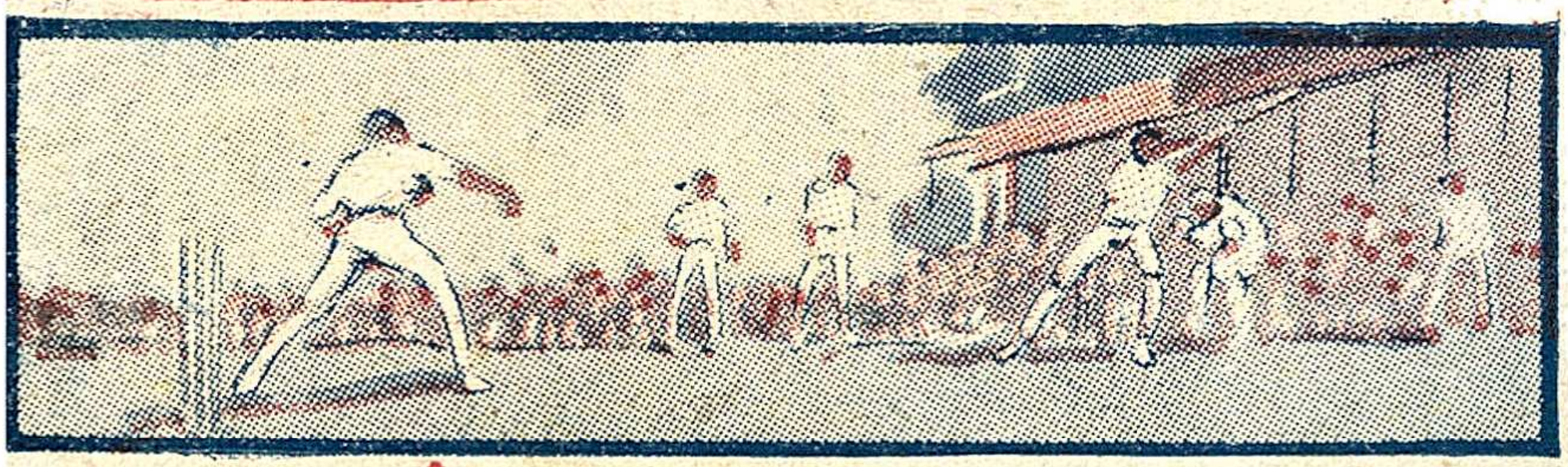
GRAND NEW CRICKETING SERIES STARTS TO-DAY!

NELSON LEE Library

And St. Frank's Magazine

2D

Fenton's eyes literally blazed. "Here's my answer!" he said thickly, pointing to the door. "Get out!"



FENTON'S CRICKET SENSATION!

The first story of the great new St. Frank's cricketing series which begins this week.

No. 516. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. April 25, 1925.

The bank was open wide, revealing a black cavity. And then, to add to the extraordinary occurrence, three figures appeared, one after the other.

FENTON'S CRICKET SENSATION!

This is the first story of a grand new cricketing series, and has been written specially as the result of many requests from readers who are keen followers of the great summer game.

THE EDITOR

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

TEA WITH MUSIC!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, of the Fourth Form at St. Frank's, paused as he was about to drown some tea-leaves with a totally unnecessary amount of boiling water.

"What's that awful noise?" he asked, frowning.

"Noise?" repeated Church, looking up from the current magazine, which was propped in front of the jam-pot. "I can't hear anything—— Oh, that?" he added, as a few painful strains smote his ear. "Goodness knows! Sounds like somebody moaning!"

"It's an organ!" declared Handforth, setting down the kettle.

"The organ?" said McClure. "Don't be silly. We can't hear the chapel organ from here, and there's nobody in there at tea-time——"

"Fathead!" interrupted Handforth witheringly. "I mean a street organ—one of those rotten moaning things!"

"Barrel-organs don't moan," disagreed Church.

"I'm not talking about barrel-organs!" roared Handforth, exasperated. "Haven't you seen those giddy organs that Italians carry on their backs and prop on one leg when they're playing it?"

"My hat!" said McClure. "You don't mean to say one of those merchants has had the nerve to wander in here?"

The strains of the alleged music floated through the window in even louder volume, and the chums of Study D got up and had a look out. The Triangle was empty, except for a swarthy-looking gentleman near the fountain, who was turning the handle of his noise perpetrator. Seated on the top of this instrument of torture was a pert-looking little monkey. Round about, in close proximity, were three or four critical fags.

"Of all the cheek!" said Handforth indignantly. "Coming in here with that fearful contraption! Buzz outside, Church, and send the rotter about his business!"

"Not likely!" snorted Church. "Do your own dirty work!"

"Look here, you rotter——"

"He wouldn't go, anyhow!" objected Church. "These organ-grinders won't move unless a master comes along, or something like that. Just have a look at that monkey. I'm blessed if it isn't the twin brother of Marmaduke!"

"Marmaduke!" said Handforth, with a start. "That awful animal of Willy's, you mean? You've spoilt all my appetite for tea now. Whenever I think of my minor I get a pain!"

"Oh, leave the poor chap alone!" said McClure. "He's making a terrible row, but I don't suppose he can help it. Let's get back to the table. How about that new brew of tea you were making, Handy?"

He picked up the pot and stared into it blankly.

"Why, you ass, you've filled it up!" he snorted. "This stuff's no good—it's like

dishwater! When will you realise, Handy, old man, that you're a rotten cook?"

"Eh? What's that?" asked Handforth, turning round and glaring.

"All great men fail in certain ways," said McClure hastily. "Even the cleverest detective on earth, or the greatest author living, can't cook and make tea properly. And why should he? His brain's always busy with marvellous thoughts, and he can't waste time on trivialities."

Handforth calmed down.

"Oh, well, of course, there's something in that!" he said. "But you always seem to forget that I'm the exception. If that isn't good, my lad, I'll drink the lot of it myself. Oh, my goodness! What the dickens is he playing now?"

A kind of jig was emanating from the organ, and as half the notes were flat, the result was not exactly musical. Handforth stared out of the window again, and frowned.

"These chaps ought to be locked up!" he said severely. "Fancy coming here, and thinking that he's going to get a few coppers by making that awful noise! Here, take this bob, Church, and give it to him! Poor chap—he looks half starved!"

Church looked at the shilling dubiously.

