

KEEPSAKES of the "TESTS" INSIDE

The NELSON LEE

School Story Library

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3
TOPPING
BADGES

OF ENGLAND'S
TEST MATCH WINNERS **FREE**

New Series No. 149.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 9th, 1929.

You Can Win a "James" Bike for Easter



Who are the Twelve Most Popular Test Cricketers?

YOUR SIMPLE TASK

Here is the Fifth and Final Coupon for our topping voting contest. We have been giving away during the past few weeks portraits of the sixteen members of the Test Team in Australia, and we thought it would be rather interesting to find our readers' opinions of the popularity of the various members of the side.

So, in the coupon here, are given the names of the sixteen cricketers in alphabetical order. There are only two things for you to do. Firstly, write **IN INK** in the space at the top of the coupon (against the "X") the name of your own personal favourite. Thus, if **SUTCLIFFE** is your choice, write his name against the "X."

Next, number off **IN INK** in the other section of the coupon, twelve of the sixteen men in what you think will be their order of popularity among our readers generally. For instance, if you think that **HENDREN** is the most generally popular, put a figure "1" against his name; if **WHITE** is to come second, put "2" against his name, and so on. When you have filled in the twelve figures, put dashes in the remaining spaces.

Then sign and address the coupon, and cut it out. Now gather together your four previous coupons and enclose all five in an envelope and address it to:

"Nelson Lee" **CRICKETERS**,
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Of course, if you have not saved all the five coupons, you may send in just as many as you have.

The First Prize of a James' Cycle (as illustrated) will be awarded to the reader who correctly or most nearly correctly forecasts the popular vote, which vote will be determined from the "personal preference" votes of competitors generally. The other prizes will follow in order of merit.

The Editor reserves the right to divide the value of the prizes, if necessary, in the event of ties, and his decision on all matters concerning this contest is final and binding. No alterations must be made on coupons, which must be filled up in ink. Employees of the proprietors of "Nelson Lee" may not compete.

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MY PERSONAL
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GEARY

HAMMOND

HENDREN

HOBBS

JARDINE

LARWOOD

LEYLAND

MEAD

SUTCLIFFE

TATE

TYLDESLEY

WHITE

I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

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ADDRESS.....

N.L. **5**

POST YOUR EFFORTS TO REACH US BY MARCH 14th.

THE MELBOURNE TEST MATCH TRIUMPH



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

The St. Frank's fellows are prevented from seeing the real Test Match between England and Australia—thanks to the rascality of Claude Gore-Pearce & Co.—but are they downhearted? No-o! For they have a Test Match of their own—Young England v. Young Australia! Read all about it in this stunning yarn, chums!—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Asking for Trouble!

"WHAT about getting back to the School Ship?" yawned Claude Gore-Pearce languidly.
"Plenty of time yet," said Gulliver.
"Heaps!" agreed Bell.

The precious trio of Study A, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, had paused in the shade at the corner of Elizabeth Street and Bourke Street, just against the General Post Office, in the City of Melbourne, Australia.

It was a busy spot, too, and although it was fairly hot that afternoon, the activity was as great as ever.

Lessons, on the St. Frank's School Ship, generally finished in mid-afternoon, and immediately after dismissal, the majority of the fellows made their way into the city, so that they could see as much of this fine place while the St. Francis was moored in Hobson's Bay.

"Oh, let's get back to the ship," said Gore-Pearce, in a tired voice. "I'm fed up with mooching about in this rotten heat! What about a drink before we get on our tram?"

"There's a restaurant just down the road," said Gulliver. "We passed it a couple of minutes ago—"

"Gad! We don't want to bother with restaurants!" interrupted Gore-Pearce. "Surely there's a decent pub about here somewhere?"

"You ass!" protested Bell. "You know that pubs are out of bounds!"

Claude Gore-Pearce shrugged his shoulders. "They're out of bounds at home, too—in Bannington," he said. "But we don't keep out of the Wheatsheaf, or the Grapes, do we? And what about the White Harp, in Bellton? If we can go into those pubs, surely we can go into one in Melbourne."

"We might be spotted by somebody," said Gulliver uneasily.

"Rot! We've got eyes, haven't we?" said Gore-Pearce.

The cad of the Remove did not really wish to partake of a drink in a public-house, but he felt that it would be "daring" to enter such an establishment. Gore-Pearce had a warped idea of manliness, and he considered it quite manly to frequent such places. The public-houses of Melbourne, so far as the St. Frank's fellows had seen, were quite excellent, but really they took very little interest in them.

It was a Thursday—the very eve of the great Test Match. On the morrow, England and Australia would be in the final struggle of the great series. A great deal of interest had been lost, of course, because England had already made quite certain of retaining the Ashes; nevertheless, Melbourne was giving every indication that the game would be patronised by enormous crowds.

Cricket, to tell the truth, was the one subject of conversation. Everybody was speculating on the game—prophesying about the weather—wondering whether Chapman would win or lose the toss—and whether Hobbs and Sutcliffe would put up a big first-wicket partnership.

Gore-Pearce & Co., moving on from the General Post Office, soon discovered a fine-looking public-house, and after a glance up and down, Gore-Pearce led the way in.

"This is the stuff to give them!" he chuckled. "By gad! It's nice and cool in here."

They were in the saloon, and it was crowded with men—the majority of whom were standing in groups, or sitting on the lounges, all talking animatedly. Scarcely anybody took any notice of the three English schoolboys as they took their long drinks of iced lime-juice and soda, and sat down on a lounge.

"This isn't so bad," admitted Gulliver. "I thought you meant you were going to order beer!"

"Idiot!" said Gore-Pearce. "I'm not reckless enough for that!"

They sat drinking their lime-juice for some little time, listening to the discussions that were going on all round them. Some of these discussions were humorous, some heated, some earnest. But in every case, the subject was the same. The morrow's Test Match was the one topic.

"Gad! I'm sick and tired of hearing about cricket!" said Gore-Pearce contemptuously. He spoke loudly, and two or three young men, who were standing near by, broke off their talk and looked at Gore-Pearce with no friendly eyes. Gulliver gave his leader a nudge.

"What's that for?" yawned the cad of the Remove.

"Go easy, you idiot!" muttered Gulliver. "Don't speak so loud."

"Why not?"

"No need to run cricket down——"

"I'll run cricket down if I want to," said Gore-Pearce sourly. "I always thought that cricket was a rotten game, and I'm entitled to my opinion, I suppose?"

Gulliver and Bell began to feel uncomfortable. Other eyes were turned upon them. Gore-Pearce, in his efforts to appear big, was fairly asking for trouble.

Nearly everybody in that saloon knew that these three boys were St. Frank's fellows, from the School Ship. The whole of Melbourne knew of the vessel's arrival, for all the reports had been in the papers. Besides, the St. Frank's fellows had been seen everywhere during the past few days—their caps were unmistakable.

There were other reasons why the good inhabitants of Melbourne should know of St. Frank's. There had been quite a lot of publicity regarding the schoolboys of late. Half the school had come on this trip—the entire occupants of the Ancient House and the Modern House. They had gone up into the bush of Queensland, after leaving Adelaide, and they had met with all sorts of startling adventures beyond the region of the "never-never" land. They had been rescued by Lord Dorrimore in a fleet of giant aeroplanes. They had flown to Melbourne from Sydney, and some of them had met with an exciting adventure even on that comparatively short trip.

So, at the first glance, the men in this saloon knew that Gore-Pearce & Co. were three of the St. Frank's boys.

"Cricket—cricket—cricket!" went on Gore-Pearce scornfully. "Nothing but cricket. I'm fed up with the very subject."

"Well, you needn't air your opinions!" said Bell, in a low voice. "Shut up, you chump! Everybody's looking at us!"

"Who cares?" said Gore-Pearce, with a sniff. "Most of these Australians are mad! They live for cricket—and jaw about cricket until it's enough to make a fellow go off his rocker! It's a pity they can't think of something more sensible to gossip about!"

As Gulliver and Bell had half-feared, one of the young men moved forward, and caught Gore-Pearce by the shoulder.

"See here, young feller-me-lad," he said, "are you trying to be funny—or is this just chiac?"

"Is it what?" asked Gore-Pearce. "You can't expect me to understand your queer Australian lingo. Why don't you speak English?"

The young man flushed.

"You were talking about cricket!" he said curtly. "And I think you said, too, that we Australians are mad. Do you want to go out of this place quietly, or shall we throw you out?"

CHAPTER 2

The Trouble Arrives!



UNDoubtedly, the young Australian was justified in his attitude. Gore-Pearce was not only ill-mannered, but positively impudent. Possibly he thought it very clever to ventilate his warped views on cricket in public—but he had reckoned without his hosts.

"Keep your hands off me!" he said unpleasantly. "I wasn't talking to you, anyhow. Can't I come into a pub and chat with my friends if I like?"

"It strikes me that you English schoolboys are looking for trouble," said one of the other men, coming forward. "I always understood that you were young sportsmen—but I must have been mistaken."

"You mustn't judge by three of them," said another man. "There's good and bad everywhere, Jim. I dare say these beauties are the bad lads of the school. They wouldn't be in this place if they weren't. Public-houses aren't permitted—for schoolboys."

Gore-Pearce laughed.

"If this place is good enough for you, it's good enough for me," he said, in his most supercilious manner. "And if I like to speak to my pals about cricket, I'll do so."

"Well, don't you run the game down—that's all," said the young man who had first spoken.

"I'll run it down if I want to!" said Gore-Pearce sourly. "I'm entitled to my opinion."

"Confound your nerve!" said the young man. "What are you looking for—trouble?"

Gore-Pearce shrugged.

"You Australians are too confoundedly touchy about cricket," he said contemptuously. "You may think it's a good game, but I think it's a rotten game."

"What?"

This time the shout had come from nearly everybody in the saloon, and Gore-Pearce & Co. were surrounded by a hostile throng.

"He—he doesn't mean it!" gasped Gulliver uneasily. "He's—he's only trying to pull your legs!"

"That's all!" babbled Bell.

"Then he'd better choose some other subject to joke on!" said one of the men. "This friend of yours has got too much nerve."

"Too right, he has," said somebody else.

Gore-Pearce, astoundingly enough, did not see the danger signal.

"This is a public building, and I'm as good as any of you," he said defiantly. "I suppose you think that your fellows are going to win this last Test, eh?"

"The best team's going to win," said one of the Australians.

"And that team will be England!" said Gore-Pearce, with a laugh. "Why, you Australians don't stand an earthly chance! Look how England has wiped you up already! Your players aren't worth tuppence!"

This wasn't merely impudence and "sauce." It was sheer madness.

For Gore-Pearce knew perfectly well that the famous Australian cricketers were brilliant players, dogged fighters, and worthy opponents. It had pleased him to affect this contemptuous attitude.

THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

contains handsome metal portrait badges of White, Mead, and Ames. Trim the badges with a pair of scissors and slip them in your album. Or if one of these cricketers is your favourite, why not wear the badge in your button-hole?

"As sure as my name's George Gordon, I'm going to throw you outside!" said the young man hotly.

"Here, steady!" ejaculated Gore-Pearce, realising that he had said too much. "Keep your hands off me, confound you!"

"Throw them out!" shouted another man.

"That's it! Throw

them out into the street!"

"Good-oh!"

All these men were fed up with Gore-Pearce. Cricket in Australia is regarded more or less as a kind of religion, and on the eve of a great Test Match, the feeling with regard to the great game is enormously intensified.

If any of the St. Frank's fellows had been there, they would have been horrified and furious. Indeed, they would have hurled Gore-Pearce out on his neck without any help from the Australians. For they would have deemed—and rightly, too—that Gore-Pearce was giving St. Frank's a bad name.

By a curious chance, it so happened that three stalwarts of the Remove were only a short distance away at that very moment. They were Edward Oswald Handforth, of Study D, and his inseparable chums, Church and McClure. They were strolling along, wondering whether they should go into a restaurant and have some tea, or whether it wouldn't be a better idea to go to one of the beaches and indulge in a bath.

"Melbourne's a fine city," Handforth was saying. "I don't take much interest in towns as a rule, but, by George, this place is tophole."

"And the beaches are jolly fine, too," said McClure suggestively. "We've been to St. Kilda, Brighton, Sandringham, and Black

Rock. What about taking a trip out to Beaumaris? It's only just beyond Black Rock, and we can get there in about half an hour on a tram."

"Oh, all right, I don't mind," said Handforth agreeably.

All the St. Frank's fellows had been charmed by the splendid streets of Melbourne—so wide and airy, so imposing and handsome. The central business section, known generally as "the City," was laid out in parallel streets, running from east to west, and from north to south. All the main streets were just on a hundred feet wide, and most of them were lined with great hotels, stores, and public buildings of imposing architecture.

And all round the city there were handsome boulevards, with velvety green lawns, trim shrubs, tree-bordered drives. The famous St. Kilda road, indeed, was one of the most entrancing that any of the juniors had ever seen. Five miles long, it was the kind of road that one sometimes dreams about, but seldom sees. Down the centre of it, cool and shady, was a line of trees; on either side there were wide, well-paved roads, especially made for fast traffic. Then came belts of grass, ornamented with flower-beds and shrubs, and after that a section of road for heavy and slow traffic, and finally a splendid footway, with more grass and shrubs and flowers. Not many of the St. Frank's fellows would forget the St. Kilda road for a long day. Once seen, once traversed, it could not easily be forgotten.

But, then, Melbourne was full of beautiful spots, packed with an extraordinary number of parks and open spaces. There were over one thousand eight hundred acres of parks and gardens, and all were greatly used by the citizens, and all splendidly kept.

Handforth & Co., as they prepared to find a tram for the beaches, little dreamed that Chance was leading them to an adventure which was certainly not to include any such peaceful item as bathing!



CHAPTER 3

Rough on Handforth & Co.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth abruptly.

Church and McClure looked at him wonderingly, for his

tone was charged with excitement. They found that their leader was staring straight ahead of him, apparently at the back of a man who was walking some little distance in front.

"What's the matter?" asked Church.

"That man!" said Handforth tensely.

"Eh? Which man?"

"The man just in front."

"What about him?"

"He's Woodfull, the famous Victoria player!" said Handforth eagerly. "My hat! Don't you recognise him?"

"Not by the back of his head," said McClure sarcastically.

"Well, he's Woodfull all right!" said Handforth. "I met him in Adelaide. He signed my autograph-book for me. Don't you remember?"

"Well, what about it?" asked Church. "I suppose that Mr. Woodfull is entitled to walk through the streets of Melbourne if he wants to, isn't he? He's a Victorian anyway——"

"That's not the point!" interrupted Handforth. "Why not hurry up to him, grab him, and make him give us a few facts about the Test Match?"

"Is he playing to-morrow?" asked Mac. "I don't seem to remember——"

"Never mind that!" interrupted Handforth. "He'll know all the inside information. Come on! He's a pal of mine, and I'll introduce you chaps, too."

Church and McClure, who had not met the famous Australia player on the other occasion, were only too glad to take advantage of Handforth's suggestion. So they all hurried forward, surrounded Woodfull, much to that gentleman's surprise, and brought him to a halt.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Woodfull!" said Handforth boisterously.

"Good afternoon, young 'uns," said Woodfull. "Some of the English schoolboys, eh? Haven't I seen your face before?" he added, looking at Handforth and smiling.

"You bet you have, sir," grinned Handforth. "Don't you remember where?"

"It wasn't in a comic paper, was it?" said Woodfull musingly.

Handforth frowned.

"My photograph has been in the papers, if that's what you mean—although, if it comes to that, it didn't look a bit like me. My face generally looks like a smudge in a photograph."

"You mustn't blame the photographer for that," said Woodfull, shaking his head.

Church and McClure grinned, and Handforth fortunately missed the point.

"You signed my autograph-book in Adelaide, sir," he said. "Don't you remember? I barged into the ground. Sir Arthur Brampton, the millionaire, let me in."

"Ah, that's right," nodded Woodfull. "I remember now."

"We're here to see the final Test, sir," said Edward Oswald. "What's the latest about the game?"

"The latest?" said Woodfull thoughtfully. "Well, as far as I know, it starts to-morrow morning."

"But we know that, sir."

"I suppose you do," said Woodfull.

"Well, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything more than you've already seen in the newspapers. You can be quite sure that Australia will work hard for a victory, and you can

be just as sure that England will do precisely the same."

They had been strolling along whilst talking, and now suddenly they became aware of a strange commotion, proceeding from the open windows of a large public-house near by.

"Seems to be a bit of trouble in there," remarked Handforth. "We'd better hurry on, sir. We don't want to be mixed up—"

"Hil Rescue!" came a shout. "Rescue, Remove!"

"My only hat!" said Church excitedly. "That's one of our chaps!"

"Rescue, St. Frank's!" came the cry.

"I rather think," remarked Woodfull, "that I had better bid you youngsters good-bye. You seem to be wanted."

Handforth hardly heard the famous cricketer's words. At that magic call—"rescue, Remove,"—he forgot all else. Somebody was in trouble—presumably a Remove fellow. Handforth never failed to answer such a call.

"Come on!" he panted. "We're needed."

"Just a minute!" gasped Church. "This is a public-house, you know, and all pubs are out of bounds—"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Somebody's in trouble, and we've got to go to the rescue."

He dashed into the establishment, and Church and McClure, knowing that they couldn't leave their leader to face this thing alone, dashed in with him. As it happened, they went headlong into Gore-Pearce & Co., just as these three precious youths were running helter-skelter for the street.

There was a violent collision, a series of yells, and Handforth and Co. went sprawling on the floor, just inside the entrance. Having rushed in out of the strong sunlight, they had been more or less blinded in that comparative gloom, and they had had no chance of seeing the faces of the fellows with whom they had collided.

Meanwhile, Gore-Pearce & Co., deeming themselves lucky to have escaped, were tearing off into the next street. They had made a sudden bolt for liberty when they had seen Mr. George Gordon and his friends advancing threateningly upon them, and the very unexpectedness of the move had made it successful.

However, Mr. George Gordon and his indignant companions were not altogether "done," for when they pressed out of the saloon they found Handforth & Co. struggling to their feet. And it was only natural, perhaps, that Mr. Gordon and his friends should take it for granted that these three juniors with the familiar school caps were the identical three who had just bolted.

Nobody had a chance of giving Handforth & Co. a close inspection. There happened to be a scuttle full of ashes close at hand, which one of the hotel servants had apparently left there for a few minutes. Anyhow, one cheery individual seized the scuttle, heaved it up, and the contents went

flying over the unfortunate chums of Study D. There was a large amount of soot amongst those ashes, too!

"Gug-gug-grrrrrrh!" gurgled Handforth.

It was certainly rough luck on Handforth & Co. They had come into this place with the idea of rescuing some unfortunate in distress. Instead they had been bowled over by some unknown miscreants—actually Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell—and now they were half-choked and smothered, and temporarily blinded.

To cap the lot, they found strong hands upon them. They felt themselves being propelled towards the outer door. Then, to put the lid on the whole adventure, they were literally thrown headlong into the gutter, one on top of the other.

"Now you're out—and you can stay out!" said one of the Australians, with satisfaction. "And the next time you try to air your views on cricket, go to a place where nobody can hear you!"

But Handforth & Co. were paying no attention. They were far too occupied in getting the soot and ashes out of their mouths and ears and eyes and nostrils.

And it was just one of those unpleasant tricks of fate which caused Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Fourth Form, to turn round the corner at that precise moment!



CHAPTER 4

On the Carpet!

MR. HORACE PYCRAFT was not a pleasant man at the best of times. He possessed an acid temper, he was a busybody, and he generally took a keen pleasure in getting the juniors into trouble.

Therefore, when he came round this corner and found three dishevelled figures in the gutter, just outside a public-house, he was considerably shocked. But these feelings were nothing compared to those which followed immediately afterwards—when he recognised a St. Frank's cap on the pavement, and when he saw two other caps in the gutter.

"Good gracious me!" said Mr. Pycraft, aghast.

He could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes. The thing was fantastic—impossible. It was, indeed, horrifying. Three St. Frank's fellows—thrown out of a Melbourne public-house!

Mr. Pycraft recovered himself rapidly, and he came to the conclusion that it was his duty to make immediate inquiries. Rather to his surprise, other pedestrians were taking very little notice of the three scarecrow figures in the gutter.

