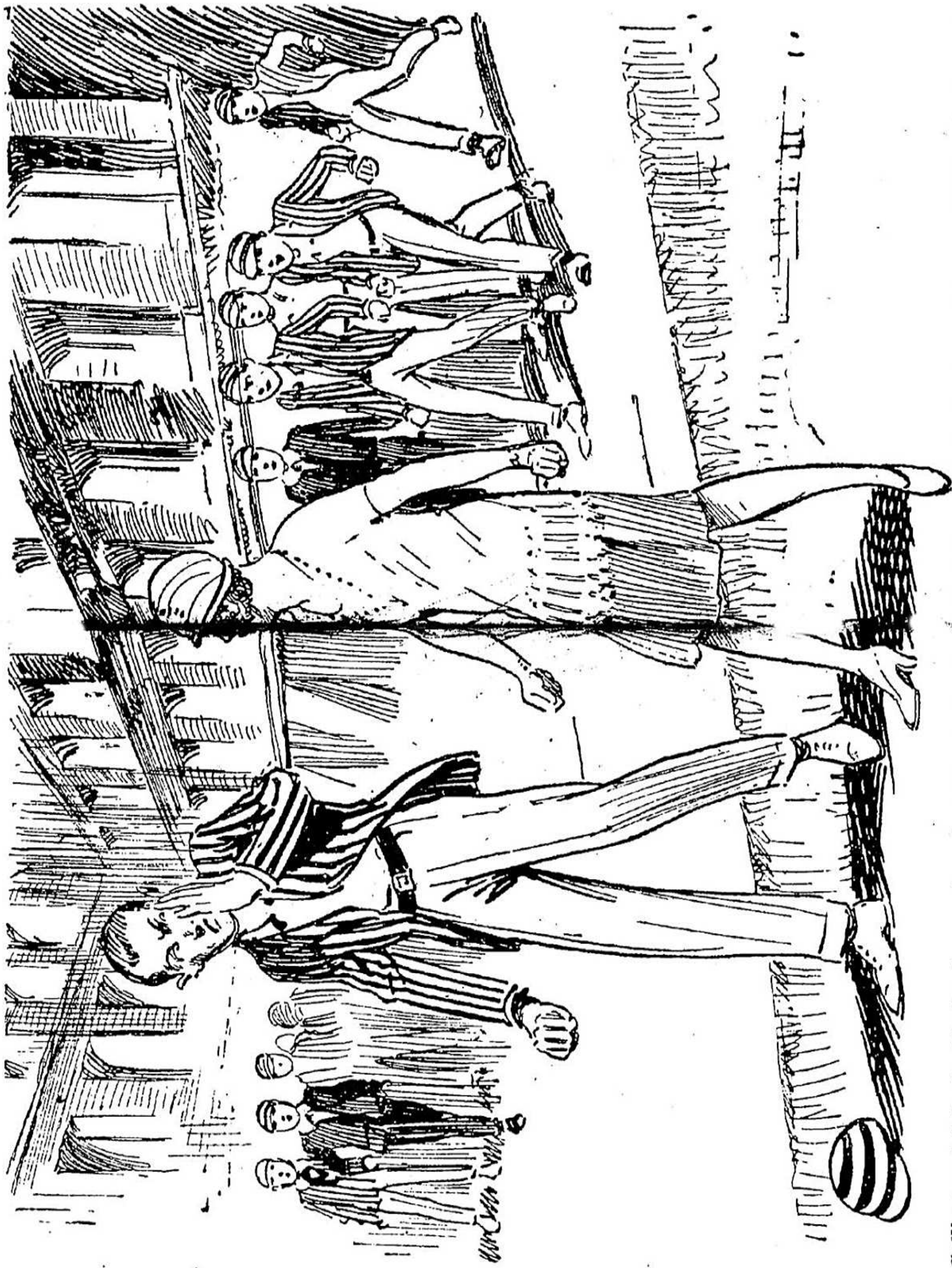
"I'll try," said Fenton dubiously.

He did try, for, if possible, he wanted his Test team to remain undisturbed. But Dr. Stafford was quite firm. He had made his announcement that morning, and he was not departing from it.

"Have you no other cricketers, Fenton?" he asked. "You are surely not admitting that these two junior boys are indispensable?"

"Well, I've got Frinton and Reynolds, sir," admitted Fenton. "They're both in the Sixth, and they're both good men. But those two juniors have already proved their worth, and Handforth is particularly useful."

"I can't understand Handforth," said the Head, frowning. "I really expected him



Gulliver reeled back, his hand pressed against his cheek, when Winnie's openpalm had caught him. "Will you tell me the truth?" she asked breathlessly. From the corner of his eye, Gulliver glimpsed a horde of fags bearing down on him. They must have seen everything! The cad had got himself thoroughly into the cart this time!

to do much better. Mr. Crowell tells me that he is amazed at Handforth's papers. They are not merely poor, but positively atrocious. No, Fenton, I can't make this concession."

So Fenton could do nothing but report this decision to the unhappy pair, who received it with groans of anguish.

"We might as well crawl away and die," said Handforth in a hollow voice. "What's the good of living?"

"If you want to end it all, don't do anything violent in this study," said Fenton drily. "There are plenty of dark corners about. But, seriously, you fellows, I'm cut up about this. We can't blame the Head, but we can certainly blame you. Why in the name of all that's mad did you neglect your swotting? The Head tells me that your papers are too ghastly for words, Handforth."

Edward Oswald had had a suspicion of this. "I don't remember much about the exams," he confessed dolefully. "Oh, what's the use? Let's get out of here, Fully—we're outcasts! No more games for weeks and months—"

"Don't you believe it," said Fullwood grimly.

Outside, they walked away with misery written all over them.

"Think of it!" burst out Handforth. "No cricket—rotten reports to our people—and bad feeling between us and the girls! Why, after this we shan't live at all. It'll just be a hopeless existence!"

CHAPTER 11.

WILLY SPEAKS HIS MIND.



B

ERNARD FORREST chuckled gleefully as he fingered a heavy pocketful of money which nearly caused his trousers to sag.

"Forty-five quid, all told," he chuckled. "During these last two days I've been on the rush from morning till night—in every House, too! And these mugs think that they're on a cert.!"

"You've taken an awful risk," said Gulliver, rather alarmed.

"Rats!" grinned Forrest. "Young England's in a hopeless position now—without Fullwood and Handforth. I see that Fenton's using Frinton and Reynolds as substitutes, and they're both duds!"

"They're big chaps in the Sixth, anyhow," said Bell.

"Size doesn't count in cricket," retorted Forrest. "I'm just off to the East House to grab another quid or two—one or two clients over there are waiting for me."

He hurried away in high good humour. Naturally, the fellows who used Bernard Forrest as a bookmaker were either the "fast set" or the weaklings. None of the decent men would look at him. Not that Forrest wanted them to. He was reaping a rich harvest from the mugs.

Mr. Crowell acted with surprising generosity. He was frankly amazed at the



Gulliver reeled back, his hand pressed against his cheek, "What's the truth?" she asked breathlessly. From the corner of his eye he saw that she must have seen everything! The cad had

failed in the failure of Fullwood and Handforth, and knew that there must be some hidden reason. They were so worried, too, that he took pity on them. Why, Forrest & Co. had come through the exams. with more marks!

"I'm not asking you boys to take me into your confidence," said Mr. Crowell quietly, as he spoke to the pair just before lessons. "But I must confess that I am shocked at your poor showing. If there is any adequate reason—such as being unwell, or—"

"It was our own fault, sir," interrupted Fullwood awkwardly. "We might have done better if we had concentrated. As it is, we've got to face the music. That's all, sir."

"It's a great pity, boys—and I cannot tell you how sorry I am," declared the Form-master. "And now you have the added misfortune of being debarred from the Test match. I rather think that the Head might have deferred— Ahem! Perhaps we had better not discuss the point. However, since I feel that you will both be useless in class this morning, I shall not press for your attendance."

He walked off, and Handforth and Fullwood looked at one another.



Finnie's open palm had caught him. "Will you tell me the driver glimpsed a horde of fags bearing down on him. They tumbled themselves thoroughly into the cart this time!"

"By George, he's a good old stick!" said Handforth warmly. "He's excused us from lessons! And think of the way we've ragged him sometimes!"

"He's a brick!" said Fullwood heartily.

It was indeed a consolation for their bitter disappointment. At least they would be able to watch the start of the match and see their colleagues in the field. And at about this time, Fenton was greeting the freshly-arrived Australian team, and having a word with Beaton, the skipper.

"Two of my men are unable to play," he was saying. "They're quite fit, but the Head's got a bee in his bonnet about sports, and as they made a poor showing in Wednesday's exams., they're barred."

"What rotten luck," said Beaton sympathetically.

"Fullwood and Handforth are the two——"

"Handforth, eh?" said Beaton. "That slogging young demon! Why, Fenton, he's one of your bonzer batsmen! I don't mind admitting that I'm just a bit relieved—although we've come here to whack you and collar the Ashes, whoever you play!"

Fenton smiled.

"Rummy thing," he said, "we've decided to win the Ashes, too—and by to-morrow evening we'll be on level terms, Beaton. Two wins each, eh? But about Handforth and Fullwood. Perhaps the Head may relent—one never knows—so I want you to regard them as in the Eleven."

"Why, of course," agreed Beaton. "That's only fair."

"They'll be on hand, in the pavilion, all the time," continued Fenton. "If the worst comes to the worst, I shall play Frinton and Reynolds in their places. But if they're suddenly released, you won't object to them playing, will you?"

"My dear man, they're in the Eleven, so what have I got to object to?" asked Beaton, smiling. "I'd rather they played all through. I don't want any feeling that Australia is being favoured, you know."

The point was settled, and Fenton felt slightly more comfortable. He was a cautious captain, and always believed in being prepared—not that he had any real hope that the unfortunate pair would be freed from the ban.

Young England was anticipating some luck in this match. It was inevitable. In the last game they had met with all sorts of minor misfortunes, and Fenton had committed the worst crime of all by failing to win the toss.

"Of course, Fenton won't be such an idiot this time," remarked Morrow, as the fatal moment arrived. "He can't lose twice in succession. I mean, there's a limit to such insanity."

Edgar Fenton, however, caused a loud groan to go up by foolishly spinning the coin so that it came down heads. And Beaton, the cunning rascal, had called "heads." So Australia had won the toss again!

"Sorry!" said Fenton, as he met the grim-looking team.

"And so, Brother Fenton, you ought to be!" said William Napoleon Browne severely. "What of my advice? What of my stern, unbending orders? Alas, you go out upon the green and deliver this stunning blow!"

"Just our luck, of course," said Fenton, smiling. "Not that it matters so much this time. The weather looks like keeping fine, and the wicket won't deteriorate much."

"Let us trust that you are a true prophet, brother," nodded Browne. "I take it that we now must go out beneath the sweltering sun, and allow ourselves to be baked while the Australians score sundry centuries."

However, St. Frank's wasn't entirely dissatisfied with the day's play. Australia batted well, but not sensationally, and collected the businesslike total of 246. Browne and Fenton were in great form, the Australians declaring that their bowling was hotter than ever before. Dick Hamilton took two wickets, too, and there was nothing much to grumble about.

The Young England innings was very much the same, and within an hour of close of play they were all out for 232. Only 14 below the Australian total, and both Frinton and Reynolds had cracked up.

Everybody was delighted—particularly with

the great William Napoleon Browne—who, carrying his bat practically through the innings, made an individual score of 103, not out. With Fenton making 52, and Morrow 27, the other members of the team had not been called upon to perform miracles.

Before the day's play finished, however, Australia had made a good start towards their second innings, being 93 for no wickets.

"The bounders mean to give us the fight of our lives," said Fenton that evening. "If we only had Fullwood and Handforth playing, we might serape through. But I've no faith in those substitutes."

"They're both Sixth Form men——" began Morrow.