"That's your last bob, isn't it?" he asked. "McClure and I are broke, and if you give that away ——"

Handforth didn't wait to hear the rest. He marched out of the study himself, strode along the passage, and emerged into the Triangle. In ten purposeful strides he reached the organ-grinder and gave him the shilling.

"The music's not bad, but we're having tea!" he growled. "Why not go down to the vicarage and have a try there?"

The Italian grinned all over his face.

"You no like da music?" he asked, with a gleam of teeth.

"Eh? Music?" said Handforth. "Oh, this organ, you mean? Between you and me, old man, it's a bit cracked. I'm giving you the straight tip—clear off! Another five minutes of this, and you'll have the school after you. Buzz while the buzzing's good!"

"Da music is good!" said the Italian. "Si! Si! I mucha thank you! I play many tunes—you lika da music——"

"I don't like it at all!" gasped Handforth. "Look here, isn't a bob enough? Hi, you fags! Turn out your pockets, and have a whip round! Don't stand there enjoying the show for nothing!"

But the fags, who mostly consisted of nonentities, melted away like mist before the sun. If any of them possessed any coppers, they were certainly not going to part with them in this rash fashion.

And the organ-grinder, completely misunderstanding Handforth's "straight tip," started up a new tune with great gusto, evidently intent upon giving his benefactor value for money.

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.

No. 25.—Jack Blythe.

One of the Third's most well-dressed members. A fair-haired youngster, with a cheerful disposition and a resolute character. A swotter, with little time for the usual Third Form ragging.

CHAPTER II.

MARMADUKE ON THE TRACK.

CHRISTOPHER LEMON, known throughout the Third as Juicy, looked at his watch anxiously. Not that this was much good. Juicy's watch suffered from occasional lapses, and it was a perilous thing to rely upon it.

"Stopped again!" he grunted, with disgust. "I'll bet that's because Chubby chucked it across the Form-room this morning. What's the good of these rotten watches? They won't stand any ordinary treatment, and this one cost ten bob!"

He paused, and shook the watch. An ominous rattle sounded within.

"Seems all right," said Lemon. "The works are all there, anyway! I shall have to have a go at it to-night, and put it right!"

Lemon was at the back of the Ancient House, and his occupation was a rather curious one. He was pacing up and down, and behind him, attached to a string, marched Marmaduke, the monkey. Marma-

duke, in fact, was indulging in his usual evening exercise.

It must not be supposed that Juicy Lemon was addicted to this sort of thing. Marmaduke belonged to Willy Handforth, and Willy had gone to the village on an extremely urgent mission. It had brooked of no delay, so he had sternly instructed Juicy to give Marmaduke his exercise.

"Walk him up and down for half an hour!" Willy had commanded. "Not a minute less, my son. If you play any of your tricks, and dodge off before time you'll have to account to me when I come back!"

And Lemon, who knew exactly what this meant, was obeying instructions to the letter. None of the Third-Formers ever dreamed of ignoring their forceful young leader's commands. In the Third, Willy was a kind of autocrat. Fags trembled before his gaze, and fell before his fist.

It is probable that not ten per cent of the Third knew Lemon's actual Christian name. Two minutes after his arrival at St. Frank's he had been nicknamed Juicy, and Juicy he remained.

"I suppose I shall have to go round and have a look at the school clock," he told himself. "I believe I've been more than half an hour already. Come on, Marmy—buck up, you lazy little tyke!"

Marmaduke, thus urged, grinned cheerfully, and chattered. He had a feeling that something was wrong to-day. Juicy wasn't giving him the exercise that his master always gave him. Willy generally played about, turned a few somersaults, and allowed Marmaduke to maul him. But there were none of these joys this evening. Marmaduke was kept strictly at the end of the string, and he felt that he was being swindled. His one desire was to dash about a bit and get rid of his excess of exuberance.

He gave a leap, and landed on Juicy's shoulder. But before Juicy could get at him he was off again, chattering with delight.

"Stop that game!" said Lemon gruffly. "If you think I'm going to let you mess me about, you're mistaken! Why the dickens doesn't Willy turn up? He ought to have been here long ago!"

He made his way round the angle of the Ancient House, frowning. True, Willy's mission had been vital, and it was possible he was delayed. Willy, in fact, had gone down to the village for the express purpose of claiming a hamper at the station.

Juicy was living in a kind of dream. He had already enumerated the exact contents of the hamper. A big cake, certainly, and probably some meat or fish pastes, some tins of sardines, two or three pots of jam, and so forth.

The shock would come later. For how was Juicy Lemon to know that hamper contained a live snake? Willy, in his enthusiasm for living pets, had decided that a harmless, non-poisonous snake would form a lively addition to his collection. There were possibilities with a snake. One could do all sorts of ripping things.

But Juicy's mind was not running on snakes. If he had had a suspicion of the truth, he would probably have revolted, and Marmaduke would have languished in his cage. It was only the thought of an eatable reward which caused Juicy to stick to his task.

He passed round the angle of the building and halted. At the first glance at the clock he groaned. His calculating powers were obviously at fault. He had only been on the job seventeen minutes. Then he caught sight of the Italian and the organ—with Handforth standing in a dazed, bemused condition. The music was having a strange effect upon him. It was so awful that all Edward Oswald's forcefulness was sapping away.

"My hat!" said Juicy with interest. "I thought I heard some music somewhere! Ripping! What's that he's playing? 'It's a long way to Tipperary,' I believe. No, it isn't. It's 'The Lost Chord.' Anyhow, it's jolly good!"

Juicy's ear for music was sadly distorted. He had been even known to acclaim the strains of a jew's-harp, and had stated it as his opinion that the Hebrews knew what real music was.

Juicy wandered into the Triangle, irresistibly attracted by the organ. For the moment he forgot all about Marmaduke.

But Marmaduke was taking an even livelier interest in the proceedings. The music he held in contempt, but the monkey seated on the top of the organ aroused a brotherly curiosity.

He caught one glimpse of his relative, stood stock still in surprise for a moment, and then leapt forward with a perfect screech of excitement, forgetting all about his leash.

It snapped at the collar like a piece of cotton, and Juicy Lemon felt his heart jump into his mouth as he saw Marmaduke streaking across the Triangle in a beeline for the organ.

CHAPTER III.

MR. PYCRAFT RECEIVES VISITORS.

MARMADUKE evidently meant business.

He could not have been more eager if the other monkey had been his actual long-lost brother. They were certainly of the same family, almost identical in appearance and size.

The first Handforth knew about it was a kind of streak which happened near by.