"Who are you?" demanded Mr. Pycraft, in a terrible voice.

"Better not touch them, chum," said a voice from the doorway of the public-house.

Mr. Pycraft turned with a start.

"Were you—er—addressing me, sir?" he asked stiffly.

"I was," said Mr. Gordon. "Those three youngsters deserved all they got."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Pycraft. "Perhaps it will interest you to know that I am a St. Frank's master!"

"Bonzer!" grinned Mr. Gordon. "You'd better take them in charge then. We've just thrown them out of this pub!"

"What?" gasped Mr. Pycraft.

"They were in here, drinking and talking, and they insulted us," said Mr. Gordon grimly. "So we threw them out."

"Drinking!" said Mr. Pycraft hoarsely. "Good heavens! In a public-house, drinking!"

"What do you think they came in for—to ask the time?" said the other tartly.

He walked away, and Mr. Pycraft had all the evidence that he needed. Indeed, Mr. Gordon's statement had been more or less unnecessary—since the facts were all too obvious. Here were these three juniors in the gutter, just as they had been flung out of the public-house. In fairness to Mr. Gordon, it must be explained that he had no idea that these three figures were different from those who had originally started the trouble.

"Gurrrrrh!" said Handforth, as he struggled dizzily to his feet, his face now somewhat free from the soot and ashes—although he was still unrecognisable. "By George! Who did that? Where are we? What's happened?"

"Handforth!" ejaculated Mr. Pycraft triumphantly.

"My only sainted aunt! Old Piccrust!" gasped Handforth.

"What did you call me, Handforth?" snapped the Form-master. "How dare you? You wretched boy! Who are these companions of yours? Get to your feet at once!"

Church and McClure rose, startled.

"Your names!" rapped out Mr. Pycraft.

"Church, sir."

"McClure, sir."

"I thought so—I suspected so!" said Mr. Pycraft, horrified. "Handforth! Church! McClure! You will come with me at once! I shall take you straight to the School Ship, and report you to Mr. Lee."

"Here, half-a-minute, sir!" said Handforth. "Before we go anywhere I want to find out who assaulted us! By George! When I find those silly fatheads—"

"Be silent!" commanded the Form-master. "I am ashamed of you, Handforth! I have not the slightest doubt that you are the ringleader in this disgusting affair!"

Handforth stared, bewildered. Church and McClure began to look alarmed.

"I have all the evidence I need," went on Mr. Pycraft coldly. "You have been thrown out of this—er—public-house, and I come along and find you sprawling in the gutter, smothered in soot and rubbish. I am positively stunned, Handforth! You have dishonoured the good name of St. Frank's!"

"But you don't know what you're talking about, sir!" ejaculated Handforth. "We heard somebody shouting, and we rushed in, and the next moment we were—"

"You will not improve your position by inventing such a fabrication," said Mr. Pycraft acidly. "Fortunately, I already know the facts. I have ascertained that you were in this public-house, 'drinking—'"

"Wha-a-a-at!" babbled Handforth & Co. in one voice.

"You were in this public-house, drinking, and you were thrown out," said Mr. Pycraft. "Doubtless you know why you were thrown out better than I. At all events, I came along and found you in the gutter. That is quite sufficient! I am shocked—horrified. Come with me at once!"

"But it's not true, sir!" shouted Church. "We haven't been drinking!"

"Silence!" thundered the Form-master.

He felt justified, in the circumstances, in chartering a taxi-cab, and as one was handy just at the moment, he signalled to it. The vehicle pulled up smartly, and Mr. Pycraft opened the door.

"Now then, boys—in here!" he commanded. "No nonsense! An example shall be made of you—to prove to the good people of Melbourne that the St. Frank's authorities do not tolerate this—this disgusting behaviour."

"Half a minute!" shouted Handforth desperately. "I tell you, you've made a mistake, sir! Ask anybody in the public-house! They'll explain that we only ran in because we heard a shout, and—"

"Don't you believe it," said a man who had just come out of the public-house, addressing Mr. Pycraft. "I was in the saloon at the time. These boys were drinking in there—it was only lime-juice, I think—but they were insulting and impudent. Some of the fellows threw them out, and it served them right, too."

Handforth's jaw dropped.

"You're mad!" he gasped. "We weren't in the saloon—we've never set foot in it!"

"The kid's lying!" said the man contemptuously. "I was there—and I saw them."

"I can quite believe it, sir—and thank you!" said Mr. Pycraft triumphantly.

Handforth & Co. wondered if they were dreaming. This fresh witness was just as sincere as Mr. Gordon—for he, too, had confused these three juniors with the three who had escaped. Their faces were still grimy and unrecognisable, and the man's mistake was understandable.

So Handforth & Co., dizzy and speechless, were packed into the taxi, and Mr. Pycraft climbed in after them.



The indignant Australian seized the scuttle, heaved it up, and a shower of ashes and soot went flying over Handforth and his two chums. "Gug-gug-grrrr!" gurgled the luckless Handy.



CHAPTER 5

The Chopper I

DURING that ride to the School Ship, Handforth & Co. tried hard to explain to Mr. Pycraft, but that gentleman silenced the juniors every time they attempted to speak.

In Mr. Pycraft's view, there was absolutely nothing to be said.

The case was obvious—it was proven to the hilt. These three juniors had been in a public-house; they had got mixed up in a brawl; they had been thrown out into the gutter. That was the whole thing in a nutshell. Furthermore, it was amply proved, since two independent witnesses had assured Mr. Pycraft of the facts.

Whatever Handforth & Co. said could make no difference.

"I am ashamed of you!" declared Mr. Pycraft scathingly. "I only hope that this disgraceful affair will not be mentioned in the newspapers. You have brought dishonour upon the name of your school—"

"There's some mistake, sir," panted Handforth. "Those men were telling whoppers!"

"And why, pray, should they tell—er—whoppers?" demanded Mr. Pycraft curtly. "They were practically strangers to you, and

they certainly had no desire to injure you. I am astonished, Handforth, that you should have the audacity to maintain an air of innocence. You are only making things worse by adopting this attitude."

"But look here, sir—"

"That is enough!"

"Yes, but—"

"Silence!"

Upon reaching the School Ship, Mr. Pycraft led Handforth & Co. straight below to Nelson Lee's cabin. As it happened, the famous schoolmaster-detective was in. At St. Frank's, he was the Housemaster of the Ancient House; but on the School Ship he was the Head.

"Really, Mr. Pycraft, why have you brought these boys to me in this condition?" asked Lee, in surprise.

"I thought it advisable, sir, that you should see them in this state," replied the Fourth Form-master. "This is exactly as I found them, in the heart of the City—sprawling in a gutter!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed, sir," said Mr. Pycraft. "They had just been ejected from a public-house!"

Nelson Lee's expression became grave, and he looked at Handforth & Co. with troubled eyes.

"Mr. Pycraft's made a mistake, sir!" burst out Handforth breathlessly. "I'll admit that we were chucked out, but it was all a blunder. We must have been mistaken for somebody else—"

"Silence, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee sternly. "Mr. Pycraft, be good enough to tell me the exact circumstances of this strange affair."

"I happened to walk round a corner, near a public-house, sir," said Mr. Pycraft. "You can imagine my surprise when I found these three boys sprawling in the gutter, nearly choking. Two men from the public-house assured me that the boys had been in the saloon bar, drinking——"

"Drinking!" broke in Nelson Lee sharply. "Do you know what they were drinking?"

"Lime-juice, I believe, sir," said Mr. Pycraft, with reluctance.

"Lime-juice," nodded Lee, relieved. "Well?"

"It seems that they were using insulting words," continued the Form-master. "At all events, they enraged the Australians who were in the saloon, and these men threw the boys out. These facts were given to me by two different men, and they cannot, of course, be disregarded. I would also remind you, sir, that I was actually on the scene myself. I saw the boys in the gutter—just where they had been flung."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips, and then he looked at the three juniors with grave eyes.

"I am very surprised to hear this, Handforth," he said quietly. "I hope that you will be able to give some sort of explanation—although, I fear, there can be no excuse for your entering the saloon bar of a public-house. You know perfectly well that such places are rigidly out of bounds. In an impulsive moment, perhaps, you led Church and McClure into this——"

"But it isn't true, sir," broke in Handforth excitedly. "We didn't go into any public-house—at least, not into the saloon bar."

"But you admit that you were in the establishment?"

"Only just in the hall, sir," said Handforth. "We heard a shout for help, and we dashed in. Then somebody collided with us, and somebody else chucked some soot in our faces, and then we were thrown out into the gutter. That's all, sir."

Handforth had realised, with a sudden shock, that he could not explain that they had heard a cry of "Rescue, St. Frank's!" That would immediately inform Nelson Lee that there had been some St. Frank's fellows in the place; and Handforth had very strict ideas on sneaking. Moreover, he felt that such a story could do no good, since neither he nor his companions knew the identities of the real culprits.

"And do you assure me, Handforth, that this is all that happened?" asked Lee quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"Then how do you account for the fact that two witnesses informed Mr. Pycraft that you were in the saloon bar, drinking lime-juice?"

"But we weren't, sir!" protested Handforth. "Were we, you chaps?"

"Of course we weren't!" said Church and McClure.

"I am very sorry," said Nelson Lee, "but the facts speak for themselves, Handforth. You would not have been thrown out of this establishment unless you had committed some offence—some minor offence, perhaps. It will be far better if you confess at once."

"We've nothing to confess, sir."

"It is only natural, perhaps, that these boys should attempt to whitewash their behaviour," said Mr. Pycraft unpleasantly. "I would remind you, Mr. Lee, that I found them in the gutter; that two men supplied me with positive evidence——"

"I do not need this reminder, Mr. Pycraft," said Nelson Lee. "These boys have behaved in a manner which is discreditable to the school. Yet I cannot believe that they did so deliberately. If I thought such a thing, their punishment would be very severe, indeed. As it is, I shall let them off lightly."

"Really, sir——" began Mr. Pycraft.

"To-morrow, the Test Match commences," continued Nelson Lee sternly. "The whole school has been granted a day's holiday for the occasion, and the school will be further permitted to attend the Test Match on the afternoons of subsequent days. These three boys will have this privilege denied them—as a punishment for their foolish escapade of this afternoon!"

Handforth gulped, and breathed hard.

"You—you mean that we're not to see the Test Match, sir?" he asked hoarsely.

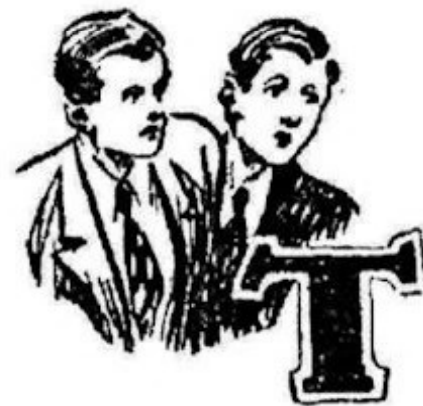
"That is exactly what I mean, Handforth!" replied Nelson Lee. "You three boys are detained—for the entire duration of the Test Match. You are to remain on board this ship, and you will be given extra work, so that you may be kept fully occupied. That is all. You had better go and get yourselves thoroughly clean."

"But, sir, it's not fair!" burst out Handforth. "We want to see the Test Match!"

"We haven't done anything wrong, sir!" shouted Church.

"That will do!" commanded Lee. "Go! You have heard your sentence, and I see no reason why I should alter my decision."

And Handforth & Co., recognising the note of finality in Nelson Lee's voice, departed. The chopper had come down with a very heavy swing!



CHAPTER 6

Many Sympathisers!

THE Junior Common-room contained quite a number of fellows when the chums of Study D arrived,

after having a thorough wash, and changing their clothes.

It was very pleasant in the Common-room, with the windows standing open. Actually, the place was one of the big lounges of the liner, but it was always referred to as "the Common-room." On the floating school everything was as nearly a replica of St. Frank's as possible.

There was a loud hum of conversation; everybody was in the highest possible spirits. On the morrow the Test Match would start, and it was to be a whole holiday. Excellent reasons, therefore, for the juniors to be in high spirits. Cricket, of course, was the one subject of conversation.

But when Handforth & Co. walked in, a kind of gloom walked in with them. They seemed to be surrounded with an atmosphere of tragedy. Their expressions were as nearly approaching haggard as any of the other fellows had ever seen. Handforth, in fact, was positively pale, and his eyes had a look of intense misery. Church and McClure were more or less dazed.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glen-thorne. "Enter the Demon King and his myrmidons, what? I mean to say, a chilly sort of blast has oozed through the atmosphere. Absolutely!"

"What on earth's the matter, Handy?" asked Nipper, with concern. "What's up with you fellows?"

The juniors crowded round, and Handforth looked at him dully.

"Justice!" he said, with terrible bitterness. "Oh, my hat! Never talk to me of justice again!"

"But what's happened?" insisted Nipper.

"The worst!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"What the dickens——"

"We're gated!" said Church mournfully.

"What?"

"Gated for a week!" said McClure, with a sigh.

"Great Scott!"

"Gated for the whole period of the Test Match!" said Handforth, his voice becoming thick with sudden indignation.

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"Poor old scouts!"

"Tough luck!"

"Luck!" roared Handforth. "It's nothing to do with luck! We've been victimised! The Grand Inquisitor of Spain was a gentle gazelle compared to Mr. Lee!"

"Look here," said Nipper, "there's no need to rag my guv'nor——"

"He's a tyrant!" said Handforth hotly. "He's unjust!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Nipper. "If you've been barred from the Test Match by Mr. Lee, there's a pretty good reason for it. I expect it's simply a difference of opinion. You fellows think that you've done nothing that calls for punishment—and Mr. Lee holds a different view."

"He's no right to hold a different view!" retorted Handforth fiercely. "The facts are as clear as daylight, and we've done absolutely nothing. And yet Mr. Lee says that he has let us off lightly!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church and McClure.

"But what did you do?" asked Travers.

"Nothing!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Fullwood. "You must have done something!"

"But we didn't!" said Handforth. "We happened to meet Woodfull in the City——"

"Woodfull? The great Australian cricketer?"

"Yes," said Handforth. "We were chatting with him, when we noticed a rumpus going on in a public-house near by. Then a shout came: 'Rescue, Remove!' Naturally, we dashed in."

"Who was it shouting like that?" asked Nipper.

"We don't know; we didn't recognise the voice," replied Handforth. "We barged into the place, and then we were bowled headlong by somebody. I suppose we collided with them. Anyhow, we went down, and then a crowd of men chucked a lot of soot and ashes into our faces, and pitched us out into the gutter. Then Pycraft came along, spotted us, and hauled us here. Mr. Lee heard everything, said that we had disgraced the school, and barred us from the match. That's all!"

There was an excited buzz.

"But why did he bar you from the match?" asked Nipper, in astonishment.

"Well, it was mainly Pycraft's fault," said Church. "And yet it wasn't altogether his fault, either. A couple of men came out of that public-house and told Pycraft that we had been in the saloon, drinking lime-juice, and making insulting remarks about the Australians. They told Pycraft that they had chucked us out deliberately—and, of course, when Mr. Lee heard all that, he naturally took it for granted that we had been in the pub. The evidence seemed to be conclusive."

Nipper looked relieved.

"Why, you ass," he said, glaring at Handforth, "what's the idea of making these accusations against my guv'nor? He hasn't been unjust."

"He's barred us from the Test Match!" retorted Handforth.

"Only because there's been a misunderstanding," said Nipper. "He was obliged to take Pycraft's word—and you've got to admit that the facts look significant. You were thrown out of a pub., and two men came along and accused you of being insulting. I suppose you have told us the full yarn?"

"Of course!"

"You weren't really in that place?"

"Oh, chuck it!" protested Handforth. "Of course we weren't in it—except for that second or two. It was somebody else who used the insulting words, and we were so smothered with soot and ashes that those men didn't know the difference."

"Then you can't blame them—or Pycraft, either," said Nipper judicially. "As I said before, it's simply a misunderstanding. And there's no need to get the wind-up, either. You fellows will see the Test Match all right."

"How can we?" asked McClure. "We're gated!"

"My dear asses, there's an easy way out for you," said Nipper coolly. "You've only got to find Woodfull, and the thing will be done."

"Find Woodfull?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Yes."

"But what for?"

"He's an important witness," said Nipper. "You told us that you were talking to Woodfull when this shout came."

"That's right."

"Well, then, if you find Woodfull, he'll give evidence in your favour," said Nipper. "If he can satisfy Mr. Lee that you didn't go into that public-house until you heard the yell for help, it'll be clear evidence that there's been a mistake. Woodfull will soon put things right for you."

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"By George! I hadn't thought of that!" he said tensely. "It's a wheeze! But where can we find him? How can we get hold of Woodfull? Where does he live? Come on! Let's dash ashore, and—"

"Just a minute!" grinned Nipper. "No need to be so excited. You fellows can't go ashore, anyway—you're gated!"

"Oh, my hat! So we are!"

"But we can get up a little party," said Nipper briskly. "We'll see you out of this. Handy, old man. I dare say we can find out where Woodfull is by inquiring at the cricket ground. Anyhow, he's in Melbourne, and we won't be satisfied until we've got hold of him. Three of us will be enough for the job. As for your accusations against Mr. Lee, they're unfair, Handy. He acted according to the evidence that was placed in front of him—and you've got to admit that the evidence was pretty strong."

"Yes, now I come to think of it, it was," agreed Handforth. "It was mainly Pycraft's fault for being such a beastly busybody—"

"Well, we're only wasting time by talking like this," said Nipper. "Let's be doing something. Who's coming with me?"

At least a dozen fellows wanted to go, but in the end only Vivian Travers and Fullwood accompanied Nipper. And they went ashore without any further loss of time—to look for Woodfull!



CHAPTER 7

Out of the Frying Pan!

As it happened the search for Mr. W. Woodfull was extraordinarily brief.

As Nipper led the way towards the gangway, he observed a supple figure coming on board, and the next moment Nipper uttered an ejaculation.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he said. "He's Mr. Woodfull himself!"

"Hallo! Who's taking my name in vain?" asked the famous Victorian, smiling.

"Not in vain, sir," said Nipper, running up. "We were just coming ashore to look for you."

"About those three youngsters who were collared by one of your masters, eh?" asked Woodfull, nodding. "As a matter of fact, that's why I'm here, too."

"Good man!" said Nipper enthusiastically. "There was a misunderstanding, sir! Those three fellows have been barred from seeing the Test Match!"

"Too bad!"

"Mr. Lee thinks that they were mixed up in some disgraceful scene," went on Nipper. "But you know well enough that they only just entered that place because they heard a yell for help. It was somebody else who—"

"Yes, I know," said Woodfull. "As a matter of fact, I saw the three culprits running off, although I don't know who they were."

"But they were St. Frank's fellows?"

"Undoubtedly," said the famous cricketer.

"And I gathered that there might be some little confusion, so I thought I'd just come along and do all I could to help."

"That was very sporting of you, sir," said Travers. "Hi, Handforth, dear old fellow! Look who's here!"

Handforth & Co. were crowding up with a number of other fellows, and they surrounded Woodfull in a shouting mob. The smiling Victorian was in no way disconcerted.

