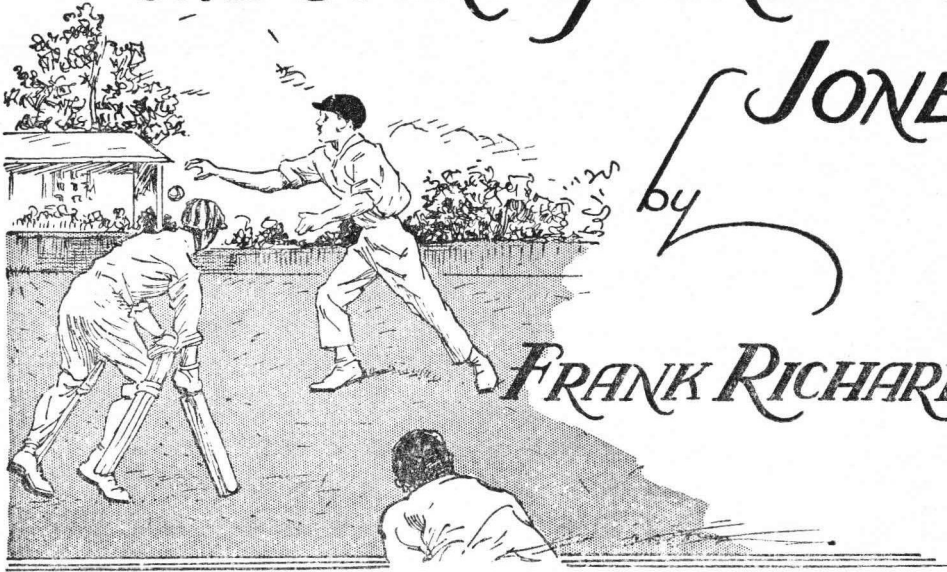


The SAD STORY of ARTHUR

JONES

by

FRANK RICHARDS



A lot of people never knew what troubled Jones at all,
Nor why the poor chap sometimes turned his sad face to
the wall,
And if he uttered sudden sighs, or unexpected groans,
Few guessed the woe that lay upon the heart of Arthur
Jones.

The tale is sad and tragic, and might touch the hardest
heart,
From eyes that never wept before, the pitying tear might
start,
Old Boys of Barcroft knew the grief that lay on Jones
like lead,
They could not help but pity him, alive, and later dead.

When Jones, at long last, hanged himself upon an ancient
yew,
Old Boys of Barcroft sadly said "Well, what else could
he do?"
They only wondered how he'd kept so long upon the go,
His heart bowed down by deep remorse and unremitting
woe.

Old Barcroft men who'd known him in his early, happy
days,
Knew but too well why Jones would shrink from any
Old Boy's gaze,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Their pity could not comfort him: he dreaded looks of
scorn,
Outside the Old Barcroftian pale, he led a life forlorn.
They pitied him—a man of greatest promise in his prime,
A man who'd worn the First-Eleven blazer in his time,
A Wegg's House Cricket Cap before his second year was
out:
A First-Eleven man whose future never seemed in
doubt.
But though they pitied him, yet what excuses could they
make?
When Old Boys talked of Arthur Jones, their grizzled
heads would shake,
The fact remained unchangeable that Jones had dropped
the catch,
A simply perfect sitter, in the Dudshire County match.
Long years had drifted by since Jones had walked the
Barcroft quad.,
Long saddened years since Jones's feet the cricket-
field had trod,
But time brought no relief, and Jones, though middle-
aged and grey,
Still brooded with an aching heart upon that fatal day.
In summer time, if Jones should hear the click of bat
and ball,
What sad and searing memories that clatter would recall,
Of white-clad figures on the green, of fielding in the
slips,
And of that perfect sitter slipping past his finger-tips!
On dreary winter nights, when wild winds wailed in
darkness deep,
Upon his lonely pallet Jones would turn in fitful sleep,
In which in broken dreams he played again the County
match,
And starting up would cry "If only I had held the catch!"
In vain, through long and changing years, in city, camp,
and court,
He sought forgetfulness: he failed in finding what he
sought.
By Cresta's snows, by Tiber's wave, by Venice' ancient
stones,
The memory of that fatal day still haunted Arthur Jones.
He shunned the men that he had known: he went his
lonely way,
They saw him not at Barcroft School, on Speech or
Founder's Day.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

They never saw him at the clubs where chatty Old Boys
met,
Where they revived old memories that Jones would
fain forget.

The Old Boys, when they meet, still pass the story round
and round,
How Dudshire County came to play upon the Barcroft
ground,
They go through the vicissitudes of that historic match,
And sigh to think what might have been, if Jones had
held the catch.

“What putrid luck,” the Old Boys say, “Remember how
De Brown
Faced Bloggs’, of Jugson’s, bowling, with nine county
wickets down?
With two to tie, sir, three to win—the County’s final
stand,
He knocked a perfect sitter fairly into Jones’s hand.

By Gad, sir, they were handing us the game upon a plate,
If only Jones, of Wegg’s, had not been half a tick too late!
He dropped it, sir! He dropped it!” Then, in melancholy
tones,
“I wonder what’s become of Him! Heard anything of
Jones?”

