No. 312.—THE FIRST STORY OF A GRAND NEW CRICKETING SERIES!

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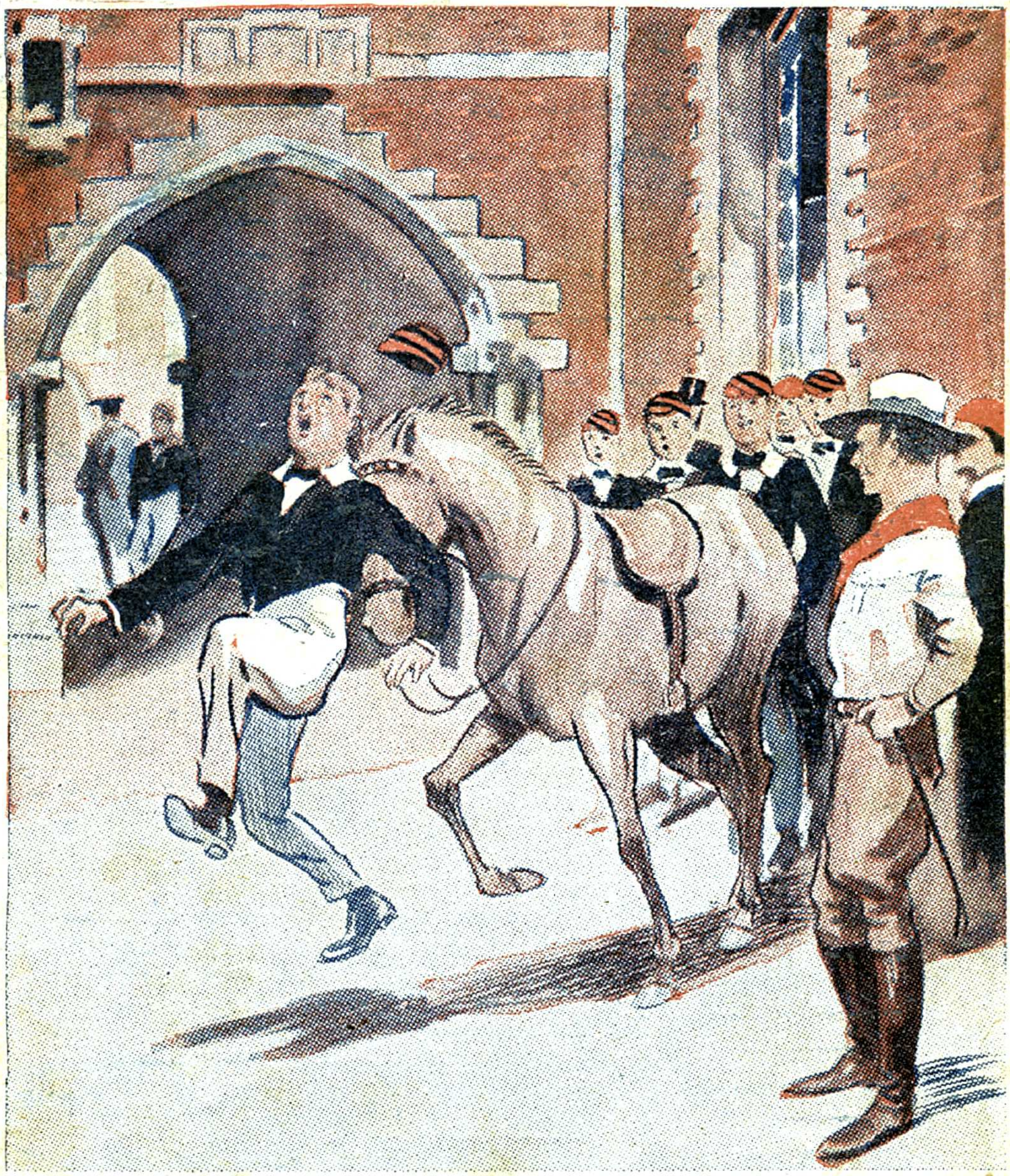


THE AUSTRALIAN WONDER

May 28, 1921.

THE Australian Wonder

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Saving of the Capital," "The Sign of the Flaming Torch," "The Hounds of the Tagossa," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF JERRY DODD!

"CHOCOLATES!" exclaimed Handforth scornfully. "Not for me, thanks! I never want to see another chocolate as long as I live!"

"Same here!" said Church, nodding.

Fatty Little grinned.

"All right—all the more for me!" he said cheerfully.

He withdrew the box of chocolates he had offered to Handforth and Co., who were leaning idly against the steps of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. It was a fine May afternoon, and a half-holiday. The sun was quite hot, but, in the shade of the Ancient House, the juniors had nothing to complain of.

Fatty Little proceeded to partake of his chocolates, although not very long since he had demolished an excessive dinner. By the way he was eating, one might have judged that he had tasted nothing for days.

"What's the idea of refusing chocolates?" he asked, with his mouth full. "It's the first time I've known anybody to do anything like that!"

"I was poisoned by a chocolate!" replied Handforth grimly.

Fatty glared.

"These ain't poisoned!" he said indignantly.

"Perhaps not; but I've lost my appetite for chocolates!" replied Handforth. "The very sight of 'em makes me feel bad. Go away and guzzle them somewhere else, you fathead!"

"Oh, I forgot that!" said Fatty Little. "By chutney! You did have a narrow squeak a week or so ago, Handy, now I come to remember it. Just because of eating one chocolate, too! It's a good thing I wasn't there—I should have eaten a dozen!"

Handforth and Church and McClure looked rather serious. They were thinking of the period, only just over, when they had been marked down by Ivan Grezzi, one of the chief members of the Tagossa—the grim Mordanian secret society which Nelson Lee and the St. Frank's boys had been instrumental in wrecking during their recent trip to the Balkans.

But that was all over now, and there was no further danger. The new term had started at St. Frank's a couple of days earlier, and the fellows were just settling down to the regular routine of school work and pleasure.

Personally, I meant to devote myself a great deal to cricket this term. Things had been going rather badly with the Remove eleven, and every match, so far, had been lost. But this was hardly to be wondered at, considering that all the best cricketers had been absent from the school.

But now the new term had started, I was determined to put a different complexion on all matters appertaining to cricket. I told the juniors that I should require them to practise for all they were worth during their spare time. The honour of the junior eleven was at stake, and we could not afford to suffer any further defeats.

At the moment when Handforth and Co. were lounging on the steps, I was busy on Little Side. There was no match on this afternoon, but we were hard at practice. Handforth would be required a little later on, after one or two other fellows had had their turn at the wickets.

"Yes, it's a good thing we didn't peg out after eating those giddy chocolates!" said Handforth thoughtfully. "It was a jolly near thing, and I'm not feeling exactly right yet. But I suppose I shall recover in time."

"Rats!" said Church. "What's the matter with you?"

"We're all right!" added McClure.

"I don't seem to have got my proper punch back," said Handforth, doubling his fist and regarding it anxiously. "Somehow or other it hasn't got the same effect as before. I can't get any force behind it!"

"Oh, no!" said Church sarcastically. "I suppose you didn't get any force behind it when you punched my nose yesterday, and knocked me clean out of the window? It's a wonder I've got any nose left!"

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, that!" he said. "That wasn't a punch—it was just a little tap. I went for De Valerie yesterday—the ass would keep arguing--and he had the nerve to hit back, and knock me down backwards!"

"The awful cheek!" said McClure, with a wink.

"The frightful nerve!" added Church. "Fancy somebody having the terrible audacity to hit back! I haven't seen De Valerie to-day, by the way. Where did you hide the body, Handy?"

"You—you silly ass!" roared Handforth.

"I thought perhaps you'd murdered him, and settled it," said Church. "After daring to hit you, Handy, you couldn't do anything less than slaughter him on the spot."

Handforth glared.

"If you're rotting, you fathead, I'll jolly soon show you that my fist has recovered its full power this afternoon!" he said threateningly. "I'm not going to stand any of your—— Why, what the dickens—— My only hat!"

Handforth broke off and stared in astonishment towards the gateway. Church and McClure stared, too, for at that moment a most unusual sight had presented itself. A chestnut pony had come dashing into the Triangle at full speed. Upon its back was seated a youngster, who was hatless, and attired in riding breeches, leather leggings, and a dark red flannel shirt. The latter was open at the neck, and tastefully adorned with a carelessly knotted scarf. He certainly looked quite out of place in the Triangle at St. Frank's.

Handforth and Co. stared in wonder. The pony was a beauty. Not particularly small, but graceful in all its limbs—a fine, active animal who seemed to be fit enough for any task that was given it. The rider uttered a sharp word, and the pony instantly came to a standstill, swishing his tail impatiently, and pawing once or twice with his front hoofs. The rider looked round him with apparent interest, unhooked a wide-brimmed soft hat from the peak of the saddle, and slung it carelessly on the back of his head.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, his face hardening. "Of all the nerve! Who does this silly fathead think he is?"

"Better go and ask him!" said Church.

"By George, I will!"

Handforth strode forward, looking very grim and determined. One might have supposed that the whole of St. Frank's belonged to him, and that it was his duty to go forward and demand explanations on the spot. But this was merely one of Handforth's little ways; he was always giving himself tasks which had nothing whatever to do with him.

Other fellows were approaching the new-comer also. For it was a most unusual thing for an apparition of this sort to appear in the Triangle of St. Frank's. And it was obvious at a glance that neither the animal nor the rider were English bred. They reminded one of sunbaked plains and wide, open spaces, and there was a Colonial touch about the rider's appearance which could not be overlooked.

The very way he straddled the pony proved that he was accustomed to riding almost since he had been able to walk. His face was open and cheerful—not exactly handsome, but, nevertheless, good-looking. His mouth was slightly too large, but it possessed a certain upward twist at the corners which told of good nature and humour.

Handforth approached, and stared up

at the rider somewhat aggressively. He found himself looking into a sunburnt face, where two twinkling blue eyes were set, and where two perfect sets of teeth were revealed in a cheerful smile. From beneath the wide-brimmed hat a number of curly wisps of dark-brown hair were escaping.

"Who the dickens do you think you are?" demanded Handforth bluntly.

"Jerry Dodd!" replied the new arrival promptly.

"Eh?"

"You asked for my name, I believe?" said the other. "It's Jerry Dodd!"

Handforth sniffed.

"Well, you're welcome to a name like that!" he said witheringly. "Where do you come from?"

"Australia!"

"What?"

"New South Wales, Australia," said Jerry Dodd calmly.

"If you're trying to pull my leg, you'll jolly soon find yourself off that pony, and counting a collection of stars!" said Handforth grimly. "So you come from Australia, do you?"

"Sure!"

"And what are you doing here?"

"Why, I've arrived," replied Jerry Dodd.

"What do you mean—you've arrived?"

"I reckon the words are plain enough," said Jerry Dodd. "And perhaps you will give me a little information while you're about it. Which is the Ancient House?"

"This one," put in Church, pointing.

"Say, that's good—I was hoping for that," said the new arrival, nodding. "I reckon this house is a lot better than the other one across the square. There's no reason why I shouldn't be fairly comfortable."

Handforth stared.

"Comfortable!" he repeated. "What the dickens are you getting at? Oh, I've hit it! I suppose you're the new stable-boy?"

Jerry Dodd removed his hat, and grinned.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not," he replied. "I may not look it, but I've come here to learn things. I reckon I'd better explain right at once that I didn't want to come—so don't blame me. But, now that I'm here, I'll make the best of it."

"Well, I'm hanged!" muttered Fullwood, who had strolled up with his two chums.

"You'll make the best of it!" repeated Handforth. "Why, you cheeky rotter, are you trying to make out that you are a new kid—that you're coming into the Ancient House as one of us?"

Jerry Dodd nodded.

"I apologise!" he said calmly. "I didn't think you were so smart—you've guessed it the first time!"

"But—but it's impossible!" shouted Church. "It's all rot to say that you're booked for the Ancient House! I suppose you're trying to be funny? Whoever heard of a chap arriving on horseback, and dressed up in togs like that?"

"Perhaps it's unusual; but I'm rather unusual, too!" said Jerry Dodd, slipping down from the saddle, and standing before the juniors. "Well, chums, ain't you going to shake hands? I reckon we've got to be together a good lot in future, and we might as well start good. Shake!"

He held out a rather big fist to Handforth, and the latter took it somewhat dazedly.

"You—you ass!" he said. "You're spoofing, ain't you?"

"I don't like to disturb your peace of mind, but I'm not," replied Jerry Dodd. "It's dead right, chum. I'm Jerry Dodd, and I've arrived at St. Frank's to stay for a whole piece! My dad reckons that I shall go up to Oxford later on; but I reckon—— But that doesn't matter!"

Handforth hardly knew what to say. It was one of his greatest delights to get hold of a new kid, and "put him through his paces," as Handforth termed it. But he didn't quite know how to manage this newcomer. He couldn't very well see how he could put Jerry Dodd through any paces.

But he certainly was not going to let the new boy escape now.

"Hold on!" he said grimly. "You're a new kid, and you're coming into the Ancient House?"

"Sure!"

"There's no spoof about that?"

"None at all!"

"And you've come here for good?"

"You've got it, chum!"

"I'm not your chum, and if you say that again I'll biff you!" roared Handforth—not because he objected to the term, but because he wished to show

his authority. "Which Form are you going into?"

"Some blamed place they call the Remove," replied Jerry Dodd.

"My hat!"

"So he's for the Remove, eh?"

"It's the first time I've heard it called that!" snorted Handforth. "A blamed place, eh? I'm going to punch your nose for referring to the Remove in such a way, you new fathead!"

"Say, I'm sorry if I've offended——"

"Rats! You're not going to get out of it like that," snapped Handforth, who was fairly itching to punch somebody. "You've got to learn that a new kid must be humble and submissive. He's got to answer questions without making any fuss. Are you going to take this punch quietly, or will you put up your fists?"

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"There's no need to get excited——" he began.

"Who's excited?" bellowed Handforth, rolling up his sleeves. "I'll soon show you whether——"

"Say, Bud, headrs—headrs!" said the new boy quickly.