And at the same instant the music abruptly ceased, and the Italian gentleman commenced stringing out a volume of sound in his own picturesque tongue.

The reason for his volubility was clear.

His own monkey, catching sight of Marmaduke, evidently got the wind up. He saw Marmaduke leaping at him, and he emulated Marmaduke's own manœuvre. With one leap he was off the organ, and snapped his chain. It broke midway, and the little animal shot away with two feet of chain dragging.

Marmaduke, swerving, rushed in chase.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth blankly.

"Hi! Catch him!" gasped Juicy.

"You young ass, you might as well ask me to catch an express train!" said Handforth. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Deliberately setting Marmaduke on to that other monkey like that!"

"I didn't!" howled Juicy. "He broke away!"

The Italian was still using his own language, and he dropped his organ, and ran across the Triangle in despair. In the meantime Marmaduke was unmistakably gaining. He had no warlike intentions. He only wanted to shake hands, as it were, and discuss a few tribal affairs.

But the other monkey felt that the only safe thing was to get out of the way. An open window offered a means. So he took one leap, and shot through the window. Thereafter the details were interesting.

Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Modern Fourth, was indulging in tea at the moment. Mr. Pycraft was a somewhat sour-tempered gentleman, and this evening he was particularly irritable because a quantity of soot had descended on his head upon entering the study, half an hour earlier.

Mr. Pycraft knew well enough that it was impossible to trace the culprits. He was always suffering these incidentals, and he never seemed to realise that he paved the way for them by his own mean-spirited attitude.

The juniors would rather have maimed themselves before setting a booby trap for Mr. Crowell or Mr. Stokes. It can all be boiled down into one word—respect.

For Mr. Pycraft the juniors had no respect whatever, and consequently he was always being made the victim of these little jokes.

Having cleaned himself, Mr. Pycraft was now having his tea. While sipping the fragrant brew, he was trying to devise some scheme whereby he could discover the culprits. And in the middle of his cogitations two visitors arrived in rapid succession.

First of all came Jacko—for it was afterwards learned that this was the Italian monkey's name. Jacko whizzed through the window, and alighted in the middle of Mr. Pycraft's table, with considerable damage to the tea-things.

Jacko was probably just as startled as Mr. Pycraft was, although he certainly wasn't hurt so much. For Mr. Pycraft received the scalding contents of his tea-cup in his lap.

"Good heavens!" yelled Mr. Pycraft, leaping up.

Crockery scattered on the floor, and Jacko leapt madly from the table on to the top of a bookcase. Here he gazed down at the scene with gleaming eyes, and with his little chest positively palpitating.

Mr. Pycraft failed to take in the scene; he hadn't time.

For about a split second later Marmaduke appeared. Marmaduke was much quicker than Mr. Pycraft. He spotted Jacko on the instant and took one leap on to the top of the bookcase.

But Jacko didn't think so. He fled, alighting on the top of Mr. Pycraft's head, en route for the side-table. In fact, he used Mr. Pycraft's head as a kind of stepping-stone.

"Help!" shrieked the startled master. "Help! Help!"

He stood there, breathing hard. His light grey flannel trousers were ruined, his tea-table was a wreck, and he was fearfully scalded. As if these disasters were not sufficient, a sort of whirlwind was taking place in the study.

Jacko was racing round, and Marmaduke was in full pursuit. The speed was simply terrific. Mr. Pycraft became dizzy as he looked. And it never occurred to him to make a grab at one of the excited animals.

"It's all right, sir—hold him!" panted Juicy Lemon, appearing at the window. "They're trapped now—they can't get out!"

Mr. Pycraft came to himself.

"You—you wretched child!" he shouted desperately.

"Child!" gasped Juicy, turning pale.

"You set these monkeys upon me deliberately!" roared Mr. Pycraft. "Come in here and capture them! I'll have you flogged for this—expelled!"

Before Juicy could climb through the window, however, the door opened and Mr. Beverley Stokes appeared.

"Anything wrong here?" he asked briefly. "Well, my only hat! What's the idea, Mr. Pycraft? A new form of amusement, or what?"

Mr. Stokes, affectionately known in the Ancient House as Barry, had been passing, and hearing Mr. Pycraft's howls, had thought it wise to look in. Mr. Stokes was somewhat addicted to "schoolboy talk," and as a rule he conversed as informally as any of his junior boys.

"Amusement, sir!" hooted Mr. Pycraft. "Do you call this amusement? This—this infernal monkey——"

Mr. Stokes didn't wait to listen. He was a man of action. With one grab he seized Marmaduke as he shot by. Willy's little pet clung to him, chattering and breathing hard.

And Jacko, at the same minute, leaping for safety through the window, alighted fairly in Juicy Lemon's arms. The excitement was over.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHOCK FOR WILLY.

WILLY HANDFORTH marched briskly through the gateway, swinging his hamper with keen enjoyment. He had taken a peep inside on the way up the lane, and his new pet was even better-looking than he had expected.

The Triangle was quiet, except, of course, for sundry cat-calls from a remote quarter where a number of Third-Formers were indulging in the undignified pastime of leap-frog.

"Hallo! Here you are at last!" exclaimed Juicy Lemon, running up. "I thought you'd be back long ago!"

Willy shook his head.

"You shouldn't think, old son," he said. "I've warned you about it before. It's too great a strain, Juicy. When a chap's only got half a brain, he's got to be careful——"

"Oh, don't rot!" growled Juicy. "I say, is that the hamper!"

"What do you think it is—a snuff-box?"

"Not much better!" sniffed Juicy. "I thought it was going to be a big one—not a miserable little thing like that! Why, there's hardly enough tuck in there to divide among three of us!"

Willy gave Juicy a pitying look.

"Tuck?" he repeated. "My poor, benighted imbecile! Who said there was tuck in this hamper? Did I ever give you that impression? You shouldn't jump to these unhappy conclusions. Think in haste, my son; and your path will be strewn with disappointments!"

Juicy Lemon stared.

"Hampers always contain tuck!" he exclaimed. "If there isn't tuck in this one, what is there in it?"

"Nothing much—only a snake."

"A snake!" yelled Juicy, leaping a yard into the air.

"Coward! It won't bite!"

"A snake!" said Juicy, faintly. "You—you spoofer! You swindler! You said the hamper was important! Look here, you'll get sacked if anybody finds out about that snake! It might escape and sting somebody."