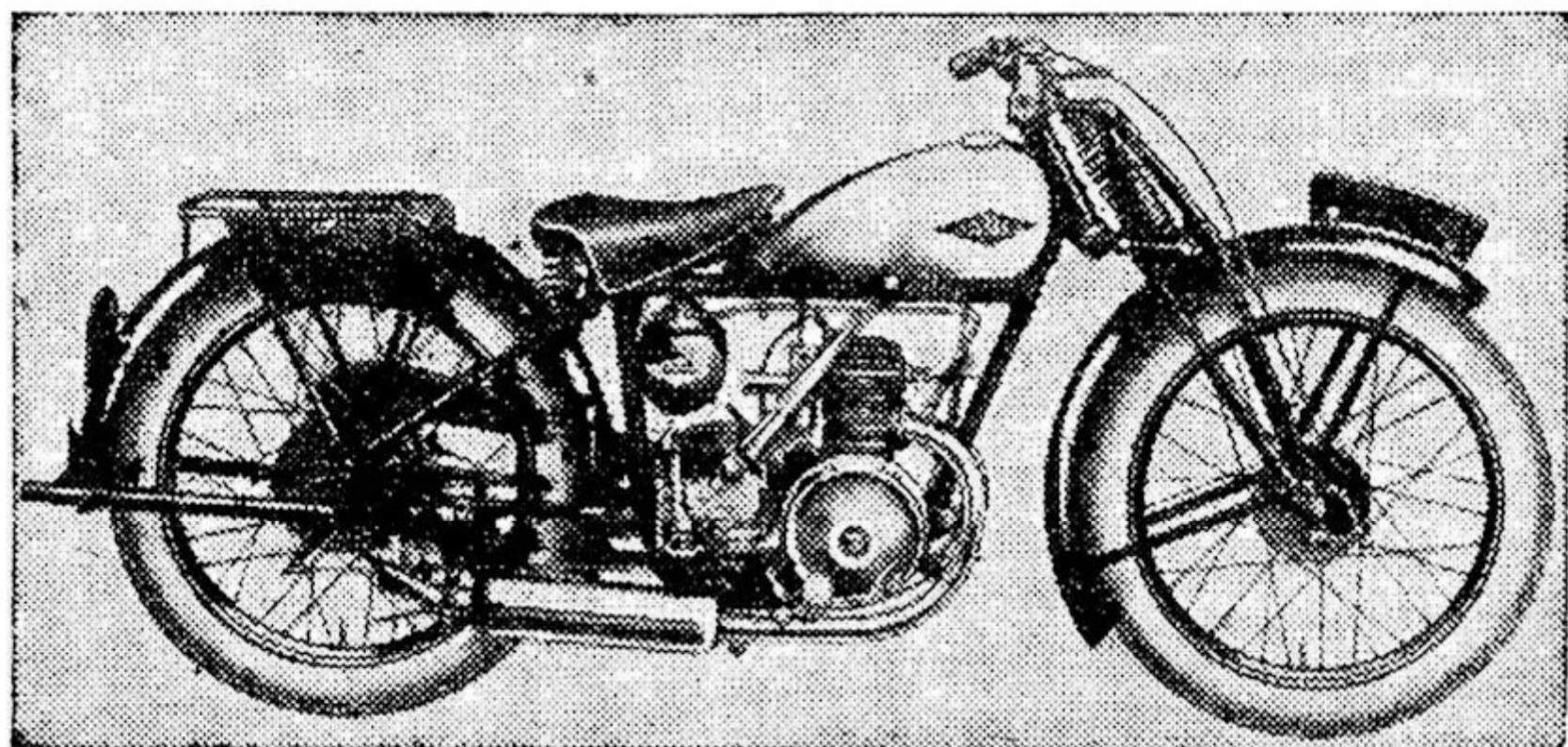
"Where's your headmaster?" he asked briskly. "We'll get this thing settled at once. Which are the three boys who spoke to me just before that unhappy little incident?"

"We're the ones, sir," said Handforth eagerly. "Churchy, Mac, and me. Mr. Lee thinks we were guilty of rotten conduct, and I must say that the evidence was as black as ink. But you can prove—"

"Come along!" said Woodfull, with a chuckle.

He was triumphantly led below, and a few moments later he was ushered into Nelson

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Lee's cabin—or, as it was called on board, his study.

"This is Mr. Woodfull, sir—the famous Australian cricketer," said Handforth proudly. "A friend of mine, sir."

"A totally unnecessary introduction, Handforth, since Mr. Woodfull and I are well acquainted," smiled Nelson Lee. "How are you, my dear fellow?"

"Very fit, thanks," replied Woodfull. "I'm here on an errand of justice. Three of these boys, I think, have recently been punished for some misdemeanour."

"Unfortunately they were mixed up in a brawl," said Nelson Lee. "I do not think their offence was very serious. It was rather a matter of thoughtlessness."

"But they're not guilty," said Woodfull. "These three boys are more to be sympathised with than punished. According to the way I look at the thing, it's a case of mistaken identity."

"That's what we told you, sir," said Handforth eagerly.

In a very few words, Woodfull explained the circumstances. He told Lee how he had met Handforth & Co. in the city, and how he had been chatting with them when that cry of "Rescue, Remove!" had come to them.

"These three youngsters were with me until that very moment," he explained. "If they were in the public-house at all, they were only inside for a few seconds. But three

other St. Frank's boys came rushing out, and they ran off. They are the three who should be punished, since it is fairly obvious that they created the original disturbance. I fancy there must have been a bit of a mix-up in the hall of the place."

"A mix up!" echoed Handforth. "I should think it was, sir! Before we could even pick ourselves up, somebody threw a lot of soot and cinders over us. That's why those men came out and told Mr. Pycraft that we'd been in that place, drinking lime-juice and—"

"A very natural mistake, Handforth," put in Nelson Lee. "Mr. Woodfull's information, of course, absolves you three boys from blame. Yet I do not reproach myself in the slightest degree for having passed sentence on you. According to the evidence that was placed before me, I had no alternative but to punish you."

"And now, sir?" chorused Handforth & Co.

"Well, I think I can safely pardon you," replied Lee dryly.

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir!"

"By George, you're a brick, sir!"

"Rather!"

"This, however, does not alter the fact that three St. Frank's boys are guilty of creating a disgraceful disturbance," continued Nelson Lee. "These three boys must be found—and punished. I take a very serious view of this matter, and I shall not lightly dismiss it."

Handforth & Co. gave Woodfull some warm, grateful glances, and then they were permitted to go. Outside they congratulated themselves, and they were congratulated by the others. And Woodfull was voted to be a splendid fellow.

"Well, that's that!" said Handforth heartily. "By George! It was a pretty narrow shave, though! We were nearly barred from seeing the giddy Test Match!"

"I'd rather have lost a term's pocket money!" said Church.

"You'd better go easy next time, Handy," said McClure warningly. "You're always so jolly impulsive."

Handforth looked at his chums coldly. "Whenever I hear a shout of 'Rescue, Remove!' I'm going to answer it," he replied. "If I get into trouble over it, I shan't grumble. And I'm surprised at you fellows for suggesting that any such call should be ignored."

"We weren't suggesting it," said Church indignantly. "But there's no need to be so ramheaded. If we had gone into that pub. like human beings, instead of battering-rams, we shouldn't have collided with those three fellows who were escaping."

"By the way, who were they?" said Handforth, frowning. "The rotters! They're the cause of all the trouble!"

Clang-clang!
"Hallo! What's that for?" said Church, glancing round. "It's the bell for Big Hall!"
"But why now?" said Handforth. "It isn't calling-over yet!"

However, it was useless asking questions. Nipper and Travers and Boots and a lot of the others were puzzled, but they were compelled to go along to Big Hall with the rest of the fellows. Seniors and juniors alike were obliged to answer that imperious summons.

When the prefects had rounded everybody up, it was found that there were many absentees, for, as it was not calling-over, many of the fellows were still ashore. Nelson Lee appeared on the platform, and he was looking grave and stern.

"It has come to my knowledge," he said, "that three of our boys entered a public-house in the city this afternoon and created a disturbance. If those three boys are here, I call upon them to stand forward immediately."

There was no response.
"But, Mr. Lee, surely there is a mistake?" said Mr. Pycraft, bewildered. "The three boys have already been brought before you—"

"Handforth and Church and McClure are not the three boys, Mr. Pycraft," said Nelson Lee. "I have had conclusive evidence placed before me which proves that three other boys are the actual culprits."

"But, really—"
"We told you we weren't guilty, sir," said Handforth, looking triumphantly at the Fourth Form-master.

Mr. Pycraft was more bewildered than ever, but he was not rash enough to say anything further, although he mentally told himself that he would have an interview with Nelson Lee immediately the school was dismissed. Not that that interview was destined to come to anything.

"I take a very serious view of this incident," continued Nelson Lee sternly. "The good name of St. Frank's has been injured. It is the duty of you all to conduct yourselves respectably and honourably whilst ashore; and you all know that public-houses are strictly out of bounds. Unless these three culprits confess before bed-time to-night, I may find it necessary to cancel to-morrow's holiday, and, indeed, place the Test Match completely out of bounds!"



CHAPTER 8

Gore-Pearce's Cunning!

HERE was a murmur of consternation, which rapidly swelled to a loud buzz. Seniors and juniors alike were startled and staggered by this pronouncement.

"But is this fair to the school, sir?" protested Fenton, of the Sixth.

"It will be hard lines for the majority of you," said Nelson Lee. "But I am determined to find out those three culprits. If they have not confessed by bed-time, I shall, as I have said, find it necessary to confine the whole school aboard ship for the duration of the Test Match. That is all I have to say now. You may dismiss."

And the school dismissed, seething with excitement, indignation, and alarm.

"Rather drastic, Mr. Lee, isn't it?" inquired Mr. Stockdale mildly.

He had joined Lee on the platform, and the Housemaster of the Modern House was looking troubled.

"I don't intend to stick to the letter of that little threat," replied Lee, with a smile. "You may have noticed, Mr. Stockdale, that my words were quite guarded."

"But why put the school into such a fright?"

"Because I think there is very little prospect of these three boys confessing," replied Lee. "I mean confessing of their own accord. But it is most probable that the other boys will know of their identities, and they will compel the guilty trio to come to me and make a confession."

"And if they don't?"
"In that case, I shall leave the school in suspense until the morning," replied Lee.

"Perhaps I shall obtain the names then, and, if not, I can very easily 'reconsider' my decision."

"Upon my word, it's a very astute plan," said Mr. Stockdale, relieved. "The chances are that these three boys will present them-

selves to you before the evening is over."

"Exactly!" nodded Nelson Lee. "I fancy the others will see to that."

In the meantime, "the others" were holding indignation meetings in the Common-rooms and on the decks. Everybody was bubbling with excitement and consternation. The prospect of being barred from the Test-Match was simply too awful for words. And, as Nelson Lee had anticipated, crowds of fellows were already deciding that the three culprits should be hounded out and forced to make a confession. The trouble was nobody knew who the three culprits were.

As a matter of fact, these bright young gentlemen were still in the city, and still more or less scared by the narrowness of their recent escape.

"It was all your fault, confound you!" Gulliver was saying, as he glared at Gore-Pearce. "Bell and I warned you against sneering at the Australians! You silly idiot! It was only natural that those fellows in the pub. should get ratty. You don't think they were going to hear you run down the Australian cricketers——"

"Oh, shut up!" broke in Gore-Pearce savagely. "When I want any lectures from you, Gulliver, I'll ask for them! How the deuce was I to know that those men would flare up?"

"Your own common sense ought to have told you!" snapped Bell. "Now there'll probably be a report—and we shall be in the cart. Things are a lot worse because a crowd of our chaps barged in and collided with us——"

"A crowd be hanged!" interrupted Gore-Pearce. "There were only three of them. I believe Handforth was one."

"Well, you know what a chap Handforth is," said Gulliver bitterly. "He makes enough noise for a dozen. I expect the news of that affair is being broadcast everywhere by this time. And if Handforth managed to spot us——"

"He didn't!" interrupted Gore-Pearce. "And if we provide ourselves with a cast-iron alibi we shall be safe."

"How the dickens can we have an alibi?" growled Gulliver. "Talk sense, do! If we were recognised, there's an end to it. We shall be questioned when we get back to the ship, and——"

"By gad!" muttered Gore-Pearce abruptly.

There was something so exultant in his tone that Gulliver and Bell looked at him in wonder. They chanced to be walking past the side of one of Melbourne's big picture theatres, and crowds of people were pouring out through the wide-open exit doorways.

"Quick! Follow me!" said Gore-Pearce crisply.

"But what on earth——"

"Come on!"

Gulliver and Bell were bewildered by their leader's sudden unexpected move. He was pushing his way past the people who were

coming out of the cinema. Gulliver and Bell followed, thinking, just for a moment, that Gore-Pearce was trying to get into the place "on the cheap."

An attendant, who was just inside the door, placed a hand on Gore-Pearce's arm.

"It's all right—forgot a parcel," said Gore-Pearce glibly. "Left it under my seat."

He pushed past, and Gulliver and Bell succeeded in keeping up with him. They went round to the central aisle, and at that moment the lights were being lowered. Gore-Pearce dropped into a seat, and pushed his companions into two others.

"What's the idea, you confounded idiot?" whispered Bell.

"Dry up—and leave it to me!" said Gore-Pearce. "Sit still, confound you! We don't want any attention drawn towards us!"

He looked round rather anxiously, fearing that the attendant might come up and ask what their game was. But nothing happened. A news-picture was on the screen, and the orchestra was playing a lively tune.

"We're all right!" muttered Gore-Pearce, after a few minutes had elapsed. "We shall be safe after this, my sons."

But Gulliver and Bell were still at a loss to understand the wheeze. As soon as the topical picture was over, Gore-Pearce rose to his feet and prepared to leave.

"This way!" he muttered.

He did not choose the exit door by which they had gained an unlawful entry. Instead, he led the way up the broad aisle, and finally he and his companions found themselves in the great foyer of the theatre.

As Gore-Pearce had anticipated, a uniformed attendant was standing here in all his glory. He was a big man, an ex-guardian by the look of his frame.

"Jolly fine show!" said Gore-Pearce, as he carelessly dropped a half-crown into the attendant's palm.

"Thank you, sir!" said the man, surprised.

"I'm so pleased with it—the show, I mean—that I can't help giving you a tip," said Gore-Pearce coolly. "The big picture is a regular corker!"

"You're some of the English schoolboys, ain't you, sir—off the ship?" asked the attendant.

"That's right."

"Give my regards to the Old Kent Road, young gent, when you get back," grinned the man. "I'm a Londoner—born and bred in New Cross. Glad you enjoyed the pictures, sir."

"They were first-rate!" declared Gore-Pearce enthusiastically. "I thought you were English, you know. I spotted you as we came in."

The man grinned.

"Well, it ain't very easy to miss me, young gent," he replied good-humouredly. "I ain't what you might call a midget."

Gore-Pearce nodded, and he and his companions calmly strolled out into the main thoroughfare.

"Well, that's that!" said Gore-Pearce contentedly.

"But what's the idea?" demanded Bell.

"Our alibi."

"Eh?"

"Cast-iron," said Gore-Pearce coolly. "If there are any questions about us, we'll say that we were in this picture theatre all the afternoon."

"But we weren't!" said Gulliver. "We can't prove——"

"We can prove it easily enough," interrupted Gore-Pearce. "If there are any questions, we'll say exactly which picture theatre we were in, and, if necessary, obtain the evidence of that doorman. After our little chat with him, he'll swear that we were in the theatre all the afternoon. He saw us coming out, and we told him that we spotted him as we went in. He'll never dream that we dodged in by one of the exit doors only five minutes ago."

"You deep bounder!" said Gulliver admiringly.

"By gad! I believe it'll work, too!" said Bell.

They were still standing just in front of the big entrance, and at that moment Biggleswade and Mills, of the Sixth, confronted them. Gulliver and Bell were inclined to be scared, but Claude Gore-Pearce remained as calm as ever.



CHAPTER 9

Into the Hornets' Nest!

"GOING in?" said Gore-Pearce, nodding his head towards the entrance.

"Yes, we thought about having a look at the pictures," said Biggleswade.

"Well, you'll enjoy the show—the big picture is first-rate," said Gore-Pearce. "We've just come out, so we ought to know."

He strolled off, and Gulliver and Bell, being only too glad to get away from the vicinity of the two prefects, promptly followed.

"Well, that's clinched it," grinned the cad of Study A. "We're as safe as houses now, whatever develops."

And it certainly seemed that there was very little chance of their being brought to book for their bad behaviour.

They arrived back at the School Ship, relieved and easy in mind. The first person they saw on deck was Teddy Long, of the Remove. Teddy was looking very important and excited.

"Better bolt, you fellows!" he advised. "Everybody's looking for you."

"Looking for us?" said Gore-Pearce, staring.

"Yes."

"What for?" demanded Bell nervously.

"You'll find out what for," grinned Teddy Long. "There's a whole packet of trouble waiting for you fellows."

Teddy Long was an insignificant junior—so insignificant, indeed, that he had been more or less ignored ever since this trip had commenced. Nobody ever took any notice of him. At St. Frank's he was generally active as a sneak, but of late, mainly because the ordinary school routine had been interrupted, Teddy had found no openings for his own peculiar talent.

"Get out of our way, you young fool!" said Gore-Pearce contemptuously. "You don't know what the deuce you're talking about!"

"Oh, don't I?" retorted Teddy Long. "You're the three rotters who created a disturbance in a pub. this afternoon——"

"Oh, my only aunt!" breathed Bell faintly.

"Confound your sauce!" snapped Gore-Pearce, seizing Teddy by the arm and squeezing it. "What do you mean? I'll teach you to make accusations like that!"

"Hi! Lemme go!" howled Teddy Long. "You know jolly well that you're the culprits! And everybody's after your blood!"

"As it happens, we've been in a picture theatre all the afternoon," said Gore-Pearce sourly.

"That's a likely yarn!" said Teddy, with open scepticism. "Nipper and Handy and the others have been holding a meeting, and they've been reckoning who are the chaps who might have gone into a pub. All the rest have been marked off, and you three are left. So it's as clear as daylight——"

"Oh, go and boil yourself!" interrupted Gore-Pearce, pushing past.

Gulliver and Bell followed him, and they walked to the other side of the wide promenade deck, retiring into the shadows.

"There you are!" panted Gulliver. "What did we tell you? We're in the soup! And as for you and your rotten alibi——"

"Keep quiet!" hissed Gore-Pearce. "As long as you chaps back me up, we're safe! For goodness' sake, keep your heads!"

He was rather startled by what he had just heard. So everybody else had been eliminated! And he and Gulliver and Bell were suspected! It was a fairly obvious process, and it was for this very reason that Gore-Pearce disliked it so much.

"There's only one thing to do—we've got to bluff it out!" said Gore-Pearce suddenly. "And it's no good staying here, either. We'll go right into the Common-room, and we'll stick to our yarn that we were in a picture theatre all the afternoon. Remember that, you fellows! If you let me down, I'll never speak to you again!"

He opened a door which led into a lounge, and strode in. Passing down the wide stairs, they reached another deck, and strolled leisurely into the Junior Common-room.

A yell immediately went up.

"Here they are!"

Mr. Horace Pycraft glanced disdainfully at the three dishevelled figures in the gutter, failing to recognise them as Edward Oswald Handforth and his two chums of Study D. Then the Form-master saw the St. Frank's caps. "Good gracious me!" he gasped, in scandalised tones. Trouble loomed ahead for Handforth & Co.



"Grab them, you fellows!"

Gore-Pearce & Co. were immediately surrounded, and they pretended to look very surprised and bewildered.

"What's the meaning of all this?" asked Gore-Pearce sourly.

"We've been waiting for you fellows to come aboard!" said Nipper, in a grim voice. "We've been waiting very anxiously."

"Oh?" said Gore-Pearce. "I didn't know we were so popular."

"By George! We'll soon show you how popular you are!" put in Handforth aggressively. "You're the three rotters who were in that pub this afternoon! You can't deny it—"

"Pub?" repeated Gore-Pearce, puzzled. "You're mad. We've been in no pub."

"Not likely!" said Gulliver and Bell, in one voice.

"I'm afraid you fellows were a bit too prompt," said Nipper. "That denial of yours rather smacks of—well, insincerity. That's putting it politely."

"Have you all gone off your rockers?" asked Gore-Pearce, in disdain. "We've been in a picture theatre all the afternoon."

"Do you swear that?"

"Be hanged to you!" said Gore-Pearce. "I'm not going to swear anything just to please you! But if it's necessary, we can easily prove that we were at the pictures."

"Then you'd better get your proofs ready!" said Handforth grimly. "The whole school is going to be kept away from the Test Match—unless these three rotters

are found out. Don't you understand? We're all going to be gated—for over a week!"

"Why jump on me?" asked Gore-Pearce. "I can't help your silly troubles! And as for the Test Match, I don't care a toss about it!"

A roar went up.

"Let's grab them, and bump them until they confess!" said Handforth excitedly. "We jolly well know they're guilty! I don't believe any of this rot! Picture theatre, indeed! I don't think!"

"Steady on!" interrupted Nipper. "There's no evidence, Handy, that these three fellows are really the culprits. We've got to take their word, I suppose."