What great events, the poet sings, from little causes
spring!
Even a cricket-match may hang upon the slightest
thing.
If only Jones had held that catch! Ah, what a change of
scene!
O saddest words of tongue or pen, that saddest “might-
have-been!”

Long years have passed: but every Barcroft man recalls
the day
When Barcroft met the County Dudshire’s best in full
array,
De Brown was County captain, with such men as Smythe
and Swobbs,
And Sniggerson, and Wubbles, and that deadly bowler
Lobbs.

The County captain won the toss, and put us in to bat,
We knocked up eighty runs—not bad, in view of this
and that,
The bowlers, as we all agreed, had rather more than luck,
The umpire gravely erred when I was sent out for a duck.

When Dudshire took their innings, ninety-eight was all
their score,

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

And cricket is, and always was, a most uncertain game.
Three Dudshire wickets went, and still the board showed
only four,
And then De Brown get going, and the Duds began to
score.

The runs went up for Dudshire, but the wickets, too,
went down,
Till Sniggerson put on his pads, and went to join De
Brown,
And then the fur began to fly: The game, so nearly won,
Was pulled out of the fire between De Brown and
Sniggerson.

Our bowlers did their best: we watched for chances in the
field,
They gave us leather-hunting, till we gasped, and almost
reeled,
And still the runs went up, and still we saw the figures
mount,
With twos and threes and boundaries, more than a chap
could count.

De Brown was near his century, with Snig at fifty-three,
When Jorkinson, of Gubbins' House, caught Sniggers,
bowled McPhee,
For half-a-mile round Barcroft School, you might have
heard the shout,
"Well caught, sir! Oh, well caught!" when Sniggerson, at
last, was out.

But Barcroft men looked serious to see the County's
score,
A hundred, Sir, and seventy-eight—they needed little
more.
With three more wickets still to fall, they wanted only
five,
Pie for De Brown, if Dudshire's tail could keep the game
alive.

But once more Fortune seemed to smile again the Bar-
croft side,
The game's uncertainty was once again exemplified.
The next man in for Dudshire added nothing to the score,
McPhee sent down a hot one, and he went out, leg-
before.

Two more balls to the over: two wickets yet to fall!
Excitement was at fever-heat, when Mac sent down the
ball.
But Wubbles at the wicket knocked it well away, for two.
The last ball of the over sent him out—but we looked
blue.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Last man was called for Dudshire. It was Lobbs: all
knew that he
A wizard with the leather, with the willow was N.G.
If old McPhee could only have sent down another ball,
The game was ours—we merely had to watch the wicket
fall.

But now the County captain had the bowling, and De
Brown
Had shown that Barcroft bowling couldn't put his wicket
down,
Our bowler now was Bloggs, of Jugson's House: a good
man he,
But even at his very best, not deadly like McPhee.

A hush fell on the field, as Dudshire sent their last man in,
The County wanted only two to tie, and three to win.
Bar shouting, then, the game was over—everyone could
see
The County captain swiping and the batsmen running
three.

And then—and then—by Gad! What was the matter
with De Brown?
We almost rubbed our eyes, Sir, when the ball came
whipping down,
We stared amazed, breath hardly coming through our
parted lips,
When Dudshire's captain knocked a perfect sitter to the
slips!

Jones jumped to it—his hand was up, his eye was on the
ball,
Who could have dreamed a Barcroft man would let that
sitter fall?
The chance, Sir, of a lifetime, and the last chance in the
match,
A fag, Sir, in the Second Form, would not have dropped
that catch.

The game was ours—there trembled on our lips a mighty
shout,
De Brown, bowled Bloggs, caught Jones, by Gad!
Lobbs, for a duck, not out.
The County beaten at the post, and Barcroft School on
top!
But—but—horresco referees—Jones let that sitter drop!

He let it drop, Sir, let it drop! Jones, fielding in the slips,
Allowed that perfect sitter to slip past his finger-tips!
The silence of the breathless field was broken by a sound
Of gasping, as the round red ball dropped lightly to the
ground.

TOM MERRY'S ANNUAL

Jones stood as pale as death, his starting eyes fixed on the
ball,

The ball that touched his finger-tips before he let it fall,
Someone yelled "Butterfingers!"—he could neither hear
nor heed,

He stood like one confounded as he realised his deed.

Well, Sir, the County won, of course: the next ball saw
them through.

As Shakespeare says, 'tis true, 'tis pity: pity 'tis, 'tis true!
Right at the finish Barcroft would have won the county
match,

If only—only—only Jones of Wegg's had held that catch!

No wonder Jones of Wegg's House was a changed man
from that day.

No wonder that he left soon afterwards, and went his
way.

No wonder that he wandered, like an Ishmael, to and
fro,

Like Ió by the gadfly driven, always on the go.

No wonder that he sank, at last, beneath his dark despair,
No wonder that his burden grew too great for him to
bear,

No wonder that he hanged himself, at last, upon the yew.
Life had no further meaning—there was nothing else
to do!

Old Boys of Barcroft, in their clubs, or doddering at their
spas,

Still tell the tale of Arthur Jones, of Wegg's House, in
the bars,

They cannot help but feel the bitterness that lingers yet,
But Barcroft School forgives him—if it cannot quite
forget!