"What on earth does that matter?" interrupted Fenton irritably. "Look at the score sheet! Reynolds 2—Frinton 5! That's a fat lot of good, isn't it? Those two juniors couldn't do worse than that if they deliberately tried! And Handforth's the very man we need for run getting."

The game, in fact, was in a most interesting state—for nobody could predict how it would end. There was no collapse on either side, and as the weather was settled, it would be a straight fight to the finish.

Forrest was still confident, although he was inwardly anxious. He hadn't expected Young England to do so well. But he was still convinced that his money was absolutely safe.

Handforth and Fullwood were a little happier, too. It galled them to see the insignificant scores of Frinton and Reynolds, although they even got a little consolation out of this, for the lordly Sixth had to sing very small. Fenton's policy of playing juniors in the First Eleven was overwhelmingly justified.

The Moor View girls had kept strictly away from St. Frank's. At least, Irene Manners and Winnie Pitt had failed to appear. Others had watched the game during the evening, but nothing had been said about the recent quarrel.

By chance, Willy happened to meet the pair near the gates of the Moor View School early on the following morning. He was giving his Silent Two a run, although he had changed the engine. Owen minor and Dicky Jones had made a wager of two ice-cream cones that they could develop more horse-power than the other engine. And Willy was giving them a trial.

But he couldn't resist the opportunity to have a few straight words with Irene and Winnie. He had offered to act as peacemaker, and his offer had been refused. It was too late now, for the damage had been done, but for his own satisfaction Willy felt like speaking out. He wasn't liable to make the same blunder as his major.

And he felt Edward Oswald's position

deeply. He knew how keen his major was on cricket, and he knew what a dreadful disappointment Edward Oswald had received. He hadn't been himself for days.

"Just a minute, you girls," said Willy quietly.

Irene Manners and Winnie Pitt were looking none too cheerful themselves. Being girls of nice disposition, they had a vague feeling that the fault was mainly theirs. But they didn't know how to rectify the position. It was surely not up to them to approach the boys.

"We've got to go in, Willy," said Irene.

"No, you haven't," retorted Willy. "You can give me five minutes, anyhow. There's something I want to say—and I want to say it badly. Just a minute."

He climbed out of his strange car, and gave Owen major brisk instructions to take the driving wheel and shift the Silent Two a hundred yards down the lane. The "engine" was now rather lopsided, but it functioned satisfactorily.

"No need for those chaps to listen-in," explained Willy, after the Silent Two had gone. "The fact of the matter is, I'm going to tell you off!"

"Oh!" said Winnie coldly.

"Don't you realise what you've done?" went on Handforth minor, with a glare. "Don't get in a huff and accuse me of being cheeky. I'm just telling you the straight truth. You've committed a beastly injustice, and Fullwood and poor old Ted are nearly dotty with worry."



CHAPTER 12.

AN ACUTE POSITION.

"We acted as we thought right," said Irene angrily. "How dare you accuse us of——"

"There's no question of daring," interrupted Willy.

"When a thing's right it's right, and there's an end of it. You're the worst, Winnie! Without any real cause you jumped to the conclusion that Fullwood had gone back to his old pals. Of course, the whole thing's potty——"

"But we both saw Ralph," interrupted Winnie, "didn't we, Renie? We not only saw him, but heard him."

"Didn't he explain to you that it was all spoofer?" asked Willy indignantly. "Why, all the St. Frank's chaps believe him and take his word. Why shouldn't you? Just because you saw him I suppose? Seeing is believing, eh? Well, you can't always trust to that maxim."

"Ted made things twice as bad by coming to our school and making a fuss," and Irene coldly. "In fact, there can't be any doubt now. And Winnie and I are as determined as ever."

"My hat!" exclaimed Willy, breathing hard. "They say that girls are obstinate, but I'm blessed if you don't take the cake."

ANSWERS

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Do you know that those poor chaps made a hopeless hash of the exams.?"

"Did they?" asked Irene, with concern.

"A hopeless, horrible hash!" said Willy. "Ted in particular. And why? Not because they weren't prepared, but because the exams happened the day after that quarrel. They were so worried about it that they couldn't concentrate. And they've come nowhere!"

"We—we didn't know this," said Winnie, with deep anxiety.

"Of course you didn't," said the fag. "You've kept away from St. Frank's as though it were contaminated, and you've left Fullwood and my major to mope in their misery. And that's not all! You know the penalty for failing in the exams., don't you?"

"Your Headmaster said that all boys who failed to get a certain number of marks would be barred from sports," replied Irene. "Oh, but you don't mean— Win! Ralph and Ted aren't playing in this game! But it can't be that they've been barred—"

"Can't it?" interrupted Willy. "Well, it can! It is! Those chaps were selected for the Test eleven, but owing to their awful showing in the exams. they've been forbidden to play games. And it's all your fault."

"Oh!" exclaimed Irene indignantly. "How can you say that, Willy?"

"We won't stand it!" cried Winnie hotly.

Handforth minor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, try and see if you can make the facts any different," he said, with a sniff. "Goodness knows, I don't want to have a row with you girls. I like you tremendously. As a rule, you're a couple of jolly good sorts. But you can't deny that you're absolutely to blame in this affair."

He felt so strongly on the question that he wouldn't trust himself to speak further. So he raised his cap and walked off. The two girls glanced at one another with angry eyes and went in the other direction.

"Oh, Win, I wonder if he's really right?" asked Irene, in a low voice. "Wouldn't it be simply dreadful if Ted and Ralph have been suffering like this unjustly!"

"Renie, I've got an idea that we are wrong," said Winnie, shaking her head. "And I think we ought to do something, too. St. Frank's haven't played their second innings, and that's the most important. Perhaps, after school—"

She broke off and bit her lip. Reggie Pitt's sister was looking very worried. Somehow there was something about Willy which couldn't be ignored. He was so downright straightforward that he couldn't have spoken to them in that way unless he had had full justification. It wasn't in his nature to stand up for a fellow who was in the wrong.

In the meantime, Willy went back to St. Frank's feeling that he had at least cleared the air a bit. He had no desire to act as a peacemaker, for very wisely he knew that peacemakers usually get themselves into hot water and make matters generally worse. He had spoken to the girls in order to relieve his own mind.

And that morning he needed some relief, too. For Young Australia proceeded to make certain of the match. In the Third Form class-room poor Mr. Suncliffe was in a dreadful state of anxiety. Mr. Suncliffe took cricket with intense gravity, and he was dearly hoping that St. Frank's would win this game.

"It's no good, sir, we're whacked," said Willy, just before twelve o'clock. "Beaton and that other Aussie chap are still in, and not a single wicket has fallen."

"Can you see the score, Handforth minor?" asked Mr. Suncliffe.

"Yes, sir—127," replied Willy, whose eyesight was keen.

"Good gracious!" muttered Mr. Suncliffe. "This indeed looks serious!"

In his agitation he allowed the Third to dismiss almost at once, and he fairly ran out to the pavilion to watch the game. By the luncheon interval Mr. Suncliffe was in a state of acute misery.

Young Australia was defying all the bowling.

One hundred and fifty-seven for no wicket! Beaton had scored 67 off his own bat, and he looked well set for his century. The St. Frank's bowling was just as good, but these two Aussies were set, and they were making a wonderful first-wicket stand.

"It's disgusting!" said Handforth indignantly. "Those two Cornstalks, or Gumsuckers, or Croweaters, or Sandgropers, or whatever they are, have had the nerve to defy our bowlers since last night! Imagine it! An hour yesterday, and all this morning, and still they're in!"

"Awful!" agreed Fullwood dolefully.

Beaton and his partner had been batting with that grim deliberation which is most exasperating to watch, but which secures the runs. There was nothing spectacular in their display, but they were certainly a match-winning pair. And Beaton had set his heart upon making sure of the Ashes.

It would be all very nice to leave the issue in doubt until the final match at Lord's, but in these Tests there was no quarter. And if the Australian schoolboys could secure the honours now they were going to grab while the grabbing was good.

It was scarcely any wonder that St. Frank's was in a hopeless mood when the game continued after luncheon. By the look of things, Australia would go right ahead and make it impossible for St. Frank's to win.

However, Beaton was dismissed by Browne's very first delivery, and St. Frank's began to breathe again. The school not merely breathed, but yelled when Browne's next ball shattered the new batsman's wicket. Cricket is ever an uncertain game, and there was never greater proof of it than this afternoon.

Within fifteen minutes four wickets had gone west, and the total had only been increased by three runs. One hundred and sixty for four looked a lot better than 157—0.

Whether his success had encouraged him or

not, it was an undoubted fact that William Napoleon Browne became utterly deadly. During the afternoon he took no less than six wickets, and three of them completely removed the middle stump on each occasion.

And five minutes before the tea interval Australia was all out for 324. The tail had not collapsed. Far from it. All the Australian fellows had batted with determination, and the score was eloquent of their prowess. The St. Frank's bowlers had been compelled to exert themselves very strenuously in order to dismiss the team.

Young England's task was formidable.

"It looks a pretty hopeless case, but we'll do our best, anyhow," said Fenton grimly. "We need 339 to win, and we've only got a limited amount of time. There's only one thing, you fellows—we shall have to go all out for runs. It's going to be a race, and the odds are all against us."

The team wasn't particularly optimistic.

A total of 339 was an exceptional one, and it seemed almost impossible that Young England could make such a score. Only by very rapid run-getting could the task be accomplished. It was far more likely that the Australian bowlers would dismiss them for a nominal total, and win the match by a good margin of runs.

Bernard Forrest was naturally in high feather.

"What did I tell you?" he chuckled

exultantly. "Wasn't my judgment sound from the very beginning? England's got no more chance of winning this match than we've got of burgling the Bank of England. Those bets of mine are safe."

"You're a cute bounder," said Bell enviously. "Of course, your money's safe. How about lending me a fiver?"

"I could do with one, too," said Gulliver eagerly.

Forrest laughed.

"Wait until this evening," he replied. "We'll have a regular spree in Study A after the match, and if I'm feeling in a happy mood I might spring you a quid or two each. But there's nothing doing now."

Handforth and Fullwood were feeling just a little consoled. Perhaps they had had a lucky escape after all, for it wasn't very pleasant to be members of a losing side. In their hearts, however, they were both longing for the chance to take their knock.

Five minutes after the Young England innings had opened it seemed that fate had finally sealed the result. Fenton and Morrow opened as usual, and they both went all out for runs. Morrow hit a boundary, then he secured a three, and then Fenton hit another boundary. But with the very next delivery he was out. Caught in the slips!

A groan of anguish went up from all sides.

Edgar Fenton out—and the innings had hardly commenced!

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CHAPTER 13.

WINNIE TAKES A BOLD COURSE.



REGGIE PITT shook his head. "The fact is, Winnie, I don't know anything about it," he confessed. "At least, I don't know any of the details. We've been so jolly busy this week, what with exams. and cricket practice, that there's been no time for any personal——"

His sister looked anxious.

"Oh, but, Reggie, do think!" she said. "I wanted to speak to you about Ralph on Wednesday, but I couldn't get away. I saw him with Forrest and those other boys, and I couldn't be deceived, could I?"

"Yes, you jolly well could, sis!" said Reggie promptly. "You can't tell me that Fullwood has been backsliding. Why, if I'd known this earlier I should have done something to patch things up. No wonder he's been looking so miserable! And Handforth, too——"

"It was really Ted's own fault for being so clumsy with Irene," said Winnie. "But that doesn't make any difference to my guilt. I'm feeling awful, Reg. Isn't there something I could do to put matters right?"

Reggie Pitt, who was sitting in the pavilion, looked moodily at the field.

"It's too late now, anyhow," he replied. "We've lost the Ashes, and the Fifth Test match at Lord's will be merely an ordinary game. It's a beastly pity, but it can't be helped."

"And it's my fault!" said Winnie wretchedly.

Reggie couldn't help grinning.