The pony pricked up its ears on the instant, and it evidently understood precisely what this curious term meant. For, without any delay, he put his head down, pranced round for a moment, and butted Handforth squarely in the back. Then he proceeded to push Handforth before him in quite a surprising way. Whichever way the unfortunate Edward Oswald tried to dodge, the pony followed. The sight was so comical that the onlookers—who were now fairly numerous—roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Call him off!" roared Handforth desperately. "You—you rotter, I'll smash you! Hi, what the thunder——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's efforts to escape the pony were futile. As fast as Handforth went round the Triangle, Bud followed him, with his head still down, butting Handforth in the back. And Jerry Dodd stood looking on with his face wreathed in smiles.

"Right-oh, Bud!" he sang out suddenly.

The pony ceased his efforts at once, and came trotting back to Jerry Dodd's side, where it stood quite passive and obedient. Everybody regarded the performance with wonder and admiration—everybody, that is, with the sole exception of Handforth.

"By Jingo!" said McClure. "That's a ripping pony!"

"Rather!"

"And doesn't it understand this new chap, too?"

"I reckon we're the best of pals—real good chums!" said Jerry Dodd. "Say, we've known one another since I was ten years old, and what Bud don't know in the trick line ain't worth learning."

"And you've brought him right over from Australia?" asked Reginald Pitt, in surprise.

"Sure thing, chum."

"But you can't keep that pony here, you ass!" said Pitt good-naturedly. "A junior isn't allowed to have a pet of that kind."

Jerry Dodd smiled.

"If Bud don't stop, I don't," he said coolly. "I don't reckon we're going to be parted again. It was bad enough when he came over on the boat before me. Bud stays at St. Frank's. I guess it's all arranged."

Before anybody could ask any questions, Handforth came up, dusty, hot, and red with exertion and indignation.

"What do you mean by that?" he bellowed.

"No offence, only just a little joke," said Jerry Dodd calmly. "Say, you're not the sort to make a fuss. I reckon we'll be chums within a day or two—or right now, if you like. What do you say?"

Handforth was contemplating assault on the spot, but the new boy's calm and cheerful manner completely disarmed him, and Handforth's sense of humour had permitted him to see the comical side of the incident.

"Well, you're a corker!" he said bluntly. "It's not my way to squabble, so here's my paw!"

They shook hands again, and Fullwood sniffed.

"And have we got to put up with this low-down bounder?" he asked, addressing everybody in general. "By gad! What a come-down for St. Frank's! I thought the school was goin' to the dogs, an' now I'm bally well sure of it!"

"Disgraceful!" said Gulliver.

"I don't see why we should stand it," added Bell.

Fullwood and Co. were all there, and the Co. dutifully echoed the sentiments of their leader. Ralph Leslie Fullwood

was always keen upon seizing an opportunity to be unpleasant. It seemed that Fullwood only really enjoyed himself when he was saying or doing something nasty.

"Shut up, you cad!" said Pitt, turning.

"I don't see why I should shut up! I've got a right to my opinion!" retorted Fullwood sourly. "Anybody can see that this chap isn't our sort. He's a rank outsider—a blessed coachman's son, by the look of him. I'm going to make a public protest about him being sent to St. Frank's!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bell.

"A rough cad like this never ought to be admitted," added Gulliver.

Jerry Dodd flushed slightly, and looked round.

"Say, chums, do you all agree to that?" he asked quietly. "Ain't I welcome here?"

Pitt clapped him on the shoulder.

"My dear chap, as welcome as flowers in May!" he replied. "You mustn't take any notice of these snobs; they're necessary evils in the Remove. We'd like to get rid of 'em, but we can't."

Fullwood scowled.

"Who told you to interfere?" he demanded hotly.

Reginald Pitt's eyes flashed.

"And who told you to insult this new chap?" he retorted. "If your attitude wasn't palpably ridiculous, I'd knock you down. But this new chap has got more sense than to take any notice of you."

Jerry Dodd smiled again.

"Thanks!" he said. "I don't reckon to stay where I'm not wanted."

"Well, you're not wanted here!" snarled Fullwood. "These other chaps can say what they like, but I'm against you. Understand? This is a school for gentlemen?"

"You really surprise me!" said Jerry Dodd smoothly. "May I inquire how you happened to get in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good for you, Doddy!"

Fullwood glared.

"Did you hear that?" he shouted thickly. "This—this new cad has had the nerve to insult me!"

"Well, you've only got what you asked for!" said Handforth.

"He won't remain at St. Frank's if I can help it!" shouted Fullwood fiercely. "We've had to stand a few common beasts before—such as Burton and Farman. But this chap is about the limit. A low, uncouth son of a Colonial backwoodsman, who probably can't write his own rotten name, or put two figures together! If chaps of this sort come to St. Frank's, it's about time——"

Jerry Dodd's eyes were flashing, and he turned to the pony.

"Catch him, Bud, old son—catch him good!"

The pony obeyed instantly. Fullwood had an idea that he was going to be treated as Handforth had been treated, and he dodged. But it was not of much use attempting to dodge the active Bud.

The pony rushed after him and caught him within a few yards. But he acted very differently now. Instead of harmlessly pushing the junior in the back, he opened his mouth and caught the shoulder of Fullwood's jacket between his teeth. The teeth came together firmly, and Fullwood was held as in a vice, quite unhurt, but thoroughly scared. He wriggled and twisted and struggled, but it was no good.

In spite of his efforts the pony half pushed, half dragged him across the Triangle to his master's side. Fullwood yelled for all he was worth, but nobody took any notice of his appeals for help. He deserved what he was getting, and all the juniors knew that he was not harmed. They were far more interested in the pony than in Fullwood.

"Good boy, Bud!" said Jerry Dodd. "Now, Fullwood—I think that's your name—you've got to apologise!"

Fullwood, finding that he was unhurt, began to calm down.

"Apologise!" he raved. "What for?"

"For insulting the new kid, of course," said Handforth.

"No, not for insulting me," said Jerry Dodd quietly. "But for insulting my dad. I don't stand for that!"

"Lemme go!" snarled Fullwood. "Call this rotten pony away! If you don't, I'll kick!"

"Go ahead!" said the new boy calmly. "I reckon you'll find that Bud can kick one better every time. He don't release you until you've apologised."

"You—you new cad!" gasped Fullwood. "I won't—I won't!"

"Take him round, Bud," said Jerry Dodd softly.

The pony trotted forward, and Full-

wood trotted with him. That grip upon his shoulder was like a clasp of a vice. And as the pony trotted, he gained speed. Fullwood had to accommodate his own pace to that of his captor. He dare not risk falling. Although, even if he had done so, Bud would not have harmed him. Round the Triangle the pair went for all they were worth, until Bud came to a halt in front of his master again. Fullwood was nearly exhausted.

"Still of the same opinion?" asked the new boy.

"I—I apologise!" snarled Fullwood. "But, by gad, I'll make you pay for this before long, you Australian——"

He pulled himself up, realising that he was only making matters worse. But he had been compelled to apologise in public, although it was quite obvious that he did not actually mean it.

"Release him, Bud!" said Jerry Dodd easily.

The pony was certainly well trained; it seemed to know every word that his master said. It opened its mouth and allowed Fullwood to go free, then trotted quietly round and stood behind Jerry Dodd. The latter leapt lightly into the saddle and grinned.

"See you all again later!" he said cheerfully.

He said one word to the pony, and they both disappeared out of the Triangle into the street, going towards the stables at the rear.

Reginald Pitt took a deep breath.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he exclaimed. "I reckon he's about the queerest new chap we ever had--and a good sort, too!"

CHAPTER II.

THE HEADMASTER'S DECISION.

JERRY DODD had created quite an impression.

Unfortunately I had not witnessed his arrival, or the arrival of Bud, the amazing pony. But all the details of the incident were fully described to me by Pitt and several others. And, although I had not seen Jerry Dodd yet, I came to the conclusion that he was made of the right sort of stuff.

The new boy had certainly made an enemy of Fullwood, but this was not in the least surprising. The cad of Study A generally made himself unpleasant to everybody who was really decent. The fact that Fullwood and Jerry Dodd were already on bad terms was decidedly a point in favour of the new fellow.

And while we were talking about Master Dodd, Dr. Malcolm Stafford was seated in his study, thoughtfully drumming his fingers upon his blotting-pad. The Head of St. Frank's was deep in thought.

Then the door opened, and Nelson Lee appeared—not Nelson Lee, the detective, but Nelson Lee, the Housemaster. For he was now attired in a flowing gown, and looked very scholastic.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I just want a few words with you, if you don't mind," said the Head. "Sit down—sit down! The subject of my chat will be the new boy who has arrived at St. Frank's this afternoon."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I was fortunately able to witness the youngster's entry into the Triangle," he said. "I didn't interfere, because I thought it better to let the boy meet some of the juniors alone. He seems to be quite an original character."

The Head frowned in a perplexed way.

"You are certainly right there, Mr. Lee," he agreed. "I hardly know what to do. This boy's name is Dodd—Jerrold Dodd, and he is the son of a very rich Australian sheep-farmer. I think that Mr. Dodd possesses one of the largest ranches in New South Wales, and is not far short of a millionaire. But, judging by his letters—and I have had a good many—education does not seem to be his strong point. I have pictured him as a somewhat rough-and-ready type, good-hearted, but hardly what you could call a member of high society."

"None the less for that, he may be a gentleman," said Nelson Lee.

"Quite so—quite so!" said the Head quickly. "I agree, my dear sir. A man with no education at all may certainly be a perfect gentleman. But he can certainly not be polished. And I am afraid Mr. Dodd's son is after the same style—rough-and-ready, but quite unrefined. I do not think he will prove a difficult boy to teach, but he will certainly need a good deal of brushing-up, so to speak."

"I will have a quiet chat with Dodd, and I dare say we shall get on well together," said Nelson Lee. "Mr. Crowell is a patient man, and I've no doubt that Dodd will get on well in the Form-room. Just because he is the son

of an Australian sheep-farmer, that does not mean to say that he is unfit to be at St. Frank's."

The Head nodded.

"I fancy the boy has had very little schooling," he said. "He has lived an open-air life on his father's ranch. Upon my soul! I suppose you know about the pony? Mr. Dodd wrote me that the boy positively refused to come to England without the pony. Nothing would appease him, and at last his father was forced to agree. And here we have the boy—and the pony as well! I have had to make special arrangements to have the animal placed in one of the stables. Needless to say, his father is perfectly willing to pay an added fee on behalf of the pony."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I can't altogether blame the lad," he said. "That pony is indeed a wonderful little chap, and there is a perfect understanding between him and his master. I dare say they have been friends for years, and the thought of coming to England for several years, and leaving the pony behind, did not appeal to Master Dodd at all. He is evidently a boy who likes his own way."

"And there is another matter I wish to discuss with you, Mr. Lee," went on the Head. "You see, Mr. Dodd has great ambitions. He is a sheep farmer, but he does not want his son to follow in his own footsteps. His great aim is to make Jerrold a gentleman, with a position in life appropriate to his upbringing. In other words, Mr. Dodd has decided Jerrold shall read for the Bar. After leaving St. Frank's he will go to Oxford, and then, later, he will become a barrister."

"Is the boy keen upon this programme?"

"That's just the point, Mr. Lee—that's just the difficulty," said the Head. "The boy is not. He doesn't want to have anything to do with the law—his greatest ambition is to lead an open-air life, like his father. But Mr. Dodd is obstinate, and means to have his own way. He tried his best to keep Jerrold at school in Australia, but he couldn't do anything with the boy. For that reason he has sent him right across to England, believing that the changed atmosphere will have its due effect. Mr. Dodd believes that after settling down here, Jerrold will get into different habits, and will settle down comfortably and willingly to his life's task. Whether such will be the case remains to be seen. The whole thing is in the nature of an experiment."

"So I should imagine," said Nelson Lee. "Of course, Mr. Dodd may be right—the changed conditions of England may cause the lad to forget his yearning for his father's ranch, and, being so far away, he will be more inclined to settle down. He has come to St. Frank's, I understand, to spend his time in diligent study?"

Dr. Stafford nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "You have used the right term, Mr. Lee—diligent study. But will the boy do it? Will he be content to spend his time indoors, poring over books, and cramming his head with classics, and such like! Personally, I am doubtful—I hardly think it will work."

"Of course, we cannot do anything just now," said Nelson Lee. "We must wait until Dodd has had time to find his feet. No doubt he will gain a great deal of recreation by devoting his spare time to cricket, and so forth——"

"Now you have hit upon the real point, Mr. Lee," interrupted the Head. "I must confess that I'm greatly worried. Mr. Dodd has instructed me most firmly that his son must not play cricket for the school."

Nelson Lee elevated his eyebrows.

"But why?" he asked. "Why should the boy be denied that?"

"Well, it seems that he is excessively keen on cricket—he is, indeed, one of the most wonderful players that Australia has ever bred," replied the Head. "This, of course, is his father's opinion—and that opinion may be prejudiced. I know nothing about the boy's capabilities myself. Well, Mr. Dodd does not want his son to play at all, because, if he does so he will spend all his spare time at cricket, instead of at his studies. That is the point."

"I see—I understand now," said Lee thoughtfully. "And, after all, it is quite a good point. We are both willing to agree, Dr. Stafford, that a boy who devotes all his time and thought to cricket—a boy who looks upon cricket as the serious business of life—takes but little interest in lessons. And I agree that Dodd will not study very much if he devotes too much of his time to cricket and sports in general. But surely he can have a game now and then?"

"I don't think it would be wise," re-

plied the Head. "As a matter of fact, it has been left to my discretion whether Dodd shall play cricket or not. He certainly must not play for the eleven—that is forbidden. And I do not think we had better let him play at any other times, for it would only cause trouble all round. Dodd himself would feel aggrieved because he could not partake in the school games—the recognised fixtures—and the other boys would be highly indignant because they could not use a good player. Therefore, in my opinion, it will be better to tell the boy at the outset that he must not play at all."

Nelson Lee nodded in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, perhaps you are right in this particular case, Dr. Stafford," he said. "Practice takes a great deal of time—and Dodd would be compelled to practise if he was given his cap. He must take his recreation in another way—walking, riding his pony, and so forth."

"It is rather hard on the lad, but I do not blame myself in any way," said the Head. "After all, these restrictions are not of my making, but of Mr Dodd's. The man has a right to say what his own son shall or shall not do. He does not want the boy to spend his spare time in sport—that, in fact, is the main reason why Jerrold has been sent to England. I am trusting you, Mr. Lee, to see that the lad devotes himself to his studies. On half-holidays he will, of course, have his own pleasures. We cannot compel the boy to study at such times, and it would not be fair."