"Sting?" repeated Willy. "What do you think snakes are—wasps? I always thought you were ignorant, and now I know it. Snakes don't sting—they bite! They keep their poison just behind their teeth, and when they pip you, they squirt a few drops into the wound. Hold on a minute, and I'll take old Sebastian out."

"Sebastian?" breathed Juicy, backing away.

"I thought it was rather a good name for him," explained Willy. "Goes pretty well, eh? Don't bunk, you fathead! This snake can't bite—he's as harmless as a kitten; hasn't got any poison at all. You don't think I'd bring a venomous reptile into the place?"

Juicy was somewhat reassured, but he was still dubious.

"Don't open it here," he said hurriedly. "Wait until we get round to the pet-shed. I say, you nearly lost Marmaduke about half an hour ago," he added, as though struck by a sudden thought. "If it hadn't been for Mr. Stokes——"

"Nearly lost him!" shouted Willy, in alarm. "What do you mean? Look here, you rotter, I trusted you to keep Marmaduke on the string——"

"He escaped!" interrupted Juicy. "It wasn't my fault; he caught sight of another monkey."

And Juicy gave a graphic account of the happenings. Willy grinned with keen pleasure as he heard about Mr. Pycraft's misfortunes. And as Mr. Stokes had passed the verdict that nobody was to blame, and nobody was punished, the affair had ended satisfactorily.

"The organ-grinder's gone now. Mr. Stokes gave him a couple of bob, and told him to buzz off!" added Juicy. "Poor old Marmy is nearly whacked, too. When I put him in the cage he was panting like the dickens. I don't wonder at it, the way he chased round."

Willy hurried off to the pet-house with many misgivings. He was afraid that Marmaduke would be in a worse fix than Juicy intimated. Arriving, he rushed in, took one look at the cage, and then gasped.

"This isn't Marmaduke!" he yelled excitedly.

"Eh?" gasped Juicy. "But—but——"

"You've got the wrong monkey!" exclaimed Willy, turning upon the other fag; and grabbing him. "You dotty, gibbering idiot! This isn't Marmaduke at all! That organ-grinder has walked off with him, and left me this thing!"

"You—you must be mistaken!" ejaculated Juicy. "He jumped right into my arms! You wouldn't expect a strange monkey to do that!"

"I wouldn't expect any monkey to jump into your arms!" interrupted Willy hotly.

"Of all the muddling, blundering fatheads! Come on! Which way did that organ-grinder go? We've got to catch him!"

"I don't know—I think he went up the lane——"

"Good! He's probably playing his rotten old bellows outside the Moor View School!" said Willy crisply. "But he must know that Marmaduke isn't his monkey—and that's why he hurried off so quickly! Marmaduke's twice as good as this one!"

Willy had made no mistake. He knew Marmaduke well, and could have picked him out from a hundred others. And a minute later the two Third Formers were running up the lane at full speed.

CHAPTER V.

MARMADUKE ISN'T HAVING ANY.

MEANWHILE, the organ-grinder was hurrying away.

He had seen, in the first minute, that Mr. Beverley Stokes had handed him the wrong monkey. And the Italian, being a wily gentleman, also recognised the fact that Marmaduke was a better specimen.

Jacko was getting old, and he refused to be taught any tricks. Marmaduke, on the other hand, was in fine physical condition, and obviously a youngster. The organ-grinder knew more about monkeys than even Willy himself, and he hurried away from St. Frank's, delighted with his prize.

He decided to get as far away as possible.

Later, perhaps, there would be a chase. The owner of Marmaduke would certainly know the difference, and he wouldn't be satisfied with the exchange. So it was up to the Italian to show some speed.

This was all very well as far as it went.

But Marmaduke thought he'd have a say in the matter. He took an instinctive dislike to his new master at once. Willy was the only master he had ever known, and Marmaduke was not going to lightly submit to this abduction.

He commenced operations, while the music merchant was hurrying up the lane, by struggling violently to get away. In the meantime, he chattered and made other noises.

Receiving a heavy cuff, Marmaduke stopped.

He thought things out, and felt decidedly aggrieved. A cuff was an unusual thing for him. Now and again one of the juniors had given him a bang, and he had always resented it.

He resented this treatment now, and at the first opportunity he made a snap at the organ-grinder's hand. The latter gentleman, however, was on the look out for it, and Marmaduke received another cuff.

On the top of this, Carlo, the organ-grinder, called a halt, and produced a muzzle. Marmaduke, watching and waiting, eyed the muzzle with grave suspicion. He didn't know what it was, having never seen anything like it before, but he had an idea that it was something to hurt him with.

Jacko, the original monkey, had a habit of biting people if he came into contact with them when he was in one of his bad tempers. So Carlo kept the muzzle handy in case it was wanted.

To Marmaduke's infinite disgust, the thing was clapped over his face, and strapped at the back.

"Now, you little beast, bite if you can!" said Carlo.

He spoke in Italian, of course, but that was what he meant. And Marmaduke, suspecting the purport of the words, simply glared. He had never felt so swindled in all his life. Biting was his only method of attack, and he was even deprived of that!

He struggled and scratched, but it was useless.

The organ-grinder snuggled the monkey into his coat, and hurried on. Fortunately, he had many handicaps when it came to a matter of speed. He was no longer young, and his feet were sore. And his organ, slung across his back, was no featherweight.

However, he managed to put a considerable distance between himself and St. Frank's, and in this he displayed a certain amount of cunning.

Instead of keeping to the road, he broke through a hedge, and proceeded across a meadow in the direction of Bellton Wood. By making his way through the wood he would get lost, and any possible pursuers would have no chance of overtaking him.

But Carlo had been unaware of the fact that two young ladies had observed him, and were rather curious concerning his movements. The pair were Ena Handforth and Violet Watson, of the Moor View School.

Before reaching the wood, disaster overtook the Italian.

It was Marmaduke's fault. Finding that struggling was useless, and that biting was out of the question, he resorted to subterfuge. So he appeared to give up the fight, and snuggled comfortably and resignedly against his new owner's grubby chest.

He was so quiet, in fact, that Carlo grew slightly careless.

When he had nearly reached the other side of the meadow, he opened his coat slightly, and took a look at the prisoner. Two gleaming little eyes looked up at him. The organ-grinder grinned. He had tamed his new possession already!

But a moment later he was disillusioned. Marmaduke seized his opportunity and

sprang. It was a lightning-like movement. One of his tiny fists struck the organ-grinder in the face, and before the man could make a grab, Marmaduke had gone. With a single leap he was on the ground, and he scuttered away with the speed of a hare.