And in this Nipper was right. There was really no shred of evidence against Gore-Pearce & Co. The juniors had suspected them because it was in keeping with their characters for them to go into a public-house. But, after all, there were other St. Frank's fellows who might easily have fallen from grace. Crowe and Webb and Crooke, of the Fourth, for example, were not any too particular—and they had been out all the afternoon, and hadn't turned up yet.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Handforth helplessly, as he retired into a corner of the Common-room with his chums and Nipper and Travers and one or two others.

"We can't do anything," said Nipper. "We're pretty sure that those cads are guilty—but without any evidence we're help-

less; and it'll be frightfully difficult to trip them up. Gore-Pearce is wily, and I dare say he has provided himself with an alibi."

"In the meantime, dear old fellow, the whole school is seething," said Travers. "From the lordly Sixth-Former to the grubbiest fag, everybody is foaming at the mouth. And I've got to admit it'll be pretty frightful if we're all barred from seeing the Test Match."

Nipper slowly stroked his chin.

"Do you know, you chaps, there's an idea slowly forming in my mind," he said thoughtfully. "Being barred from the Test Match might not be such a serious calamity, after all!"



CHAPTER 10

Putting It To Fenton!

"WELL, well!" said Travers amiably. "What is this Great Thought, dear old fellow? Hadn't you

better get into top gear, and speed it up a bit?"

Handforth grunted.

"Nothing can compensate us for missing the Test Match!" he said tartly. "Only a week or so ago, when we were out in the wilds, we thought that we should never get to Melbourne in time for the Test. And now that we're here—actually on the spot—there's a danger that we shan't see the game! It's—it's unbelievable! Mr. Lee's a giddy torturer!"

"So much so, in fact, dear old fellow, that I doubt if he really means it," said Travers shrewdly. "You must remember that Mr. Lee didn't actually commit himself. He said he 'may' be compelled to place the Test Match out of bounds. In my opinion it's a wheeze."

"But we can't rely upon it," said Nipper shaking his head. "And in any case, playing in a test match is better than watching a Test Match, isn't it?"

"Eh? What's the——"

"There's nothing much in my idea—except that it will be novel in one way," said Nipper. "Look here, you chaps. Fenton, I think, is getting up a game for the school against Melbourne schoolboys, as soon as the Test is over. But why wait until then?"

"The reason is pretty obvious, isn't it?" asked Fullwood. "We all want to see the Test Match."

"I'll admit that it's a good reason—but how would it be for us to hold a sort of rival test match?" asked Nipper keenly. "Here's the stunt. Supposing we get the game fixed up at once—and arrange for it to start at exactly the same minute as the real Test Match?"

"To-morrow morning?" asked Handforth.

"Yes."

"A two-day match, do you mean?"

"No. I mean a junior test match, played on the same lines as the real Test Match," replied Nipper coolly. "A fight to a finish, my sons!"

"Phew!"

"St. Frank's against Melbourne!" continued Nipper. "A genuine, gilt-edged, jewelled-in-every-hole test match! And we'll see if we can't carry it on for as long as the big game—for six days, perhaps. Two innings each side, and a fight to the bitter end!"

"My only hat!" said Harry Gresham breathlessly. "It's a stunt, you chaps! It's a wheeze!"

"It's a brainwave!" said Travers.

"Playing is better than watching, anyhow," said Nipper enthusiastically. "And if we get this fixed up, I don't see how Mr. Lee can stop it—particularly if Fenton arranges everything. Being barred from the Test Match won't make any difference. Mr. Lee can't very well interfere with the school fixtures—although he can easily prohibit us from having a whole holiday."

"But this will only affect the Eleven," said Travers. "The rest of the school will be subject to the ban."

"That won't affect us, will it?" grinned Nipper.

"It'll affect me!" growled Church. "And Mac, too. It's all very well for you fellows to chortle over this——"

"It's all for the honour of the school," said Nipper coolly. "If we can have our own test match going simultaneously with the proper Test Match, it'll be a novelty, and we'll see if we can't beat the big men at their own game."

"Let's put it to Fenton!" said Handforth briskly.

A deputation was quickly formed—Nipper, Travers, Handforth, and Gresham. The others were warned not to say anything just yet.

Fenton was found in the Senior Day-room, looking very worried—as, indeed, were all the other seniors who were there.

"What have we here, brothers?" said Browne, of the Fifth. "Is it possible that the guilty ones have come to confess? I am grieved, Brother Nipper, to discover that you are addicted to the frequenting of public-houses——"

"Cheese it, Browne," said Nipper. "We haven't come to confess anything."

"Perhaps you know who those fellows were, though?" asked Fenton pointedly.

"Well, we suspect three of the chaps—but as we haven't any proof we can't mention any names," said Nipper.

"But I can mention names," retorted Fenton. "Gore-Pearce is one of them! Am I right?"

"Well, yes," admitted Nipper. "We've taxed Gore-Pearce, but he swears that he was in a picture theatre all the afternoon

—and I don't very well see how we can prove otherwise."

"And we're to suffer?" put in Reynolds hotly. "Because three of you young idiots act the goat, the whole school has got to pay the penalty! I think it's an absolute outrage! It's confoundedly unjust!"

"Steady on," said Fenton quietly. "Mr. Lee's quite right—he's the Head, and he's got to maintain discipline. Before the morning, perhaps these young sweeps will realise their responsibility and confess."

"Not unless they're plainly told that they won't be severely punished," said Reynolds gruffly.

"Well, look here," said Nipper. "We've come to you with an idea, Fenton."

Briefly and concisely, Nipper told of his wheeze. At first Fenton and the other seniors were a trifle impatient; then they became more interested, their eyes began to gleam, and their faces became slightly flushed.

"Without question, brothers, this is an idea," said Browne at length. "In fact, I have no hesitation in describing it as a brainwave."

"A representative team," said Nipper. "I suggest that the Eleven should be something like this, Fenton: Conroy, Wilson, Reynolds and yourself, of the Sixth; Browne and Stevens, of the Fifth; Gresham, Handforth, Travers and myself, of the Remove; and Boots of the Fourth—with, perhaps, Fullwood or Christine as twelfth man. You're already in touch with some of these big Melbourne schools, and——"

"Wait!" interrupted Fenton. "You mean a team something like we played at Adelaide? Young England versus Young Australia, eh?"

"Exactly," said Nipper. "But this will be a genuine junior test match, Fenton—a fight to a finish—played simultaneously with the England versus Australia game. Don't you think it would be pretty good?"

"Better than watching the big game, you think?" asked Fenton.

"Personally, I'd rather be playing than watching," replied Nipper.

"Well, I agree with you," said the school captain, smiling. "As it happens, I was talking to Mr. Lee yesterday, and he's very doubtful as to whether we shall have time

for a real game—if we leave it until after the Test Match. The School Ship is setting out on her travels again within a week. I fancy Mr. Lee wants to get to sea—so that the school can settle down to hard work again. And unless we get this match in now, there's more than a chance that we shan't get it in at all."

"Then it's settled!" said Handforth firmly. "By George! We're not going to miss the chance of playing against the Melbourne schoolboys! Blow the Test Match! We want to be in action—not just looking on!"

Fenton was a fellow of action himself.

"Well, there's no time to be lost, if we're to do anything," he said briskly. "I'll run

ashore straight away, and get busy with the telephone. This idea is a good one, you kids—and if we possibly can, we'll put the thing through."

"Good man!" chorused the juniors delightedly.

They had no fears regarding the outcome of Edgar Fenton's activities.

He was Sports Captain of St. Frank's, and he'd be able to arrange the match all right.

The juniors were thrilled at the very thought of it. Young England v. Young Australia.

"Back up, tomorrow!" said Handy enthusiastically, and his chums agreed—heartily!

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CHAPTER 11

Getting Some Speed On!

THE school, as a whole, was not burning with excitement over the "great idea." All the fellows who were likely to be members of the Eleven were naturally bubbling with anticipation, but the rank and file thought the wheeze to be pretty tame. They only thought this because there was no likelihood of their taking part—or, indeed, of even watching.

For if that ban was maintained, nobody would be allowed ashore. As Nipper had said, it was hardly likely that Nelson Lee would forbid a school fixture, once it was made and definitely arranged, but the rest of the school would have to resign itself to

hard work—and that was a gloomy prospect.

Two hours later the situation seemed to be very much the same. Nothing had apparently happened, and Gore-Pearce & Co. were now feeling safe. Having got over the first stile, they were not likely to be scared by any other such obstacle. They coolly and insolently maintained their attitude of innocence. They were suspected by all the Removites and Fourth-formers—but nobody could bring any proof against them.

To add to the exasperation of the position, all the other fellows had satisfactorily accounted for their own movements. Even Crowe & Co., of Study No. 5 in the Modern House—three suspects, these—had proved quite conclusively that they had been to Sandringham Beach, bathing. Quite a number of other fellows had been there, too, so there was no doubt about this.

The Junior School, at all events, had no doubt that Gore-Pearce & Co. were the culprits; and the Junior School was getting into a restive mood.

A few stalwarts, headed by John Bustersfield Boots, of the Fourth, were preparing a very special kind of programme. The Fourth saw no reason why it should be "dished" out of its whole holiday on the morrow, and there were plenty of Removites to back up this scheme. Gore-Pearce & Co., had they only known it, were on the crater of a volcano.

Nipper and Handforth and a few others were called to a special meeting in Boots' study; but they had hardly got there before they were summoned to appear before Fenton. Willy Handforth, of the Third, brought the message.

"Fenton says it's urgent," he announced. "Five of you are wanted—my major, Nipper, Gresham, Travers, and Boots."

"By George!" said Handforth. "It's about the cricket!"

"Marvellous!" said Travers languidly. "How did you perform those mental exercises, dear old fellow?"

"About the cricket?" said Willy, frowning. "You mean this special test match you're arranging?"

"Yes."

"Then why am I left out of this conference in Fenton's study?" asked the fag. "Aren't I going to be in the Eleven?"

His major waved a lordly hand.

"Little boys should be seen and not heard!" he said airily. "Clear off, Willy, my son! Go and find some marbles to play with!"

"Will you lend me yours?" asked Willy sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheeky young fathead!" said Handforth, turning red.

When they got to Fenton's study they found a number of seniors present, and all of them were looking extremely satisfied.

"Well, you kids, it's all fixed up," said Fenton briskly. "I thought I'd let you know

the news as quickly as possible. These Melbourne chaps are keen as mustard on the game—and they think it's a good idea for the match to be played to a fighting finish."

"Good egg!" said Nipper. "And what about Mr. Lee? Does he approve?"

"He can't very well do anything else," replied Fenton. "I'm sports captain, you know—and this is a school fixture. We've been holding a conference about the team, and we have finally selected the players."

"It took us a long time," said Reynolds, "but we've got it out at last."

"May we see the list?" asked Gresham eagerly.

Fenton handed a sheet of paper to the juniors. The list for the big game was as follows: Fenton (captain), Conroy, Wilson, Reynolds, Browne, Stevens, Hamilton, Gresham, Handforth, Travers, Boots.

"Why, you chumps——" began Handforth.

"A pretty good list, Fenton," said Nipper, giving Handforth a nudge. "Thanks for including five of us juniors. We'll do the best we can for the old school."

"I know that," said Fenton. "And it's got to be a representative team, anyhow. Rather a pity we haven't had a chance of getting any practice during the past few days, but I daresay we shall be fit."

"I venture to suggest, Brother Fenton, that we shall do all honour to the good name of St. Frank's," said Browne. "But listen! Do I not hear the clang of the bell for Big Hall?"

"My hat, yes!" said Handforth. "What's wrong now? I hope to goodness this match isn't going to be squashed!"

Outside on deck, Handforth caught Nipper by the arm.

"What did you stop me for in there?" he asked. "I was just going to tell Fenton that the Eleven he has chosen is exactly the same as you mentioned——"

"I know," grinned Nipper. "It took these seniors about an hour to decide on that list—and it's exactly the same as I suggested. But why remind them of that? Diplomacy, Handy, is a virtue. Let them have their little delusions if it pleases them."

Gresham and Travers and Buster Boots chuckled.

It was certainly amusing that the seniors should have taken so much trouble over the list, whilst Nipper had rattled it off after only a moment's thought.

They went into Big Hall wonderingly. The rest of the school was all agog. It was felt that some announcement was to be made regarding the morrow's whole holiday. And the school was not far wrong.

When everybody had arrived, Nelson Lee appeared on the platform, and he was looking rather more stern than usual.

"I think you all know why you have been called together," he said quietly. "The whole school is present now, and I want the three boys who broke the school regulations

by entering a public-house this afternoon, to stand forward."

There was a dead silence, but nobody moved.

"I would like these three boys to remember the responsibility that rests on their shoulders," continued Nelson Lee. "If their identities are not known to me to-night, it is possible that I shall detain the entire school to-morrow. Come! Are you three going to permit the rest of your fellows to suffer because of your own misdemeanour?"

There was still no response. Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell tried their hardest to look as innocent and unconcerned as the rest. Gore-Pearce succeeded, but Gulliver and Bell were palpably uneasy.

"I would like to add," said Nelson Lee grimly, "that I have been making very searching inquiries—and I have, moreover, persuaded two Melbourne gentlemen to come to the ship for the purpose of identification. Once again I call upon the culprits to step forward. An immediate confession is very advisable."

Gore-Pearce yawned, but Gulliver and Bell had turned a sickly sort of putty colour. They both felt the nudges that their leader gave them—for he was standing between them.

"Very well!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "I have no alternative but to call upon the two gentlemen to identify the culprits."

And even Claude Gore-Pearce was startled when, at a sign from Nelson Lee, Mr. George Gordon and another man appeared upon the platform!



CHAPTER 12

In the Net!

MR. GEORGE GORDON was the gentleman who had taken such exception to Gore-Pearce's sneering remarks in the saloon of the public-house. His companion had also been present. It was clear enough that Nelson Lee had left no stone unturned to discover the names of the guilty ones.

Mr. Gordon and his friend were sportsmen, and at first they had refused to attend the "identification parade." They didn't want to get any of the fellows into trouble. But when they understood that the whole school would suffer unless they spoke, they changed their minds.

As it happened, however, they were not called upon to name the culprits—much to their relief and satisfaction. For Gulliver and Bell, feeling that the game was up, nearly fell over themselves in their anxiety to confess. They realised that their punishment might be lightened if they owned up before being identified.

"It's all right, sir!" panted Gulliver desperately. "We—we didn't think we were doing any harm, sir."

"It was Gore-Pearce's idea, sir," blurted out Bell. "We only went in to have a drink of lime-juice—"

"One moment!" said Nelson Lee. "Am I to understand, Gulliver, that you are confessing? And you, too, Bell?"

"Yes, sir!" they chorused.

"They're mad, sir!" shouted Gore-Pearce savagely. "They don't know what they're talking about! We were in a picture theatre all the afternoon."

"Thank you, Mr. Gordon, but I do not think your help will be necessary," said Lee quietly. "Now, Gore-Pearce, let me examine this statement of yours. Come forward—all three of you!"

Gore-Pearce gritted his teeth, but there was no help for it. He and his cronies stood forward before the rest of the school.

"Now," said Lee, "two of you have confessed to being in this public-house, whilst the third one maintains that you were in a picture theatre. Gore-Pearce, I think you have been lying to me!"

"I haven't, sir!" panted Gore-Pearce. "We were in the pictures all the afternoon. I can produce the doorman, if you like—"

"I don't think it will be necessary for you to produce the doorman, Gore-Pearce," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Biggleswade, one moment, please!"

Biggleswade of the Sixth, looking uncomfortable, came forward.

"By gad!" shouted Gore-Pearce triumphantly. "Biggleswade and another senior saw us coming out of the picture theatre—"

"And we saw you sneaking in, too!" interrupted Biggleswade gruffly.

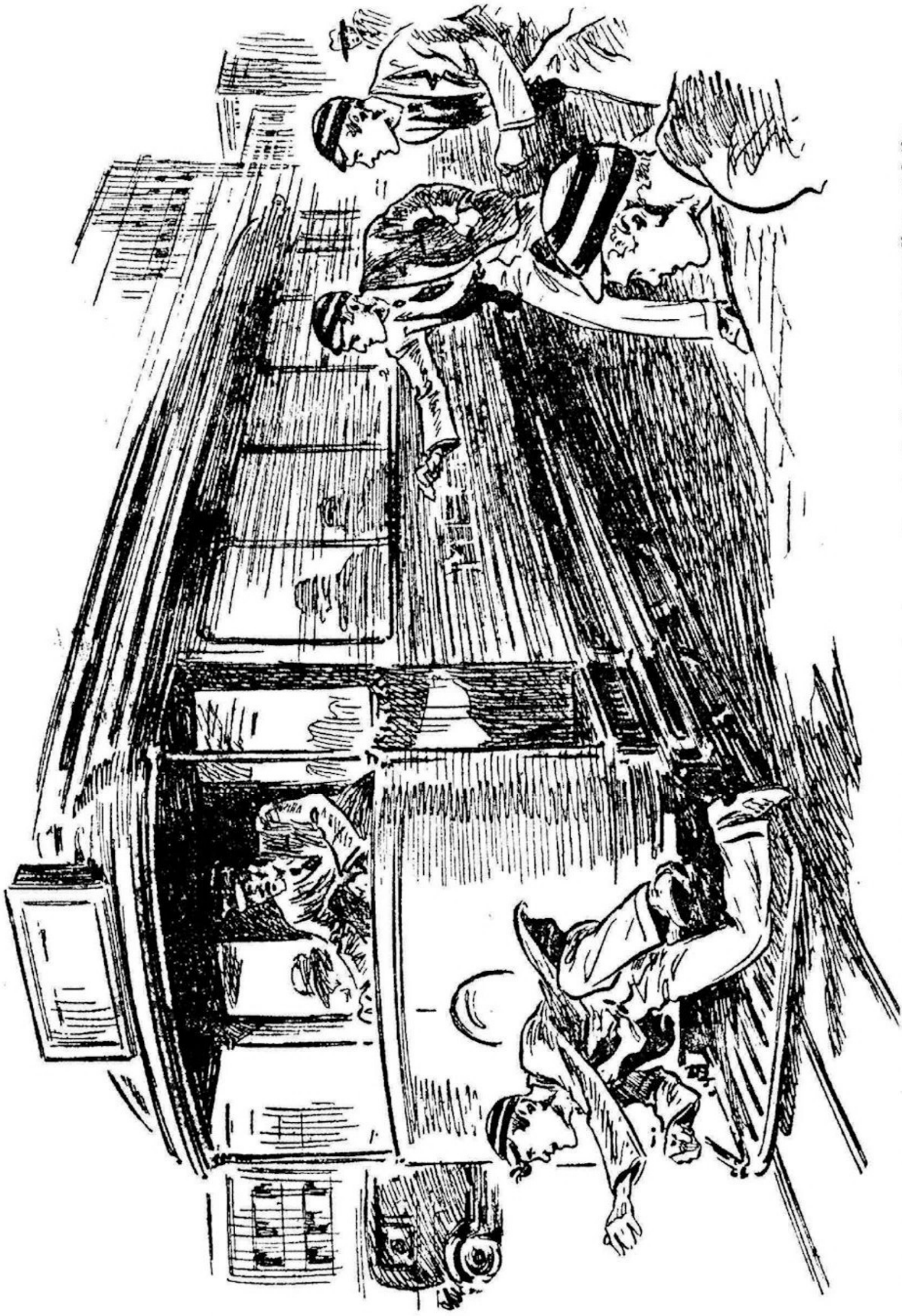
"Wha-a-at?"

"We spotted you nipping in through one of the exit doors," said Biggleswade. "We thought you were trying to get in on the cheap, and, in fact, we were going into the place in order to fish you out. But when we saw you outside, we came to the conclusion that you had been playing a bit of a lark. Now we can understand your scheme."

"You were attempting to manufacture an alibi, Gore-Pearce," said Nelson Lee sternly. "You have declared that you were in this picture theatre all the afternoon—but it is perfectly clear, from what Biggleswade has said, that you were not in the picture theatre for more than ten minutes. Do you still maintain—"

"Oh, what's the use, sir?" said Gore-Pearce recklessly. "Supposing we were in that saloon? There was no harm in it. We were only drinking lime-juice and soda."