"What character does Mr. Dodd give his son?" asked Lee.

"Oh, it is excellent in every way," replied the Head. "The boy is good-natured, generous, and thorough in all his work. In manners and speech he is, perhaps, rather unpolished; but that is a matter which we shall remedy in the course of time. He came over, I understand, with a friend of Mr. Dodd's, and has been staying in London for two or three weeks."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, he certainly arrived at the school in a most novel manner," he said. "I do not think any other boy has ever presented himself at St. Frank's on the back of his own pony! That pony, by the way, is quite a remarkable little animal."

"Yes, so I judged from Mr. Dodd's letters," said the Head. "I suppose Jerrold had it sent down to Bannington—I remember hearing something about that—so that he could pick it up, so to speak, on his way here. His boxes arrived yesterday."

A tap sounded upon the door.

"Come in!" said the Head, glancing up.

The door opened, and Jerry Dodd appeared.

But he now presented a very different appearance. His Colonial aspect had gone. He no longer wore the riding breeches, the leggings, the red flannel shirt, or the wide-brimmed Stetson hat. Instead, he was immaculately clothed in well-cut Etons, with highly polished shoes, spotless linen, and with his hair carefully brushed.

Jerry Dodd had certainly done his best to convert himself into a normal St. Frank's junior; but the effort could not be called absolutely successful. The clothes, although perfect in fit, were obviously uncomfortable to the wearer, and he seemed quite stiff and unbendable.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head. "I do not think I sent for you, my boy."

Jerry Dodd beamed.

"No, sir," he said calmly. "But some of the new chums reckoned that it was up to me to get busy and come around. So here I am, sir."

The Head restrained a smile.

"Yes, so I see," he said. "So you are Jerrold Dodd?"

"Sure—Jerry Dodd, to be more exact," said the new boy. "I don't figure on any fancy names, sir."

"Well, Dodd, now that you are here, we might as well have a good chat," said the Head, rising and extending his hand. "You have come a long way to St. Frank's, and I hope that you will settle down to your new life and devote yourself to your studies."

Jerry Dodd made a wry grimace.

"I'm scared, sir," he confessed; "plumb scared. By jings! When I think of squatting right down and nosin' into books, I get a sort of creeps down my back. I don't reckon I've done much book learnin', sir. My dad wants me to study for the Bar, and become a great lawyer later on."

"And a most excellent prospect, Dodd," said the Head. "If you devote

yourself to your studies, you will do well."

"Well, I'll try, sir," said Jerry Dodd. "My dad's dead set on it, and that's the only reason why I'm goin' ahead. I wouldn't like to hurt my dad's feelin's for worlds—he's the best man in the whole of the little island Down Under. 'An' I'm goin' to work with all my strength to make good his hopes about me."

"Splendid—splendid!" exclaimed the Head. "That's the right spirit, Dodd—the spirit that carries a boy onwards. By the way, this gentleman is Mr. Nelson Lee, your Housemaster. In future he will have a great deal to do with you."

Jerry Dodd thrust out his hand.

"I reckon I'm pleased to know you, sir," he said warmly. "Say, this is plumb good! Mr. Nelson Lee! We've heard of you down there—I guess we know heaps about what you've done, sir. I'm sure a lucky feller to have you for a master."

Nelson Lee took the new boy's hand.

"That's the style, Dodd," he said, in his free-and-easy way. "I am quite sure that we shall get on well together. In your spare time I want you to look upon me as your friend—somebody you can come to with all your little troubles and difficulties."

"Say, that's bully of you, sir," said Jerry Dodd warmly. "But I reckoned that a new chum at one of these swell schools wasn't allowed to go tellin' tales to a master. I've read that it's kind of bad form."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"It is certainly bad form to sneak—to use the juniors' own term," he replied. "But I dare say you will find plenty of other little troubles, Dodd, and I should like you to seek my advice when you are in doubt or difficulty. Don't look upon me as a master—don't be afraid to approach me. I always like to be friendly with my boys, and to do my best for them. In return, I expect them to do their best for me."

"By golly! I'm sure havin' my peepers opened!" exclaimed Jerry Dodd enthusiastically. "I never reckoned that St. Frank's would be like this—no, sir! 'And I'm feelin' good an' comfortable right now."

"With regard to cricket and other sports, I am afraid you will be disappointed," put in the Headmaster. "At St. Frank's, Dodd, you must devote yourself to your studies, and not to sport. I may as well tell you at once, to avoid disappointment later, that it is against your father's wishes for you to play cricket while you are here."

"By jings! Ain't that just my durned luck?" complained Jerry Dodd, with comical dismay. "But it don't surprise me, sir—my dad fixed all these things in my head before I sailed. No cricket! Say, it's the worst punishment I could have. But I've got to do what dad says, and I'll try as hard as I can go."

Both Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford came to the conclusion that Jerry Dodd would do well at St. Frank's, and that he would justify his father's high opinion of him. He accepted the decision about the cricket cheerfully, but with great inward disappointment. It was a bigger blow to him than he would allow the Head and Nelson Lee to see.

After a further talk—mainly about lessons—he was allowed to take his departure. And he made his way straight out into the Triangle, and was at once surrounded by a group of Remove fellows.

"So this is it!" exclaimed Bob Christine, eyeing the new boy curiously. "This is the merchant who had the nerve to bring a pony here as a pet! What's your name, you new kid?"

"Say, ain't you heard it yet?" asked Jerry Dodd. "I don't figure that it's a name of any great distinction, but it was presented to me by my dad, and it's good enough. Jerry Dodd, sir—that's my handle!"

"Well, you've got a good lot to say for a raw, new kid!" exclaimed Christine. "I'm not sure that we oughtn't to scrag you."

"Rats!" put in Owen major. "If you lay your paws on the new chap, you College House bounder, we'll jolly well wipe you up!"

"Yah! Clear off, you Monks!"

"Fossils! Mouldy old Fossils!"

The juniors yelled at one another, and Jerry Dodd looked on with mild surprise.

"By jings! What's the game, 'chum?" he asked, turning to Owen major.

"Why, those chaps belong to the College House," said Owen major warmly. "We don't mix with them, you know; they ain't exactly our class!"

"Not your class, eh?" yelled Christine. "Why, we wouldn't have you in the College House if you begged on your

knees to be admitted. As for that antediluvian old barn you call the Ancient House, it ain't worth burning down!"

"Yah, Fossils!"

"Yooh! Monks!"

The juniors hooted at one another, but they did not risk a fistic encounter in the open Triangle. The eyes of a master or two might be upon them. Jerry Dodd looked on, grinning. This was something quite new to him. But he would soon learn all about the House rivalry at St. Frank's. Actually, the Fossils and the Monks were the best of friends, but they took a great delight in slanging one another on every available occasion.

It was quite a puzzle to Jerry Dodd at first. By the way the juniors insulted one another he imagined that they were bitter enemies. But he would soon learn that this was only just one of their little ways.

Handforth came out of the Ancient House in flannels, with a cricket bat tucked under his arm. And Jerry Dodd eyed him rather enviously. The new junior had rather taken to Handforth, in spite of the latter's aggressive ways. And there was certainly something about Edward Oswald that attracted one.

"Oh, here you are!" said Handforth, with a proprietary air. "I was looking for you, you ass! You've got to come along to Little Side."

"To where?"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth witheringly. "Did you ever know such ignorance? He pretends that he doesn't know what Little Side means! The playing fields, you Australian duffer! The giddy cricket field."

"Oh," said Jerry Dodd, "that's good! I'd like to see a bit of cricket."

Handforth looked the new boy up and down.

"Well, you look more decent now," he said critically. "A bit stiff, perhaps, but that clobber is new, and I don't suppose you're used to wearing Etons. You'll soon shake down. Keen on sports?"

"Sure! Er—that is, no!" said Jerry Dodd quickly. "I don't figure on much, anyway. I don't play a great deal."

"Oh, well, you'll have to alter that," said Handforth. "Come along; I'll introduce you to Nipper. Our skipper, you know. Not at all a bad chap, although he does think a good bit of himself."

Bob Christine winked.

"Of course, things are wrong in the Remove, strictly speaking," he said. "Through some ghastly mistake, Nipper was made captain instead of Handforth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled, and Handforth glared.

"If you start any of your rot, I'll wipe you up!" he roared. "Don't take any notice of these fatheads, Doddy. I don't say that I'd be a better skipper than Nipper, but if Nipper left the school they'd have a job to find a new captain."

"Well, we certainly shouldn't look into Study D," said Owen major. "If you were skipper, Handy, you'd punch everybody's nose, and the whole Remove would be upside-down in less than twelve hours——"

"Oh, come on!" interrupted Handforth.

He took Jerry Dodd's arm and marched him across the Triangle towards the playing fields. Church and McClure were just behind, rather amused at Handforth's fatherly manner with the new junior.

"By the way," said Handforth, "what study are you going into?"

"Study F."

"Not so bad," said Handforth critically. "You'll have Burton and Conroy minor as study mates. Quite decent chaps!"

"So I understand," said Jerry Dodd, as they entered Little Side. "Mr. Lee was telling me—— By jings, that was a bully swipe!"

Jerry Dodd paused, and looked with great admiration at the junior who was at the net, batting. He was Reginald Pitt, and he was certainly shaping very well. I was bowling, and I was quite pleased with Pitt's form.

I crossed over at once as soon as I saw the new boy.

"I heard you'd arrived," I said, extending my hand. "How are you, old son? I'm Nipper, and you're Jerry Dodd, I believe. I hope we'll get on all serene. We're lucky to have an Australian chap in the Remove."

"Thanks!" said the new boy. "I reckon that's a nice compliment. I've come to St. Frank's to learn things, so I don't reckon you'll hear much of me out in the open."

"Oh, so you're going to devote yourself to study—eh?" I said. "You don't

look much like a swotter. How about sports—cricket, and all that?"

Jerry Dodd held himself firm.

"I don't play," he remarked quietly.

"What!" I exclaimed. "You came from Australia, and you don't go in for sports! What about cricket?"

"I don't play," repeated Jerry Dodd.

"What do you mean—you don't play?" I asked curiously.

"I reckon the words are distinct enough."

"Do you mean that you can't play?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I can—just a bit," said Jerry Dodd. "But I don't reckon I'd be much good to you. You chums mustn't figure that every Australian can play cricket like a professional. We raise a few big men Down Under, but we're not all swell cricketers."

"Oh, well, we'll give you a trial, and see what you can do!" I said. "If you like, you can have a go at the nets now."

Jerry Dodd looked rather uncomfortable.

"I don't figure I could do much in these clothes," he objected.

"Well, go and change into flannels," said Handforth promptly.

"There ain't flannels in my outfit."

"That's nothing; I'll lend you some," said Handforth obligingly. "Come on; you're just about my size, and I'll soon rig you up."

Jerry Dodd looked more uncomfortable than ever.

"You're sure good fellows, but there's nothing doing," he said quietly. "There is no sense in me taking hold of one of them pieces of wood."

"Pieces of wood!" I echoed, staring.

"Sure—like that fellow's got a hold of," said Jerry Dodd, nodding.

"Oh, you mean a bat!" I exclaimed.

"Sure! Is that what it's called?" said Jerry Dodd. "A real swell name!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth. "Didn't you know it was called a bat? I suppose you know what those things are called over there?" he added, pointing to the wickets.

Jerry Dodd smiled.

"You can bet your life I do!" he replied. "They're round bits of stick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Round bits of stick!" yelled Handforth. "Why, you idiot, they're the stumps!"

"Yes, I recollect having heard the name," said Jerry Dodd, nodding.

"I don't think you'll become very famous as a cricketer," grinned Pitt, who had strolled up. "But you might as well take this bat and have a go. There'll be no harm done. We'll see how you shape."

The Colonial boy shook his head.

"It wouldn't be no sort of use," he objected.

"Rats, you've got to!" I broke in briskly. "Never mind about flannels. We're always on the look-out for new talent, and, just at the moment, we want some smart fellows in the Remove eleven. You may be a dark horse, for all we know. Grab hold of this bat, and I'll send you down a few easy balls."

Jerry Dodd hesitated for a moment, and then grinned, his eyes sparkling for a second.

"I let on that I could play a bit," he said. "But maybe you'll think different after you've seen me. I'm caught real good. A fellow doesn't like to admit his failings. Don't blame me if I disappoint you."

"We sha'n't blame you," I said. "Go ahead!"

And Jerry Dodd walked to the wickets.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGERS WITHIN THE GATES!

QUITE a number of juniors had collected round by this time, and they stood watching with interest. They wanted to see how the new fellow would shape. For, as I had explained, the Remove had not been very successful in cricket. I was doing my utmost to knock the eleven into shape.

"He won't be much good!" said De Valerie, shaking his head.

"Dear old boy, I'm afraid you're right," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "An' that's a frightful pity, too. We were hopin' that Australian chap would be a regular terror at cricket."

"I expect he will be a terror, but not the kind we require," said Jack Grey.

Jerry Dodd went to the wicket accompanied by Handforth, who was still acting as the new boy's guide. And Jerry Dodd was holding the bat in his hand as though he was mortally afraid of it.

"Now, then," said Handforth; "we'll see what you can do."

"Where do I stand?"

Handforth stared.

"Where do you stand?" he repeated blankly. "Why, there, of course! Don't you know the giddy positions?"

Jerry Dodd loked rather hopeless, and grasped the bat firmly between his fingers and held it high above his head, as though he were about to play tennis—and he stood with his heels only an inch or two from the stumps.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is this right?" asked Jerry Dodd uncomfortably.

"Right!" bellowed Handforth. "You --you silly lunatic! You don't hold the bat up there; you've got to put it on the ground, and you've got to be a yard away from the wicket. How do you think you're going to swipe with the stumps only an inch behind you?"

"I'm sorry!" said Jerry Dodd awkwardly. "I reckon you'd best put me right."

"Oh, the chap's a born idiot!" said Handforth gruffly.

He grabbed the bat from Jerry Dodd's hands and planted himself on the crease in the correct position.

"That's what you've got to do," he said. "Hold the bat like this--see? And when Nipper sends the ball down you've got to swipe at it——"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Pitt. "What's the good of talking to him? The fags in the First Form know more about cricket than he does!"