"Don't be so silly, sis," he said. "Fullwood and Handforth are good players, but they couldn't have made much difference——"

"Couldn't they?" challenged Winnie. "If England made a lot more runs in the first innings the whole game might have been different. Even now there's a chance. I'm going straight to the headmaster, and I'm going to ask him to let Ted and Ralph play."

Reggie looked at her in wonder.

"You're going to the Head?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"My dear child, he'll scalp you!"

"He won't!" said Winnie indignantly. "And I'm not your dear child, either! I'll tell him exactly how the trouble started, and if he's just he'll let those two play. Only I'd like to have some proof first," she added thoughtfully.

"Why, aren't you convinced yet?"

"Yes; but I can go to your Head with much more confidence if I positively know," replied Winnie. "Renie will come with me for support, so between the two of us we ought to be successful."

Reggie glanced at the two barred juniors, who were sitting in the front of the pavilion watching the game with glum interest.

"By Jove, it'll buck them up a bit if they can only fill their proper places in the eleven!" he muttered. "Perhaps it's worth trying, Winnie. I wouldn't have enough check to go to the Head like that, but it's different with a girl. Good luck to you! I hope you wangle him."

Winnie left the pavilion in search of Irene. The latter had not cared to come too near in case she met Handforth. There was rather too much publicity for any "making friends" business. And Winnie had succeeded in getting in and out of the pavilion without Fullwood knowing. As a matter of fact, both he and Handforth were intent upon the game.

After Fenton's early dismissal, Morrow was doing wonders, and Dick Hamilton was backing him up brilliantly. They were both scoring freely, opening out well, and mounting up the runs with determined speed. Already the score stood at 53—1. When Dick Hamilton was caught out with 28 runs to his credit, Hussi Kahn took his place, and the cheery Indian junior proceeded to show that he could rise to an occasion.

Winnie Pitt went round the outskirts of the crowd, her mind very far from the actual game. She had heard that Irene was with Doris Berkeley and Marjorie Temple on the other side. But Winnie's keen eyes caught sight of somebody else before she found her girl chums.

Albert Gulliver was walking towards the Triangle alone.

Only for a moment did Winnie hesitate. Then she followed him and overtook him just as he reached the private road.

"Just a moment, Gulliver!" said Winnie firmly.

He turned and looked at her in surprise. Gulliver was thin and weedy, and his shoulders were peculiar for their narrowness. His large ears stood out prominently, and with his thin lips and pasty complexion his features were generally unpleasant. And he was not only an out and out snob, but he possessed utterly no spirit. The one point in his favour was that he always dressed with fastidious neatness.

"Speaking to me?" he asked, staring rudely.

"Yes, I am," replied Winnie quietly. "I think you'll be able to tell me something, Gulliver—something that I want to know. Do you remember being in a boat with Ralph Fullwood on Tuesday evening?"

Gulliver grinned unpleasantly.

"Do I remember?" he repeated. "Of course I do! You came by in a canoe with one of those other girls. Irene Manners, wasn't it? I must say you looked jolly pretty," he added, with a smirk. "As a matter of fact, you look jolly pretty now——"

"That's enough!" interrupted Winnie sharply. "Compliments from you, Gulliver, are not wanted! Why did Ralph Fullwood go with you that evening?"

"Why?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because he wanted to, I suppose," replied Gulliver inanely.

"Did he go of his own accord, I mean?" asked Winnie. "If you don't tell me the truth about this I—I—well, can't you speak?"

Gulliver's grin became more idiotic. As the match was going so badly for England, he was feeling particularly happy, and his cunning brain at once grasped that Winnie was trying to find out the truth about Fullwood. And he had no intention of telling her the truth. He was quite enjoying this conversation, for it wasn't often he got a chance of talking to one of these pretty girls. Now that he came to look at her, Pitt's sister was a ripper.

"Did Fullwood come with us of his own accord?" he repeated. "Why, of course he did. What gave you the idea that he didn't?"

"Was he very friendly with you?"

"Friendly isn't the word," replied Gulliver promptly. "Why, he and Forrest were as thick as thieves—and are now. At one time we thought that Fullwood was becoming goody-goody, but that's all changed. He's gone back to his old pals, and I can tell you we're pretty glad. It's like old times to have him back in the fold."

"Old times"—the very term that Winnie had heard on the Tuesday evening. And Gulliver spoke so glibly that a momentary doubt assailed her. Then she eyed Gulliver more closely. The grin on his face was rather too palpable, and his story of Fullwood's back-sliding was too wholesale. Reggie had told her that Fullwood was unchanged, and Reggie couldn't have been fooled to such an extent as that. So it was obvious that Gulliver was lying.

"I don't believe you!" she said hotly. "I don't believe that Fullwood has become friendly with you again."

"Didn't you see us all together in the boat?"

"Yes: but there was something queer about that—"

"Oh, no, there wasn't, my little spitfire!" grinned Gulliver. "You can't whitewash Fullwood in that way! If you want to know the exact truth, he came to us with a scheme for rooking some of the other fellows at cards, and Forrest thought it was a bit too thick."

"That's a lie!" said Winnie furiously.

"And he tried to conspire with us all the time," went on Gulliver. "My hat! Can't you see through the cad? He pretends to be a saint, and he's nothing but a hypocrite and a fraud! You ought to have heard him in that boat—urging Forrest to fall in with his dirty schemes."

Winnie was breathing very hard. She half-blamed herself for speaking to Gulliver at all, for he was obviously deceiving her. Unless—unless— Oh, but that was impossible! Ralph hadn't gone back to his old friends to such an extent that they refused to help him because his schemes were too caddish.

Gulliver, in fact, completely gave himself away, because he overdid it. He fondly believed that he was blackening Fullwood's character for good, and he didn't seem to realise that he was in the slightest danger.

If Winnie had been a boy she would have knocked him down on the spot. For she was convinced that he was maliciously false. At the same time, it annoyed her to think that she had not been able to extract the real truth from him.

"Fullwood's worse than ever he was before," went on Gulliver, unable to appreciate when he had said enough. "At least, worse from one point of view. Personally, I think he's jolly sensible to chuck up that saintly life. The trouble is, he won't come out into the open. He goes about pretending to be a sportsman, and half the time he's swindling—"

"You've said more than enough!" interrupted Winnie, in a low voice. "Oh, you cad! Do you think I believe anything you've told me? I don't! You're just saying this to injure him. If my brother were here I'd get him to knock you down."

Gulliver roared.

"Little spitfire was right!" he grinned. "I've touched you on the raw, eh? By gad, Fullwood's your special pet, isn't he? Now I come to think of it, you're a bit sweet on him—"

"Will you stop?" panted Winnie, as red as a peony.

"Not likely!" chuckled Gulliver. "Blushing, eh? I don't wonder at it! Won't the chaps yell when I tell them—"

"I'll get the truth out of you yet!" exclaimed Winnie breathlessly. "Oh, you wretch! You—you unutterable cad!"

Crash!

Gulliver was totally unprepared for what happened. After all, she was only a girl, and this was a fine piece of sport. But then Winnie's little hand flashed, and, with her open palm, she delivered such a forceful slap on Gulliver's cheek that he reeled back dazedly.



CHAPTER 14.

THE TRUTH.

GULLIVER had never been so surprised in all his life.

That slap hurt him, too—hurt him in two ways.

His cheek was burning, and the sting of it made him gasp. He wasn't the kind of fellow to bear pain bravely. Furthermore, his dignity was shattered. Slapped! Slapped in the face by a girl! Albert Gulliver nearly fainted.

"You—you spiteful little cat!" he gasped, all his grins gone. "Why, I'll make you pay—"

"You'll tell me the truth about Ralph Fullwood, or I'll slap you again!" said Winnie, her voice trembling with rage. "I'm not afraid of a cad like you! Will you tell me the truth?"

She was so certain that Gulliver had lied, that she was acting with far more force than she had ever dreamed of. For Winnie was usually a quiet, reserved girl, almost without



A terrific uproar sounded at one side of the playing fields, and Forrest came into sight, running for his life. Behind him was a crowd of fellows who pursued him in grim silence. Forrest and the rest disappeared from view, heading for the fountain in the Triangle! Forrest was about to get his just deserts.

a temper. But when she did get angry, there was no mistake about it.

"I've told you the truth!" snarled Gulliver, holding his face. "And if you weren't a girl I'd smash you. It's a dirty trick to slap me like that when I can't hit back— By gad, can't I, though!" he muttered suddenly. "I'm blessed if I'll stand your rot!"

A quick glance up and down assured him that nobody else was in sight. Gulliver possessed no gallantry, and his nature was vicious. He was furious at being slapped, and, after all, Winnie was only a slip of a thing! He'd show her!

"Take that!" he muttered savagely.

Some latent instinct stopped him from actually punching at her, but he gave her a rough push which sent her staggering backwards. A second later he regretted it tremendously.

"You cad!" panted Winnie. "You coward!"

Gulliver thought that a tornado had broken loose. She slapped him right and left, beating him back in the intensity of her righteous anger—and a wave of utter horror came over him as he saw, out of the corner of his eye, that two or three fags were watching in the distance.

"Stop!" he gasped frantically.

"Will—will you tell me the truth?" breathed Winnie.

"Yes—yes!" babbled Gulliver. "I—I was only fooling you just now. Fullwood only came with us on Tuesday evening, because Forrest tricked him into it. He hasn't changed a bit."

Winnie ceased her onslaught.

"Well?" she said breathlessly.

"It was Forrest who made the proposition," moaned Gulliver. "And we found out afterwards that Fullwood was only egging him on—just to see what his game was. In fact, the cad went for us afterwards. Just after you'd gone by in that canoe."

"He went for you?" asked Winnie, her eyes shining.

"Like—like a madman!" said Gulliver, cringing away. "He gave Forrest a black eye and knocked half his teeth out. And he smashed up Bell and me, too. Then he knocked us all into the river—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Winnie, her coolness returning.

She had got the truth now, with a vengeance! This spineless wretch had babbled it all out because she had merely slapped him. And she had been prepared to believe that Ralph was friendly with such an unutterable cad!

She turned away, disgusted, and walked off quickly—eager now to find Irene. She even thought of running straight to the Head alone. But it was better to get Irene first, for two of them would make a stronger party. And Irene was such a cool girl, too!

She entirely forgot Gulliver as she searched for Irene Manners.

"Oh, how unjust I've been!" she murmured anxiously. "I shall never forgive myself for it—never! Poor Ralph was only telling the truth when he explained, and I wouldn't believe him! If he never speaks to me again, I shall deserve it!"

She was wholehearted in her condemnation of herself, and her one purpose now was to set matters right. It startled her when she thought of the train of ill luck which had

followed that quarrel. Both Fullwood and Handforth had muddled their exams.—they had failed to get the necessary percentage of marks—and they were barred from games. And all because she had refused to believe an obvious truth!

In the meantime, Dicky Jones and Owen minor and a few other fags were collected round Gulliver—hemming him in, so that there was no escape. They formed a complete circle, and regarded him with open curiosity.

“Poor little darling!” said Owen minor. “Did he get his face slapped, then?”

“Where’s his mother?” asked Hobbs, looking round.

“He must have lost himself, I suppose,” suggested Dicky Jones. “Hadn’t we better go and tell somebody? Perhaps he’s fallen out of his pram. Rush off, Gates, and get a feeding-bottle!”

Gulliver nearly choked.

“Get out of my way!” he snarled furiously.

“Now, ’oo mustn’t lose ’oo’s ’ickle temper!” said Owen minor, shaking a reproofing finger. “Nursio slapped you for being naughty! All bad boys get slapped!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Did she make you smart, then?” said Dicky Jones sympathetically.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You—you infernal young cubs!” panted Gulliver, looking round wildly. “If you don’t get out of the way I’ll smash you—”

“Cubs!” said Owen minor, glancing at his fellow fags. “Did you hear that, you chaps? Wouldn’t it be rather a good idea to spoil Gully’s suit? He’s too smart to live!”

“Hear, hear!”