"It would have been better, Gore-Pearce, if you had confessed at the commencement," replied Nelson Lee coldly. "I am prepared to believe that it was you who influenced these other two boys—and I shall, accordingly, give you a heavier punishment. You



“Look out!” shrieked Church, in alarm. But the warning came too late. Handforth slipped, went sprawling, and the next moment the tramcar had rushed into him!

not only broke the school rules by entering a public-house——”

“But it was a thoroughly respectable place, sir!” broke in Gore-Pearce.

“I do not doubt it,” said Lee. “I am not questioning the respectability of this particular establishment. But rules are rules, and you knew well enough that you were breaking a rule by entering that saloon. You also acted in an ungentlemanly manner—in a manner that was calculated to bring the good name of St. Frank’s into disrepute. I am going to cane you!”

He turned to Gulliver and Bell.

“You two boys can return to your places,” he said. “You will—to use the old familiar term—be confined to gates for the period of one week. That means to say that you must not go ashore during that period. This is also your sentence, Gore-Pearce—in addition to the caning that I am now about to inflict.”

And Gore-Pearce got it—a rip-roaring six-hander. The Remove and the Fourth looked on with perfect satisfaction—feeling, indeed, that the unhappy Claude was not getting half enough. He had had the school in a rare stew all the evening, owing to his refusal to own up.

“You may now dismiss,” said Nelson Lee, after the painful business was over. “I need hardly tell you that to-morrow will be a whole holiday, as previously announced——”

“Hurrah!”

“Bravo, sir!”

“I understand that a kind of secondary test match has been arranged,” continued Nelson Lee dryly. “I wish the team the best of luck. It will be rather interesting to see if Young England and Young Australia can keep it up for as long a period as their elders. I hope it will be a good game—a hard-fought game.”

“Thanks awfully, sir!”

“Hurrah!”

The school dismissed, elated and cheerful.

“‘Out of evil cometh good,’” said Billy Nation, beaming.

“In what way, ass?” inquired Boots.

“Why, if there hadn’t been a chance of the whole school being gated, Nipper wouldn’t have suggested that wheeze about a test match of our own,” replied Nation. “The thing is arranged now, and you can’t back out of it.”

“Who wants to back out of it?” asked Buster Boots promptly. “We fellows in the Eleven will miss the real Test Match—but we shall have something better. We shall be playing a test match of our own—Young England v. Young Australia!”

“Lucky beggars!” said Bob Christine, with a sigh.

It was learned that one of the finest school grounds in the whole Melbourne district had been secured for the “secondary test match.” Fenton had made all the arrangements, and the Australian Eleven had been selected from several of the Melbourne schools. These Australian schoolboys were as keen as mustard on the game—so keen, indeed, that their interest in the real Test Match had waned.

At precisely the same minute, the two



“Look out!” shrieked Church, in alarm. But the war next moment the

matches would start—and while Melbourne hummed with excitement over the forthcoming bigger match, St. Frank’s and the schoolboys of Melbourne bubbled with glee over their own particular fixture.

It was to be something of a novelty in school games—a match without a time limit—a game to a fighting finish!

CHAPTER 13

Fenton Does the Right Thing!



"HEADS!" called Edgar Fenton.

The coin was tossed, and when it came down, Fenton smiled complacently. Heads it was. The Australian skipper, a tall, stalwart young

juniors were all round the enclosure—with hundreds of Melbourne schoolboys. A mighty cheer went up from the St. Frank's fellows when it was understood that Fenton had won the toss.

Strang, the Australian captain, was one of the finest fellows Fenton had ever met—an upright sportsman, a fair-haired giant of a fellow, and, by all repute, a terrific batsman.

Before long he came out into the field with all his men, and they looked a sturdy, businesslike team in their spotless white flannels. The majority of them were between sixteen and eighteen years of age—only one or two being perhaps a year younger.

Jerry Dodd and Boomerang Bangs—the latter being a new fellow in the Remove—were interested spectators. They were both Australians, but they were unable to play in this match, since they were St. Frank's fellows. They couldn't very well play for St. Frank's because they could not represent Young England in the school team; and they couldn't play for Young Australia because they were St. Frank's boys. So they had to content themselves by being spectators.

Over on the Melbourne Cricket Ground, a vast and enthusiastic throng was already cheering the big men of the great game; but here hardly a thought was given to the genuine Test Match. This schoolboy test match was of far greater interest—and, in the opinion of the fellows, of far greater importance.

The juniors were honoured by the fact that Fenton selected Nipper as his partner to open the innings. The Senior skipper and the Junior skipper of St. Frank's walked out of the pavilion together. They were a fitting opening pair.

Nobody had any delusions about this game. No risks were to be taken, no spectacular batting was likely. In exactly the same manner as in the big game, these schoolboys were to play to a finish, no matter how long the match lasted.

The bowler who opened for the Australians was a young fellow named Griffin—a lean, lanky customer, with an enormously-long stride. He set his field, and there was a tense hush when he prepared to take his first run. He came loping down towards the wicket, covering the distance in a series of extraordinarily-long hops. Then over went his arm, and the ball was delivered to Fenton with terrific velocity.

Clack!

Fenton drove skilfully, and a single was obtained. Then Nipper faced the bowling, and he kept it for the remainder of the over. He made no runs, just contenting himself in getting the measure of Griffin's bowling.



Handforth slipped, went sprawling, and the ball rolled into him!

A fellow of about Fenton's own age, grinned rather ruefully.

"Well, that's that!" he remarked. "Good luck to you, Fenton! The wicket's perfect."

This was no exaggeration. The ground was splendidly kept—an ideal arena. The day was fine, and the pavilion was crowded with St. Frank's seniors, whilst scores of

A thick-set fellow named Briggs bowled from the other end—and his deliveries were slow, but tricky.

It took Fenton and Nipper two or three overs to settle down, and after that they commenced to open out well, although Fenton had a narrow escape when the scoreboard showed 32. He was tempted to hit at a rising ball from Griffin, and he gave a distinct chance in the slips. Only by a fraction did the fieldsman fail to get his hand to the leather.

Watchful and keen-eyed, Fenton and Nipper treated every ball which came to them with great respect. Nipper, if anything, was rather more forceful than Fenton, and some of his strokes were exceptionally fine.

"They're nicely set now," said Handforth complacently. "They ought to make a century each on a wicket like this."

"Optimist!" said Gresham.

"Don't you think they'll make a century each?"

"No, I don't," grinned Gresham. "They'll do jolly well if they keep together to see the hundred go up on the board."

"Fenton ought to have let me open the innings with him," said Edward Oswald sternly. "He and Nipper are too slow—too cautious. On a wicket like this, a chap can afford to open out a bit. When I go in, I mean to slosh hard."

"And you'll probably be out before you've scored a dozen," said Buster Boots. "You ass, Handy! You mustn't take any risks like that! This isn't an ordinary school game—a two-day affair."

"What difference does that make?" argued Handforth. "Look at that, now! Only a two! And if Nipper had only opened his shoulders a bit more, he could have scored a boundary as easy as winking. By George! Wait until I'm in!"

"How many do you reckon to score, dear old fellow?" asked Travers politely.

"Oh, I shall be satisfied if I get about a hundred and fifty."

There were many grins.

"I think Fenton will be satisfied, too, if you get a hundred and fifty, Handforth, my lad!" said Wilson, with a chuckle. "You silly young chump! You'll do jolly well if you get fifty."

A round of applause went up when it was seen that Fenton had reached his half-century. During the last two overs he had had most of the bowling, and he had been scoring well. Nipper was only 42.

But now he was facing Griffin, and twice in succession he drove the ball to the boundary, and another roar of applause went up. The "100" was on the board, and there seemed little likelihood of smashing this opening partnership yet.

Strang changed his bowling quite rapidly. Griffin was taken on and off, and on one occasion he was tried at the other end, but did not do so well. A stoutish fellow, named Marlowe, was bowling now, and he proved

to be a medium-paced man, with some tricky touches. However, both Fenton and Nipper soon grew accustomed to him, and they punished him rather severely before Strang took him off.

When the luncheon interval came, the opening pair were still in, Fenton having scored 72 and Nipper 87.

"Very fine, brothers—very fine!" said Browne approvingly.

"You're giving us a bit of trouble, you fellows," said Strang, with a grin. "Fine work, though. It's a great game."

"How's the Test going?" asked Nipper.

"The Test?" repeated Handforth, staring. "My only hat! You're playing in it, and you ask how it's going!"

"No; I mean the real Test," smiled Nipper.

"This is the real Test," replied Handforth coldly. "That other game isn't worth bothering about!"

CHAPTER 14

Laying a Solid Foundation!



HE St. Frank's cricketers unanimously declared that the luncheon was a stunner. Their

Australian hosts were "doing them proud." And when the game re-started, prompt to the minute, everybody was feeling mightily refreshed, and ready for further big deeds.

Fenton only added one to his score, however, before disaster befell him. He attempted to hit out at a straight ball from Marlowe, but it sped beneath his bat and touched his foot.

"How's that?" yelled the wicket-keeper.

The bowler was shouting, too, and the umpire's finger went up. Not everybody on the field could see what had happened, but the umpire had made no mistake. It was a palpable case of leg-before-wicket.

"Hard lines," said Nipper regretfully.

"Can't be helped, smiled Fenton. "Stick it, young 'un."

Fenton received a great ovation as he walked in. He had made a masterly 73, and he had done well.

Conroy major was the next man in, and he came out confidently. Conroy was a good batsman—safe and steady. He wasn't exactly brilliant; he was not famous for his centuries; but he could generally be relied upon to tire the bowlers.

He took guard, and Marlowe bowled.

The ball sizzled off the pitch at tremendous speed—for that delivery was as fast as any of Griffin's. The leather shot across whilst Conroy was halfway through his stroke, and in the next flash the leg stump was right out of the ground.

"Out, by Jove!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Conroy major stared at his shattered wicket in a dazed kind of way, and then his gaze met that of the wicket-keeper.

"That was a hot one," remarked the wicket-keeper cheerfully.

"Too right, it was!" agreed Conroy, unconsciously using the Australian expression.

He went back to the pavilion in a gloomy mood. He had meant to do great things for St. Frank's, and he had scored a duck! It was very hard lines on the Sixth-Former.

Wilson came next—much to Handforth's indignation. For Handforth considered that it was up to him to go in now and put a stop to the rot.

There was a tense expectancy as Wilson prepared to receive Marlowe's next delivery. There was a chance of the young Australian performing the hat trick, and the St. Frank's fellows were beginning to look anxious and worried.

Everybody held their breath when the ball went down. But Wilson made no mistake. He met the ball with the full face of his bat; there was a dull thud, and the leather rolled a few yards up the pitch.

A sigh of relief went up from the St. Frank's spectators, and another sigh—perhaps of regret—from the Australian schoolboys.

Wilson kept his end up for the remainder of the over, and he treated Marlowe with very great respect.

Then Nipper had the bowling, and he hit out with great confidence and power. In that over he scored another two boundaries, a pair of twos, and a single.

Wilson scored a single, too, breaking his duck, much to his own relief, and when the next over commenced Wilson had the bowling.

He was playing restrained cricket. It was somewhat dull for the crowd. A certain proportion of the spectators considered all cricket dull unless the ball was shooting to every part of the field. But the players themselves, and all those who thoroughly understood the great game, knew that the bowling was keen, and, in the circumstances, Wilson was playing the right game.

Then, twenty minutes later, having mounted his score to 10, he attempted to hit out, and disaster befell him. He hit out at a ball which he should have left well alone, and he had the mortification of being caught at cover-point.

"Things aren't going so well as we expected," said Fenton, frowning. "You're

next, Browne. Keep your end up, old man!"

"Leave it to me, brother," said Browne confidently.

Most of the fellows expected to see William Napoleon Browne indulging in his usual fireworks. He was a spectacular batsman, and, as a rule, he provided excellent entertainment. But this afternoon he treated the bowling with excessive caution, and, from a spectator's point of view, his work was not interesting. Yet Browne, like Wilson, was playing the right game. This was a match to a finish, and there was no sense in taking any unnecessary chances.

Browne broke his duck ten minutes later, and there was much ironical clapping and cheering, mainly from the St. Frank's fellows, who felt that they were being swindled. Browne merely waved a cheery hand, and kept up the good work.

He was amazingly slow, and Nipper, during the same period, was scoring apace. A tremendous burst of cheering went up when Nipper reached his century. The junior skipper had displayed no nervousness during that vital five minutes while his score hovered in the nineties. He reached his century by a perfectly-timed stroke that sent the leather hissing over the turf to the boundary, well

beyond the reach of any fieldsman. Now, as the crowd cheered enthusiastically, Nipper acknowledged it by sticking his cap on the end of his bat and waving it in the air.

"Well played, Hamilton!" shouted Fenton enthusiastically. "By Jove! I was wise to include these juniors in the eleven! They're hot, Conroy!"

Conroy major grunted.

"Trying to rub it in?" he asked sadly.

"Sorry, old man! I didn't mean that," said Fenton. "I dare say you'll have better luck in the second innings."

"Luck!" said Conroy. "I was crazy to be dismissed for a duck! It was rotten play, and I don't mind admitting it."

Strang himself was bowling now, and the first ball he delivered to Nipper proved fatal. Whether Nipper was a trifle careless, having scored his century, or whether the change of bowlers momentarily put him off his stroke, nobody could tell. But the ball seemed to slip under the junior skipper's bat, and his leg-stump sagged.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"It's becoming a procession!" said Hand-

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forth, in alarm. "My only hat! Somebody's got to stop this rot!"

"You're in next, old man," said Harry Cresham.

"By George, so I am!" said Handforth, jumping up. "Oh, well! There's nothing to worry about."

It sounded very much like boasting, but Handforth was not a braggart; he was a super-optimist. He had an extraordinary faith in his own abilities. Sometimes this faith was not justified.

But it was justified now, for he proceeded to open the eyes of the Australian schoolboys, who were one and all expecting him to meet the same fate as the others. The Australians, indeed, were now hoping that the entire St. Frank's eleven would be dismissed on the first day, although the Australians had no desire to bat during the last half hour. Tired after their day of fielding, they would be at a disadvantage.

However, as it turned out, there wasn't the slightest prospect of the Australians batting to-day, for Handforth, without waiting to get "set," hit out with tremendous energy.

A burst of cheering arose from the spectators. This was the kind of cricket they liked.



CHAPTER 15

Making Things Hum!

THERE was nothing pretty about Edward Oswald Handforth's batting, but it was undoubtedly useful.

He was imbued with an amazing confidence, and he thoroughly justified himself. The Australian bowlers began to feel that there wasn't the slightest chance of getting him out.

He treated the bowling with the utmost indifference, hitting out at every kind of ball, and taking the most risky chances. But his famous luck stood him in good stead, and he coolly kept his end up.

Browne, in the meantime, was now opening out, and the scoring was fast. Strang changed his bowlers again and again, but nothing could be done with these two batsmen.

Browne and Handforth, in fact, were making a splendid stand, and they were adding swift and valuable runs to the Young England score.

Tea-time came, and Browne had already passed his 50, and Handforth had reached 42. The total score was becoming substantial, having already mounted to just over 300.

After tea, the spectators hoped to see a further display of fireworks, and they were not disappointed. It was generally felt that Handforth could not last much longer, and that he would now soon go. But he didn't go. He continued to score with amazing freedom, and the tumult was positively deafening when he reached his century.

"My only sainted aunt!" said Church breathlessly. "Old Handy's done it! And we thought he was bragging!"

"You can never tell with Handy," said McClure. "He's a dark horse. In the next innings he'll probably score about 5. But he's set now, and there's no telling what he'll do."

"He might be out in the next over," said Fullwood. "That's just the joy of old Handy—you never know what he's going to do next."

Handforth was not out in the next over, and Browne in the meantime flicked the ball away for a single which gave him his own century. The St. Frank's cricketers were doing splendidly, the juniors giving a far better showing than the seniors.

It was fitting, too, that a senior and a junior should now be in together, making this splendid stand. When stumps were drawn, the score stood at 408 for four. Browne was 102 not out, and Handforth 116 not out.

"We've got these Aussies tied into knots!" grinned Hubbard, of the Remove.

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"Don't you be too sure, my lad!" said Jimmy Potts. "Cricket is an uncertain game——"

"I know that!" interrupted Hubbard. "But the wicket's at its best now, and the Australian chaps will never have the chance of scoring like our fellows. This game is going to be a walk-over for us."

And many other seniors and juniors—fellows who were not players themselves—prophesied an easy victory.

There was much discussion that evening over the real Test Match, and while some were pleased, others were disappointed. Amongst the St. Frank's crowd, however, and amongst the Melbourne schoolboys, the secondary test match was the game that really mattered, and, considering the state of the game, it was only natural that the Australian boys should be feeling just a little depressed.

But there was no depression in the ranks of the St. Frank's throng. Before returning to the School Ship, numbers of juniors celebrated in the city, and there were all sorts of jollifications.

Handforth, much to his delight, was the hero of the hour. He had made the highest score so far, and, whilst everybody else was astonished at this, Handforth took it all as a matter of course.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" he demanded at length. "Didn't I tell you before I went in that I was going to score about a hundred and fifty? I can't understand what you're congratulating me for! I haven't even got the hundred and fifty yet!"

"You'll do, old man!" chuckled Nipper.

"Hadn't we better be getting back to the ship?" suggested Church. "We don't want to be late for calling-over, or anything like that."

McClure looked troubled.

"No whole holiday to-morrow," he said ruefully. "The members of the Eleven will have no morning lessons, but the rest of the school will be kept in the class-rooms until the afternoon. My only hat! I wonder how the chaps will get on in the morning?"

"No sense in wondering about that now," said Handforth. "You can be certain that Browne and I will keep going—— Hallo! There's old Griffin over the road, with Briggs. Let's rope them in, and cart them off to the ship!"

"That's not a bad idea," said Nipper, smiling.

Handforth dashed across the street. They happened to be just near the Town Hall, at the corner of Collins and Wanston Streets. Handforth was reckless. He dodged in front of an approaching motor-car, and slewed round, his eyes on Griffin and Briggs.

"Look out!" yelled Church, in alarm.

For Handforth had failed to see an approaching tramcar. He heard the sound of shrieking brakes, spun round, and halted—which was rather a mistake on his part.

The tram was bearing down upon him; he attempted to dodge, but his foot slipped on something, and he went sprawling. The

next second there was a clattering crash, a thud, and a series of shrieks from passers-by.

"He's hit—he's under the tram!" gasped Church, turning pale.

"Oh, Handy!" muttered McClure.

It was true enough. The tram, unable to stop in time, had run full tilt into the sprawling figure of Handforth. The guard had swept him up, and now he was apparently jammed beneath the front of the heavy car.

Everybody was shouting, policemen were running up, and the St. Frank's fellows crowded round excitedly.

"Handy—Handy!" shouted Church desperately.

"Cheese it!" came Handforth's voice, from under the front of the tram. "Don't make a fuss, you fatheads! I'm not hurt!"

"Oh, thank goodness!" said Nipper.

The car was a single-decker—as all the cars are in Melbourne. The passengers were now crowding off, making frantic inquiries, and adding to the confusion.

"Better have an ambulance fetched," said the driver, who was looking shaky. "I couldn't help it, young gents. I had my brakes on hard——"

"It wasn't your fault," said Nipper. "He shouldn't have run across the road like that."

"You howling chump!" came Handforth's voice from under the car. "What's the good of standing there, jawing? I'm jammed in here! Lend a hand, somebody! These cars ought to have better brakes!"

It was a relief to hear him talking so characteristically—and so coolly. He couldn't be hurt very much.

Fenton appeared on the scene now, with a number of other seniors, and there were many willing hands. The "catcher" appeared to be caught somewhere, and Fenton was one of those who worked the hardest. Bent double, he strained tremendously, until the perspiration rolled down his face.

Church and McClure and Nipper and the others were helping, too. At last the guard was pulled clear, and Handforth was enabled to emerge. He was pulled out, dusty, torn, but apparently unhurt.

"I'm all right!" he declared, for the tenth time. "I'm not hurt a bit."

But, as usual, Edward Oswald Handforth was unduly optimistic!



CHAPTER 16

Cause and Effect!