Jerry Dodd seized the bat again and tried to copy Handforth's example. He stood there, very clumsy and awkward, but his position was something after the right style. I grinned and held up my hand.

"Get ready!" I sang out. "I'll give you an easy one!"

I sent down a slow, simple ball. Jerry Dodd lifted his bat, sent the bails flying up from the stumps, and whirled the bat round with such force that he threw himself off his feet and sat down with a bump. Naturally, he had missed the ball by about a yard, and he looked about him dazedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You—you fathead!" roared Handforth. "And you told us that you know a bit about cricket!"

"I reckon I'm sorry," said Jerry Dodd humbly. "By jings, but I warned you, didn't I? I said I shouldn't shape well. A fellow doesn't see much cricket on a sheep-farm in Australia."

"Much!" echoed Pitt. "I should imagine he doesn't see any."

I strolled down the pitch.

"Well, I don't think it's any good trying him again," I said, with a chuckle. "That's enough for us, my sons. Dodd, old scout, I'm afraid you won't develop into a champion this season."

"I'm awful sorry——"

"Rats! It's not your fault," I interrupted. "We insisted, and we got what we asked for. You're at liberty to peg away at your lesson-books all you like. We certainly sha'n't ask you to fill a vacant position in the eleven."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jerry Dodd nodded.

"I don't reckon I'd be much good," he said regretfully.

If we had only known it, it had cost the new boy a very great deal to act as he had just acted. It was only by sheer will power and grim determination that he had played the fool so cleverly. Not for one moment did any of the fellows suspect that Jerry Dodd had deliberately made himself out to be a duffer.

All the new boy's instincts urged him to show us what he really was. An overpowering desire to be his real self seized hold of him and nearly won the day, but by a supreme effort he kept himself in check.

It had been a fight, but Jerry Dodd had allowed no sign of it to appear in his expression. He could play cricket; he could play in a manner which had caused wonder and admiration among professionals in Australia. But here, at St. Frank's, he had to keep that secret.

Knowing that he could beat every other fellow in the Remove, knowing that he could show St. Frank's an exhibition of batting which would open all eyes, it was hardly surprising that Jerry Dodd felt somewhat bitter and despondent.

Cricket was his mania; he loved the sport almost as well as he loved his pet pony, Bud. And to be denied the pleasure of showing us what he could do was the essence of refined torture.

But Jerry Dodd took hold of himself and remained firm. His father wanted him to avoid cricket, and to devote himself entirely to study, and Mr. Dodd's wishes were law to Jerry. He never thought of opposing them.

As far as the Remove went, nobody gave another thought to Jerry Dodd as a possible acquisition to the junior eleven. He was dismissed for good and all, and interest in him flagged a bit.

At a big school like St. Frank's a duffer at sports was not particularly popular. A boy who always pored over his lesson-books was, as a rule, left strictly to himself, and his friends were not numerous.

On the other hand, if a junior showed great prowess at cricket, swimming, boxing, and so forth, he was looked upon as a popular hero. I mattered little if he was a rank duffer during school hours. It is the way of public schools.

At tea-time Jerry Dodd went into the Ancient House and presented himself in Study F. He had not yet met Tom Burton and Conroy minor, for these two juniors had been absent during the afternoon. But they were at home now.

Jerry Dodd entered the study and looked round.

"Hallo, chums!" he said pleasantly.

"Oh, so you're the new chap!" said Conroy minor, staring at the newcomer with all a boy's rudeness. "We've heard about you, Dodd. You made a frightful mess at the nets, didn't you, and you caused a bit of a sensation by arriving on a donkey?"

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"Say, that's an insult to Bud!" he exclaimed. "He's the best chum I've got, is Bud--a pony; sir—not a donkey."

"Oh, it's all the same thing!" said Conroy minor. "Did Mr. Lee put you in this study, or did you choose it yourself?"

"I wasn't allowed any choice," said the new boy. "But I figure that we shall get on pretty good. I won't be much bother; just a corner of the table and a few inches of the bookshelf—that'll suit me."

"Swab my main decks!" said Tom Burton, starting up. "We don't do things like that in this cabin, shipmate. You're one of us now, and you'll have your locker and an equal share of space. We're glad to have you here."

"That's decent of you," said Jerry Dodd. "But I figure I didn't know this room was called a cabin--—"

"Oh, that's only Burton's way of speaking," grinned Conroy minor. "His father is a retired sea captain, you know, and the Bo'sun always uses nautical terms. It's a habit with him."

Before tea was half way through, the three juniors were getting on well. Burton and Conroy minor were rather attracted by their new study mate's frank and open manner. They caught him looking very thoughtful now and again, but asked no questions. A new boy was generally miserable for the first two or three days.

"Say, how do we go on about feed?" asked Jerry Dodd suddenly. "Does the school provide this grub?"

"Well, no," said Conroy minor. "Any chap can have tea in Hall if he likes, but it's only wishwash and slabs of bread with a ghostly film of butter on the top. Times have to be pretty hard before a chap descends to having tea in Hall. We generally provide our own grub for the studies."

"Oh, I see," said the new boy. "Kind of pool together, eh? Well, it's up to me to stand my share——"

"Souse me!" interrupted the Bo'sun. "Not to-day, messmate! You're having tea with us, at our expense--you're a guest. Later on we'll arrange things. The general idea is to pool the money at the end of the week, when the pocket-money is paid out by the skipper——"

"He means the Head," put in Conroy minor. "Most of the chaps here have an allowance from their people, in charge of the Headmaster. And the Head doles it out every Saturday."

"My dad wasn't agreeing to that," said Jerry Dodd. "He reckoned that I could bring enough money with me to last a week or two, and then I could draw some more from my dad's bankers in London."

"That's all right," said Conroy minor. "How much have you got?"

"Oh, not much--about thirty pounds."

"Thirty what?" yelled Conroy minor, nearly dropping his teacup.

"Pounds!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Conroy. "Thirty quid—to last a week or two! And you say that's not much! Why, I'd consider myself lucky if I got thirty bob; in fact, I don't get much more than that during the whole term!"

"Say, I hope I didn't sound like boasting——"

"Rats!" said Conroy minor. "I suppose your pater's rich?"

"Sure," said Jerry Dodd.

"You lucky merchant!"

Conroy minor was frankly envious; but Tom Burton merely smiled in his

large, good-natured way. His own father gave him a fairly large allowance, although it didn't run into sums like thirty pounds for a few weeks.

By the following morning Jerry Dodd was feeling quite at home in Study F. He had taken a great liking to his study mates, and they passed the seal of approval on Jerry Dodd. This was fortunate, because a new boy in any study is not always welcome, and he does not usually shake down until several weeks have elapsed.

During morning lessons we were able to discover what the Australian junior was like in class. There was no denying that he was decidedly backward, and, consequently, took his place at the bottom of the Form. Many fellows considered that he ought to have been put into the Third.

Strictly speaking, this was probably his place, but he was a big chap, and fifteen years of age. He would have been very conspicuous among the fags. Mr. Crowell was easy with him, and pleased to find that Jerry Dodd was enormously anxious to do his best. The new boy applied himself to his lessons with surprising energy.

There was a double reason for this.

Jerry Dodd earnestly wanted to catch up with all the other fellows in the Remove, and he wanted to move up from the bottom place—which, hitherto, had been the sole possession of Teddy Long. That young gentleman was now in high feather, and, by the way he strutted about, one might have imagined that he had shifted, in one jump, to the topmost place—which, incidentally, was held by myself.

Jerry Dodd's other reason for applying himself to work was to bury himself in his books and forget sports. He longed to play cricket, to be rowing on the river, to be boxing—in short, to devote himself with all his wiry energy to an outdoor life.

But he could not do this, and he strove to forget his longing by working his very hardest at his books. It was an ordeal for him—a grinding, agonising process which called for great efforts of will power.

The first day was torture to Jerry Dodd. But he succeeded; he fought back his real inclinations, and buried himself in study. He progressed, too. He was even surprised at himself at the amount he learnt in such a short space of time. He had never really tried before; but he was finding it just as hard, if not harder, than he had imagined. He spent every spare minute at his books, and after tea that day he remained in Study F, seated at the table, and laboriously writing exercises—drilling himself into habits which he had never expected to acquire.

Outside, the May evening was delightful—warm, sunny, and with a gentle breeze blowing through the trees. And on the breeze came the enticing "clack" of bat meeting ball. The shouts of the juniors flooded through the open window, too. Looking up, Jerry Dodd could catch a glimpse of white-clad figures on the green turf.

He set his teeth, and turned back to his books.

It was hot in the study—close and stuffy. And, after a while, an idea came to Jerry. It was an idea which rather scared him for a moment. Why shouldn't he take his books and go to some quiet, shady corner by the river bank? He could study just as well there, and he would be under the open sky, and away from this stuffy, over-heated little room.

But he wondered if it would be wise. Here, he would not be distracted, but, by the riverside, he might find his attention wandering—he might be tempted to get into a boat——

"No, I reckon I'll be better there," he decided at length. "My brain don't seem to work in this blame room. It's kind of gone rusty. What I need is fresh air. By jings! Why shouldn't I have both—the studying and the open air, too?"

It was quite a good idea—if he stuck to it. But, somehow, if a fellow takes his books out into the open he generally discovers that his books are soon cast aside. The temptations are frequently too great to be resisted.

But Jerry Dodd collected his books together, tucked them under his arm, and sallied out. He had not weakened—he was fully determined to stick to his studies for all he was worth. And, to his credit, he did so. Seated upon a grassy bank near the river, he breathed in the pure air, and lost himself completely in a tangled mass of English grammar. The whole thing was hateful, but it had to be done.

Meanwhile, Tom Burton had come into Study F to do his preparation; he wanted to get it over quickly, so that

he could go out again. The Bo'sun was rather surprised to find the room empty.

"Hallo! What's happened to the new hand?" he murmured. "He told us he wasn't going ashore this evening!"

Tom Burton could hardly blame the new boy for being tempted by the glorious evening. And he settled down to his prep. without much enthusiasm.

And, out in the Triangle, two strangers had appeared.

Fortunately for them there were very few juniors about at the moment. They were two extraordinary looking individuals, and would certainly have caused a great deal of interest. It is hardly too much to say that they would have been severely and thoroughly ragged, for their very appearance invited laughter.

Having entered the gateway, they came to a halt, and stood looking about them with an air of lofty importance. They stared at the College House, and they stared at the Ancient House. Then one looked down at the other, and they both gave mysterious nods.

They were certainly not ordinary people. One was a gigantic, stout man—tall, broad, and so enormous that it seemed rather wonderful that he could move at all. He was attired in a singularly quaint manner, wearing a light-grey suit with a pronounced check, a glaring red waistcoat, and a small, soft hat which was perched upon the top of a perfectly bald head. It really seemed as though he had grown out of all his clothing, for his suit and his hat were sizes too small. He sort of oozed out of it from every quarter, overflowing the limits, so to speak. Nothing short of a disaster would have occurred if he had bent down with any suddenness.

From one pocket a large round glass protruded—and this, upon examination, would have been seen to be a powerful magnifying lens. His face was red and large, with about half a dozen chins hanging in fat, puffy folds over his collar, and from between his lips projected a large-bowled briar pipe.

But if this enormous specimen of humanity was remarkable in appearance, his companion was no less so. The other man was just as small as his friend was large, being an extremely diminutive person. He hardly reached higher than the large gentleman's chest, and, although his clothing was not exactly loud, it certainly appeared to be too large for him. His sleeves descended over the backs of his hands; his coat came nearly to his knees; his trousers hung in baggy folds; and his feet seemed to be encased in a pair of police-size boots. He wore a bowler hat which almost obliterated his face entirely. It could be seen, however, that this face was thin and perky-looking. It possessed a sharp nose, not unlike a beak, and the little gentleman held his head forward in a curious, inquisitive fashion.

"We are here, Mr. Podge!" said the little man, in a high, piping voice. "What is our next move to be? Would you suggest inquiring of a master——"

The fat man held up a large hand.

"Tut—tut! Have you no sense, Mr. Midge?" he asked, his voice resembling the puff of a steam engine. "A master! Certainly not! We will inquire of this boy—the youngster we now see in front of us. No doubt he will put us on the track—not that it is necessary for anybody to do that. We are past masters of the art!"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge -- undoubtedly!" murmured Mr. Midge.

The boy they referred to was Teddy Long, of the Remove, and Master Teddy was eyeing the strangers with wondering, inquisitive interest. He had rubbed his eyes at first, but now came to the conclusion that he was not seeing visions, but realities. The busybody of the Remove was always ready to make himself important when the occasion demanded. He strolled forward now, trying to look careless.

"Looking for somebody?" he asked casually.

Mr. Podge removed his enormous magnifying lens, and, bending down, focused it upon Teddy Long. The latter stared in blank astonishment, and every line of his face was enlarged ten times by the lens.

"Ha!" said Mr. Podge. "A boy! Yes, undoubtedly a boy."

"What did you think I was—a beetle, or something?" asked Long sarcastically. "What's the giddy idea of squinting at me through that fatheaded glass——"

"Young man, you are impertinent!" puffed Mr. Podge severely. "We have come here with one definite purpose in mind—in short, we are looking for a certain young gentleman named Master Jerrold Dodd. He arrived here a day or two ago, I imagine. Possibly you can direct us to him?" he added, inserting

two fat fingers into his waistcoat pocket and producing a half-crown.

Teddy Long's attitude changed; he eyed the coin greedily.

"Yes, rather!" he said. "I expect Dodd's in his study. I'll take you along, if you like. Relations of his, I suppose?"

"We have called to see Master Dodd on business," put in Mr. Midge meekly. "I understand that he is at present in the school?"

"Yes, I think so," said Long. "This way."

He hesitated for a moment, still looking at the half-crown. The coin was passed over to him, and Teddy seized upon it eagerly, and examined it as though uncertain whether it was genuine or spurious.

He was of the opinion that the two remarkable strangers were thorough gentlemen, and he held hem in very high esteem as he led the way into the Ancient House, through the lobby, and into the Remove passage. Hardly anybody was about, for the evening was so fine that the juniors were all in the open.

Teddy Long came to a halt outside the door of Study F. He was about to knock upon the panels when Mr. Podge grasped his shoulder.