Gulliver realised, too late, that he would have been wiser to accept the taunts with a good grace. He was dressed in his smartest suit, and looked resplendent from top to toe. But the next moment the fags swarmed upon him like an army of ants, and he vanished in a smother of dust.

About one minute later he sat up.

The fags had gone, and Gulliver was no longer recognisable. His glorious flannels were torn, tattered and grubby. His hair was like a mop, liberally filled with soil from the neighbouring flower-bed. Several large stones had been pushed down his neck, and he was generally in a state of debris.

Altogether, Gulliver had spent an unhappy half-hour.

The fags, feeling that they had satisfactorily completed the work which Winnie had begun, returned to watch the game. It was well worth watching. Young England was making a bid for victory. Of course, it was a hopeless sort of bid, but that made it all the more creditable.

Many a team would have lost heart, and would have collapsed under the strain. But even Edgar Fenton’s early dismissal did not effect the stoutness of the St. Frank’s Eleven’s fight.

Morrow had gone, and the two batsmen were now Hussi Kahn and Reggie Pitt. And the score stood at 145—3. Pitt was batting

gamely, and Hussi Kahn was already set. And there was nothing slow about the game now. It was a battle against time, and the St. Frank’s cricketers were opening their shoulders and smiting hard. When a hit did come it was generally a hefty one.

But this policy was bound to have one result. The runs came quickly, but the wickets fell quickly, too. Kahn was out next, and the lanky figure of William Napoleon Browne strode out from the pavilion. The school gave him a rousing, heartening cheer.

Everybody had been waiting for Browne—confident that he would give one of his famous displays of fireworks. Browne was the most popular batsman at St. Frank’s, with Handforth a close second. This was readily understandable, for they were both spectacular in their methods. And with the game in such a critical state as this, Browne could be relied upon to do something worth looking at.

A veritable roar went up when he knocked his very first ball into the pavilion. It was a glorious, beautifully-judged drive. There was nothing reckless about Browne. His style was a pleasure to watch, and it was generally acknowledged that he was one of England’s coming bats. He was cool under any circumstances, and the trickiest of bowling never flurried him. No matter what came down the pitch, he was ready for it.

“Hurrah!”

“Good old Browne!”

Clack!

Another boundary—this time clean between the very fieldsmen who had been put on to deal with Browne’s batting. But Browne was always altering his placing, and he had a perfect command of the field.

The fellows were beginning to look at one another with gleaming eyes. Was there a trace of hope, after all? There was time! If only Browne could keep this up, and the other fellows could support him—173—4! The score was creeping up—indeed, it was leaping up.

But then the gleams died away. One hundred and seventy-three looked quite good, but there were 339 runs required. And the remembrance of this fact cooled the enthusiasts. Hope was practically dead when two more wickets fell in rapid succession, and the score board showed the figures of 176—6.

Browne was a marvellous chap, but he couldn’t do miracles. And the “tail” was being skittled out. Why, the game would be over in half an hour, and Young England’s chance of the Ashes would be lost.



CHAPTER 15.

THE GIRLS DO THE TRICK!

“WINNIE, are you sure of this?” asked Irene Manners breathlessly.

“Haven’t I told you I’m sure?” said Winnie, her

eyes wide and shining. “I’ve just forced it

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Silent-footed figures that flit through the night!

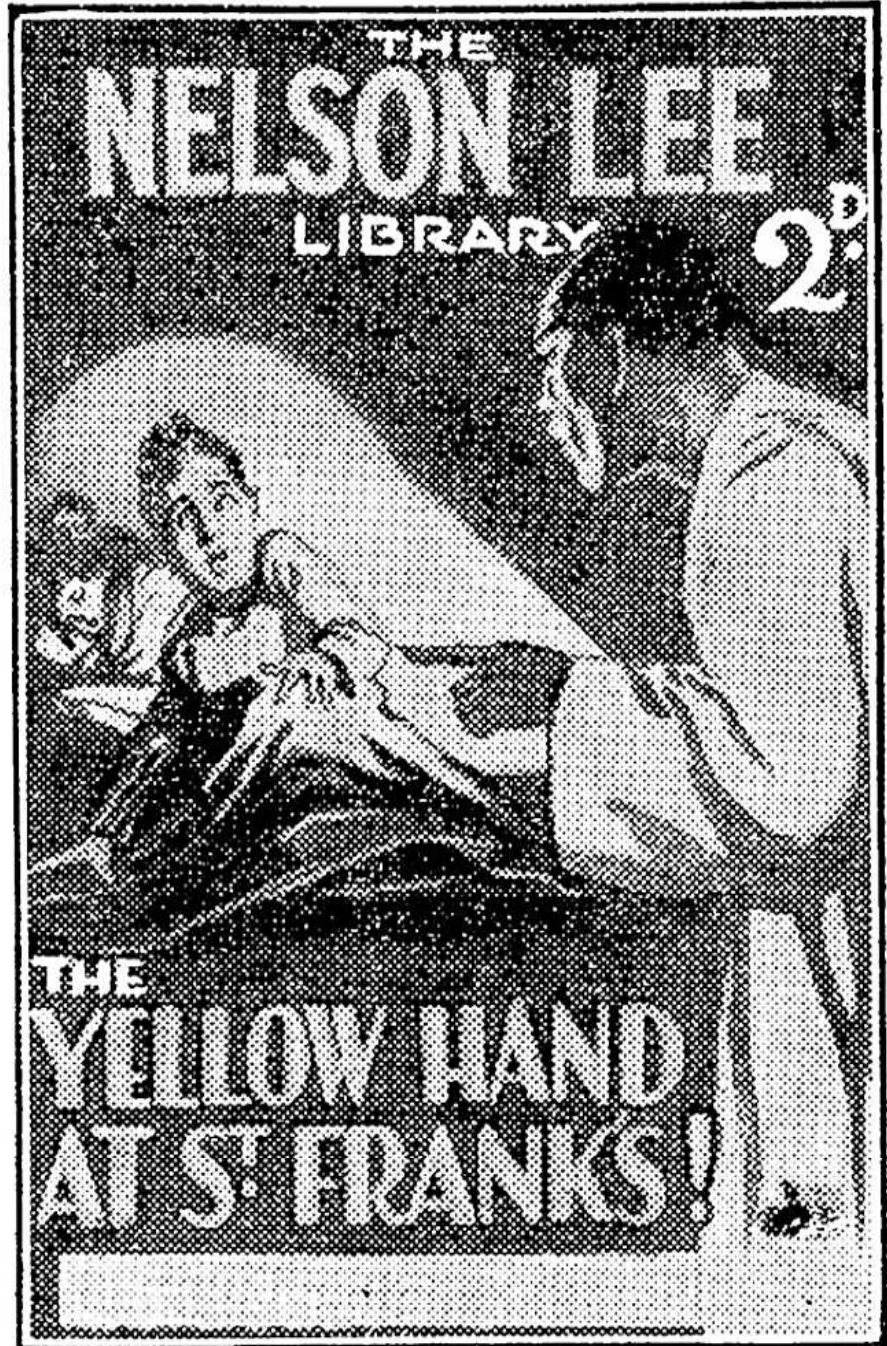
Handy sees them! More—Handy has a fight with some of them!

But nobody will believe it. The fellows tell him that he's had a nightmare! Yet the time comes when they believe Handy's yarn of the midnight marauders. For once, Handy is right!

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Is Handy scared? You bet he isn't! No Chinaman living could scare old Handy—even if the Chinaman does come in the middle of the night, breathing threats! Look out for this cover next Wednesday.

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

all out of Gulliver. Ralph was telling us the truth the other night. He was only in that boat to see what Forrest wanted him for, and he thrashed them afterwards.”

“Oh, what a shame!” said Irene in distress. “Then it's all our fault about the exams, and those poor chaps being barred from cricket! I shall never be able to face Ted again, Winnie!”

Winnie glanced at the score board.

“The game's going wonderfully,” she murmured. “What a pity we can't watch it, Renie—everybody's terribly excited. But there's something else for us to do. We've got to go and speak to Dr. Stafford.”

“It can't be done—”

“It can be done—it shall be done!” insisted Winnie fiercely. “We must do SOMETHING to make amends, Renie! And if Ted can only go out to bat now, he might—”

“Why, yes!” said Irene, with a deep breath. “When he finds that we're friends again, and he can bat, he'll be so enthusiastic that— Oh, quickly, Win! Let's go to the Head at once! He can't hold out after we've told him all the facts!”

With scarcely anybody noticing them, they ran through the Triangle, and then across the deserted Inner Court. Practically the whole school was watching the match, and all the buildings looked empty and lonely. Even the Head was about to come out to watch the finish of the game.

The girls met him, indeed, in the porch.

“Please, Dr. Stafford, we want to speak to you,” said Winnie breathlessly. “You won't refuse, will you?”

“Why, no,” smiled the Head benevolently. “But is this a matter of importance? You are both looking excited—”

“It's terribly, terribly important,” put in Winnie. “I'm Reggie Pitt's sister, you know, sir.”

“You needn't tell me that,” replied Dr. Stafford drily. “But come inside—to my study. If this matter is of such importance we must have a little privacy.”

They followed the Head indoors, rather alarmed by his calmness. Why couldn't he let them speak in the porch? Every second was of importance, and it might be too late if he dallied.

"Well?" he asked smoothly, as he closed the study door. "Seat yourselves, young ladies."

"We'd rather not, sir," put in Irene quickly. "We've come about Ted and Ralph—I mean Handforth and Fullwood. You barred them from playing in the match, and it's not fair."

"Indeed?" said the Head. "Why am I accused of—"

"I—I didn't mean that, Dr. Stafford," interrupted Irene, flushing. "But those two boys have been barred because they did so badly in the examinations. And that was our fault."

"Your fault?" said the Head, startled. "Come, come! You must forgive me for seeming a little sceptical—"

"But it's true, sir," put in Winnie quickly. "You see, on Tuesday evening we had a quarrel with Fullwood and Handforth, and we were entirely in the wrong. It was our fault all the time, and—and those two boys must have been awfully wretched on Wednesday, when they were sitting for the exams. They'd have got full marks otherwise."

The Head sat back in his chair, astonished.

"Really, I wasn't aware that such friendships as this existed," he said gently. "They must indeed be strong if a quarrel could have such a noticeable effect. Not that I deprecate such friendship. I am inclined to encourage it, and I am sorry if there has been any misunderstandings. But I fail to see how I can help you now, young ladies. Surely, it is for you to make things right in your own way!"

"But—but that's not it, sir," said Winnie. "We want you to give Fullwood and Handforth permission to play in this match. They're in the regular Eleven, and, if they only get your word, they can bat to-night."

"Oh!" said the Head slowly. "H'm! This is rather awkward. After making such definite statements, I am afraid I cannot consent to such a concession. Fenton made a similar request, and I was compelled to refuse."

"But it's different now, Dr. Stafford," said Irene. "Surely you can see it's different? We're to blame for those two doing so badly in the exams., and we want you to let them sit again, when their minds aren't upset. They'll come through with flying colours."

"Besides, the whole match depends upon it!" added Winnie excitedly. "Please, sir! There's just a chance that St. Frank's might beat the Australian boys. And—and think what it'll mean if Ralph and Ted can bat! They'll be so enthusiastic that—that— Oh, PLEASE!"

"Really!" protested the Head gently.

Winnie was so emphatic that Dr. Stafford hardly knew what to say. And before he could make any further remark the girls were at him again. They pointed out how completely they were to blame—how Handforth and Fullwood would pass the exams. with ease if they were only given another trial. It wasn't fair to bar them from sports. And

this evening was vital. Wasn't it possible for him to let them play?

The unfortunate Head was left breathless. He couldn't treat these girls as though they were two of his pupils, and, at the back of his mind, he remembered Mr. Crowell's astonishment that those particular boys should do so badly. Indeed, Mr. Crowell had suggested that something unusual must have distracted them on the fateful day.

The Head soon made up his mind.