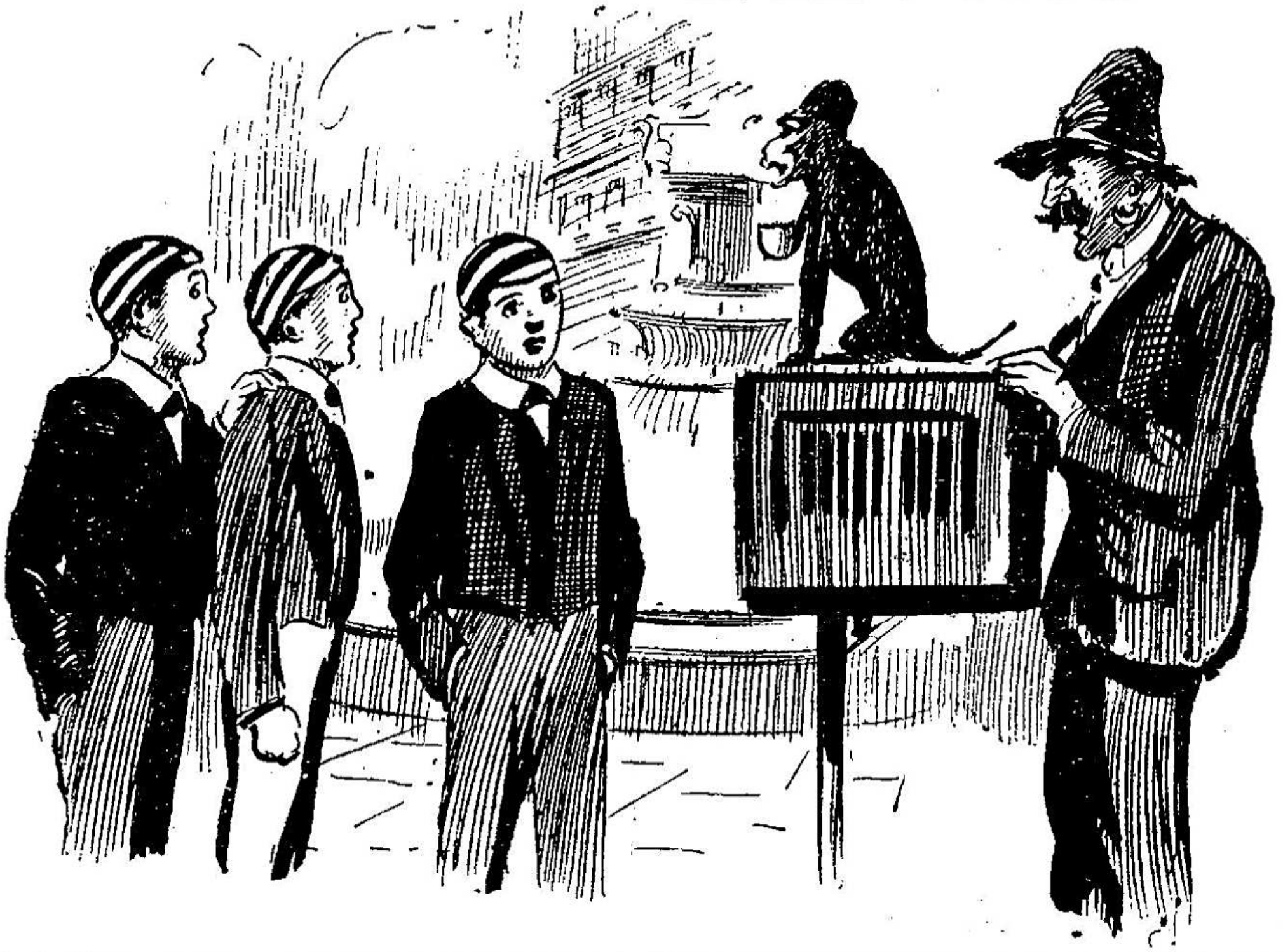
Then he paused, looked round, and sat up. His persecutor was running towards him, having dropped his organ. Marmaduke ceased his attempts to remove the muzzle, and scooted off at a tangent. And for ten minutes he enjoyed himself by dodging Carlo.

"Just a minute, sis!" panted Willy, as he came up.

"Don't bring your monkey near me, Willy!" said his sister. "I've always wondered at your liking for such awful pets——"

"This isn't my monkey!" interrupted Willy. "Some beastly organ-grinder has pinched Marmaduke, and left me this apology in his place! It was Juicy's fault, the young fathead."

"I didn't know!" protested Lemon. "They looked both alike to me!"



Seated on the top of this instrument of torture was a pert-looking little monkey. Round about, in close proximity, were three or four critical fags.

The organ-grinder paused at last—hot, perspiring and alarmed. He had lost Marmaduke, and it was impossible to go back and claim his own monkey. His duplicity had left him monkey-less!

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT WILLY SAW.

ENA HANDFORTH and Violet Watson looked round as they heard a hail. They were just about to enter the gates of the Moor View School, and they saw two youthful forms racing towards them.

"An organ-grinder?" repeated Violet.

"Yes—have you seen him?" asked Willy. "I was going to ask you if he'd come along this way——"

"No, but we've seen him," replied Violet. "We caught sight of him in a meadow, just down the road—he was going towards the wood, and we wondered what he was up to. We thought it was jolly suspicious, in fact."

"The wood!" said Willy, in alarm. "My goodness! We shall never find him now! Which meadow?"

"The second one down here on the right-hand side," answered Ena promptly. "I

hope your monkey is a better one than this, Willy! I don't approve of any monkey at all, but——"

Willy didn't wait to hear his sister's views, but hurried off, accompanied by Juicy. They broke through the hedge, and came to an abrupt halt. The chase was much shorter than they had expected. The organ-grinder was in clear view on the other side of the meadow. He was sitting on his organ, mopping his forehead.

"There he is!" panted Lemon.

"Yes, but where's Marmy?" asked Willy anxiously. "My hat! I believe he's lost him! If so, I'll—I'll——"

He tore up, and the organ-grinder rose from the organ, and his eyes gleamed as he caught sight of his own property.

"You bring Jacko?" he asked eagerly. "He my monk! I thanka you——"

"Yes, but where's Marmaduke?" demanded Willy, as he got rid of Jacko. "Look here, you rotter, what have you done with Marmaduke?"