"Wait!" he said. "This is the room where Master Dodd spends his time?"

Long stared.

"Well, he spends some of his time here, sir," he replied. "This is his study, you know. During the day he's in the classroom, with the rest of the chaps. I expect we shall find him here; he's a frightful swotter, I believe."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Podge.

He and his little companion looked up and down the Remove passage critically, and with rather unnecessary scrutiny. Teddy Long tapped upon the door, and a cheerful voice from within invited him to "Come aboard!"

Long opened the door and looked in.

"Oh, Dodd ain't here, sir!" he said, turning. "There's only Burton—one of the other fellows who share the study with him. I'll go and find Dodd, if you like."

"Thank you, it is unnecessary," interrupted Mr. Podge.

They marched into the study in a stately manner, and closed the door after them. Long remained outside in the passage, having discovered that one of his bootlaces had come untied. In order to attend to this matter thoroughly, his left ear, by some curious chance, came into very close proximity to the keyhole.

Tom Burton looked up from his prep. and stared blankly at the two extraordinary men.

"We came here to see Master Jerrold Dodd," said the fat stranger impressively. "Apparently, however, Master Dodd is absent."

He and his companion looked round the study, as though they half expected Jerry Dodd suddenly to appear from behind the coal-scuttle or the bookcase.

"Yes, sir; Dodd's not on board, just now," said the Bo'sun. "He went ashore some little time ago. I suppose he thought it was a bit stuffy in the cabin, and the air's certainly better on deck."

"Evidently a boy with some nautical knowledge," puffed Mr. Podge.

"Undoubtedly," observed Mr. Midge —"undoubtedly."

Tom Burton rose to his feet.

"Do you want to see Dodd, sir?" he asked.

"We came here for that purpose," replied the fat man.

"Then I'll just go ashore and scout about for him," said the Bo'sun obligingly. "I don't exactly know where he is, but he can't be very far from the old boat. Maybe he's in the rigging. I'll go aloft and have a look."

And Burton hurried out of the study, his intention being to go aloft into the rigging at once. In other words, he would go upstairs to see if Dodd was there. If not, he would "go ashore" and search round.

"We are alone, Mr. Midge," said the stout stranger softly.

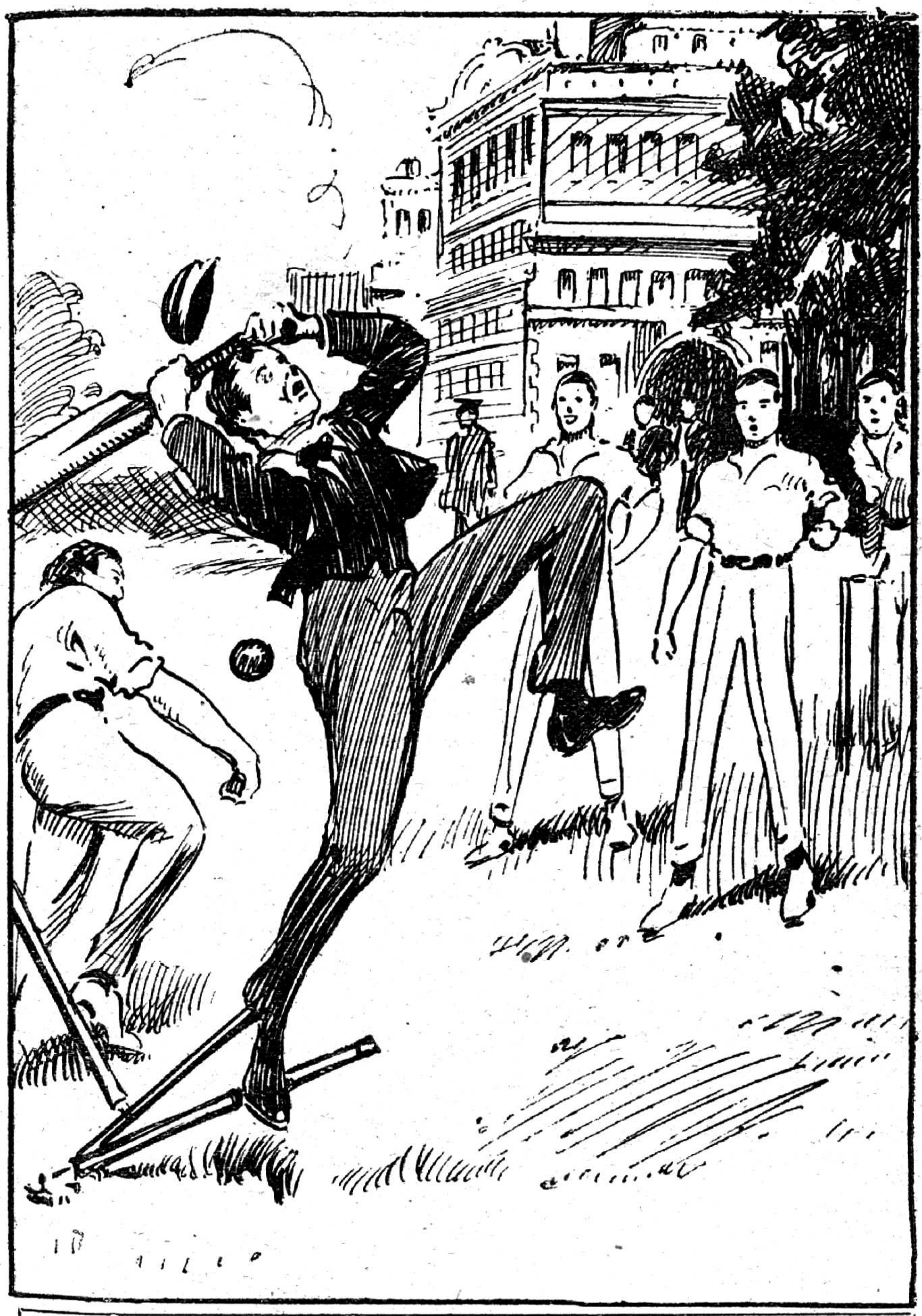
"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge—undoubtedly!" said Mr. Midge.

"A most remarkable boy," went on Mr. Podge. "But we are here on business—we must not forget that. I do not think that Dodd will disturb us; we know for a fact that he is nowhere within the school property. Our plan have worked well."

"They have, Mr. Podge," said the little man, nodding.

"Our methods are thorough, that is the reason," said Mr. Podge solemnly. "We must waste no time. H'm! Quite so! Rather a small room, but that is no disadvantage. Not many comforts, by all appearances."

He frowned as he glanced at the win-



Jerry Dodd lifted his bat, sent the bails flying up from the stumps, and whirled his bat with such force that he threw himself off his feet.

dow; then he scrutinised it carefully through his lens.

"Most unsatisfactory," he said. "This apartment is on the ground floor—the window easily accessible. A pity, Mr. Midge—a great pity!"

"As you say, Mr. Podge—a great pity!" agreed Mr. Midge.

"Kindly bear in mind the position of this window," continued Mr. Podge softly. "You will observe that three chestnut-trees are in direct line. It will therefore be impossible for us to mistake the window from outside. You see my point, Mr. Midge? You agree that it will be easy for us to recognise the window from without?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge — undoubtedly!" observed Mr. Midge, with a wise nod.

"So far so good," said the other. "But we must not linger. We have accomplished our object. Have we ever been known to fail?"

"Never, Mr. Podge."

"Our methods are infallible," said Mr. Podge calmly. "And now that we have seen Master Dodd's study, it will be fitting for us to retire. Any further steps we may take must be indicated by circumstances. You have the envelope, Mr. Midge?"

"It is here, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge.

"Good! Place it on the mantelpiece."

Mr. Midge produced a stout envelope bearing a heavy seal. He propped this against a cheap clock which adorned the mantelpiece, and regarded it with approval. He stepped back and put his head on one side, looking more than ever like a bird.

"I do not think it will fail to attract attention now," he said. "What is your opinion, Mr. Podge?"

"The position could not be bettered," puffed Mr. Podge. "Come, we will go—we have remained too long, as it is."

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge — undoubtedly!"

They bowed rather stiffly to one another, and then left the study. The strangely assorted pair passed out of the passage, through the lobby, and out into the Triangle, Mr. Midge trotting just behind Mr. Podge, like a dog following his master. Within a minute they were out in the lane. Apparently they had no wish to encounter any more of the boys.

Tom Burton, having failed to locate Jerry Dodd, returned to Study F rather breathless. He entered, red of face and apologetic.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but I can't find —— Souso my scuppers!" he ejaculated, staring round. "They ain't here—they've both slipped their anchors."

The Bo'sun was rather indignant.

"Swab me!" he murmured. "I wonder if they've left port altogether? Why, what the Blue Peter—— A note!"

He stared at the envelope on the mantelpiece, and picked it up. He looked at the writing, and at the seal on the back.

"'Master Jerrold Dodd—Private,'" he read. "Souso my maindeck! Those fish were in a hurry to leave like that, without even waiting for me to come back! Oh, well, it's not my business, anyway!"

And the Bo'sun settled himself down to his work again.

Some time later, just when he had finished his prep., the study door opened and Jerry Dodd entered. The Australian boy was looking somewhat weary. He had been putting his heart and soul into the drudgery of learning English grammar, but it went against the grain, and took away some of his natural cheerfulness.

"Hallo, shipmate!" said Burton, looking up. "Where did you steer away to?"

"Oh, I reckon I've been stewin' in grammar!" replied Jerry Dodd. "By jingo! The feller that invented the stuff ought to be baked! Say, chum, there's nothin' like the open air! I've been out near the river——"

"Oh, so that's where you entered port?" interrupted the Bo'sun. "A couple of freaks came here after you—on business, I suppose."

"Freaks?" repeated Jerry Dodd curiously.

"Yes," grinned the Bo'sun. "You never saw such guys! A huge fat man an' a tiny companion!"

"Who were they?"

"Souso me! I didn't ask their names!" said Burton. "And they went away while I was looking round for you. They left that note for you;

it's on the mantelpiece. Maybe it will explain things."

Still looking rather surprised, Jerry Dodd took the envelope from the mantelpiece, turned it over once or twice, and then broke the seal. He knew nothing of any visitors. He had not been expecting anybody, and he could not imagine who the two men could have been.

"Well, this beats me, chum!" he exclaimed. "I don't figure I'm havin' any friends in England—or any relatives, come to that. And these men came to see me on business? I don't know what business they could want to discuss."

He pulled out a piece of notepaper from the envelope, unfolded it, and stared at the writing rather blankly for a moment or two. Then he looked across at Tom Burton, who was mildly interested.

"Great jumpin' kangaroos!" he ejaculated.

"You seem a bit surprised," said Burton.

"Surprised! I should say I am, chum!" said Jerry Dodd. "This fairly takes the wind out of me, by jings! Look at it—just cast your eyes on this queer thing!"

Tom Burton took the sheet of paper and regarded it curiously. It was not in the form of a note, and bore no address. And the words were quite few, consisting merely of the following remarkable short sentences:

"POINTS TO REMEMBER.

"(1) At any moment you may be in danger.

"(2) Be constantly on your guard.

"(3) Do not venture beyond the school grounds unattended.

"(4) When danger threatens, friends will be near."

Tom Burton looked up, his fresh, open face expressive of much astonishment and wonder.

"Well, swab my fo'c'sle!" he ejaculated. "What's the meaning of this, messmate?"

"It's no sort of use asking me," replied Jerry Dodd. "By jingo! It must be a joke--some idiot's idea of being funny!"

"What's all this about danger?"

"How can I tell you?" asked the Australian boy. "I'm in no danger, and not likely to be. Those fellows must have been here for fun. Anyhow, this thing's goin' in the place where it deserves to be!"

And Jerry Dodd tore the sheet of notepaper and the envelope to fragments, and tossed them into the fireplace. He grinned cheerfully, and sat down, but there was still rather a puzzled look in his eyes.

"Oh, hang it!" he said abruptly. "I'm not going to worry about that fool thing! There's nothing in it--there can't be anything in it! And if those jokers think I'm going to be scared—well, I reckon the business will fall real flat."

And Jerry Dodd proceeded to forget all about the mysterious note, the even more mysterious warnings, and the unaccountable visit of Messrs. Podge and Midge. Who or what they were, he did not care.

But, at no very distant date, Jerry Dodd was destined to remember this trivial and mystifying incident.

CHAPTER IV.

NOT SUCH A DUFFER!

REGINALD PITT looked at the sky critically.

"Not quite so fine as it was yesterday, and I don't particularly care for the appearance of those clouds," he remarked. "Still, with luck, we shall get through the afternoon all serene. It would be rough if it rained."

"Well, it wouldn't surprise me," growled Tommy Watson. "It's generally fine when we're at work in the classrooms, and wet and miserable on the half-holidays—that's just the way of things."

"My dear chap, what's the good of worrying?" I put in cheerfully. "If it rains, it rains. All the talking in the world won't make any difference. There's an important match on this afternoon, I know, but, personally, I think we shall have quite decent weather."

I had already inspected the sky. One or two clouds certainly did not meet with my entire approval, but there was no reason why we should expect the worst to happen. It was Saturday afternoon, and the junior heroes of Bannington Grammar School were to be

our visitors on Little Side, quite an important fixture in junior cricket.

I was far more concerned with my eleven than about the weather. Most of the juniors were showing up well at practice, but they were a long way from perfect form, and we had heard reports that Bannington Grammar School were terrifically hot stuff this season. They had already been doing great things.

But, of course, we were handicapped. Most of the fellows in the St. Frank's junior eleven had been away on the Mordanian adventure during the time when cricket should have been receiving full attention. Consequently, the members of the eleven were not at the top of their form, and if we succeeded in beating the Grammar School we should do exceedingly well.

I had chosen my eleven without favouritism. Tregellis-West and Watson were included, and Pitt and Grey and Handforth. I was also giving Bob Christine and one or two College House fellows a show. But I knew very well that we were weak, particularly in batsmen.

"It's a beastly shame that Australian chap is such a dud," remarked Pitt. "I was hoping that he would turn out to be something particularly good. Still, all Australian fellows can't be good cricketers."

Jerry Dodd himself was not feeling very happy. It was a half-holiday, and he would not do any work. He had been studying hard during all his spare time, but he felt that he must take some recreation on a half-holiday. The "swotting" was distasteful to him at any time, and he was likely to get stale if he did too much of it.