"Well, I will tell you what I will do," he said, smiling. "No, no! Let me speak, please! I will hold an inquiry into these particular cases, and I shall instruct Mr. Crowell to act on my behalf. If Fullwood and Handforth can satisfy Mr. Crowell that they were unfit on the day of the examinations, I will let them sit again."

"But—but what about this evening, sir?" asked Winnie breathlessly.

"In the meantime we may regard the sports ban as in abeyance," continued Dr. Stafford cheerfully. "Under the circumstances, I will release them until this inquiry has been made. And, if there is time, they will be able to take their places in the game. But I am afraid it is too late—"

"Oh, Dr. Stafford, thanks awfully!" cried Irene, clapping her hands.

"You're a dear!" insisted Winnie excitedly.

"Ahem!" said the Head. "I will give you a brief note for Fenton—"

The girls were so eager to hurry off that they could hardly wait for that note—which meant the freedom of Edward Oswald Handforth and Ralph Leslie Fullwood. Having got it, they sped off like the wind, and arrived in the pavilion flushed and triumphant.

"Oh!" said Irene in dismay.

She was staring in horror at the score board. Two hundred and nineteen for eight! No wonder everybody was looking so grim and tense. Only two more wickets to fall, and there were 120 runs needed! The two girls inwardly groaned. Of course, it was utterly impossible now. They hadn't dreamed that so many wickets had fallen.

Browne was still in—with 71 runs to his credit. Indeed, his display had been the most brilliant one of the season, but he had not yet found a partner who could support him. One by one they had gone, and now the last two men were Reynolds and Frinton. The school naturally assumed that the game was lost—for they had no faith in the two Sixth Formers.

"Oh, Winnie!" said Irene, nearly crying.

"There's still a chance!" breathed Winnie. "Where's Fenton? We've got to take him this note— Oh, Ralph! Everything's all right! We've got the Head's permission for you to play."

Fullwood stared. He had just come up looking rather flushed upon seeing the two girls. And he had made up his mind to speak to them, never dreaming of the surprise. Handforth came, too.

"You've—you've got what?" gasped Fullwood.

"This is hardly the place to say it, Ralph, but we're awfully sorry for the way we treated you," murmured Winnie. "And we've been to the Head, and he's going to let you play in the games again. If there's time you can bat in this match."

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth violently.

Everybody in the pavilion looked at the score-board, wondering what Handforth's shout was about. Fenton came up and found Handforth and Fullwood and the two girls all talking at once. He couldn't quite understand what the excitement was about, for it seemed to him that it was a fitting moment for breaking down and sobbing.

"I've brought you this note, Fenton," said Winnie quickly.

Fenton took it and glanced through it.

"Of course they can play," he said without enthusiasm. "I arranged that with Beaton before we started the match. They're the regular men, anyhow. But what's the use? With eight wickets down——"

"Two left!" broke in Handforth fiercely. "That'll be Fullwood and me! Fenton, you chump, take that frown off your face! We're going to win this giddy match yet!"



CHAPTER 16.

A FIGHT TO A FINISH.

HOW'S that?"

"Out!"

A groan of anguish went up from the packed crowds. Fenton, with his heart in his mouth, twirled round and stared at the pitch. Then he almost reeled with relief.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "I thought it was Browne!"

But Browne was talking genially to the Australian captain, and it was the other man who was carrying his bat in. Two hundred and twenty-nine for nine! Young England needed 110 runs to win, and with only two more wickets to fall this seemed an utter impossibility.

Reynolds, who was just going out, was pulled up by Fenton.

"Hold on, Reynolds," he said briskly. "I'm afraid you two substitutes will have to stand down. We can play the regular men now. Handforth's in next."

Reynolds was frankly relieved.

"Good!" he said. "I'm not bursting to make an ass of myself, and there's nothing pleasant in being on a losing side. If Handforth can do better than me, good luck to him! I think he's by far the best man."

"That's rather decent of you, Reynolds," said Fenton, nodding.

Handforth, bubbling with excitement, strapped his pads on. This was something he had never hoped for. And the added fact that Irene and he were pals again made him all the more eager to distinguish himself. His optimism was at its highest pitch. Would

they win? What utter rot! How could anybody be ass enough to think anything else?

A shout of surprise went up when Handforth appeared from the pavilion. He ran to the wicket, and such was his hurry that he hadn't troubled to strap his pads on properly. As he readjusted them the Remove and Fourth gave him a wild cheer of encouragement. The whole ground was swept by a sudden wave of excitement. Reynolds and Finton weren't batting! Handforth and Fullwood had got their old places! And although it was too late for them to pull the fat out of the fire, the game would certainly have a thrilling finish. Young Australia wouldn't win the Ashes so easily.

Beaton was smiling confidently, and Handforth took centre. He was certain of victory now, and the fact that Handforth and Fullwood were playing made no difference to him. Indeed, he couldn't have objected even if he had wanted to, which he didn't. Beaton was a thorough sportsman, and although he was thrilled at the thought of a third successive win, there was just a little pang of regret deeply within him. It was rather a pity that the fight for the Schoolboy Ashes couldn't have been carried on to the last game of the series.

Handforth was feeling at the top of his form as he received the first ball. He was not only confident, but wildly determined to knock up the runs. And he knew how vitally important it was to protect his wicket. Browne was well on the way to his century, and he needed a helpful partner.

Clack!

Handforth's bat swept round, and the leather shot along the turf well beyond the reach of the fieldsmen. It was a glorious stroke.

"Boundary!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Keep it up, man!"

And then the school was treated to a display that it long remembered. Handforth seemed to catch Browne's fighting spirit, and between the two of them they sent the score soaring with stunning rapidity. Beaton's expression changed. His bowlers seemed powerless against this pair.

A stand! A ninth-wicket stand!

Just when everybody had expected the last two men to be skittled out, there was this sensational bid for victory. Two hundred and fifty-six! It was creeping up steadily. Almost every delivery resulted in a two or a three. Neither Browne nor Handforth were in the mood to bother with singles. And occasionally, to the delight of the crowd, came fours and sixes.

Indeed, in one over Handforth not only hit three boundaries in succession, but with the fourth ball he lifted Australia's best bowler clean over the shrubbery for a six. He was continually causing heart-failure among the crowd by his apparent recklessness.

"By Jingo!" breathed Fenton, with set lips. "Is there a chance after all? Morrow, old man—look at that! Two hundred and

seventy-nine already—and these two are set by the look of it! How much longer before close of play?"

"Never mind about close of play!" snapped Morrow intently. "There's time if they keep up this speed, and that's all we need worry about. We're going to win, Edgar—I can feel it in my bones!"

"I can't believe it!" muttered Fenton. "It's too good to be true!"

"Hurrah!"

Another boundary, and by this time the onlookers were simply weak with shouting and the general tenseness. Every moment they expected a wicket to fall, and then it would be a case of "last man in" and a swift end.

With the score at 283 William Napoleon Browne's wonderful innings came to an end. He succumbed to the Australian bowling at last—but not before he had reached his century. Two in one match! No wonder he was carried shoulder-high as soon as he reached the pavilion.

When Fullwood went out a silence fell, and a kind of fearful coldness gripped St. Frank's. There was one junior in particular who watched with feverish eyes and a tensely haggard expression. Bernard Forrest was beginning to wonder

if those bets of his were safe, after all.

"I'm all right," he muttered huskily. "Of course I'm all right. They've got to get another 56 runs to win, and they'll never do it. It's impossible. As soon as another wicket goes—"

"Shut up!" muttered Gulliver. "Watch!"

Fullwood received his first ball, and dealt with it respectfully. It happened to be the last ball of the over, and then Handforth was at it again. He had lost most of his excitement now, and he was cold and grim. One slip and all would be over.

He made up his mind to go slow, and promptly slashed the leather away for another 4. And then, in a spirit of despairing recklessness he hit out with all his strength at everything. In that one over Fullwood did nothing but run or stand by while the ball was thrown in from the boundary. Handforth's amazing luck was with him. He added no less than 20 runs to the score in that one over.

In the next over Fullwood became imbued with Edward Oswald's desperate spirit. He scored a 2, then a boundary, another 2, and a second boundary. The crowd was almost afraid to cheer, for the tension was so acute.

Only 24 runs needed for victory!

And so it went on. The Australians were amazed and dismayed. The whole thing was simply ridiculous. Ten wickets down and they were in a positively safe position. And

yet these men were defying them, and both of them juniors! The very pair who had been left out of the first innings!

"They're going to win!" exclaimed Irene, hugging Winnie. "I'm sure they are, dear. They've just got to!"

"If they do, we shan't have worked for nothing," whispered Winnie. "And you're right, Renie."

"Look—another boundary!"

Seven minutes more to go, for it had been agreed that the match should finish at a fixed hour, whatever the state of the game. Handforth and Fullwood, now certain of success, were simply doing as they liked with the bowling. It is quite certain that the Australians were off their form—dismayed by the stubbornness of the batsmen, and tired after their long day. The bowling during this last hour was ragged and erratic, largely accounting for the success of the St. Frank's batsmen.

But they were taking advantage of the luck of the game, and it is not every team that has the grit to do it. Even allowing for the weak bowling, those two juniors performed marvels.

Clack!

It was Handforth who triumphantly sent the leather soaring away to the pavilion for the last hit of the

match—the hit that secured the 341st run. And the crowd gave one long, drawn-out sigh of happiness. It was too exhausted to cheer properly.

The Ashes were still safe! Young England and Young Australia had won two games each, and the final decision would have to be fought out at Lord's after all.

Just after the game had ended there was a terrific uproar at one side of the playing fields. Bernard Forrest showed in full flight, tearing across the grass and pursued by a crowd of grimly-running fellows. They wanted Forrest to pay out, but he couldn't. He hadn't the money.

They called him a welsker and a swindler, and the chase finally ended with Forrest in the fountain in the Triangle. He justly deserved his fate; in fact, many of the "smart set" who had made bets with him were of opinion that he had escaped very lightly. They would have been surprised if they had known how many fellows at St. Frank's, hearing about the affair, were of the opinion that they should have followed Forrest into the fountain for betting on the result of the Schoolboy Test match.

(Handy declares that he saw two mysterious Chinamen lurking in the Triangle by night. Was he only dreaming or— Read all about it in next week's story: "THE YELLOW HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!")