With much volubility, the Italian explained that it was all a mistake, and that Marmaduke had escaped. He tried to make out that he had been ignorant of the substitution, but Willy refused to believe a word of it.

"You rotter, you tried to escape with my monkey!" he said angrily. "And now you've lost him! Which way did he go? Where did you see him last? If I don't find Marmaduke, I'll—I'll——"

"There he is!" shouted Juicy suddenly.

Willy looked round as Lemon grabbed his arm. Sure enough, Marmaduke had just appeared from behind an isolated clump of trees. He had heard his master's voice, as a matter of fact, and had paused in the midst of his operations—for Marmaduke had been attempting to remove the muzzle.

"Good old Marmy!" roared Willy. "Come on, my son!"

He gave a shrill whistle and hurried forward. Marmaduke, recognising the whistle, came to meet him. Usually he was most obedient, and always obeyed his master's commands.

But perhaps Willy was too precipitate. Perhaps Marmaduke was thinking of those cuffs he had received. At all events, just before Willy reached him, he turned tail, and fled.

"Hi!" roared Willy. "Come here, you little imp!"

But Marmaduke made for the nearest tree, and streaked up it like a squirrel. He was so fast that it was almost impossible to follow his movements. And in next to no time he was perched on the topmost branch. From this lofty point of vantage, he gazed down.

"Well, you've run him to earth!" said Juicy, with relief.

"If this is what you call running him to earth, I don't!" said Willy tartly. "He's fifty or sixty feet in the air!"

"Well, you know what I mean."

Willy stood looking up thoughtfully. It seemed to him there was only one method. He would have to climb the tree himself. Fortunately it was separate from the others, and even Marmaduke, with all his agility, would not be able to leap from one to the other.

"Well, it's got to be done, I suppose," growled Handforth minor.

He had forgotten the organ-grinder by now, and that gentleman, in safe possession of Jacko, was making tracks. He didn't quite like the look of these young schoolboys.

All Willy's thoughts were for Marmaduke, however. He instructed Juicy to stand on guard, and catch the monkey if he dodged to the ground. And Willy himself started climbing the tree.

He was an agile youngster, and he swarmed up from branch to branch with a recklessness which brought Juicy's heart into his mouth every other second. One slip, and Willy would come crashing down like a stone. But the leader of the Third was absolutely fearless.

And his task was easier than he had expected.

For Marmaduke offered no resistance. He probably realised that Willy had nothing but kindly intentions. And he was rather exhausted, too, after all his adventures. Willy came up, the twigs and branches cracking perilously. And as he approached he made soothing sounds.

Marmaduke, thus coaxed, condescended to leap into his young master's arms, where he snuggled, chattering happily. Willy crossed his leg over a branch, and fixed himself there.

"My hat! A muzzle!" he said angrily, as he tore the thing off. "Poor old Marmy! That rotter ought to be prosecuted! It's all right, old son—you're safe now."

Willy didn't seem to realise that both he and the monkey were in dire peril. They were on the topmost part of the tree, and were swaying dizzily. Juicy, down below, was racked with anxiety.

"Got him?" he yelled up. "For goodness' sake, come down, Willy! You'll slip, or something, and break your giddy neck!"

Willy grinned.

"Rats!" he called. "I'm safe enough. I'll just rest here a minute to get some breath, and then——"

He paused, for something remarkable had caught his eye.

CHAPTER VII.

AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT!

IT sometimes happens that the most trivial thing will lead to something of importance. Willy, for example, had never suspected for a moment that his chase of Marmaduke would permit him to see something which was certainly not intended for his eyes.

But that is the way of things.

It was only by sheer accident that Willy was perched in the top of this high tree—a tree which towered above its fellows. On account of this lofty position, Willy Handforth beheld a spectacle which literally filled him with astonishment.

On one side of him lay the meadows, with St. Frank's and the playing fields in clear view in the evening sunlight. On the other hand lay Bellton Wood. The effect was rather picturesque.

For Willy could see over the tops of the trees, and they resembled a great, uneven sea of moving waves—for the breeze was stirring the tree-tops vigorously. He could also see into one or two clearings, which stood out like little islands amid the massed foliage.

And in the nearest of these clearings the thing was happening.

It was empty when Willy first looked—a little grassy opening in the trees, with a weed-covered bank on the far side. The fag only gave it a glance. Then it seemed to him that a small portion of the bank moved. It couldn't have done, of course—just the weeds, perhaps——

It was at this point that Willy grew very interested. For the bank actually was moving! A section of it came upwards like a trapdoor! It moved back slowly and deliberately, like some magical effect in a pantomime.

And Juicy Lemon, getting wilder and wilder with anxiety below, couldn't for the life of him understand why Willy clung to that perilous branch at the tree-top.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Willy.

He even released one hand, and rubbed his eyes. He half-suspected that he was seeing things. The bank was now open wide, revealing a black cavity which looked like an inky smudge at this distance. And then, to add to the extraordinary nature of the occurrence, three figures appeared, one after the other.

They emerged from the cavity, and their very appearance was astonishing. Willy had sharp eyes, and he could see that the three men were dusky—dark men, like Indians. Yes, they were Indians. No mistake about it—Hindus, or something of that sort.

They only stood there for a moment—while the secret trapdoor was being closed. Then they disappeared amid the trees, and the weed-covered bank took on its former look. Willy stared. Had he imagined it all?

He looked again, but everything was normal.

"Well, that's about the rummiest thing I've ever known!" he decided. "What's more, I'm going to look into it more closely! No need to tell Juicy—he'd only say I'd been imagining things."

Much to Lemon's relief, Willy descended the tree—and landed, at last, in perfect safety.

"What did you stick up there all that time for?" asked Juicy warmly.

"You ass! I was admiring the scenery!" replied Willy promptly. "I've never known such a chap for getting the wind up! Do you think I'm afraid of being in a tree?"

"You might have broken your giddy neck!" growled Juicy. "Well, you've got Marmaduke now—and perhaps you're satisfied!"

Willy looked at him coldly.

"Perhaps I'm not!" he retorted. "It was your fault that Marmaduke escaped. Fancy mistaking that mouldy specimen of a monkey for good old Marmy! I thought you had more gumption, you fathead! It's the last time I'll get you to take Marmy for his evening exercise."

"Thank goodness!" said Lemon fervently.

They made their way back to the school, and Juicy couldn't quite understand his leader's unwonted preoccupation. Willy, in fact, was very thoughtful. He kept on remembering that scene in the wood, and he was trying to think of some natural explanation. But he couldn't. It was the queerest affair within his memory. Indians—in Bellton Wood! And Indians, moreover, coming out of cunningly devised earth-doors, like figures in a successful film drama. It was more than Willy could understand.