When the youthful cricketers arrived from Bannington, laughing and cheerful, Jerry Dodd felt strangely out of the picture. All his natural instincts were on the cricket-pitch; he wanted to be there, attired in flannels, and ready and eager to do his utmost for his school. The thought of being a spectator was like a stab to Jerry Dodd. It pained him, and took away all interest in life.

It destroyed his natural buoyant good-humour, and made him feel sullen and despondent—a state of mind absolutely foreign to his open, generous temperament.

Cricket! The one game he loved better than all others in the world—the one game in which he excelled! And he was forbidden to play—he could take no part in this glorious sport. Expert as he was—and he knew himself to be an expert—he was denied the pleasure of participating in the game.

Jerry Dodd did his utmost to reconcile himself to these new conditions. In Australia he had played for his school with heart and soul. And he tried to make himself believe that his father was justified in setting up the ban.

He was certainly backward at his lessons—he knew this better than anybody. But what did lessons matter? Why did he want to learn—to stuff his head with knowledge that he would never require in later years? When Jerry Dodd grew up he wanted to be a rancher in Australia; his ambition was to live in the open, to breathe in the pure air and to be bathed in the sunlight of Australia.

But his father had decided otherwise. Mr. Dodd wanted Jerry to learn, to study for the Bar, to become a barrister, or a politician. And, much as the boy detested the idea, he was loyal to his parent, and was determined to do his best. And so, perhaps, it was just as well that cricket should not be allowed to get hold of him at St. Frank's. If he didn't play at all, he would devote himself to study. And he couldn't have any half-measures—he couldn't join in a game at odd moments. Cricket was a mania with him, and, once it had him in its grip, he would forget everything else.

And so it was a listless and despondent Jerry Dodd who lounged towards the ropes at Little Side when the junior match commenced. The sun was now shining brilliantly, and the weather promised to be excellent for the game.

Jerry Dodd sighed.

"By jings!" he murmured. "I'd give all I've got to be in this!"

The fresh green turf, the figures in cricketing flannels, the gaily coloured blazers, all contributed towards making a picture which filled the Australian boy with eager longing.

He stood there, attired in his Etons, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets. His curly hair was escaping from beneath his cap, and his tanned face was rather expressive of sorrow and hopelessness. A hand clapped upon his shoulder—a decidedly heavy hand—and Jerry Dodd awoke with a start.

"Wishing you could play, eh?" said

Handforth patronisingly. "Hard lines, old chap. You don't know what you're missing—cricket's one of the best games that was ever invented."

"Sure!" said Jerry Dodd readily. "It's the finest game——" He pulled himself up with a jerk. "Not that I do any playin'," he added. "But I suppose you fellows find a certain amount of amusement in knocking that rubber ball about, and chasin' after it like a lot of half-baked kangaroos!"

Handforth snorted.

"You hopeless fathead!" he said politely. "A rubber ball! Who's been spoofing you up with that yarn? A cricket ball's made of leather—it's hard! If Nipper has any luck he'll make a cricketer of you after you've been at St. Frank's for about sixty-five years!"

Jerry Dodd shrugged his shoulders.

"All that Nipper could do wouldn't make me any better," he replied.

And, although Handforth didn't know it, there was a great deal of truth in this statement. Jerry Dodd knew more about cricket than all the members of the Remove eleven put together, including myself.

I couldn't help feeling rather grim as I heard the Grammar School juniors openly discussing the way in which they were going to "whack us to the wide." The Bannington juniors looked upon the result of the match as a foregone conclusion. They had come to St. Frank's for the express purpose of teaching us what cricket was, and how it should be played, and they took good care to let us hear all about it.

This caused me to warn my men that they were to be on their mettle, and that it would be a fitting occasion to bring the Grammarians down a peg or two—or half a dozen pegs, if it could be managed. And every member of the eleven vowed that he would do his utmost.

According to Handforth, there was no need to worry at all. Even if all the rest of us were hopeless, we had him, and he—Handforth—assured me, with his usual modesty and confidence, that he would knock up his century in next to no time.

There was not much delay, for we were all anxious to get at the game. I won the toss, and I decided to bat first. Pitt and Handforth walked out to open the St. Frank's innings, and they were loudly cheered as a matter of course. Handforth observed that this cheering was a whisper compared to the reception he would receive when he carried his bat back to the pavilion. Handforth's optimism was delightfully refreshing!

The innings opened in a way which did not cause me any great measure of delight. The first ball of the over looked a simple, easy one, and Pitt, who was receiving the bowling, swiped away at it with the intention of getting a boundary to start with. The ball curled under his bat, and neatly jerked the middle stump out of the ground. Pitt stared at his wicket in dismay.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said blankly.

He received no cheers as he walked back to the pavilion. His place was taken by Jack Grey, who met with better luck. Grey was a cautious batsman, and for the first two or three balls he did not try anything spectacular. He was content with one or two light taps while he was feeling what the bowler was like.

At the end of the over he was in the same position, and Handforth now received the bowling. Handforth's very attitude told me that he was not taking my advice—he had no intention of being cautious.

The new bowler was a fast one, and the ball came down like a bullet. Handforth swung his bat, and the next second the leather was winging its way swiftly to the boundary. It was the first real hit in the match.

"Good old Handy!"

"Keep it up, old son!"

Handforth lounged on his bat, full of confidence. As a slogger he was an excellent man, but the risks he took filled me with doubt. I was wondering whether it had been wise on my part to include him in the team.

I expected to see Handy bowled out almost at once; but this didn't happen. He did remarkably well, slogging away and sending the leather to the boundary two or three times, and getting in twos and threes regularly.

"My hat! He's improved since last season!" I said. "Not that I think a great deal of these bowlers. Handy would be nowhere if he had a tricky bowler facing him."

"Never mind—he's doing pretty well," said Tommy Watson.

Jerry Dodd stood looking on without much interest. It was not that he was indifferent to cricket—the very opposite

was the case. But he wanted to be in it--he wanted to participate in the delights and pleasures of the game. Being denied this privilege, he didn't seem to care whether he looked on or not. He felt impatient and angry.

There were all sorts of tips that he could have given the fellows--tips which would have been very useful. But he could not speak—he knew nothing about cricket! And so, feeling fed up and irritable, he found no pleasure whatever in standing against the ropes, watching other fellows engaging in the great sport.

While Handforth and Grey were still batting, Jerry Dodd walked away, and strolled with idle footsteps across the grass in the direction of the river. He didn't know where he was going—he didn't particularly care. It was a matter which did not affect him in the slightest degree; he was just wandering aimlessly.

He found himself on the towing path, and he went on, his thoughts far away in Australia. He was thinking of his cricketing days there—days that had been cut short abruptly. He remembered his surprise when his father announced that he was to be sent to England, to one of England's most famous public schools. At first Jerry Dodd had been filled with joy and delight.

And now, here he was, at St. Frank's College. He was more than pleased with the school, and with his surroundings; but he was denied the pleasure of participating in the school's sports, and this was what hurt Jerry more than anything else.

"It's just my blamed luck, I reckon!" he muttered disgustedly. "Golly! I'm durned if there ain't some other fellows playing cricket now! It doesn't matter which way I turn, I can't escape from it!"

He had walked on further than he had thought, and now he was not so very far distant from Dr. Hogge's Academy for Young Gentlemen—in other words, the River House School. This was a small, but very select establishment, situated close to the river, and not far distant from the village itself. The River House School was, in its way, just as exclusive as St. Frank's.

Jerry Dodd left the towing path almost mechanically, attracted by the sounds of cricket which proceeded from beyond a hedge a short distance away. He arrived at the hedge, parted a few twigs, and looked through. He beheld a sight which again brought that longing to the surface.

There were several junior schoolboys practising round the nets. The ground was not a very large one—nothing to be compared to Little Side, and it was almost completely enclosed by this high hedge. On one side lay Bellton Wood, thick and impenetrable. The River House junior practice ground was certainly very secluded.

Jerry Dodd stood watching comfortably. He was unseen here, and he could look on without these boys knowing anything of his presence—and he was not obliged to wear a mask. He could allow the light of interest and enthusiasm to enter his eyes.

He had never met Brewster and Co., the leading lights of the River House Fourth Form. They were thoroughly decent fellows, and were on excellent terms with the Removites of St. Frank's.

Within a week or two a match would come off between the two schools. It was a match which generally ended in complete victory for the Remove; the River House fellows hardly expected to win, and were generally content if they put up a good show. But this year Hal Brewster had high hopes of bringing off a victory. He was doing his best to knock his team into shape.

And Jerry Dodd watched keenly. He stood there, behind the hedge, eyeing the practice with a critical gaze. He approved, found fault, passed judgment, and generally acted as though he had been appointed a special critic.

And then, quite unexpectedly, a voice hailed him from the rear—practically at his back.

"Hallo!" it said. "What the dickens are you doing?"

Jerry Dodd twisted round abruptly, and found himself staring into the face of a good-looking youngster, who was mildly astonished. He wore a cap which labelled him as a scholar of the River House.

"Seen a ball over here in this grass?" he asked.

"Er—no. I—I——" began Jerry, rather confused. "Say, chum, I'll just help you to search. I reckon I was interested in the practice."

"Oh!" said the River House boy, eyeing the other curiously. "I don't think I've met you before—you must be that

new Australian chap—Todd, or Rodd ——"

"Dodd!" corrected Jerry. "Jerry Dodd, sir!"

"Pleased to meet you, old chap!" said the River House boy. "My name's Brewster, and I'm the junior sports skipper. But what's the idea of you being down here, wandering about on your lonesome? There's an important match on at St. Frank's to-day."

"Yes, sure," agreed Jerry. "But I'm not playing—I don't figure much on cricket. Say, we'll search round for that ball."

Jerry Dodd had taken an instant liking to Brewster, and the latter was rather attracted by the Australian boy. They were soon searching through the long grass for the lost ball. It was Jerry who ultimately found it. He seized the leather between his supple fingers, and a feeling of joy thrilled through him as his hand closed over the ball.

An irresistible impulse seized him. In spite of himself he could not avert his next action. The sheer joy of having the leather in his hand was like a tonic to a parched throat. He flung his hand back, and sent the ball shooting skywards at terrific speed. It came down only a yard or two from its starting point. Jerry reached out his left hand and caught the ball with adroit neatness.

"My hat!" said Brewster. "You're pretty warm, my son!"

Jerry Dodd suddenly remembered himself.

"I—I don't play!" he exclaimed hurriedly.

Brewster grinned.

"Tell that to the marines!" he said calmly. "You can't spoof me, my dear chap! Only an expert player could handle the ball in that way. But you're a new kid at St. Frank's, and I'm not surprised that you've been left out of the eleven. You must feel a bit lonely, and I suppose that's why you came down here?"

"Sure!" said Jerry eagerly. "Golly! I—I mean——"

"That's all right!" smiled Brewster. "We're only practising this afternoon. If you like, you can come round and join in. We don't mind."

Jerry Dodd's eyes sparkled. The temptation was almost irresistible, and for a few moments he had a bit of a struggle with himself.

After all, why shouldn't he take advantage of this offer? What harm would come of it? This practice ground was quiet and secluded, and away from all observation. There was hardly any likelihood of a St. Frank's fellow appearing on the scene. The River House juniors seemed to be good sorts, and it would do him a world of good to take a bat into his hand.

And it struck Jerry that this practice ground would provide him with a natural outlet for his energies. He might be able to come here often, and to indulge in cricket practice on the quiet, without anybody at St. Frank's knowing. Such a prospect was distinctly alluring—and just now Jerry was feeling rather reckless.

He wondered if he could trust the River House boys to keep his secret, for, of course, he would be obliged to explain. He knew they were booked to play St. Frank's, and he thought it most probable that they would refrain from talking about what he could do—for it would be to their interests if he remained out of the St. Frank's team.

And almost before Jerry Dodd had had time fully to consider the question, he was taking Hal Brewster into his confidence. The latter listened with some surprise. He couldn't quite understand the thing, and he didn't try to.

"It's all right, my son—I don't want to know your giddy business," he interrupted. "Your pater wants you to swot, and he's put the ban on cricket. That's hard lines, particularly if you can play. But, after all, there's something to be said for your pater—cricket does take up a lot of time, you know."

"Sure it does," agreed Jerry. "But—but I was just thinking. On an afternoon like this, for example, I——"

"You don't quite know what to do with yourself, and you don't see any reason why you shouldn't have a little game?" suggested Brewster. "I've got you, Steve! A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse! You can't practise at St. Frank's because you've spoofed Nipper and the other chaps that you don't know a cricket bat from a croquet mallet. Perhaps it's just as well that you haven't told him the truth. If it's a bit of use to you, you're always welcome to pop down to our ground if you're feeling a bit stale. I don't suppose our chaps will take the trouble to jaw about you—in any case, I'll give 'em the tip to keep mum."

"By jings! That's great!" said Jerry Dodd enthusiastically. "Say, chum, you're a real sport—and we're nearly strangers, too! I didn't figure on being treated in this way——"

"Rats!" interrupted Brewster cheerfully. "Come on!"

He seized Jerry's arm, and they went round the meadow until they arrived at a high door which was set in the thick hedge. Brewster opened this, and passed inside. They went across the soft turf to the spot where a number of juniors were round the nets. They regarded Jerry with interest.

"Allow me to introduce you," said Brewster, waving his hand. "Jerry Dodd, the new chap at St. Frank's—Glynn, Ascott, Kingswood, Norton, Hawke, Brampton, and Grant. That's the lot. I think. Oh, and there's Bingham just coming along."

"Pleased to meet you!" said Jerry Dodd genially.

"Same here!" exclaimed Kingswood. "You're the new kid, I suppose?"

"Exactly!" said Brewster. "He's the new kid, and he's going to take a hand at the nets. His pater wants him to swot like old boots, and cricket has been placed on the forbidden list. He can play all right, and he's spoofed the St. Frank's chaps that he can't. But that's not our business, and we don't want to ask any questions. If we find out that he can handle a bat decently, we've got to keep it mum. Is that understood? I've given Dodd my word, on behalf of you all, that we'll keep his horrid secret!"