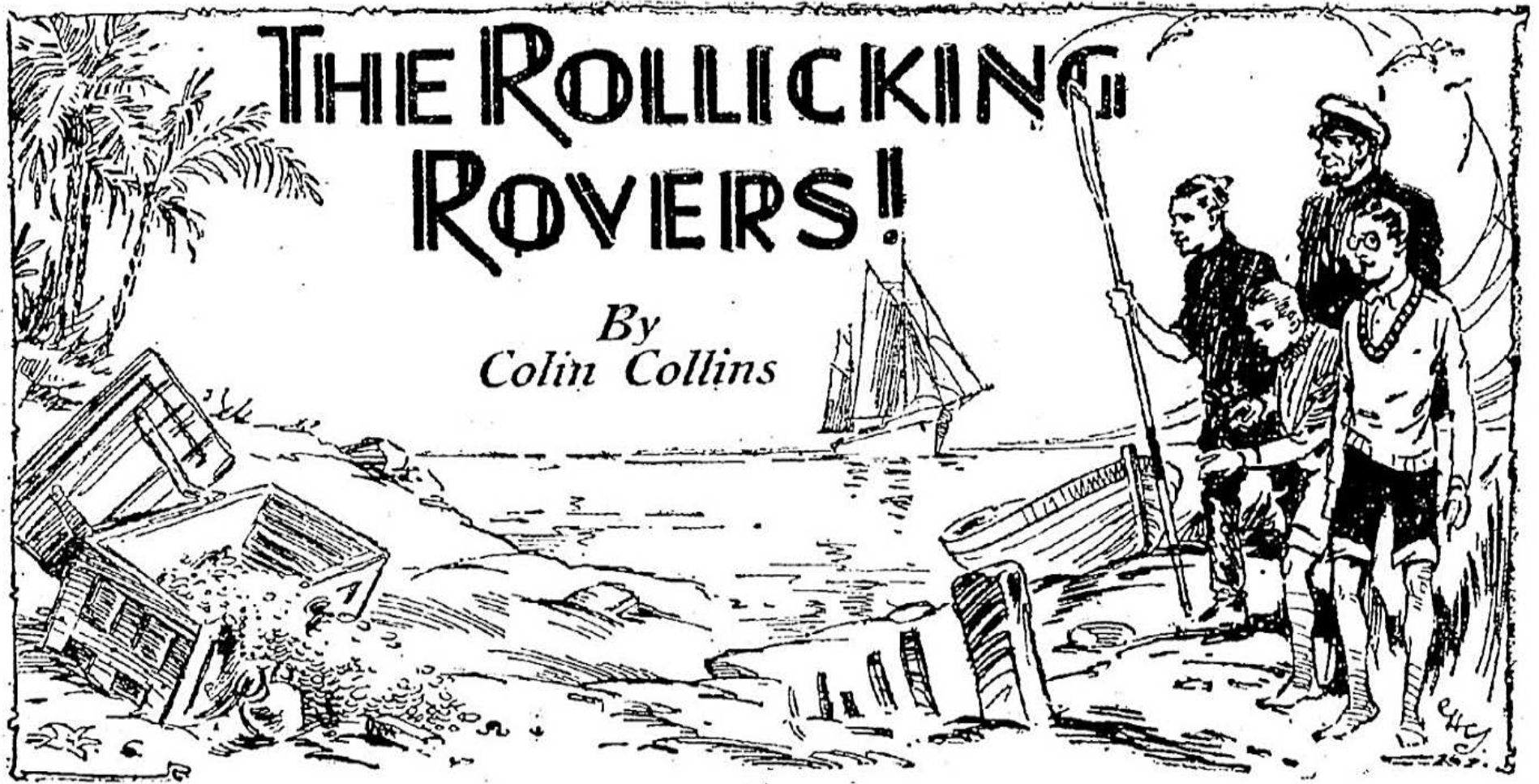
..... NEXT WEDNESDAY!

THE YELLOW HAND AT ST FRANKS!



.....

HERE ARE THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF A STUNNING NEW SERIAL



The Hidden Legacy.

"WILL he speak again, doctor?"

"I'm afraid not," answered the doctor, shaking his head and looking down sadly at the half-unconscious old man in the old-fashioned four-post bed.

Dr. Jarvis, Mr. Endersleigh, the solicitor, and old Martha, the housekeeper to Silas Digby, stood round looking on in despair. The old sea captain was passing out—dying without speaking the words that would have made three people enormously rich and settled them for life.

Not the three people standing round the bed; but three lads who were, at the moment, hurrying by train to be present, if possible, at the death-bed of the uncle who was their best and dearest friend in life.

Silas Digby had lived out his seventy-five years, and had come to the end in his comfortable yet modest house on the shelving hillside near Fowey Harbour.

The place made no pretensions to wealth. Yet, according to his own story, Silas Digby was one of the richest men alive.

But only just alive now. He was breathing softly; and his lips were murmuring words no one could hear.

"If he would only give the name of the place," said the solicitor; "if he could only indicate the country, the island, the cave, or palm grove, or whatever it was, and provide the slightest clue, it would mean so much. His wealth might be discovered by searching—if only he could tell."

"His memory failed suddenly," said the doctor, addressing Mr. Endersleigh. "He couldn't recall where he had hidden his fortune, and this undoubtedly preyed on his mind. He grew more and more feeble, and his brain was a blank."

"Ah, but he used to try and remember, sir," interposed Martha. "He'd walk about the garden like a man worried by devils, and he sometimes used to say, confident like, as if he believed it, 'It'll all come back to me one day, Martha, all come back. I shall remember suddenly, and then I'll write it all down again, and draw the plan of the place, and the tree, and have the papers locked up in the Bank of England.' That's what he used to say."

"He could remember that there was a tree in it?" said the doctor eagerly. "He mentioned a tree?"

"Yes—but that was all," said Martha.

"Men in their last hours sometimes recall things long forgotten," said the lawyer. "It might all come back yet— Look, his hands are moving; he wants to sit up! He's going to speak!"

The doctor and the solicitor assisted the old man into a sitting position and held him gently.

"I—I remember now," gasped the white-haired old fellow. "I remember. The root was three feet down—I put it under that—under—in the night—so that, when everyone was asleep, it would be so easy to get it away—and nobody know. The tree was older than the house—I bought the place—bought it."

"Where is this place you are talking about? Won't you tell us? The place, the name of the place, the country, give us some idea where," said the lawyer eagerly.

"I shall remember—in a minute," gasped the shaking man, with his hands stretched out like claws. "I can see it there—now. All snug—and no trace—I can—"

Strength failed the dying man. His two hands reached out greedily, as if to clutch the hidden hoard. He remembered, but his hands dropped and his head fell back, and

they laid him on the pillow to breathe his last.

Memory had returned too late; he never spoke again.

"He's gone," sighed the doctor.

"And his secret with him," murmured the solicitor. "Oh, the pity of it! And those lads, reared with the idea that they were to be fabulously rich, have now only a couple of thousand between them and—life!"

"And they couldn't even get here in time!" sobbed Martha. "I must go down and tell Ben—it'll nigh break his heart."

The fat, comely, middle-aged woman hurried out, and went downstairs to the kitchen, where, seated in a huge wooden chair, was one of the biggest men ever seen in Fowey Harbour, a red-faced, red-headed sailor, in jersey and cap, and shiny blue trousers, the skipper of the Saucy Ann, the master's old boat. (This was Ben Toppet, generally known as Big Ben.)

The Dead Man's Secret.

"HE'S gone, Ben," sobbed Martha pitifully.

"No—don't say it!" gasped the big fellow, shaken with emotion. Then he choked out:

"But he's told 'em? He didn't really forget? He's told 'em?"

"No, his secret has gone with him."

"Oh, why didn't he tell me, Martha, why didn't he tell me? I'd have kept his secret, fair and true. Why couldn't he have trusted me, Martha? And now—it's too late!"

"He wasn't a trusting man, Ben."

"He trusted me; he'd trust me with his life. And yet he couldn't never say a word to me about that. If he'd only tole me which port it was where he took the chest ashore, which island, what latitude and what longitude, I might have jogged his memory. But no, no one but hisself to carry the secret—and now he's carried it to the grave!"

"He's been a good master to you, Ben," sobbed Martha.

"Ay, ever since I was a cabin boy, and he bought his own boat, and him and me sailed the world together, right round, during the last year he was afloat. And me all the time thinking it was a pleasure-cruise; and he all the time with a fortune aboard, seeking a place to hide it, and never being able to make up his mind, choosing this place and that, and going on further and further, and never satisfied."

"Did he tell you, when it was all over and hidden?" asked Martha.

"No—he told me only last week. He was asking me to call to mind all the places we stopped at, so as to help his memory. I had the ship's log, and I read 'em out one by one, every stopping-place, but not a name among 'em brought anything back to his poor, wandering old mind."

"Ben, do you think, maybe, his mind was

always a wandering one, and there wasn't any fortune, any chest at all—no hiding-place?"

"You're off the track, Martha. There was a chest all right; but I thought it was full of books. But when it left the ship, or how he took it away and where and when—I never knew."

"How did he come by it—the fortune, I mean?" asked Martha. "Was it honest and fair?"

"Very simple. He was always cruising in the Pacific, couldn't keep away from the South Seas, and his greatest prize was a chart taken out of an old Spanish wreck. A treasure-chart it was. And how he used to bank on it, pore over it, and say as some day he would get the hang of it, and be master of a fortune."

"One reads about them things in books, Ben, but nothing never comes of 'em."

"Well this one was all right. I could place the week and the day when he struck it—and not a word to me, or a living soul. He brought his bargain aboard, as he called it, a box of books picked up at a dealer's shop, and so heavy two men could scarce shift it. That was what he told me. A rare old box, and terrible rusty, too."

"He did find a Spanish treasure! You're sure?" queried Martha.

"Ay. And from that day he was a changed man. And from that day things began to happen. He was frightened; he was in mortal terror. We both of us saw things on deck, shadows, creeping things. And there was marks on doors, and holes in boats. Then he decided as someone was on his track, and he must hide his treasure. He told me all that last week, and I sudden-like remembered and understood many things that used to puzzle me—why he was always stopping at strange places, and him wandering off all excited and jumpy, and coming back angry and disappointed, never explainin' nothing, but just saying 'Not here, no not here; let's push on.'"

"Well, Ben, at any rate you know some of the places where he thought of hiding it—and didn't."

"No, I don't. At every place he was the same. And it's my belief now as he was foxing, putting me and others off the scent, in case we suspected. I remember saying to him one day: 'Guv'nor,' I says, 'we don't hear much these days about that old dream chart o' yourn,' and he fair jumped, and looked as scared as if I was a ghost."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. Only next day he hinted that it was time I thought about bettering myself, and leaving him for a boat of my own. It was all kindly and friendly like; but I was too hurt to speak. He knowed I'd never leave him. It near broke my heart."

"I believe you cried about it, you old softy," said Martha, with an indignant smile.

"I believe I did blub a bit, Martha. I couldn't stomach the idea of him and me



A gasp escaped the boys when the torchlight flashed down and revealed the strange contents of the box.
 "It's a man's head—with long hair!" gasped Bob in horror.

parting company. He gave me a lump of Spanish gold next day, to comfort me, saying: 'I picked that up in a junk shop for brass—you can raise a fiver on it anywhere, Ben.'"

"And did you?"

"No, I've got it now. And I reckon it's all that's left of his treasure trove—just one gold piece—and him dead—him—"

Further utterance was choked by tears, and Ben hid his great red face in the depths of a red handkerchief.

"Oh, those poor boys, those poor boys!" sighed Martha. "He took 'em from nothing, eddicated 'em, and made swells of 'em, and now—"

"Well, they needn't starve, Martha; there's the old ship. Them and me might rove about a bit, and deal a bit, take light cargoes, and see life in the only proper way—on the briny."

"And find out where he hid that box? perhaps," said Martha.

"I never thought of that!" gasped Ben, jumping up. "I never thought of that! Why—we might all go—you and me and them—and search."

"What—me?" gasped Martha in horror.

"Martha, I've asked you to marry me six times. You're all alone now. If you would—and the young gents would come—"

"Get along with you, talking of such things—at such a time."

"But you will, Martha, you will?"

"We'll have to hear what the young gentlemen say about it," said Martha. "I'd best go up to the doctor and the solicitor, and tell 'em you don't know nothing that can help, except the names of places where the ship stopped."

Ben, left alone, forgot his grief and went out into the garden to walk up and down, like a man anxious to get going, but yet waiting for someone, or something.

He was listening all the time for sounds of a taxi from the station, bringing the young gentlemen, Captain Digby's three nephews.

The Trio Arrive!

AT a junction in Cornwall, on the way to Fowey, different trains deposited three youths, and all at about the same time.

The first to step from the train was Bob Digby—son of Silas Digby's brother—the son of a sailor drowned at sea, and nephew of a sailor; but now a young swell from Eton, thinking of going to a university, called home suddenly to his uncle's death-bed. He was tallish, blue-eyed, square-shouldered, a great footballer, cricketer, and oarsman; handsome, too, and looking older than his age, which was just nineteen.

Out of another train stepped, or rather bounced, another lad, short and round, and very fat—by name Joseph Voss, known at Rugby at "Joss."

"Hallo, Fatty!" cried Bob Digby, offering a broad palm, and giving a grip which he expected would make Fatty squeal and curl up; but Fatty's grip was as strong as his. His fat wasn't all fat; he was tough as a football. He could run, too, and run fast—run like a hare, as he was accustomed to boast, although his cousin Bob said he ran like a football, and the harder he was kicked the faster he went.