In the Triangle, the two fags ran into Edgar Fenton, of the Sixth. The captain of the school was mooching along thoughtfully, with his hands driven deeply into his white flannel trousers-pockets. He didn't see the fags until they practically bumped into him.

"Oh, hallo, Fenton!" said Willy. "Worrying about the cricket?"

Fenton started.

"Yes, things are in a pretty rotten state—— Eh?" he exclaimed, coming to himself. "What on earth—— Take that thing away!" he added irritably. "Don't bother me now—I'm thinking!"

Willy nodded sympathetically.

"I don't wonder at it," he said. "The First Eleven hasn't been doing so well, has it? I'll tell you what, Fenton," he added brilliantly. "You can put me in your eleven if you like—I'll help to win the Helmford match on Saturday."

Fenton frowned, and then suddenly smiled.

"Thanks awfully!" he said politely. "But if it's all the same to you, Handforth minor, I'd rather not. Hope you're not offended? No? Well, that's a load off my mind!"

He strolled off, and Willy sniffed.

"Sarcastic bounder!" said Willy. "He doesn't know when he's well off! If he'd only put me in the team there'd be a few fireworks! The First Eleven wants peppering up—that's what's the matter with it!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WORRIES OF EDGAR FENTON.

THERE was a great deal of truth in Willy Handforth's comment. Without any shadow of doubt, the St. Frank's First Eleven did need some peppering up. The seniors were by no means proud of their record this season.

True, the season was young, and cricket had hardly got into its stride. But in all the opening matches the First had made a very poor showing. They had not recorded a win, and their losses reflected no credit.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that Fenton was worried.

Being the skipper, the responsibilities were all on his shoulders. A school captain is always full of worries. And his troubles are greatly increased when sports go wrong.

At St. Frank's, cricket was the all-important thing during the summer term. St. Frank's was proud of its cricket. For months in advance the fellows looked forward to this term with eagerness—for it was the happiest, most enjoyable term of the year.

But when things go awry, it is the First Eleven captain who gets all the blame.

Yet Fenton was not to blame at all. He had made his men practise diligently, and every available minute was spent at the nets. But, somehow, nobody had struck his best form yet. There were two or three fine players among the Modern House seniors, but even these were not doing their best. No matter how they practised, the team couldn't seem to strike a winning vein.

And on the Saturday there was a fixture with Helmford College First Eleven. Helmford had been doing excellently, and had won all along the line. St. Frank's was faced with the prospect of a defeat on its own ground. Everybody was saying that the result was a foregone conclusion.

But Fenton didn't look at it in that way. Once the team lost its confidence, nothing much could be hoped for. The only way was to go into the Helmford match with the will to win. And Fenton was urging his men in this way, while they themselves were full of pessimistic prophecies.

The Captain made his way to the Modern House, and went in. He wanted a few words with Sinclair of the Sixth. Sinclair was about the best batsman the College House boasted of—second only to Morrow of the Ancient House. Fenton himself was a bowler.

From a personal point of view, Fenton did not like Sinclair much—he was a supercilious sort of fellow, with too much to say. Sinclair was always ready with criticism and undesirable advice. But he was a good bat—there was no question about that.

But during the last day or two he had been neglecting his practice, and Fenton wanted to have a few words with him about it. He hated urging his men to turn up at the nets, but it had to be done. He was just passing through the Modern House lobby when William Napoleon Browne strolled into view.

"Ah, Brother Fenton, do I perceive the lines of care upon your weather-worn visage?" asked Browne concernedly. "If you are in trouble, confide in me. Whisper your little worries into my ear, and I will deliver advice until further notice. Regard me as a penny-in-the-slot machine, and——"

"It's all right, Browne—don't gas now!" interrupted Fenton. "I'm just going to

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.

No. 26.—Billy Dale.

A sly, grubby fag, with an unenviable reputation for cribbing and sneaking. Even Fullerton won't have anything to do with him, and by the rest of the Third he is regarded as too insignificant for any attention.

have a word with Sinclair. He's one of my best men, and he hasn't been practising enough."

"In that case, Brother Sinclair must be reprimanded without fear or favour," declared Browne. "Doubtless you feel incapable of the task? If so, rely upon me. I am always ready to perform these little services. Leave Brother Sinclair to me, and I will guarantee that he will dash towards the nets so rapidly that you won't see him for dust!"

Browne was a new fellow in the Fifth, and his "gift of the gab" was so extensive and peculiar that most of the other seniors felt rather helpless when once he got into his stride.

"Thanks all the same," said Fenton; "I can manage. Sinclair is about the best bat I've got, next to Morrow——"

"Alas! what is this I hear?" sighed Browne. "Are you so lost to veracity, Brother Fenton, that you make these rash statements? Surely you have forgotten me? Don't I enter the category of best bats? Without wishing to boast—such self-advertisement is totally against my nature—I may surely claim to be among the elite?"

Fenton smiled.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "You're a new fellow, and I'd overlooked you for the moment."

"Enough!" said Browne gravely. "As one gentleman to another gentleman, I accept your apology. Who am I to maintain the frozen attitude? With regard to the Helmford match, have no fear. I shall be playing, and what else matters?"

"One man can't win a cricket match, Browne," said Fenton grimly. "Two can't, either—nor three! The whole team's got to be like a machine. And although I'm playing you on Saturday, I don't know how you'll shape. I've only seen you at practice."

"Surely that is sufficient?" asked Browne, in apparent pain. "While admitting that your worries must be considerable, I fail to see eye to eye with you in this particular matter. You may safely rely upon me for unlimited assistance on Saturday. Have no fear. The whisper has already reached Helmford that I shall be playing—and it therefore goes without saying that Helmford is struck dumb with consternation."

CHAPTER IX.

FENTON'S WAY.

EDGAR FENTON couldn't help grinning.

"You don't think much of yourself, do you?" he asked.

"Brother Fenton, I leave it to others to sing my praises," replied Browne. "Occasionally, when they fail in this signal duty, I find it necessary to murmur a modest word, but we will let that pass. You may take it for granted that Helmford is all a-flutter. They consider themselves a beaten team already. Between ourselves, they are whispering to one another that there is no possible way out of the tureen."