The juniors grinned, and agreed; and somehow Jerry Dodd felt as though he had fallen among friends. His heart was lighter, and his step more springy. He knew that the St. Frank's juniors were good chaps, too; but there was a difference. He couldn't tell them of his prowess at cricket—but he could tell the River House boys; and this practice ground was ready to provide him with many an enjoyable hour.

Perhaps if the Australian junior had given the matter more thought, he would not have taken these risks. But just now he was feeling rather desperate; his one desire was to get a cricket bat into his hand, and to face a good bowler. He had been longing for it ever since he arrived at St. Frank's, and now, this afternoon, the desire to play was irresistible. In spite of his strengthened determination, he was unable to deny himself the pleasure.

And, after all, what did it matter? He wasn't committing a crime. Even if the St. Frank's chaps found out, no actual harm would be done. The Head had not forbidden Jerry Dodd to take recreation—he had simply told the new boy that he could not become a member of the St. Frank's junior eleven. Jerry wasn't even going against any of the Head's wishes.

"It's awfully decent of you chaps—I reckon you're good sportsmen," he said. "Golly! It'll be fine to get a bat in my hands——"

"No need to jaw—grab hold of this," said Ascott, thrusting a bat into Jerry Dodd's hand. "We'll see what you can do. I'll give you one or two balls."

The other juniors grinned. Ascott was the champion junior bowler of the River House—a really fast man whose bowling had won him much praise and fame. At Dr. Hogge's Academy he was regarded as the most tricky bowler in the school, and if it hadn't been for his age he would have played for the first eleven.

Jerry Dodd took the bat, and went to the wicket.

He took up his position in an easy, nonchalant manner, as though he were expecting the bowler to deliver an under-arm ball. The River House boys grinned more than ever.

"We'll surprise the bounder in a minute!" chuckled Glynn. "At least, Ascott will!"

"Play!" sang out Ascott, taking a short run.

The ball left his hand at what appeared to be a slow speed, but by the time it arrived at Jerry Dodd's bat it was coming like a cannon ball. The Australian junior lifted his bat slightly, and just flicked the ball as it came. It shot away to the boundary at an angle.

"Not so bad," remarked Brewster. "A fluke, of course!"

The ball was recovered, and Ascott sent it down again. This time it broke at a nasty angle. Jerry Dodd leapt forward.

Clack!

The leather went soaring away into the distance.

"My hat!" said Ascott blankly.

"You seem to be pretty hot stuff!" said Brewster, stepping forward. "If you go on at this rate, my son, we shall

use up all our supply of cricket balls. As a matter of fact, we've only got two!"

"Sorry!" grinned Jerry. "I won't let it go so much!"

His face was flushed with enthusiasm, and his eyes were sparkling. He discovered that he had lost none of his adroitness. Handling the bat came just as naturally to him as it had the last time he had played.

The ball was recovered, and now the River House juniors distributed themselves over the practice ground. They still thought Jerry Dodd was lucky, and that his two hits had been in the nature of flukes.

But the Australian boy soon disposed of this impression.

He proceeded to make his new friends work with a vengeance. No matter what kind of a ball Ascott sent down, Jerry was ready. Ascott used all his tricks; he employed every dodge he knew. But not one ball shot past that uncanny batsman; he received everything with the same easy, careless manner.

He hardly seemed to exert himself in the slightest degree, and Ascott became aware of the fact that he was uncomfortable. When he took his run to bowl his usual confidence deserted him.

He seemed to have an idea that he couldn't defeat this batsman, no matter what he did. In a strange way, Jerry Dodd had an extraordinary influence over the bowler. His very attitude, his calmness, his careless ease—all this made it difficult for Ascott to retain his confidence.

It is said that some champion boxers have an unaccountable influence over their opponents—they are capable of reducing that opponent to a mass of nerves, and, by this hypnotic method, they make it impossible for their partner to win.

Jerry Dodd appeared to exert the same influence. Dave Ascott had never experienced anything like it before. He had always caused batsmen to be nervous and ill at ease. His fast, tricky balls generally disconcerted the best of cricketers; but nothing disconcerted Jerry Dodd.

For over twenty minutes he remained at the wicket, and not in one instance was the ball allowed to escape. Balls that broke awkwardly, balls that curled in unexpectedly, balls that twisted and spun—they were all the same to Jerry Dodd. He was ready for everything, and seemed to know exactly what the bowler had planned.

At last, hot and somewhat disgusted, Ascott threw the ball down.

"Oh, it's no good!" he grunted. "I can't touch the chap. Either I'm off colour, or he's a holy terror!"

"I'll take a shot!" said Brewster.

He was a good bowler—slower than Ascott, but capable of dismissing the best of batsmen. But, with Jerry Dodd in front of him, he might as well have saved himself the trouble, for Jerry proceeded to knock his bowling into every corner of the practice ground.

The Australian boy was enjoying himself hugely. His outlook upon life was brighter; there was a new zest in living. He felt that he could return to his studies with a cheerful mind after this. So long as he had a taste of cricket now and again, he would be able to carry on, and the River House ground would be his safety valve.

Brewster flung the ball down at last, and walked along the pitch.

"That's enough!" he said, panting. "My only hat! You're just about the limit, my son—I've never seen anything like it!"

"It's amazing!" declared Ascott. "The man's a wonder!"

"A marvel!"

"Rather!"

Jerry Dodd chuckled.

"I don't reckon I've got words to thank you," he said. "Say, chums, it was great—just great! There's something about cricket that makes a fellow feel good!"

"Oh, rather!" said Ascott sarcastically. "We're all screaming with merriment and joy. Chasing that ball about is gorgeous fun!"

"Oh, I reckon I'm sorry——"

"Rats!" said Brewster. "We offered to give you a turn at the wicket, and we can't grumble if you do your best. And what a best! Great guns! You're the best cricketer I've ever seen—and that's not flattering you, either! And do you mean to tell me that you won't play for the St. Frank's junior eleven?"

"No, there'll be nothing doing like that," replied Jerry, shaking his head.

"Lucky for us!" said Kingswood feelingly.

"Rather!" agreed Brewster. "I don't think we should care to have you

batting against us, Dodd, my son. And you can rely on us to keep this secret—not a word will we breathe!"

"Not a syllable!" said the others promptly.

"If Nipper or the others get to know of this chap's form—why, he'll be in the eleven within a minute, whether he wants it or not!" went on Brewster. "So it's up to us, my sons, to say nix."

But, as it happened, the secret was already out!

CHAPTER V.

HANDFORTH'S GREAT DISCOVERY!

"WELL done, Handy!"

"Played, old son!"

Church and McClure welcomed their great leader enthusiastically as he carried his bat into the pavilion. Outside, the other juniors were still cheering and clapping. For Edward Oswald Handforth had given us a surprise; he had knocked up no less than forty-three runs—his record performance, and one which was not frequently bettered in junior cricket.

He had knocked up the runs quickly, too, and mainly because of his slamming, go-ahead play. But at length his recklessness had paid the penalty; he had been a shade too slow, and the ball slipped under his bat, and flicked out the off stump.

But Handforth had had a good innings, and he accepted the plaudits of the onlookers as his due.

"Oh, it was nothing!" said Handforth, as Church and McClure seized him. "Ease off, you asses! I'm rather disappointed, to tell you the truth—I was out for a century——"

"Never mind the century," said Church. "You knocked up forty-three, and that was topping."

Handforth continued to belittle his performance; but, of course, his object in doing this was merely to invite compliments, and he expanded visibly under the words of praise which were showered upon him

He affected to be quite indifferent to the rest of the play, and stood looking on for some time while Tregellis-West added to the score. Handforth was critical, and he had many faults to find with the bowling, the batting, the fielding, and everything in general. One might have supposed that Handforth was a cricket instructor, by the way he passed judgment.

After he had cooled down, he lounged on the grass for some little time, with Church and McClure beside him; then, suddenly, Handforth sat up.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter?" asked Church.

"Why, those photographs of mine!" he exclaimed. "They were to be done by this morning, and I forgot all about it. Just run round to the village, Churchy, and collect the giddy things."

Church grunted.

"Rats!" he said. "They'll do this evening."

"Oh, will they?" said Handforth grimly. "I want 'em now. I posed specially for those photographs—all dressed up in cricketing flannels, and I want them particularly this afternoon."

"Why?"

"It doesn't matter to you why!" retorted Handforth sharply.

"My only hat!" said McClure. "Do you want to send one to a young lady—— Yow—yaroooh!"

McClure collapsed, Handforth's fist having come into operation.

"And if you insult me again, I'll give you another!" said Handforth aggressively. "Just as if I should spend money on having photographs taken, and then give them to a girl! A fat lot I care about girls!"

"Then what's the idea?" asked Church curiously.

"You inquisitive rotters!" snapped Handforth. "If you must know, I want to give one of those photographs to the Bannington junior skipper. He happened to mention before the match started that he was making a collection of photographs—all the most famous cricketers, you know——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Church and McClure.

Handforth glared ferociously.

"You—you yelling asses!" he shouted.

"All the most famous cricketers!" gasped Church, holding on to McClure for support. "Oh, Handy, you'll be the death of us one of these days! Your modesty is the most wonderful thing ——"

But Handforth didn't wait to hear any more. He rose to his feet and strode off, promising dire punishment for his chums later on. At present he could not very well do anything. Mr. Crowell had strolled near by, and he had looked rather straight at Handforth just after

McClure had howled. It would not be policy for the leader of Study D to use his fists again.

Handforth decided to go and fetch the photos himself. It wouldn't take him long to run to the village, and he could take the short cut for the towing path—for the pavilion on Little Side was situated comparatively near to the river, and quite a good walk from the Triangle. It was much easier to reach the village by the towing path than by going back to the school and taking the lane.

Handforth would not be required in the match for some little time, and he felt quite comfortable in going. And it was highly important that the photographs should be obtained, so that Grey, the Bannington skipper, could have one to add to his collection of famous cricketers. But whether Arthur Grey would be highly delighted remained to be seen.

Handforth walked quickly. The sun had gone behind some clouds now, and the air was not particularly hot. As Handy was passing the hedged enclosure of the River House junior practice ground, he heard sundry shouts.

"Those fatheads think they can play!" he muttered. "We'll show them something when our fixture comes off!"

He was comparatively near to the hedge, and just then he heard two juniors running along the turf on the other side of the hedge.

"It's all right, you ass!" panted one of them. "I've got it."

"Good!" said another. "That chap's a perfect terror! I've never seen such batting in all my life!"

"And he's not playing for St. Frank's at all!" said the other boy. "Why, if Nipper only knew, he'd fall over himself to include——"

Handforth didn't hear any more, but what he had heard provided him with much food for thought. He came to a halt, and stared irresolutely at the hedge. His brow was puckered into a frown.

"A perfect terror!" he muttered. "Not playing for St. Frank's! They must be talking about one of our chaps! But who can it be?"

While he was still thinking he heard the sharp sound of bat meeting ball, and his experienced ear told him that the swipe had been a clean, neat one. The shouts from the other side of the hedge were also indicative of the batsman's cleverness.

Handforth had many weaknesses, and one of these was curiosity. He forgot all about his photograph, and walked up to the hedge. He just wanted to see who was batting at the moment—not that he was interested. He didn't care a toss. At the same time, perhaps, it would be just as well to have a look.

He parted the branches, and stared through the little opening. He was just in time to see Jerry Dodd make a beautiful cut at a most difficult ball. The grace of Jerry's movements could not be denied. He swung his bat easily and with the utmost confidence.

Handforth nearly fell over backwards.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "Dodd! He—he told us he couldn't play—he made an awful mess of it. The awful, spoofing bounder! Well, I'm jiggered!"

Handforth continued to stare, as though transfixed, and his eyes were opened even more after he had seen Jerry Dodd dispose of a few other balls. Then Jerry was surrounded by the River House boys, and they appeared to be having a discussion.

"Dodd—the duffer!" muttered Handforth. "Why, he can play topping cricket! He's almost as good as I am!"

This was saying a tremendous lot. Such praise from Handforth was praise indeed—for, of course, there was only one cricketer, in his opinion, who was really perfect. To name this cricketer would be superfluous.

And then, while Handforth was still watching, Jerry Dodd took the ball, and walked easily up the pitch.

"Oh, so he's going to try his hand at bowling, is he?" murmured Handforth. "I don't suppose he'll be much good. He won't get Brewster out, anyway. Brewster's the best batsman they've got."

The skipper of the River House juniors took up his position, and waited for the first ball to come down. He watched Jerry Dodd in very much the same way as Ascott had watched him. There was something about the Australian boy which destroyed Brewster's usual confidence; but Brewster could not have explained the sensation if he had been asked to describe it.

Jerry Dodd took a peculiar run—quite short and easy, and with no particular effort. His hand went round, and it seemed that the ball would be a slow one. But at the last second his wrist shot forward in a peculiar movement,

and the leather came shooting down the pitch in a straight line for Brewster's bat.

It touched the ground, Brewster raised his bat, and the ball curled round it and lifted out the middle stump.

"Great corks!" said Handforth blankly.

Brewster smiled in a sickly kind of way.

"I thought that was coming straight!" he said. "Let's have another, Doddy!"

Jerry Dodd obliged. This time Brewster was well on the look out for the sudden swerve of the ball. But it didn't swerve at all; it came down like a bullet, close to the ground, and again the middle stump suffered.

"My only hat!" muttered Kingswood. "The chap's a demon—he can't do anything wrong! There was no fluke about that, you know!"

Again Brewster tried, and again Jerry Dodd beat him, by giving the ball a totally different spin. All Brewster's confidence oozed away, and he held his bat nervously and uncertainly.

"The chap's uncanny!" he muttered. "I can't make him out! I've got a feeling that I shall do nothing when I'm facing him."

Two or three other juniors tried, and, although Jerry Dodd did not succeed in wrecking the wicket at every ball, he did so on so many occasions that the River House boys regarded him as the most deadly bowler they had ever seen.

And then Handforth appeared.

Handforth was coming to demand an explanation.

Jerry Dodd saw him, and he gave an abrupt start. In that second he knew that he had been rash—he knew that he never ought to have revealed himself in his true colours, even to the River House boys.

"You blessed fraud!" said Handforth sternly. "At the same time, I'm jolly pleased. I don't mind admitting that you're a bit of a wonder. You made those River House fatheads look a bit sick, anyway. Who on earth told them they could play cricket?"