HERE were many expressions of relief after Handforth had been dusted down, and led away from

the scene of the "accident." Traffic resumed its normal way, and the spectators gradually dispersed.

"Well, you can thank your lucky stars that you got off so lightly, Handforth," said Fenton. "Are you sure you're not hurt? I can't believe it, you know. You were properly jammed—"

"I wasn't jammed," interrupted Handforth. "It was that catcher-thing that got busted. I seemed to be held there in a kind of hollow, and I wasn't hurt a bit!"

"One of the most marvellous escapes I've ever seen," declared Nipper. "You might have been badly injured, Handy. I've never known such a lucky beggar!"

"Rot!" said Handforth lightly. "Come on! I'm in an awful mess, you know—and my bags are torn in two or three places. We'd better get a taxi, hadn't we?"

He moved a pace or two, and Fenton's keen eyes noted that he was limping—and, moreover, he bit his lip until it became nearly white.

"Now then, Handforth, out with it!" said Fenton sternly. "You're hurt! You can't deny it! That left leg of yours—"

"It's all right!" insisted Handforth.

"Well, I don't believe it is," replied Fenton. "Anyhow, you're coming straight to the ship now—and I'm going to have a look at that leg of yours."

"It's my leg, and I'm not going to have it messed about!" said Handforth truculently.

"I'm the St. Frank's captain, and you're a member of my team!" retorted Fenton. "Are you going to defy the orders of your skipper?"

"Eh? I—I—"

"It's no good, Handy—you've got to submit," said Nipper quietly. "Fenton's word is law."

And it was.

They managed to get a taxi, and in due course they arrived at the School Ship. Handforth was taken immediately to his own cabin, and stripped. Only Nipper and Fenton were with him—everybody else had been excluded.

"There you are!" said Handforth defiantly. "What's the matter with me? Perhaps you'll believe me now?"

"You've got a nasty bruise on your left leg," said Fenton. "Turn round. Don't be so confoundedly stubborn, Handforth! Turn round! That's better."

"It's nothing!" protested Handforth. "I don't take any notice of a little bruise like that."

The "little bruise" was a large red patch, turning slightly bluish near the edges.

"How about this?" asked Nipper suddenly, as he seized Handforth's right forearm. "Does this hurt, old man?"

"No-o-o-h!" gasped Handforth, wincing.

"Sure it doesn't hurt?"

"Not a bit."

"You've got a bad bruise on your leg, and your arm is crooked, too!" said Fenton

gruffly. "Don't be an ass, Handforth! We shall have to give you some very close attention."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth.

Fenton straightened up, and Nipper noted that he had a strained look on his face.

"You seem to be hurt, too," said Nipper keenly.

"Hurt?" laughed Fenton. "It's nothing—only a little crick in the back. I think I twisted myself while I was trying to haul Handforth out. There's nothing wrong with me."

Nipper laughed.

"You've been ticking Handforth off for pretending to be sound—and you're just as bad yourself," he said. "It strikes me that we've got two patients."

And this, in fact, was true. Fenton's back was undoubtedly strained, and later on in the evening he began to feel the effects.

Handforth in the meantime was conveyed to the gymnasium, and he went through torment. At least, he looked upon it as torment. Church and McClure and other willing helpers massaged him, rubbed him with special oils, and generally mauled him about until he felt that life was not worth living. Yet undoubtedly this treatment did him a world of good. Without it, he would have stiffened to such an extent that he would have been a cripple on the morrow.

Even as it was, he awoke stiff and pained, although he maintained that he was "all right." Fenton suggested playing the twelfth man—Bob Christine—but Handforth wouldn't hear of it.

Fenton himself was not feeling any too good this morning, but he was far from being crooked.

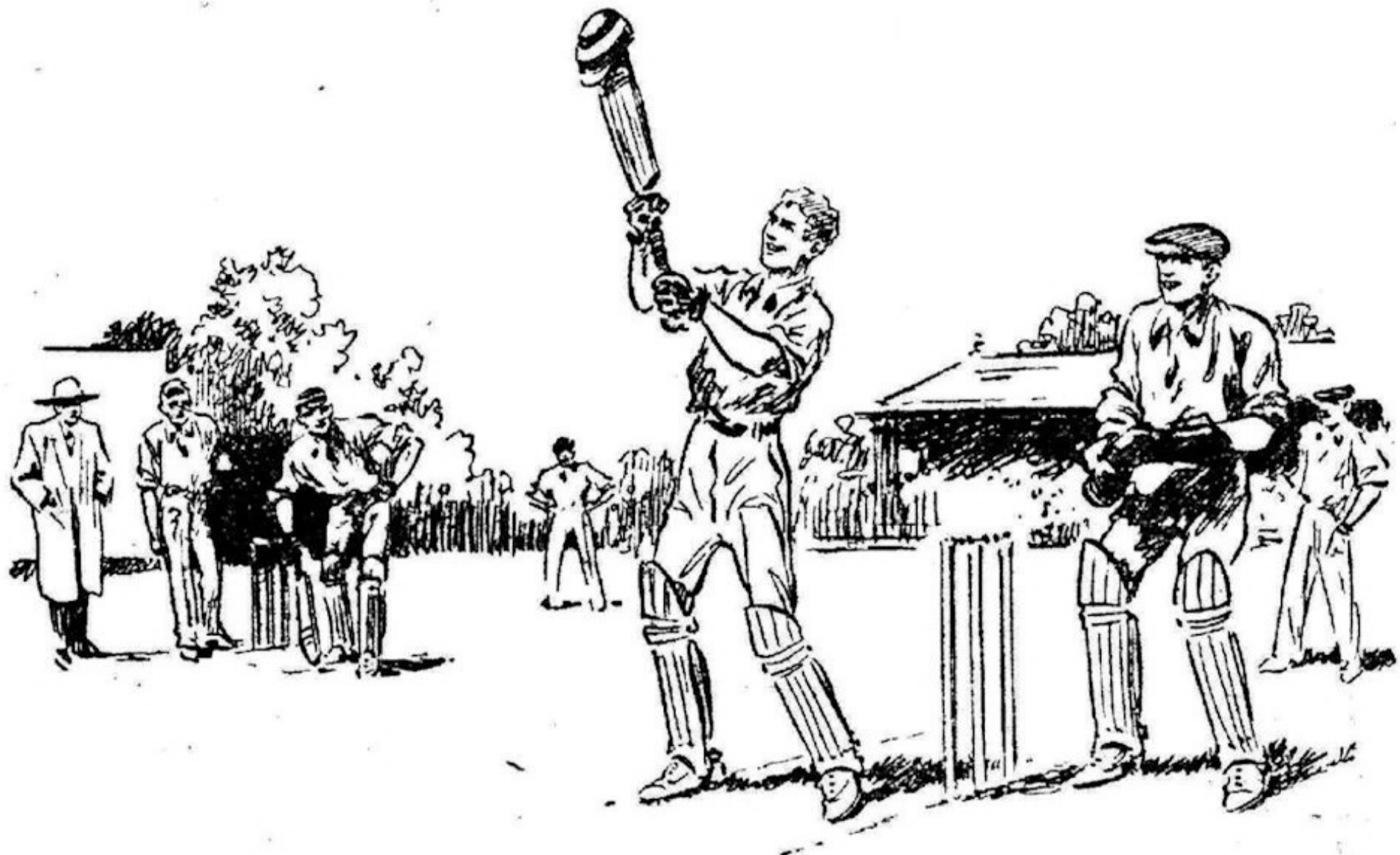
A big crowd saw the Eleven off, and wished it the best of luck. Everybody promised that they would be on the ground immediately after luncheon—after the school had been released from lessons. It was a half-holiday in any case to-day—being a Saturday.

Strang was very concerned when he heard of Handforth's condition. He had learned about the accident on the previous evening, but he had assumed that Handforth had not been hurt.

"This man had better stand down," he suggested. "We don't mind a bit, Fenton, if you play somebody else—"

"You're talking out of the back of your neck!" said Handforth coldly. "There's nothing the matter with me! How many more times have I got to say that?"

Yet, when he resumed his innings, shortly afterwards, he was out first ball. He might have been out, accident or no accident, but he had to confess to himself that his wrist was remarkably groggy, and that when he swung his bat, an agonising pain shot right up his arm to the shoulder. That ball was a true one, and Handforth missed it altogether. It whipped his bails off.



A great burst of cheering went up from the spectators as Nipper reached his century, and the smiling junior acknowledged it by sticking his cap on the end of his bat and waving it in the air.

Browne lasted until he had raised his score to 125; and then, in attempting a rash run, he was run out.

Harry Gresham and Vivian Travers came together soon after that, and they put up another stand, adding over fifty to the score before they were separated. Gresham scored 25 and Travers 34. The rest of the St. Frank's Eleven did nothing great.

However, on the whole, the St. Frank's crowds were by no means displeased when they arrived after lunch to find that young England had made a total score of 517 runs.

"Oh, we're all right!" declared Fullwood. "Over five hundred, my lads! It's marvellous! These Aussies will have to go all out to beat that!"

"Rather!"

"Wait until Gresham and Browne start bowling."

The wicket, however, was still in perfect condition, and the Australian schoolboys went right in to show their English rivals exactly how much they knew about cricket. Strang and Marlowe opened for the Melbourne schoolboys, and they soon settled down and performed great feats.

Even Harry Gresham, who was one of the finest bowlers in the Junior School, could do nothing against these valiants. Browne was baffled. Fenton changed his bowlers repeatedly, but it wasn't until after the tea interval that the partnership was broken.

By the time stumps were drawn, the Australians' score was 204 for two wickets, and this, as everybody admitted, was "good going."

It was becoming more and more obvious that this game was going to be, a genuine, slashing fight to the finish.



CHAPTER 17

The Fighting Aussies!

UNDAY intervened, much to Edgar Fenton's satisfaction. It gave Handforth a chance to make a good recovery; and Fenton himself felt the need of a full day's rest, too.

By Monday morning Fenton was as fit as ever, and Handforth airily declared that he no longer felt any pain in his leg, and that his arm was "all serene." Yet, when Fenton examined that arm, he did not quite like the look of it. The muscles seemed to be swollen, and the tendons were enlarged. Unquestionably, that arm was not yet normal.

"I don't think you ought to play, Handforth," said Fenton uneasily.

"If you chuck me out of the Eleven, I shan't play—but I'm dashed if I'm going to give in!" said Handforth. "I'm fit, Fenton—and it's only fair to play me. Anyhow, give me a trial before we start the play, and I'll show you what I can do."

Fenton nodded.

"All right," he said briskly. "That's only fair."

This was the third day of the match, and the Australian schoolboys were in no way dismayed by the big St. Frank's total. They seemed to be in a fair way to equalling it.

Handforth's test was satisfactory. Fenton sent up several skyers, and Handforth caught them with supreme confidence and ease; at the wicket he batted with all his old vim. On the face of it, he seemed fit. But only Edward Oswald himself knew of the pain that he suffered. Yet he wasn't going to admit defeat.

During the morning, however, he suffered from acute twinges of conscience. He missed a catch in the deep—an easy catch. Briggs, who was scoring freely, and whose total had already got past the half-century, gave Handforth a chance—and Handforth missed it. He got to the ball all right, but as he leapt upward that pain shot through his arm, and when he gripped the leather his fingers seemed to lose their power. The ball slipped, bounced on to the turf, and a mighty roar went up from every Australian throat.

"Hard luck, Handy!" called Stevens, who was the nearest fieldsman.

But Handforth knew that it wasn't hard luck. Ordinarily, he would have made that catch without blundering. And as the time sped on, he knew that his arm was hurting him more than ever. It needed rest—and instead of getting rest it was being over-worked.

Every time he picked up the ball, to send it in, he was agonised. He got into the habit of throwing with his left hand, and, in consequence, he was not so sure of his aim. More than one run was obtained because of Handforth's faulty throwing.

Then, during the afternoon, when the Australian total had gone over 400, Harry Gresham was unfortunate enough to split a finger. It wasn't a serious hurt, and he was enabled to remain on the field—but he could do no more bowling that day.

The valiant William Napoleon Browne, overworked, was becoming stale. These Australian fellows were grimly sticking to the letter of this arrangement. It was a match without a time limit—and the Aussies were taking no chances, and they were fighting with a bulldog spirit that was wholly admirable.

The day ended with the Australians still in—553 for 8. Already, the St. Frank's innings had been equalled and passed.

By this time the interest had become so intense that none of the St. Frank's juniors care a snap about the big Test Match—which, incidentally, was enthralling all Melbourne.

Before luncheon on the fourth day, however, the Australians were all out. Gresham was able to bowl again, and he succeeded in taking a couple of wickets in one over. The Australians were all out for 572.

Fenton and Nipper opened the St. Frank's second innings, as before. Fenton had decided that Handforth should not bat until the next day—by then, perhaps, his arm would be normal again. Handforth himself was

exasperated beyond all measure. He had expected that his slight injury would be absolutely well by the Sunday evening; he did not realise that his work in the field on the Monday and to-day had caused a set-back.

It was a very different wicket now from the one that Fenton and Nipper had played on at the beginning of the game. Over a thousand runs had been scored off that pitch, and it was considerably mauled about. It wasn't a batsman's wicket now—but a bowler's.

And disasters began early.

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Nipper received the first ball, and he skilfully edged it away for a single. Then, with the second ball of the over, Fenton's wicket was shattered. All the St. Frank's fellows stared, dumbfounded—horrified.

The ball had come from Briggs, the slow bowler, and it broke awkwardly—exactly as Briggs had intended. He was taking full advantage of the inequalities of the wicket. Fenton, whilst attempting to be ultra-cautious, allowed the leather to slip past, and he was out.

Out for a duck! To make matters worse, Nipper only lasted until the middle of the second over, scoring four runs. Then he skied a ball, and the fieldsman made no blunder with the catch.

Conroy major and Wilson came together after this, and it was curious that they should make a much better showing in this innings

than they had in the first. Conroy scored 25 before he was stumped, and Wilson was good for 37. Then he grew rather too confident, and he was caught and bowled by Griffin.

And so the game went on. St. Frank's now fighting desperately, their morale suffering. Browne only scored 16, and when stumps were drawn for the day, the St. Frank's total was discouraging—89 for 5.

"Things look bad, you fellows," said Fenton, in the dressing-room. "If we don't pull ourselves together to-morrow, the Aussies are going to win hands down."

"ST. FRANK'S IN NEW ZEALAND!"

Edward Oswald Handforth among the hissing geysers and boiling mud pools! Blundering Handy can't resist "investigating" these natural wonders of New Zealand, and he pays the penalty. He finds himself shot into the air at the top of the geyser, and he tumbles into a mud pool!

In spite of these disasters, however, Edward Oswald enjoys himself to the full. So do the rest of the St. Frank's fellows.

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"We shall be all right," said Travers coolly. "Handy hasn't been in yet—and he's been telling us that he's going to score another century, at least."

"Somebody needs to score a century, anyway!" said Handforth, with a grunt. "It's sickening! We scored over five hundred in the first innings, and now we're going all to pieces!"

"Cricket, my son, is an uncertain proposition," said Fenton. "If we're whacked, we shall be whacked by a better side. But, by Jove, we're not beaten yet!"

Handforth's optimism received a nasty jolt when he awoke the next morning.

Overnight, Church and McClure had insisted upon massaging his arm again. His leg was now fully recovered—he was as nimble as a two-year-old—but that arm still persisted in causing trouble. Now, this morn-

ing, it was so badly swollen that Church and McClure regarded it in dismay.

"You can't play Handy," said Church, as Handforth sat up in his bed, looking anxiously at his arm. "You'll never be able to hold a bat."

"Yes, I shall!" said Handforth stubbornly. "Look here, you chaps! Don't say a word to Fenton about this. I'm not going to be dished out of my knock to-day!"

Just then, however, Fenton himself looked in—and it was all up!



CHAPTER 18

A Foregone Conclusion!

EDGAR FENTON shook his head.

"Impossible!" he said firmly. "You can't play to-day,

Handforth."

"But look here——"

"You can't play!" insisted Fenton, who had given Handforth's arm an examination. "Why, man alive, this arm of yours is worse than ever! It needs a week's rest, at least—and then you'll be fit. But if you tell me that you can handle a bat—and handle it efficiently—with your wrist in this condition, then I'm going to call you something more impolite than an optimist."

Handforth groaned.

"I believe you're right!" he admitted gloomily. "Oh, my only hat! What rotten luck! I can't bat to-day, Fenton—and I've got to admit it."

"It's taken you the better part of a week to acknowledge that you're a crock," said Fenton tartly. "Not that your injury has made much difference to the match. It wouldn't be fair to the Aussies to make an excuse of that kind. They're keen players—and brilliant players. And I shan't forget, Handforth, that you played magnificently in the first innings."

Handforth flushed.

"I did my best," he said. "I'd like to play right through the match, but I suppose you're right."

The door opened, and Willy appeared.

"So you're not going to play to-day, Ted?" he asked sympathetically.

"How did you know, fathead?"

"One look at your face is enough, old man," replied Willy. "And Bob Christine is on the sick list, so there's no twelfth man."

"Bob on the sick list?" said Handforth, with a start. "That's done it! I've got to play!"

"No, you haven't," said Fenton. "Christine is down with a kind of fever—something to do with the heat, I believe. He probably caught a chill somewhere. Anyhow, he's in the sanny, and can't appear."

"Well, there's only one thing for it," said Willy. "I shall have to take Ted's place."

"You?" said his major, staring.

"I'm your brother—and why shouldn't I deputise?" asked Willy coolly. "Fenton, I don't want you to trot out any protests that I'm a fag and a cheeky ass. I'm serious. Ted can't play, and I'm his brother. And I'm as keen on cricket as—"

"That's all very well, kid," said Fenton. "According to the rules of cricket—first-class cricket, anyway—the twelfth man isn't allowed to bat. This is a friendly, of course, and perhaps it's possible. I shall have to see what the Australian skipper thinks about it. In any case, I shall have to get his permission. And if I do get it, you can play, young 'un!"

Church and McClure stared, amazed.

"You're joking, Fenton, aren't you?" asked Church.

"No, I'm not," said the school captain. "Handforth minor is a keen youngster, and he's played some fine innings in the past. If I can get permission to play him, Handforth minor will do as a substitute, and I shall rely upon him to put up a good show."

Willy, flushed and eager, grabbed at Fenton's hand.

"You're a sportsman!" he said breathlessly. "I didn't really think that you would agree, Fenton—and, by jingo, I'll show you that your judgment is sound!"

Fenton went out, and Handforth regarded his minor in a fatherly sort of way.

"It's a bit thick that I should be out of the game, and that you should be playing in my place," he said. "By George! If you get yourself out for a duck, my son, I'll—I'll—"

"Keep your hair on!" said Willy. "Fenton was out for a duck, and he's the skipper. So he can't grumble at me if I equal his own performance, can he?"

"You silly young cuckoo!" exploded Handforth. "What's the good of getting a duck? Fenton ought to be ashamed of himself for making such a mess of things! You listen to my advice—"

"Good-bye!" said Willy hastily.

He dodged out, and Handforth glared after him with much wrath.

"He's a cheeky young bounder!" said Church. "I've never heard of such nerve! And Fenton must be off his rocker to agree to such a thing!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting. "Off his rocker? Fenton?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"For allowing Willy to play."

"My minor can play as well as any of those silly seniors!" said Handforth promptly.

"Why, you were just saying—"

"Never mind what I was just saying!" growled Handforth. "Good luck to Willy! It's a pity I'm crooked, because I meant to make another century in this innings."

"In spite of the crumbling wicket?" asked McClure.

"Oh, well, perhaps it would have been more difficult—but where there's a will there's a way!" declared Handforth. "That's the trouble with our men—they've lost their pep. They think they're beaten, and that's where they're up against trouble."

Next morning Fenton approached Strang, the Aussie captain, regarding Willy Handforth, and Strang made no objections when the matter was put before him; he told Fenton that he could play any man he liked. For Strang, like the other Australian schoolboys, was of the opinion that nothing could now save St. Frank's from disaster. It had been a fine game, and a hard-fought game, but the end was obvious.

When the game was continued that morning, two other wickets fell very quickly, and the Australian schoolboys began to get more and more confident. This was easy! Seven wickets down for 93 runs!