Joseph was certainly too fat in the face, and that made his clear brown eyes look small; but his big, jolly mouth made up for that, and he was a most pleasant-looking youth when he smiled.

Joss was the son of Mrs. Voss, sister to Mr. Digby.

The greeting of the two cousins was cheery. Bob Digby was very fond of Joseph—whom he called Fatty, or Joss, or anything but his proper name—and he always pretended to be annoyed with Joss for being too fat, and never let him forget it.

They had scarcely begun to discuss their call home when the train deposited a tall, slender, quiet-looking lad, in horn-rimmed spectacles, whom the others greeted noisily with:

"Hallo, Harold Lloyd!"

His real name was certainly Harold; but his second name was Dwyer. He was the son of Silas Digby's second sister, a most studious, clever, and ingenious youth, who made magical wireless sets, contrived petrol engines out of coffee-pots, model aeroplanes that really flew, and taught motorists on the roads how to mend cars that broke down, without ever having driven a car in his life.

As a little boy Harold was a firework and toy-cannon terror. He had already blown up Martha once, and the school lab. twice. He called himself a "scientist" now, if you please. At school the pet name for this cousin was "The Stink Merchant," because of his fancy for filling his bed-room with dreadful fumes and horrible chemical liquids.

The last time Harold came home he started to electroplate his brass bedstead with a queer liquid that made the room unfit to go into. All the same, Harold was a very clever fellow. At sixteen they prophesied a great future for him at Oxford.

Harold was no good at all at sports, and very short-sighted without his "Harold Lloyds," as his goggles were playfully called. He was dark and pale and serious-looking like the great film-star, to whom there certainly was a resemblance.

Fatty used to declare that the goggles were a pose, because Harold could always see so much better over the top. The lad had a way of holding his head sideways when listening, and looking over the ends, or the rims, and slipping the goggles below the bridge of his nose. Sometimes they called him "The Owl" at school—always

any name but his right one. His cousins generally called him "Goggles."

Harold stuck his head on one side and squinted to make sure that the figures on the platform were really his cousins, and remarked condescendingly:

"Hallo, you kids!"

He gave them a limp hand to shake, holding it very high up, with the fingers drooping—like the head and neck of a swan.

Bob slapped the hand down, and Fatty slapped it up. Bob pushed his cousin's goggles back into place, and Fatty pulled them down below the bridge again.

The victim showed no resentment, and stood stock still.

"When you've finished—you two," he sighed.

"We've finished," said Bob, with a grin.

"Well, how are you both? Beastly bore fetching us home," he sighed. "I wonder what it's all about?"

"It's something serious, I fear," said Bob gravely. "The Head, when he shook hands with me said he sincerely hoped I should return."

"Mine said much the same," remarked Fatty.

"Mine said good-bye, as if for ever," observed Harold.

"Oh, here's our taxi," said Bob, leading the way. "Come along. What's that in your hand, Goggles; a new kind of bag?" he asked, when they were settled.

"No, that's my portable wireless—ten valves or two, whichever you like. We ought to pick up America down here in Cornwall. The lower part of it is a sandwich-tin, and, in the lid, as there was lots of room, I've screwed in a board that makes a perfectly beautiful tie-press—see?"

The others regarded the "scientist" with utter scorn.

Harold proudly opened his portable wireless-set saying:

"Now then, you two, take these 'phones, one ear each, and listen to the ships at sea."

"Shall we hear fog-horns?" asked Bob.

"I can only hear machine-guns, and smell burning," said Fatty.

"Dear me—something's shorted," cried The Owl, dropping his goggles into the box. "Why—there's a dead bird inside!"

"Got caught in the wires, flying too low," chuckled Bob.

"It's that chap Norton," shouted Harold. "That's the sort of joke he thinks funny."

"Well, isn't it? Whenever will you grow up, Harold, and learn—wireless?"

In spite of their chaff, these three were all excellent friends in the holidays—but holidays were over, too.

In the drive of the house, Big Ben, with his eyes red and his shoulders bent, greeted the three "young masters," as he called them, first with a touch of his cap, and then with a fling up of his hands, expressing that all was over.

"He's gone, sirs, he's gone! You're too late!"

They understood in a flash, and were "up against it" for the first time in their lives—the great reality—Death!

The Hidden Chest.

"SO, you see how it is," the lawyer was saying, as he sat in Silas Digby's old high chair at the head of the table, with the three nephews, and Big Ben, and Martha sitting round listening. "Your uncle's hidden fortune is lost, and may be lost for ever, unless you people can find it."

"We will," came the voice of Big Ben, booming out violently, "if the young masters are willing. We'll find it, if we have to search the world."

"There is only about a couple of thousand pounds between three—not enough to start you boys in any profession, but enough, if you use it wisely, and use it as Mr. Toppet here advises, in organising a search, fitting out Mr. Digby's excellent boat, and visiting the places where he might, or might not, have hidden the treasure that was once his."

"We'll find it, sir, we'll find it!" cried Ben.

"And we are all of Ben's opinion," said Bob, acting as spokesman. "The treasure is to be found. We must follow in his footsteps, cover the old ground, call at the same ports, and make inquiries about uncle's movements at each place."

"In his last moments he mentioned a house. And he mentioned a tree, and a tree root under which he put the box—that is all you have to go upon," said the lawyer. "And he said, 'I bought the house,' but there are no records among his papers of any house being bought—except this one—in any part of the world."

"We'll find it, sir," repeated Ben.

"Then do I understand that you are all agreed that the Saucy Ann should be fitted out for a tour round the world, and that you will all go?"

"Yes, all of us," said Harold fiercely, glaring through his goggles.

Bob and Fatty, both excellent sailors and athletic lads, looked at one another in a rather worried manner; and Bob spoke up fearlessly:

"Do you think, Harold, that—that it's quite in your line? You're not fond of the sea, you know."

"Quite sure," replied the young scientist. "In fact, if I don't go I don't think there's any use in your going without me to look after you."

"Oh, indeed! Ho, ho!" chortled Bob, much amused.

"This is a scientific business, where the scientific mind is needed. You, Bob, can supply the muscle and the energy; and you, Fatty, can supply the—er—"

"Well, what?" demanded Fatty sharply.

"The ballast. Oh, yes, I'm going. I'm not going to be side-tracked."

"And what is to become of Martha; is she to be left here all alone?" asked Mr. Endersleigh.

"If you please, cap'n, I mean sir, if so be as we all go, Martha will go too," said Ben. "A woman aboard a boat is allus a comfort."

"Martha turning sailor!" cried the lawyer.

"Sailor's wife, sir, begging your pardon. She's promised me," said Ben shyly, twisting his cap and blushing beetroot.

"Good old Ben!" cried the boys in delight.

"Quite a good idea," said Harold, adjusting his goggles. "It settles the only point on which I was troubled—who was going to mend our socks and things."

"The young gentlemen never could be trusted to look after themselves, and Ben is as bad," said Martha, "so I've decided to be housekeeper for the expedition."

"Martha will be cook and steward," said Bob.

Mr. Endersleigh agreed that it would be a grand idea.

While the lawyer was talking to them about the way to collect money drafts from home at foreign banks, he suddenly broke off, crying:

"Who was that? That face at the window!"

"I saw no face," said Harold. "My back was to the window, but, reflected in my glasses I thought I saw a sailor's cap with a tassel on it—a blue one."

"Ah, that's Foxey!" snarled Ben. "Always nosing round, always prowling. It's Jake Johnson, I mean, sir," he explained.

"That reminds me," said Mr. Endersleigh, "there is a clause in the will that stipulated that Jake Johnson, an old and tried seaman, and servant of your late uncle, must remain a servant, and not be discharged unless he gives very grave offence, or commits any crime against the law. In fact he is to be regarded as a family retainer."

Ben gave a groan of misery on hearing this.

"He's useless on board, sir," he cried.

"Then he had better remain on shore and look after this house," said the lawyer.

"Funny the capt'n should have put that in his will," said Ben. "He hated Jake worse 'an I do; a snakey, crawling, foxy worm of a man. Bah! If there was ever two men working on one rope, and you kept your eyes open, you'd see as it wasn't Jake as was doin' the hauling."

"As a matter of fact the man approached me this morning," said Mr. Endersleigh, "and begged me to tell him if the Saucy Ann was going to sea again, and, if so, to remember that he had been every voyage with the master for the last ten years, and if the boat was going out again he'd die of grief if he was left behind."

"Grief?" shouted Ben. "He ain't never shed a tear in all his life. The gov'nor was half afraid of him, and I could never tell why, always going on at him, and forgiving, and allus taking him wherever he went."

"Does Jake know anything of the hidden chest?" asked Bob suddenly, turning to Ben.

"Not he. And yet—he might. But if he did, d'ye think he'd tell? Not him! He's got scent of something. He's mortal anxious to know what's afoot."

"You don't trust him?"

"No, neither did the gov'nor. It's best not to let him know when, or why, we're sailing. Tell him the young gents is off on a short pleasure cruise, sir, just a short trip with me—and my new missis. And leave him behind."

"Jake shall be caretaker here, for the present," said the lawyer. "And the pleasure cruise shall be the published reason for the sailing of the Saucy Ann. That is all I need settle. It is for you voyagers now to make your plans for your journeyings. I must get back to my office."

Foxy.

HAROLD, who had been listening, and looking over the tops of his goggles, broke in with the remark:

"Has it ever occurred to anybody to discover whether uncle ever hid his treasure abroad at all? We are told this is the only house he ever bought, and there are plenty of trees with queer roots in the garden!"

"You don't mean," faltered Ben, "that nobody ain't looked?"

"To the best of my knowledge, no," said the lawyer, "but I think you are on the wrong tack in supposing he would select this garden. Still, perhaps a cautious look round wouldn't hurt. Do as you think best; but get busy. Time runs on oiled wheels, and money flies as fast as swallows' wings."

Harold walked to the window, and Bob with him, while the lawyer said good-bye and many cheery words to Ben and his bride-to-be.

"Look," cried Harold, "look at Foxy. He's over there now—digging! What's he doing with that long bar, plunging it in like that? Let's nip out and come up behind him, through the bushes."

Of course, Fatty went, too, and they all skirted the house like boy scouts, and came suddenly upon the sailor in the pointed blue skipper's cap, with the tassel hanging over his left eye, advancing upon him from different directions and closing in.

"Hallo, Foxy, doing a bit of gardening?" cried Bob.

"Ay, ay, sir; keeps your muscles from gettin' stiff when you're ashore!"

They saw before them a stooping, wizened, wrinkled man with bushy eyebrows, flesh all creases and lines, a long, thin nose, and little, beady eyes. Most of his teeth were

gone; indeed, two ugly fangs seemed to be all that were left.

"Why are you using a crowbar—for gardening?" asked Harold.

"Loosenin' the sile, sir, loosenin' the sile. Terrible stiff for a fork. See how 'ard it drives in—and think how much harder for a fork, sir."

He drove the bar down and it went a few inches with a thud—on wood!

"Hallo, what's that?" cried Fatty.

"Only a tree root, Mr. Joseph, only a tree root."

The boys looked at one another, and the same idea struck them all—a tree—a cross root—a house!

Ben came out now, rolling as he walked, and strode over to the group, with one finger pointing threateningly at Jake.

"Here—you—back to the ship—and clean up the brasses. Don't waste your time gardening. The Saucy Ann is going to take these young gents round the coast for a day or two, for a blow and some fishing."

"All right, Ben," replied the disturbed gardener, obeying reluctantly, and rolling down his sleeves. "You'll be taking me, too, I reckon?"

"No."

"Not takin' me?"

"No, I'm takin' my new wife; she'll be steward on this trip."

"Wife?"

"Yes. You've got to stay and care-take here."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"I'm willing. I don't complain. It'll be the first time the Saucy Ann has sailed without me, but—I'm not complaining. I'll be glad of the rest. And I can do a bit o' gardening. Terrible fond of a garden I be."