"Now then, Handforth—none of your sarcasm!" said Brewster, grinning. "You'd better be careful—the river's not far off, and we might be tempted to give you a ducking. What's the idea of butting in now? It's just like you to appear when Dodd didn't want anybody to see him."

"Say, Handforth, you're a good chap—I know that," said Jerry Dodd quietly. "I reckon I did spoof you, but I had a reason. You'll oblige me a whole heap by keeping quiet about this."

"Keeping quiet!" echoed Handforth. "Rot! I shall tell——"

"Now, look here, chum, be reasonable," said Jerry Dodd, seizing Handforth's arm. "If you'll promise to keep quiet, I'll promise to explain to Nipper and to you. I'll get busy on the explaining game directly after tea. Is that a go?"

"You mean I've got to keep my mouth closed until then?"

"Yes."

"I don't see why I should," said Handforth obstinately. "And what's the reason for it, anyway? You can play cricket pretty well, considering. You'd be of some use to the eleven—you ought to have been playing to-day, as a matter of fact. It wouldn't be too late even now——"

"Sorry, but it can't be done," interrupted Jerry Dodd. "I don't want the Remove to know that I can play; but since you've found it out, I've got to explain, and I'll explain to Nipper at the same time. What do you say?"

"Oh, all right—I give my word," said Handforth. "But I'm blessed if I can understand the idea!"

Very shortly afterwards Handforth and Jerry Dodd left the River House practice ground. They strolled to the village, collected the precious photographs, and then returned to the school.

Although Jerry Dodd's secret was out, Handforth was the only fellow who knew it—and Handforth, for all his faults, could be implicitly trusted once he had given his word. He was as straight as a die.

The St. Frank's innings was just at an end, and, on the whole, we considered that we had done pretty well. I had added thirty-five to the score, but the other scores averaged between ten and fifteen.

There is not sufficient space at my disposal to describe the match in full, and I may as well say at once that St. Frank's went down. It was an unfortunate result, but mainly owing to the fact that our eleven was out of practice. The Grammarians had a big fight to win, for some of their best men were dismissed quite early in the innings. Arthur Grey, however, put up a splen-

did fight, and won the match off his own bat. His companion was a fellow who was content to keep his wicket intact without making any runs, and Grey knocked up the score at a remarkable speed. As we had expected to lose, it was not much of a disappointment.

But, later on, I spoke rather strongly in the common-room. I told the fellows candidly that they would have to put more time in at the nets, and that slacking would not be allowed. Our only chance of making up for lost time was to practise until we were perfect.

I was on my way to Study C soon afterwards when Handforth came along with Jerry Dodd. Handforth touched my shoulder.

"A word with you!" he said mysteriously.

"Eh? What's the idea?" I asked.

"I've got something to tell you—in private," said Handforth. "Who's in Study C?"

"Nobody," I replied.

"Good!"

We entered, and Handforth closed the door; then he went to the window, and closed this, too. Jerry Dodd, meanwhile, was looking unusually serious.

"What's all this mystery about?" I demanded.

"I'll tell you," said Handforth, pointing an accusing finger at Jerry Dodd. "This chap's a spoofer. He can play cricket better than you can!"

I grinned.

"Exactly," I agreed. "I saw a sample of it at the nets——"

"Say, chum, that was a bit of play-acting," put in Jerry Dodd. "I reckon I can play cricket, and Handforth surprised me while I was taking a turn at the nets on the River House ground."

Handforth interrupted, and explained all the circumstances. I listened with some surprise, and not without a feeling of pleasure.

"Why, this is great!" I said at length. "If you can play like that, Dodd, I'll give you a place in the eleven——"

"You're real good, but I can't accept it," interrupted Jerry.

"Why not?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I'm forbidden to play cricket."

"Forbidden!" I echoed, staring.

"Sure, chum. Head's orders."

"But why?" I asked. "Why on earth should the Head——"

"I reckon my dad wants me to learn things—to study away at books," said Jerry Dodd, with a grimace. "He put the Head wise to this, and the result is that cricket has been put outside my reach."

Jerry went into further details, and I felt rather indignant.

"But, hang it all, it's too bad!" I protested. "We need cricketers just now—we need them badly, and it's all rubbish to say that you'd spend too much time at practice. I'm not going to let you slip through my fingers, anyway—that is, if you can play as Handforth reckons."

"By jings! I'd like to, but it's impossible——"

"We'll see!" I interrupted grimly. "Both Handy and I will keep it quiet, Dodd, but when we play the return match with Bannington next week—well, by hook or by crook you'll be included in the junior eleven!"

And the matter was left at that.

But, before that return match took place, many exciting and mystifying incidents were destined to occur—incidents which for sheer wonder would be difficult to surpass. Jerry Dodd was to provide St. Frank's with something of a sensation; but, at the moment, even Jerry himself had not the faintest inkling of the amazing events which were shortly to come to pass.

THE END.

BEYOND THE DESERT

Australian Tale of Adventure.

By REID WHITLEY.

(Continued from Last Week.)

THEY made their exit through the window of the place, which was hidden from the sniper, and, keeping in line with the hut, ran along the beach till they could slip into the bush. Then began a toilsome march.

For some way they had to crawl on hands and knees, sometimes hacking a path. Then they came to the edge of the swathe cut by the fire, and the going became easier, for here the smaller brush had been burned while the larger stems remained and gave enough cover to shield them from Braun's eyes, supposing that he was on the look-out thereabouts, which seemed unlikely.

They travelled inland for a couple of miles, then the ground began to descend and soon grew swampy. Here the fire had been halted, everything being too green to burn. Soon they came to a narrow creek of the river, covered with emerald scum, and, following it, to the river itself.

Here they halted to rest. The river had an ill look. It was sluggish and muddy. Mud banks fringed it, and on the banks were certain ominous marks which Anson spied at once.

"Plenty of 'gators here," he said. "Can't say I'm keen on crossing. And if we had to shoot we'd give our position away. Lemme think."

"Look at that tree!" exclaimed Jack. "It leans half-way across. You've got your rope. Why not make it fast and then we could swing ourselves over?"

"Good notion. Can do," replied Anson.

And making their way along the slippery bank, they soon had the rope in position. Then, one at a time, swung themselves to the further side

As Maxwell—who went first—alighted, there was a stir in the slime a few yards away, and a great alligator slithered into the water and disappeared, showing that their precaution had not been unnecessary. Making fast the rope to a branch in case they should have to return that way, they proceeded down the bank, taking care to avoid all clumps of grass where an alligator might lurk.

The sun had by this climbed high and the heat amidst the thick bush was stifling. The mud banks of the river gave out an unpleasant reek. Jack halted and was about to fill his pipe with some of the tobacco which they had found among the stores in the hut, when Anson stopped him.

"Remember how the smell may carry," he said. "What air there is drifts down stream. Let's stick it a bit longer. We can't be far off Braun's pitch now. Hark! There he goes!"

A rifle cracked at no great distance. Then from further off came the rattle of a machine-gun in reply.

"Jim or my uncle taking a pot at the beggar," whispered Jack. "I hope Jim keeps Nunky under cover. Braun is a good shot."

"So are we," muttered Anson darkly. "I thought I was through with man-killing, but I want that fellow's scalp. Ah, he has moved! Found it too hot, I suppose."

The rifle sounded nearer. Noiselessly as they could they drew nearer. Suddenly Jack halted and touched Anson's arm as he pointed to something that showed against the light close to the river bank, though so well placed that it could not have been seen except at close range.

To their eyes the thing was unmistakable. A gun emplacement—and a long, low shape swathed in tarpauling, and further protected by a kind of roof of poles and grass thatch. Anson whistled low.

"Jee-roosalem! They did things rather thoroughly, eh?" he exclaimed. "A three-inch gun, I should say. And see, it commands the passage through the reef there. They meant business. If things had gone all right, they could have played Old Harry with shipping going through the Straits. Here's a path. Let's follow it, and—— Down, man!"

He had gone forward a few paces while

he had been speaking. Now he ducked suddenly. Jack did the like. They remained motionless for a minute, then Anson beckoned and Jack softly joined him.

They were almost on the edge of a clearing cut out of the heart of the matted bush which rose like a wall about it. A hut stood in the midst, not a well-built place like the one on the beach, but a mere shack of poles and brushwood with an open front. Three men sat before it smoking and talking. One was Braun, the others bearded and less tidily dressed, who were unmistakably Germanic. Though the rumble of their voices was audible enough, neither of the watchers could distinguish what they said.

The rifle continued to crack some little distance beyond, and the bullet of the machine-gun, which rattled an intermittent reply, swished and hummed through the brush overhead. Presently the shooting ceased and a fourth man appeared carrying a rifle. One arm hung limp and bloody.

Braun sprang up with an oath and examined the man's wound. Then he bound it and gave the fellow something to drink from a flask after which they all sat down and resumed their talk.

Anson and Jack Maxwell drew back until they were at a safe distance.

"What are we going to do?" demanded Anson. "It seems a bit unsportsmanlike to pot them sitting. We should bag two for certain, and probably get the others before they had time to spot us, but I don't feel like doing it when it comes to the scratch."

"Nor I, though they wouldn't hesitate if the chances were the other way round. But why didn't they attack last night?"

"Dunno. But I seem to remember that Jerry liked to be the big dog. Perhaps they have some more chaps near and are waiting for them to come up."

"Then we'll wade in and settle the matter now," said Jack, with decision. "You go a little further up there. When I whistle we'll toddle out and open. Are you game?"

"We're a pair of asses not to bush whack 'em, but here goes," replied Anson.

The pair shook hands and parted, Anson going some way through the bush and Jack returning to the same spot. The four Huns were still talking. But either Jack advanced with less caution or they were more on the alert. A stick cracked under his heel and Braun looked up sharply.

"Wer da? What's that?" he yelled, and swung up his rifle.

Jack stepped out.

"This is our surprise party, Braun," he remarked pleasantly, and as a bullet stung his ear, let drive at the man who had fired.

He dropped, while at the same instant Anson's rifle spoke, and Braun reeled, then dodged behind the wounded man, pushing him in front of him in time to receive the bullet Jack had intended for the villain of the piece.

"Surrender!" yelled Jack. "Hands up and——"

Smash!

(Continued on page 32.)

The rifle was torn from his hands and driven against his face, a great blaze of light shot through with incandescent stars blinded him, and he fell face downwards without a sound.

"Jack! Jack!"

Something was choking him. He was plunged deep under water. He felt cool fingers slipping over his face, then a refreshing moisture in his throat, and opened his eyes to look into the eyes of Anson!

"Good egg! I thought you were a goner when I saw you go down," growled Anson. "Settled the beauty who did it though. We got three, but Braun has gone clear. You winged him though. He scuttled off, and I reckon we'll see nothing more of him for the moment."

"But what was it?" asked Jack hoarsely, as he sat up. "Did someone throw a rock?"

"I guess it felt like it! No; one of those fellows had a big bore sporting-rifle. He let you have it with that, and the bullet hit the lock of your rifle and drove it against your head. You've got a regular dome of a bump!"

"It—it feels like the dome of St. Paul's—organ playing inside, too!" groaned Jack. "But we must get back—— Oww!"

He got shakily to his feet and nearly fell.

"Sit still in the shade for a bit," commanded Anson. "I'll skirmish round and see if I can track that beauty. Keep quiet! You've had a close call."

He helped Jack across the clearing to the shade of the shack and left him for a while. After a bit he returned.

"No luck. He has gone to earth somewhere among the rocks. I'll just spoil these firearms so that he can't use them—if indeed he can use anything."

He removed the breech bolts and flung them far into the impenetrable tangle of a thorn brake, then made assurance doubly sure by dinting the barrels against a stone. Except Braun had some other store to draw upon, he would have to rely on his pistol for the future, always supposing that he was not already dead.

"Now we'll trek," said Anson. "I'll come back later and attend to these three chaps. Steady! Lean your weight on me."

The march to the mouth of the river, along a strip of beach and across the mud-flats, was like a journey in a bad dream to Jack. Everything wavered before him in bands of bright, harsh colour. Through it all he heard Anson's voice urging, encouraging, chaffing, imploring.

Once as they waded through one of the many branches into which the stream divided itself across the mud, he saw something rise out of the slime and smelt a sickening odour of musk and corruption. Then Anson's pistol roared several times, the evil thing bellowed and writhed itself away into the water, to float seaward on the slow current.

Soon he heard Harding's and his uncle's voices, but after that ensued a long lapse in which he fought confused shapes that threatened him eternally from out of the shades of a frightful forest where trees had eyes and clutching hands.

Fever had him. But luckily, among the stores in the hut was a supply of medicines, and Professor Maxwell well knew how to use them. But three days had passed before he awoke to full consciousness again. His first question was concerning Braun.

"Oh, the beggar's alive and doing well enough," replied Anson. "I've come across his tracks and twice I caught sight of him on the rocks beyond that point. But if he will leave us alone, we have decided to let him go hang himself in his own way. When you're better able to march we'll pack what grub we need, put the rest out for him, and destroy all these munitions before we go."

But, as he had said, Jack had had a close call and another week was to pass before the professor deemed him fit enough to attempt the journey.

"You can take a walk this afternoon to try your strength," he said. "And we will start to-morrow early, if you feel capable. I confess I shall be glad to be away from here. Braun makes me uneasy. Why should he linger in the neighbourhood when he knows that so soon as we reach a settlement we will set a hunt for him afoot? For that part of it why were those men you shot waiting? Braun, at all events, knew that the war was over. Did they expect someone to come for them? Did they hope to get all this stuff away? The Papuans or some of the sea-going Malays would give a small fortune for the rifles and ammunition. I have no doubt they could dispose of the guns easily enough also. There are many queer folks around the Malayan islands who would buy. I shall not be easy till we are home again."

Jack nodded thoughtfully, Anson whistled softly.

"I think you're right, professor. A grand flare-up will be the best finish for all this stuff. There is a dinky little detonating battery set amongst the dunnage. I know enough to fix it so that those petrol tanks will go up in a beautiful gusher. There's plenty of wire to loose it off from a safe distance. I'll set about it now."

In the afternoon Harding accompanied Jack on a stroll to the headland on their side of the bay. Jack started briskly enough, but as they reached the rocks at the point he was fain to sit down, utterly exhausted, for the fever had weakened him more than he knew.

Harding looked at him with concern.

(To be continued.)

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