At this period, however, Boots and Willy came together. There was a great deal of interest when Willy Handforth, looking remarkably cool in spite of his small size, strode out from the pavilion. Everybody expected to see him bowled within a minute or two; even the St. Frank's fellows were of this opinion.

Fenton stood watching anxiously. Nearly everybody thought it very rash on his part to play a mere Third-Former in such a vital innings as this, but Fenton knew what he was doing. He had seen Willy in action on many occasions—and, indeed, Willy had once played for the St. Frank's First Eleven, and he had played splendidly, too. Fenton had remembered this—knowing full well that Willy was just the kind of fellow to put forth his very best when things were going badly. Willy's temperament was of the right kind. He was young, he was inexperienced, perhaps—but his spirit was indomitable. And Fenton proved his sound common sense as a cricket captain when he decided to play Willy Handforth.

For Willy, much to the delight of the St. Frank's crowds, and much to the amazement of the Australians, proceeded to face the batting, on that bad wicket, with a confidence that was positively eye-opening.

Not only this, but Willy scored runs.

Singles—twos—threes—and, on two occasions, boundaries—flashed from his bat. Boots, in the meanwhile, was doing fine. A stand by a Fourth-Former and a Third-Former! It was something that nobody had anticipated.

At this critical period of the game, Willy and Boots did much to restore the morale of St. Frank's. Willy, the fag, scoring easily, valiantly! Boots, hitting out with mighty force, and knocking the bowlers right and left!

Incredibly enough, Willy took his total to 64 before he was caught out—and the ovation he received was tumultuous.

"Well done, kid!" said Fenton, slapping him on the shoulder.

And that was all the reward that Willy Handforth needed—although he was overwhelmed with numerous other congratulations.



CHAPTER 19

As It Should Be!

IF Willy Handforth had made twenty runs, Fenton would have been thoroughly satisfied, but Willy had made sixty-four—and the Third Form, in consequence, was nearly delirious with glee. If Willy had been a hero to his fellow-fags before, he was now a kind of demi-god.

In spite of his good work, however, St. Frank's were all out for 185, for the "tail" was very quickly dismissed.

"I don't see how we *can* win," said Nipper soberly. "The Aussies only need 131 to win."

"But the wicket is in a frightful state now," said Gresham, his eyes gleaming.

"It's a bowler's wicket, too! While there's life there's hope!"

"Well said, brother!" declared Browne. "Let us go into the field, determined to send these valiant cobbers of ours back to the pavilion, one after the other, in a long procession. Such things have been done before. Who are we to prophesy that failure will be ours?"

Fenton spoke quietly to his men for a few minutes before leading them out into the field. He reminded everybody that the English and Australian cricketers in the big Test match had been playing a hard, splendid game. It was for them—the schoolboys—to take an example from this.

"It's any odds that we're going to lose," said Fenton, "but let's go into the field in a fighting mood—with our blood up. The Aussies only need 131 to win. Can we get them out for less than that total?"

"It doesn't seem possible—but, by Samson, we'll try!" said Travers.

Browne opened the bowling against the Australians, and Strang, the skipper, promptly knocked Browne to the boundary. In fact, Strang and Marlowe batted with the apparent intention of knocking up the necessary 131 runs off their own bats.

After the score had reached 30 they opened out and became more and more confident. When the "50" went up, and no wickets had fallen, the Australian schoolboys com-

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menced to chortle with delight. It was a certainty now!

Gresham was bowling at this period, and Strang, who had made 33 runs, felt that it would be just as well, perhaps, if the necessary total was knocked up in quick time.

Possibly he became reckless; at all events, he fell into a trap that Gresham had laid for him, and he gave a very easy catch to the fieldsman at cover point.

"Out!"

"Thank goodness one of them's gone at last!" said Handforth, who was watching from the pavilion. "Not that there's any chance for us now."

Griffin was the next man in, and a perfect yell went up a minute later. Gresham sent down a ball which came well on the outside of the off-stump, and Griffin slashed away at it. But, instead of getting the ball full in the middle of the bat, he felt a kind of snick, and saw the leather flying towards the slips. The next instant there was a "slap," and Browne was grinning.

"How's that?" he asked blandly.

Griffin went back, rather downhearted. Briggs came next, and now everybody round the enclosure was tense with excitement. Would Harry Gresham do the hat trick?

His father was one of the most famous cricketers that England had ever produced—"Hat Trick" Gresham!

Briggs did not look any too confident as he faced the bowler, and when the ball came speeding down he attempted to stonewall. The leather came off the turf at an unexpected angle, touched the edge of Briggs' bat, and with a zip it was in the wicket-keeper's hands.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Gresham!"

"The hat trick, by jingo!"

The Australians were cheering, too, for Gresham's feat had indeed been remarkable.

Then came a tense, hectic period.

The Australians were finding that the wicket was indeed in a bad condition. Some of them lasted for two or three overs, but by now the bowlers were well on top. The "100" went up on the board after six wickets had fallen, and hardly anybody round the field dared breathe.

Another wicket fell—Travers bowling now. 106 for seven!

"Oh, this is too much!" groaned Handforth. "They'll never do it, you chaps! They'll never get them all out before they score another twenty-six or twenty-seven runs!"

"Don't talk!" breathed Church. "Just watch! It's getting feverish now!"

The Australians themselves were feeling the tension. Their victory was not to be such an easy one, after all! The batsmen were cautious—over-cautions, perhaps. Yet the runs continued to slowly mount—a single here, a 2 now and again.

117!

Then Browne took another wicket in the next over.

119 for eight!

A terrific roar of cheering went up five minutes later. Gresham in the next over clean bowled the new man.

123 for nine!

A silence settled over the ground as the last man faced Harry Gresham. The ball came down, and the batsman ran out and lashed away. Everybody expected disaster, but instead the ball went soaring off towards the boundary, and there was nobody there to stop it!

127!

Another boundary like that, and victory would be with the Melbourne schoolboys!

Now Browne was bowling again, and for a brief period the game remained at a standstill. But the fourth ball of the over was a trifle loose, and the batsman seized his opportunity and lashed out.

Away sped the leather towards the boundary. Another four seemed imminent.

The Aussies had won the game—

And then a tremendous yell went up. The batsmen were running—and so was Willy Handforth! He was the nearest fieldsman, and he was streaking across the turf like a hare. Would he be able to get to the ball before it reached the boundary?

A mighty gasp went up when Willy was seen to collect the ball in the very nick of time, a foot from the boundary itself! He spun round, and threw in with deadly accuracy. The batsmen, who were just about to run again, checked. It would have been folly. The ball was in the wicket-keeper's hand.

Only 3! 130!

"A tie!" said Fenton, taking a deep breath. "Both scores exactly the same!"

It was the other batsman who was facing Browne now, and he was obviously nervous. The ball came down.

Clack!

The leather sped off, and the batsmen were running. A single was only necessary for victory—

But Nipper was after the leather, running like mad! He fairly swooped upon it, threw in, and the wicket was shattered!

"Out!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, St. Frank's!"

The game was over, and, in spite of the almost certain likelihood of defeat, St. Frank's had tied! The English schoolboys and the Australian schoolboys had scored precisely the same number of runs!

And this, as everybody was willing to admit, was a very fitting finish to the greatest game that either side had ever played!

THE END.

(Next week the chums of St. Frank's bid good-bye to Australia. They're bound for New Zealand—the land of geysers! All readers will enjoy this grand story, entitled, "St. Frank's in New Zealand!" in which Alec Duncan, the Removite who comes from that country, plays a prominent part. Order your copy now, chums!)



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed, EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



M. KACHELHOFFER

NO need to ask to be excused for type-writing your letter—Mauritz Kachelhoffer (Kimberley). Some people seem to think that it is *infra dig* to type one's letters. If this is really so, I must be very *infra dig* indeed, because I type all mine. It would be a good idea, too, if some readers typed their signatures, or, if they haven't a typewriter, pen them in printed characters. You ought to see me sometimes with a magnifying-glass, like Sexton Blake, trying to decipher some of my readers' signatures. Here's your photograph at the top of the page this week, but don't blame me if a lot of readers mistake it for a portrait of the late Larry Semon.

* * *

It was very nice of you—Edward Maganie (Monte Carlo)—to send me that handsome volume ("Twenty-Five Years Big Game Hunting," by Brigadier-General R. Pigot) as an expression of your appreciation of my St. Frank's yarns. Needless to say, the splendid book now occupies a prominent place in my library, and I shall read it with great interest.

* * *

These same remarks apply to you—Reg T. Staples (Walworth)—for sending me that nice book, "Mr. Punch's History of the Great War," as a New Year gift. Yes, Violet Watson and Ethel Church, at least, appeared in the stories before the Moor View School was opened. I can't tell you exactly how many fellows there are in the Sixth. There is quite a lot, although only sixteen names have been actually mentioned. Clarence Followe shares Study Q in the West House with Timothy Tucker and Robert Canham, and his birthday is on February 19th. Fullwood was skipper when Nipper arrived, and at that time Fullwood was a bit of a rotter, and Nipper had a terrific scrap with him and won the captaincy. As for Archie Glenthorne's birthday, it is on November 11th. Mr. Langton, the Sixth Form-master, is quite a nice-looking gentleman, quiet and reserved, and highly respected by the seniors.

None of your letters bore me, as you suggest—Oswald Brigham (Norwich). Although I haven't given you many replies, all your letters are treasured, as every letter from every other reader is. I appreciate it very much when readers drop me a line about a particular story which gives extra enjoyment, or, perhaps, extra pain. In this way, by receiving indications of approval or disapproval, I can best strike the note that is most likely to be of general appeal. So, you see, I value your letters, and all readers' letters, more than ever if they contain comments, for or against, upon the current yarn. You mustn't think, Os, old man, that your letters make me tired. Yes, certainly; you can have your photograph published on this page if it's a good snap. But what's the good of asking this without enclosing your dial. Send it along, and you'll get mine in return, in any case.

* * *

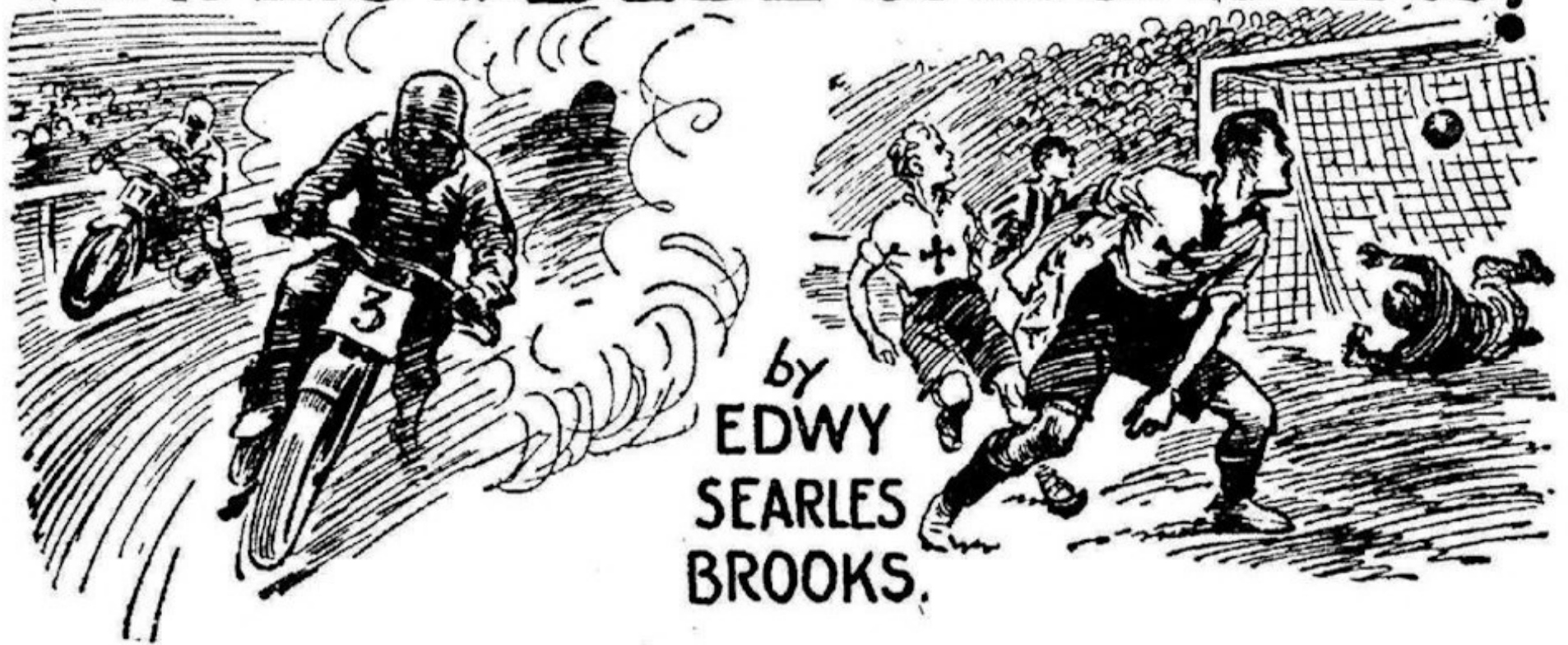
As far as I know—Harold Branney (Nottingham)—Arthur Castleton is still at St. Jim's. I believe Alan got a letter from him from there a few days ago, anyhow. Willy Handforth first appeared in the St. Frank's stories in No. 386, Old Series, in a story called "Handforth Minor." "The Secret of the Old Mill" appeared in No. 494, Old Series.

* * *

The average ages of the boys—W. G. Gamage (Ipswich)—are something like this: Sixth, between sixteen and eighteen; Fifth, between sixteen and seventeen; Remove and Fourth, between fifteen and sixteen; Third, between twelve and fourteen.

IF IT'S EXCITEMENT YOU WANT, THIS IS THE STORY FOR YOU!

RIVALRY OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



by
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.**

Poor Rex Carrington! Every day and in every way the breach between him and Mr. Ulysses Piecombe is widening—and that's just what Peter Burke, the manager of Bannington Speedway, wants!

Widening the Breach!

IT was obvious to Rex what had happened. The tiny piece of rubber containing the small needle had been deliberately glued in the toe of his football boot. Thus every time he had kicked he had compressed the rubber, and the little point had penetrated his toe—providing him with ample excuse for miskicking! No wonder he had felt such pain!

"What's wrong with you, Carrington?" demanded Smart, the trainer, as he came up. "How's your foot? Worse, I suppose?"

"I believe it is—a bit," admitted Rex.

He allowed the trainer to peel his stocking off, and, in the meantime, he wondered whether he should say anything about his discovery. It was clear that there had been foul play. But who was responsible? Who had been "monkeying" with his locker, and his boots?

"Nothing much wrong here," said Growser, with a frown. "Why, it's only a tiny bruise—not enough to make you miskick so badly."

"I'll do better in the second half," said Rex.

He decided to make no mention of the infamous trick that had been played upon him. It was a matter that should be reported to the manager—and it would do no good to create a lot of comment by telling his fellow-players. Besides, by so doing, he might easily warn the culprit. Better to keep it to himself, and to report to Mr. Piecombe in private.

So, before leaving the dressing-room, Rex slipped that little square of rubber into an odd corner of a disused shelf. He did not know that Curly Hankin was on the watch. The Reserves had no match this afternoon—for this was a mid-week game—and Hankin, knowing more about that square of rubber than anybody else, had every reason to keep his eyes wide open!

In the second half, Rex played better—but not much better.

He was no longer tortured by the agonising needle-prick from that cruel device, but he was still feeling the effects of the earlier punctures. Also there was the bruise that he had suffered in the motor-cycle fall, although this alone would certainly not have affected his play to any great extent.

But he found that when he kicked the ball an acute pain shot through his foot; and this robbed him of his usual confidence. On two distinct occasions the Blues were in an ideal position for scoring—but Rex, both times, ruined the chances.

Andy Tait got through splendidly, but, finding himself menaced by one of the Stratton backs just when he was about to shoot, he neatly tipped the ball to Rex, who was splendidly placed. Ordinarily, Rex would have scored with a deadly first-time shot. Now, however, he made the mistake of attempting to use his left foot—and he wasn't in a position for this manoeuvre. As a result, the ball went off at a tangent, bounced in front of one of the Stratton backs, and the latter quickly cleared.

"Rotten!"

"You're no good, Carrington!"

"Pull your socks up, Rex!"

Rex smiled bitterly to himself. The crowds were ready enough to praise him when he played with his usual brilliance; but there were certain elements who were ready enough, too, to condemn him at the slightest provocation.

Soon after this incident, Wally Simpson, on the left, had a clear run down the touch-line, and he centred perfectly. It seemed to everybody that Rex could have got his head to the ball, but as he was in the act of doing so he seemed to stumble, and, in flinging out his arm, he unintentionally handled. The whistle blew, and a free-kick was awarded—and so another chance was utterly ruined.

Rex was feeling very angry with himself. That last mishap had had nothing to do with his trivial injury. He had merely caught his foot in a tuft of grass, and his ankle had failed him for a second. Ordinarily, perhaps, he would have had more confidence, and the thing would not have happened.

To-day, however, he was at sixes and sevens, and never once did he give a glimpse of his old form. With those two chances wasted, the Blues did not again organise any movements that looked promising, and when the final whistle blew the Rovers trooped off the winners by one goal to nil.

The famous Blue Crusaders had been beaten on their own ground.

The other players said very little to Rex, and they had hardly got into the dressing-room before one of the uniformed attendants appeared.

"Mr. Piecombe wants you, Rex, in his office," he said apologetically.

"Now?" demanded Rex, looking round.

"So he says."

"All right—I'll be there in a minute."

Rex glowered. He was quite convinced that Mr. Piecombe merely wanted him to vent some of his wrath on him. In fact, it was a mistake on the manager's part to demand Rex's presence so promptly. He would have been wiser had he waited until the players had changed.

Rex went to that little shelf, and felt for the small square of rubber. It was no longer there! He frowned, and searched again. But it was useless.

"Something fishy about this," muttered Rex. "How did anybody know——"

"What's up?" asked Fatty, coming across. "What are you looking for?"

"Oh, nothing—it doesn't matter," replied the centre-forward.

He walked out of the dressing-room, and made his way to Mr. Piecombe's office. He found the manager seated at his desk, his face stern, his bony fingers gripping the arms of his chair.

"Well, Carrington, what have you to say for yourself?" demanded Mr. Piecombe.

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Yes, you do!" snapped the manager. "You've made a pretty fine mess of this game, haven't you?"

Rex coloured.

"We can't always be at the top of our form, sir," he protested.

"Nonsense! You know perfectly well, Carrington, that you had three splendid openings during the game," said Mr. Piecombe. "If you had not injured your foot by disobeying my orders, we should have left the field as winners. It is not my habit to blame the players after a game has been lost, but in this particular instance I feel justified in making a complaint. You deliberately defied me, and——"

"I didn't play badly because of that little spill I had, sir," broke in Rex warmly.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

ELYSSES PIECOMBE—more commonly known as *Piecan*—manager of that famous *Second Division Football Club, The Blue Crusaders*, is worried; very worried. Not because the Blues are doing badly—indeed, at the moment they are playing splendid football—but because a dirt-track has just been opened near the *Stronghold*, the Blues' enclosure, and *Piecan* fears that the club's "gates" will suffer as a result. The players, however, seem unperturbed. Especially

REX CARRINGTON, the Blues' brilliant centre-forward. Rex is keen on dirt-track racing, and he enters for a race. He wins—and his clever riding considerably impresses

PETER BURKE, manager of the Speedway. Burke, indeed, asks Rex to chuck up football and become a dirt-track rider. Rex angrily refuses—he's not a traitor to Blues! The Speedway manager is not deterred, however; he's determined to get Rex by hook or by crook! *Piecan*, fearing that Rex will crock himself, forbids the footballer to enter the Speedway again. Rex is rebellious, and promptly enters for a race. He rides recklessly, and comes a cropper, injuring his foot. Next day, when the Blues play *Stratton Rovers*, his injured foot puts him right off his game, and he becomes almost a passenger. In the dressing-room at half-time, he takes off his boot, and finds in it a small piece of rubber. In the rubber is a sharp needle. Unknown to Rex, this has been "planted" in his boot by *Curly Hankin*, one of the Blues' reserves, who is acting under orders from *Burke*!