"Since when?" growled Ben scornfully. "Get along to the ship and look slippy."

The boys went off together, and discussed the new aspect of the business opened up by Harold's suggestion of the possibility of the feeble-minded old man having fooled everybody, even Ben, and brought his treasure chest all the way home, to bury it in his own garden. If his mind failed to recall a hiding-place abroad, the chances were it would have failed equally to remember a place at home.

"Let's all take our coats off and dig under the cedar tree," cried Fatty eagerly.

Bob agreed, but Harold raised an objection.

"Not in daylight," he advised. "The word may have gone round about a fortune hidden, and if we are seen digging—"

"We needn't dig deep; just pretend to do a bit of gardening," suggested Bob, eager to begin. "Who knows! The chest may be under our feet now."

"We can't dig up the whole garden feet deep," said Harold. "Take the advice of a practical man. Watch me."

"Watch Goggles," chortled Fatty, who

had no great idea of his cousin's powers.

With the crowbar Harold plunged and sounded the earth, but a few plunges were enough to start him sweating; the bar was long and heavy.

"Here, let me," cried Fatty, with a leap at the bar. "Whoosh, whoosh—whoosh!"

"Here, that did not go down a foot," cried Bob. "Let me."

The bar began to fall now, and probe and probe, finding nothing but an occasional root. At last, underneath the cedar tree, they struck one root three times.

"Here, let me!" cried Ben; and, giant that he was, he lifted the bar six feet in the air, and drove it down into the soft soil, where it plunged to half its length, quivered a moment, and then began to slide further down—and almost vanished out of sight.

"A hole!" he cried, in a gurgling whisper. "It's hollow under here."

"Let's dig, let's dig!" cried the boys in frantic excitement.

"Not now, not now," Ben advised. "People passing the house could look over the railings— And, by gosh, there's Foxey looking over now!"

Raising his voice, so that the watcher could hear, he cried out artfully:

"Now then, you boys, I've shown you the way, let's see you try again. A trial of strength. Let's see how far you can plunge it in, Mr. Bob."

Ben pulled at the bar, and it came out with a sucking sound, all wet and muddy.

"There you are now, Mr. Bob, try pitchin' the bar a bit."

The boys were quick to catch his pretence that they were all at play, and began a bar-pitching contest of a very rough order for the benefit of Foxey, who, when Ben chose to catch sight of him, was again ordered off to his work of polishing the brasses on the Saucy Ann.

The party were now getting uneasy about Foxey. They were equally impatient to get on with the digging.

"Let one of us do sentry-go at the boundary fence, and watch for passers-by," suggested Bob. "The others can dig."

"That's reasonable, sir," Ben agreed. "Here, fetch me a shovel."

"You do the watching, Goggles, and we'll dig. When I'm tired I'll relieve the sentry," cried Bob.

They hunted in the tool-house, and found only one spade. There was only one fork—the one Foxey had been using—and no pick-axe. Only Ben could dig, while Bob loosened the soil with the fork. They chose a spot under the cedar tree where the big root was near the surface and where the crowbar had sunk into soft emptiness. Here the soil was lifted in great chunks and thrown aside.

Fatty grunted for them, and danced around as if expecting every fresh spadeful to bring up Spanish doubloons.

An Important Find.

THE diggers had not got far when a whistle from Goggles, at the fence, warned them that someone was approaching. The searchers rested on their implements and tried to look as if they were gardening.

It was only the baker; and no interference was to be expected from him.

The young gentlemen had wandered away, as if not interested in Ben's gardening; but the baker was full of curiosity, and eager for a chat.

"Gardening, Ben?" he asked cheerily.

"Ay, ay."

"Digging under the old cedar?"

"Ay, ay."

"I thought you might be burying a dog when I first caught sight of the hole," persisted the fellow.

"Well, now you know. That's just what we are doin'," lied Ben.

"But there ain't no dog 'ere. Who's dog is it?"

"Mine!" roared Ben. "Get on, and leave me to my job; you're wasting my time."

"Dead? Dear me, what did the dog die of?" asked the baker, in no wise abashed.

"Curiosity! And if you don't clear off, young man, I shall give you one on the head with this spade, and then it'll be your funeral."

"Well, I'm fair mazed at 'im buryin' his dog right in front of his old master's house!" muttered the baker, trudging on, and resolving to carry the story to the very first kitchen door he stopped at—which would be next door. "I don't believe it's a dog—they're going to take the tree down!"

The boys returned after the baker had gone, and heard of the inquiries.

"All clear now," cried Fatty, receiving the sign from Goggles at the fence that the baker had gone.

But no sooner were they busy than the whistle came again.

"Who is it now, darn their eyes?" snarled Ben.

It was only the milkman.

"Be you takin' down the old cedar, Ben? I 'eard tell so," said the man, depositing his heavy can, ready for gossip.

"Who told you that?" demanded Ben in a fury.

"Jim, the baker's chap."

"I told him I was buryin' a dog."

"Whose dog?"

"My dog."

"I never seed you with a dog, Ben!"

"No, and you never will now."

"It must have been a big dog, to judge by the size of the hole, Ben."

"If you don't clear out with your silly yap I'll make the hole big enough to bury you!"

The man chortled, lifted his can smilingly, and dawdled to the house, saw Martha, and told her, in jest, that he had left Ben in tears, burying a dog in the front garden.

Out came Martha in alarm to see; and the milkman passed on, chuckling at his pleasantries.

"Whose dog, Ben, whose dog?" Martha demanded in distress. "Has the poor thing been run over?"

"No, you run along in, Martha, we're busy."

"Yes, get indoors, Martha," urged Bob. "At this rate we shan't get three feet down before dark. We're searching for—you know what."

"In the daylight?" cried practical Martha. "Why, you'll have the whole town talking."

"She's right, Ben," sighed Bob. "We must be patient and put it off till dark, and dig by night, with electric torches, and put up a screen to hide us from the road."

Ben reluctantly agreed, with much bad language. All they could do was to rig up a rough screen of sacks in the daylight, and possess their souls in patience till the dark.

At last Ben agreed it was dark enough. Out they crept like thieves, and got to their digging, Goggles alone standing idle, holding the one and only torch they allowed themselves, and holding it well down.

The pick, which Ben had now secured, was driven in with terrific force, and went through into a hollow.

"It's a big hole!" gasped Ben. "The pick went through dead branches, or peasticks, or summat under the soil."

"Yes," cried Bob, plunging his arm in, "a great big hole, and it goes right under the roots of the tree. I can feel something, my fingers are touching something!"

"What?" demanded all the others in chorus, falling on their knees in their eagerness.

"Hold the torch lower," cried Bob, lying face downwards and plunging his arm farther in.

"Ha!" he gasped. "What is it? What is it? What can you feel?" they asked in almost piteous excitement.

"A box," replied Bob, in a half-choked whisper. "A box!"

The Box Under the Cedar Tree.

FOUR pairs of eyes gazed eagerly, almost timidly, into the dark hole under the cedar tree where, in the light of the torch, stood revealed a square, iron box, about two feet long, brown with age and rust, and covered with weed and moss gathered from the depths of the sea.

"It ain't the box as I meant—" whispered Ben, as he reached in and attempted to lift it out. "It's iron and it's heavy, and wet and slimy. Here—help me."

Even his great strength could not move it without the aid of the other hands stretched down and under.

Up it came—and it was at once obvious that its weight was due to the fact that it was of iron. An iron chest, bound with iron bands, and clamped with a rusty padlock. They set it on the ground.

"This came from some old wreck, 'undreds of years old," said Ben. "I know 'em; I've seed this sort afore. And usually there's nothing in 'em but papers."

"A deed-box, you mean!" said Bob.

"Ay. Let's shake it. There's something inside, but it ain't what we're looking for."

"It may be full of banknotes," suggested Fatty.

"Buried underground," said Ben; "not likely. Men only bury stuff as they daren't let other people see. That padlock ain't old. Here, give me that pick; I'll soon have it off."

With the pickaxe as a lever, Ben wrenched and struck, but it was some time before the thing gave way, and he flung the pick aside.

"Now," he grunted, and the others all held their breath.

They knew this little box could not contain immense treasure; but none were prepared for the horror that met their eyes. Ben slowly lifted the lid, and the torch in Harold's hand wavered with excitement.

"Keep that thing still!" cried Ben.

A gasp escaped them all when the torchlight flashed down and revealed the contents, gruesome and grim, but not so horrible at first because they could not exactly make out what the long, black hair was.

"It's a man's head—with long hair!" gasped Bob in horror.

"And hands!" added Ben, peering closer.

During the three hundred years that those gruesome remains had remained hidden in that chest the flesh had become shrivelled and mummified, losing life-like reality, and the hands were mere withered things, skin dried on skeleton fingers. The hair was black and long as a woman's, wonderfully preserved, but a small moustache and tuft on the chin gave the clue to the sex. The rest of the contents were papers, charts, and ship's records, all in queer writing—Spanish—on tattered parchment rotten with age.

(To be continued.)

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SWIM—AND KEEP FIT!

Now is the time for swimming—and this short article simply bristles with useful tips.

THERE are four reasons why all of us should be able to swim. The first is, so that we can save other people from drowning; the second, so that we can save ourselves from drowning; the third, because swimming is unequalled as a health-giving exercise; the fourth, that it is up to all Britishers to lead in everything that appertains to the seas that wash our shores.

The excuse of the fellows who dare not go into the water is that they cannot swim. It is as if they intend to learn first on dry land. Of course, that is childish. What they ought to do is to pluck up their courage and toddle off to the nearest swimming bath or river, accompanied by a chum who can swim.

The chum should get in the water at a spot where the depth is such that the novice will have his head and neck above the surface when he stands on the bottom. Then the swimmer should entice the other to jump in to him.

Getting Scared.

One of the first frights experienced by one not used to bathing is that of finding difficulty in breathing when about half submerged. This he can quickly remedy, however, by ducking his head under for a moment.

Another difficulty is that of keeping the feet on the bottom. It seems as if the feet are as light as cork, and insist on trying to float to the top. Lack of balance is the trouble here, and all one need do is to walk from a very shallow part—say, where the water comes only up to the knees—slowly towards the deeper until the shoulders are covered.

Don't Swallow the River.

Strokes may be practically ignored during a first visit. What is more important is the gaining of confidence. Try to sit on the bottom where the

water is about three feet deep. You will find it next to impossible. The human body is so buoyant that it is harder to keep down than to keep up.

Take no notice of people who tell you that the best way to learn to swim is to plunge into deep water and strike out. Man does not swim naturally, although most animals do. The explanation is, that he has to manipulate his limbs in an unaccustomed manner. On the other hand, animals merely have to move their legs as if walking. That is why a dog is quite at home in the water the first time he falls or is thrown in. He just attempts to "walk" to the bank, and finds himself swimming!

It is a good plan for the novice to remember that he should regard his body as a boat, and his arms and legs as sculls. And the more "sculling" practice he gets the better he will be able to swim.

Don't Overdo It.

When you have gained enough confidence in the water, get a pal to show you how to do the first strokes. If you happen to possess a pair of water-wings, place them round your chest so that you are held up more or less level with the surface. Then your pal should stand behind you, catch hold of your feet, and teach you the leg strokes.

The arm strokes can be learnt quite easily on the land.

For a start, five to ten minutes in the water will be enough for you. Dry yourself immediately afterwards, using the towel briskly. As soon as you get into the dressing-box, remove your bathing costume. It is the wetness around the stomach that is the usual cause of chills.

One's appetite after a bath is prodigious! So unless the baths are near a shop, take a couple of cakes or a few bars of chocolate with you!

ANNOUNCEMENT—



Owing to the extra-long opening instalment of "The Rollicking Rovers!" it has been necessary to hold over the St. Frank's League Application Form and the Chief Officer's Chat. The Form was given in No. 7 (New Series) of the Nelson Lee Library, and it will be published again in next Wednesday's issue.

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