(Now read on.)

"There's been foul play. Somebody worked a rotten trick on me."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Piccombe coldly. "What exactly do you mean, Carrington?"

"During the interval, sir, I found something in my right boot," replied Rex. "There was a little square of rubber, with a sort of needle embedded in it. This had been glued into my boot, at the toe—so that every time I kicked the needle-point plunged into me. I was in awful agony during the first half—"

"One moment, Carrington," interrupted Mr. Piccombe. "This is an—er—extraordinary story you are telling me! I find it difficult to credit such a fantastic statement. Where is this piece of—er—rubber that you refer to?"

"It's gone, sir."

"Gone? Gone where?"

"I don't know, sir."

And Rex explained how he had placed the little piece of rubber on the shelf, and how it had vanished. Mr. Piccombe pursed his lips, and his eyes grew steely.

"Do you seriously expect me to believe this nonsense, Carrington?" he demanded angrily. "Upon my word! I marvel that you have the audacity to stand there and excuse yourself by means of such a paltry invention."

Rex flared up.

"It's not an invention!" he shouted. "It's the truth!"

"And the proof of this story is missing?" said Mr. Piccombe harshly. "I am surprised at you, Carrington! You know perfectly well that you came by your injury through falling off the motor-cycle, on that confounded Speedway, and now you attempt to hoodwink me by means of this—er—preposterous rubbish!"

Rex opened his mouth to speak, but he pulled himself up in the nick of time. He felt that if he gave utterance to the words that were on the tip of his tongue, he would create a breach that could never be closed. Just in time, he pulled himself up.

"Very well, sir!" he said thickly. "If you think that of me, I've nothing more to say."

He turned on his heel, and walked towards the door.

"Carrington!" snapped Mr. Piccombe. "I have not finished with you yet. Carrington! Did you hear me?"

Apparently Rex had not, for he had opened the door and was passing out.

"Carrington!" roared the manager.

But Rex, in a rebellious mood, strode out and closed the door after him with a slam. He was hurt—he was angry with Mr. Piccombe for the latter's contemptuous comments on his perfectly truthful story.

And so the breach between the manager and the centre-forward was widening rapidly, and Rex, all unknown to himself, was playing directly into the hands of Mr. Peter Burke!

Stepping Reckless!

BEFORE Rex got back to the dressing-room, he decided that he would say nothing to his fellow-players about that little square of rubber. He did not want to invite any further sneers. If Mr. Piccombe disbelieved the story, perhaps the players would be equally sceptical.

And Rex was handicapped by the fact that he now had no proof. There was absolutely no evidence to support his remarkable tale. He pondered deeply as he made his way from the manager's office to the dressing-room. Who could have put that infamous device into his boot in the first place? And who could have removed it from that disused shelf?

Obviously, somebody who had easy access to the dressing-room.

Curiously enough, at this very point, Rex happened to look up, and he found Curly Hankin, of the Reserves, regarding him with a smug, ill-concealed expression of triumph in his shifty eyes. They were in the passage, and Curly, leaning against the wall, provided an instantaneous answer to Rex Carrington's problems.

Impulsively Rex leapt forward, seized the startled Curly by the shoulder, and swung him forward.

"You rat!" said Rex harshly.

"Here, steady!" gasped Curly, his eyes alight with fright. "Have you gone mad, you fool? What are you playing at?"

"You were looking very pleased with yourself just now, weren't you?" said Rex, his voice vibrating with rage. "You infernal hound! You treacherous brute! So it was you who put that square of rubber into my boot?"

Curly's face went to the colour of putty, and Rex did not fail to observe the sudden change.

"Ah, that's bowled you over, hasn't it?" went on Rex contemptuously. "By thunder! You're not even a rat—you're only a reptile!"

Rex needed no proof. The expression on Curly's face was enough for him. And, overwhelmed by the rage which seethed through him, he brought his fist round and swung it forward with deadly effect.

Crash!

Curly Hankin uttered a loud, gurgling cry, backed away, and fell with great violence on the floor of the passage. At the same second, Fatty Fowkes and Dave Moran and one or two of the other Blues looked out of the dressing-room. They were just in time to see the blow.

"Rex!" roared Fatty, leaping forward.

"Get up!" snapped Rex, without taking any notice of the other Blues. "Get up, you skulking dog, and—"

"Keep him off—keep him off!" groaned Curly. "He's mad! Didn't you see him, boys? He hit me without any reason."

"Yes, we saw it!" said Dave quietly. "What's come over you, Rex? What's the idea of attacking Hankin in that brutal way?"



The sight of Curly Hankin's sneering face was too much for Rex. He brought his fist round in a terrific swing, and Curly hit the floor with a thud.

"Hankin knows!" said Rex fiercely.

"It's a lie!" panted Curly, struggling to his feet. "I haven't done anything. This—this cad accused me of putting something in his football boot! He wants an excuse for his rotten play this afternoon!"

Rex was aghast at Curly Hankin's audacity, and, in the same flash, he realised that he could not possibly substantiate his accusation. He knew well enough that Curly was guilty—but couldn't prove it. What was the use, then, of telling any of the others?

"Oh, let's say no more about it," he muttered sullenly.

"That's all very well," said Fatty judiciously, "but you can't dismiss it like that, Rex! You gave Curly a terrific slesh, and unless you can give us a good explanation—"

"Well?" interrupted Rex, with a truculent air. "What are you going to do?"

"It seems to me, Rex, that you're getting into a pretty awkward mood," said Dave Moran sharply. "That sort of thing won't lead you anywhere. Hang it, man, why don't you pull yourself together? You're not yourself at all."

"What's this—a lecture?" sneered Rex.

"Oh, what's the use?" said Dave helplessly. "I think we'd better leave you alone, Rex, until you can be civil."

They knew Rex of old; they knew how awkward and aggravating he could be. But for quite a long time he had abandoned those bad old habits, and he had been a very decent sort of fellow. Now it seemed that he was sliding back.

Yet, really, Rex Carrington was mainly the victim of treachery. But for the plottings of Mr. Peter Burke, and the activities of Curly Hankin & Co., these misunderstandings would not have arisen.

As it was, Rex turned on his heel, strode off, and pushed his way into the dressing-room. He changed without a word—he did not even trouble about his plunge bath. He went off, morose and truculent. Fatty Fowkes tried to intercept him, hoping that he might be able to put things right, but Rex deliberately dodged him.

The match, too, had served to set Rex's nerves on edge. The Blues had lost—and he was mainly responsible. He knew that he had been the victim of foul play, but nobody would believe that story. They were all thinking that he had played a rotten game because he was in a bad temper, and if they liked to think such things of him, he didn't want to mix with him. That was his mood at the moment.

He went off on his own, and he was attracted towards the Speedway, which was already gleaming with lights. Just as he was drawing near to the entrance, he came face to face with Mr. Peter Burke, the track manager.

"Ah, Carrington," said Mr. Burke pleasantly. "Have you changed your mind yet?"

"No," said Rex.

"Still loyal to the Blues?"

"Yes, I am!" muttered Rex. "I'd like to

see Piecombe kicked out, but there's no reason why I should desert the club."

Mr. Burke nodded.

"I understand you had bad luck this afternoon?" he went on. "You failed, didn't you? I hear that the Rovers won the game?"

"It's wonderful how you hear these things," said Rex tartly.

"Come, come!" laughed Mr. Burke. "No need to be sarcastic, my friend. How about coming in here? You're perfectly welcome to compete in one of the races, if you like. What do you say?"

A sudden fit of perversity seized hold of Rex Carrington. He knew very well that Peter Burke was crooked—the track manager had proved that to him. Yet he was in just the kind of mood to do something foolish. His eyes glittered as he looked straight into Burke's face.

"All right!" he said promptly. "That's a go! I'll enter one of the races, if you like—or all of them!"

He felt that he was a fool—yet, at the same time, this decision of his gave him some measure of satisfaction. And Mr. Peter Burke, for his own part, glowed with inward triumph. Much sooner than he had expected, he was getting his victim into the toils!

Jeers or Cheers!

ZURRRRRRH!
The big handicap race at the Bannington Speedway was about to commence. Rex Carrington, having recklessly decided to ride, was astride his borrowed mount, and a fierce exultation had gripped hold of him. Mr. Ulysses Piecombe could go hang! Rex told himself that he could do as he liked in his own free time—and he wasn't going to be browbeaten.

Smiling Billy Ross was competing in this race, too—to say nothing of several other men, more or less unknown. The big champions of the dirt track—Gold Helmet Kemp and Broadside Dick Somers, among others—were no longer at the Speedway. They had only been introduced at the opening, as an extra attraction.

The competitors had their crash-helmets on their heads in readiness; one or two of them were wearing masks, too—and they looked fearsome monstrosities in the glaring electric lights, and amid the smother of exhaust smoke.

Rex had been rather surprised at the lightness of his helmet—for it looked so extremely heavy. Actually, it was made of some sort of fabric, the outside being varnished and highly polished. There was an excellent reason for this polish; for when a rider fell, the smooth surface of his helmet offered no great resistance to the track, and the man would skid along, and the shock would be considerably lessened.

The broad, brown track was well lit by the great lamps, and now and again a rider would shoot past, spraying the dirt in a great cloud. Rex himself was surprised at his own

eagerness. Keen as he was on football, he had a feeling that this new love held a greater attraction for him.

"Get off the field, Rex—you're no good!"

The Blue Crusaders' centre-forward started. He knew that voice—the voice of one of the Blues' supporters. He looked into the crowds, and he was instantly aware of a mild sense of hostility.

"Yah! You're rotten!" shouted a raw-looking youth. "No good at football—and no good at this game!"

"Well, he can't make a worse mess of things than he did this afternoon!" shouted somebody else.

A roar of jeering laughter went up, and Rex bit his lip. He realised that the Speedway enclosure contained a large number of people who had been at the football match that afternoon. They had seen his lamentable display—and now they were jeering at him.

But he wasn't allowed to think much on the subject, for it was practically time for the race to start. Soon he was crouching over his motor-cycle, helmeted, goggled, leather-covered—a tense figure, almost part and parcel of the machine itself.

The starting signal came, and off they went. Rex forgot his troubles, he forgot those jeers that had made his ears burn. He lived only for the moment—for the thrilling, exhilarating excitement of this mad ride.

Rushing, thundering, roaring over the track, spurting up the dust, and broadsiding giddily—away they went, the rear wheels of those machines trying their hardest to change places with the front. Only the skill of the riders kept the quivering mounts in control.

"Rex—Rex!"

"Come on, boy—you're winning!"

It was the last lap, and round the bend Rex Carrington was slowly but surely gaining a winning lead in the finishing straight. He broadsided with devastating recklessness, and it seemed inevitable that he must crash over. But no; he held his machine in control with amazing confidence, and with perfect skill. Bucking and skidding, he came well into the finishing straight, roaring triumphantly past the other competitors—sometimes so close that there was scarcely more than an inch to spare.

"Ooooooh!" gasped the crowd.

It seemed that Rex was over, but up he came again, and the judge's flag was held high in readiness.

"Hurrah!"

"Rex wins!"

"Bravo, Carrington!"

There were cheers now—tumultuous, roaring cheers. Rex had ridden the finest race that had yet been seen in the Speedway. By only a split second, he had robbed Smiling Billy Ross of victory.

(Another race won! This is sure to make Rex more enthusiastic than ever over dirt-track racing. Will Burke be able to tempt him away from footer? -Look out for another exciting instalment of this fine serial next week, chums!)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee School Story Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Our Free Gifts.

HAVING collected this week's three handsome Free Gifts, all NELSON LEE readers should now have a complete set of portrait badges of all the English cricketers who have done so well in Australia. Those readers who have missed any of the badges can still obtain the missing ones—see page 19. And I certainly do advise you to get them, for it would be a shame to have an incomplete set. An opportunity of collecting souvenirs of ALL the Test players doesn't occur every week—what a triumph for the NELSON LEE!—and so everybody ought to take full advantage of the Old Paper's wonderful offer.

Many of you, I expect, have put your badges in the Album which was presented with the issue of the NELSON LEE containing the first of our Free Gifts. A splendid idea, too, for that was why the Album was given away. However, these badges can be put to another use. Everybody has a favourite cricketer, and YOUR favourite is pretty sure to be among those players whose badge has been given away during the last five weeks. Then why shouldn't you put the badge of that particular player in your buttonhole? Why shouldn't you proudly display your favourite to all and sundry? Many readers have written and told me that they intend to do this, and it certainly strikes me as being a tophole wheeze.

The Fifth Test Match.

At the present moment, of course, everybody is talking about the Fifth and last Test Match, which is due to start at Melbourne on Friday. England has won four of the matches, and the chief topic of conversation now is: Can she win the Fifth as well and thus create a record? England stands a good chance of doing it. She will enter the field with the knowledge that she's already won four right off the reel, and that is sure to spur on Chapman and his merry men. On the other hand, Australia has been doing better and better; the fourth Test Match was lost by a mere twelve runs. The Aussies will go all out to turn the tide of battle and

prevent themselves suffering the ignominy of losing all five games. The Fifth is sure to be a titanic struggle. How I envy the St. Frank's boys out in Australia!

Next Week's Story!

And now for a few words about next week's story programme. Nipper and Handforth and all the St. Frank's boys are leaving Australian territory—leaving it with the knowledge that Australia is a wonderful country. They've had some amazing adventures during their sojourn in the Commonwealth, but still they're thirsting for more—you bet!—and so they're going to sample New Zealand.

New Zealand is another wonderful country, according to Alec Duncan, of the Remove, who is a native of that land. Unfortunately, from the St. Frank's boys' point of view, they're not staying there long—a matter of days. However, they fully intend to make the best of it!

"St. Frank's in New Zealand" is the title of next week's stunning yarn. It's one of the best Edwy Searles Brooks has written in this series, and that is saying a lot.

Mr. Brooks is also living up to his reputation as a writer of really exciting stories in "Rivals of the Blue Crusaders!" This serial is going great guns; there is no doubting its popularity, judging by the enormous number of letters I am receiving from enthusiastic readers. Another gripping instalment will appear in next week's bumper issue of the NELSON LEE. Get your newsagent to reserve a copy for you, chums!

THE EDITOR.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

C. T. Browne, 74, Victoria Road, Lower Edmonton, London, N.9., has for sale several bound volumes of the NELSON LEE, old and new series. All letters answered.

Norman Kedgeley, Yew Tree Dairy, Milton Road, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, wants to correspond with readers interested in stamp collecting.

Frank O'Neill, 20, Cairo Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool, wants to hear from readers who will help to form a club.

ENGLAND'S SELECTED!

All readers will be interested in these nutshell biographies about the three famous cricketers who form the subjects of this week's superb Free Gifts.

PHILIP MEAD

CHARLES PHILIP MEAD cannot be described as a really great figure in cricket, because he has never, for some reason or other, captured the popular imagination. But there cannot be any doubt that as a cricketer he is a most efficient "workman," and thoroughly capable.

I have heard bowlers describe him as the most difficult man to get out they have ever come across, for his defence is so sound. He doesn't bang them to the boundary in double-quick time, or anything like that, but he has laid on the wood to such an extent that he has joined the small company of cricketers who have made a hundred hundreds in first-class cricket.

And lest we should forget it, here is a reminder that Philip Mead holds at least one enviable record. In 1921 he played an innings of 182 not out for England and that is the highest total ever made by an English batsman in a Test match against Australia played in the home Country.

As he is just about passing his 42nd birthday, there was some surprise that he should have been taken to Australia, but he is the sort of batsman who is well fitted for Test matches without a time limit, and if the other England batsmen had not been in such good form Mead would have played in more of the Tests of the present series.

There is real romance in the early story of Mead's career. As a lad he used to attend at the Oval--which was near his

home. Later he went on the ground staff of the Surrey club, but they did not find occasion to utilise his services, so he qualified for Hampshire. He bats left-handed, and is a useful change bowler.



J. C. WHITE

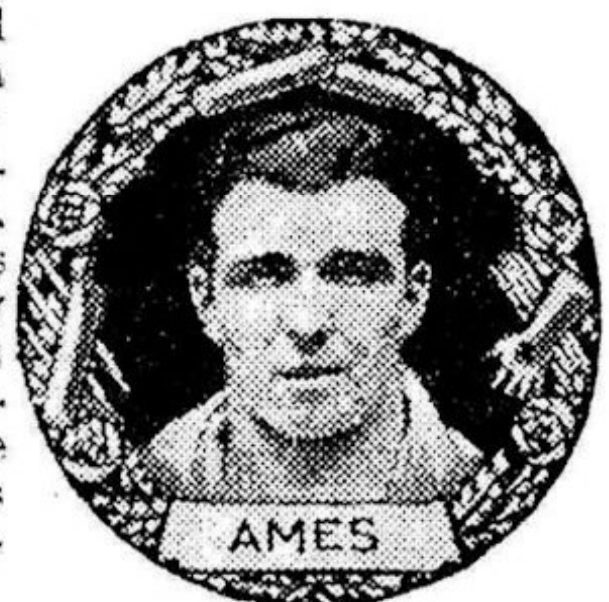
One of the England men who has had his first taste of Australian cricket conditions during the past few months is John Cornish White, who plays for Somersetshire at home. But Jack White is not one of the youngsters of the side. He is 38 years of age, having been born on the nineteenth of February, 1881.

Yet at the age of 38 Jack White has certainly justified himself as an England player. There are men who have been responsible for more spectacular performances during the present series of Tests, but there is no player who has filled a corner more completely than the vice-captain.

He is what might be called a stock bowler, and a stock bowler is always wanted in Australia; that is, a man who can keep down the runs. In the third Test match, and in the first innings of Australia, he returned the analysis of one wicket for sixty-four runs. There does not seem anything particularly wonderful about such figures, but actually White's figures were wonderful. In that innings he bowled 57 overs, thirty of which were maidens, and the average number of runs per over scored from his bowling was just over one.

He has been called a bowling machine. This description is accurate in the sense that it conveys an idea of the amazing accuracy of his bowling. But he is more than a mere machine. He thinks, and in the fourth match he just kept on getting the Australians out when our star bowlers, such an Larwood and Tate, were helpless.

Known as "Farmer White," he strolls up to the wicket and sends down a seemingly harmless left-hand delivery. But there is guile in every ball. He has bowled thirteen successive maiden overs against Yorkshire.



ENGLAND'S SELECTED

(Continued from previous page.)

LESLIE AMES

When the England team went to Australia it was fully expected that Leslie Ames would play a prominent part in the Test matches. But the luck of Ames has been out. Owing to the extraordinarily good form of Duckworth, Ames has not been able to get a place in any Test match.

But he need not worry about this unduly. He has gained valuable experience in Australia, and if there is any certainty about things connected with cricket, then it is certain that sooner or later Ames will play for England.

There are people who think that he could have played in the present series of games without affecting the wicket-keeping adversely, and at the same time improving the batting. For this is one of the strong points about Ames: that he is

almost good enough to be played in an England side for his batting alone. Last season he scored 1,666 runs for Kent, and with the bat in hand he is a most entertaining player to watch.

But Ames did more than score those runs for Kent last season. He broke all existing records for the number of victims credited to any one wicket-keeper in a season. His total "bag" was 107. Obviously this wicket-keeping had a great deal to do with the fact that a Kent bowler, Freeman, also created a record for the number of wickets gained by one bowler.

Ames is only 23 years of age, and it is that fact which makes us confident that he will play for England in due course. Also, his progress has been remarkably rapid, for he did not make his debut for Kent until 1926, and it was only in the season before last that he became recognised as the regular keeper in succession to Hubble.

Ames is also a footballer, and before he could go to Australia he had to get the consent of the Clapton Orient Club, for whom he had signed as an outside-right.



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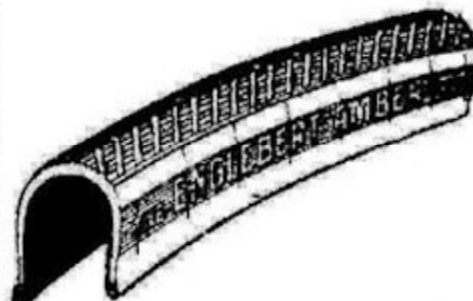
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