Fenton was getting used to Browne's bombastic manner. He didn't mean anything by it—he wasn't really a braggart. The truth was, William Napoleon Browne possessed a simply colossal amount of audacity. He was capable of doing things which no other senior dared to attempt. He would go to a master on the most impossibly hopeless quest—and return victorious. Without doubt, Browne had an uncanny knack of doing things. And his judgment, in spite of his tall talk, was thoroughly sound.

Upon arriving at St. Frank's, he had calmly appropriated the best study in the Fifth Form passage. He and Stevens—close chums—were now in occupation of No. 10. Hitherto this study had been occupied by Chambers & Co. But the mighty Chambers was now a fallen idol in the Fifth. He had never been much of a leader—being, in fact, a conceited sort of ass.

Compared to Browne, Chambers struck everybody as being extraordinarily modest. But, somehow, Browne's conceit was of such a different brand that nobody took offence at it. It only caused general amusement.

He had appointed himself captain of the Fifth, and, miraculously enough, he was allowed to retain the position! He had talked the Fifth round with supreme ease, and was now captain on trial.

Browne had no fears as to the ultimate result. A month, and he would consolidate his position immovably. On the score of cricket alone, he would gain the loyalty of his Form.

Fenton knew very well that Browne was an exception. He had seen the old Uxton man at the nets, and had been both surprised and delighted. After five minutes watching, Fenton had come to one conclusion. Browne's boasting about his cricket was justified. The man was a marvel.

He was that rare individual—a born cricketer. He not only possessed unlimited energy, but a superbly finished style which was unmistakable. And he seemed to be equally facile with the ball as with the bat. He was about the fastest bowler for a school team that Fenton had ever come across.

The St. Frank's captain regarded Browne as a distinct find, and he was instantly placed in the school team for the Helmford match. If he did well, he would undoubtedly be a regular player, and his colours were a certainty.

Of course, this was an unusual thing.

For a new boy to get his colours during his first term was almost unprecedented. But William Napoleon Browne was a fellow who proved the exception to the rule.

"I take it, then, Brother Fenton, that you would prefer to beard Brother Sinclair yourself?" asked Browne. "I am quite at your service, but if you insist——"

"Thanks all the same, Browne, but I'd rather have a few words with Sinclair personally," interrupted Fenton. "He might not like a jawing from you, you know—he's in the Sixth."

Browne nodded.

"I have not the slightest doubt, Brother Fenton, that he would accept a jawing from me with considerable resentment," he agreed. "But surely that is what we require? Once Brother Sinclair gets sufficiently enraged he will grasp the point and trot out to the nets. I fear that your tongue is hardly acidulated enough."

"It doesn't do to get a man's back up," said Fenton.

He walked off before Browne could say anything further, and the captain of the Fifth shrugged his shoulders and lounged outside. Fenton arrived at Sinclair's study and walked in. Then he abruptly paused.

He was surprised. Sinclair was lounging back in the easy-chair, with his feet on the table, and a cigarette between his lips. The room was rather blue with smoke. Sinclair held a book in his hand, and on the table, next to him, stood a half-filled glass. He was airily attired in flannels, with his shirt open at the neck.

"Hallo!" he said lazily. "Want me?"

Fenton entered and closed the door.

"I say, Sinclair, what's the idea?" he asked. "I don't want to preach, but this isn't the kind of thing to get you in good form, is it?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't start that sort of rot!" said Sinclair, laying his book down. "Are you trying to tell me that a cigarette hurts a fellow? Cut it out, Fenton! My form's all right. I shall be fit enough for the match—you needn't worry."

Fenton looked dubious. He was well aware that many Sixth-Formers indulged in an occasional cigarette. But he hated to see a man smoking and slacking when he ought to have been at the nets. That sort of thing doesn't produce good cricketers. And he was particularly anxious about Sinclair, because Sinclair was one of his best bats.

"What's that stuff in the glass—ginger-ale?" he asked, seeking for an opening to continue the conversation.

"Ginger-ale?" laughed Sinclair. "Good heavens, no! You don't think I'd drink that poison? This is whisky and soda. Care to have a nip? I've got a good supply in the cupboard."

CHAPTER X.

STRUCK OFF THE LIST.

FENTON'S expression suddenly changed.

"Whisky and soda!" he ejaculated. "Man alive! You don't mean to say you're serious? Look here, Sinclair, what's the idea? You haven't really got whisky and soda in that glass?"

Sinclair laughed.

"No need to get excited," he said. "Of course it's whisky and soda. Anything wrong in that? It's a pity if I can't have a drink without you butting in and doing the pussyfoot act!"

Fenton strode to the table, picked up the glass, and smelt it.

He had not been convinced that Sinclair was telling the truth. But he was convinced at the first sniff. The liquid in the glass was more whisky than soda.

"Well?" asked Sinclair, who was attempting to bluster. "What now? Would you care to have a tot——"

"No, confound you!" interrupted Fenton angrily. "You fool! Don't you know that you can be sacked for keeping this stuff in your study? Just because you're in the Sixth, it doesn't mean to say that you're immune from discovery!"

"Don't preach! Lots of fellows keep spirits in the cupboards——"

"I don't care what other fellows do!" shouted Fenton hotly. "I'm not interested in them—but you're in my team! And you'd better understand straight away, Sinclair, that I'm not having any members of the first eleven indulging in this game! You either stop this idiocy, or you'll be kicked out of the eleven! One or the other!"

Fenton was furious at his discovery, and he was enraged all the more by Sinclair's calm indifference. This fellow was a splendid batsman, and it filled Fenton with alarm to see him slacking and smoking and drinking.

Sinclair's own gore rose.

"Don't talk like a story-book!" he snapped. "Do you think a little drink is going to hurt me, Fenton? As a matter of fact, it helps me a lot when I'm playing cricket."

"Helps you?" asked Fenton, staring.

"Yes."

"Do you mean that you drink this stuff on match days?"

"Of course."

Fenton paused and breathed hard. He didn't believe what Sinclair was telling him—it was altogether too absurd. Sinclair, in the meantime, seized the glass and gulped the drink down.

"Come along—have one!" he said mockingly.

He went to the cupboard, produced a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda. Fenton watched him grimly.

"Some of the chaps serve cocktails," observed Sinclair, as he poured out another drink. "I know for a fact that Kenmore——"

"I'm not interested in Kenmore, and I don't want to hear anything about him," broke in Fenton. "Kenmore's nothing to do with me—but you are. You're down on the list to play against Helmford on Saturday. Good heavens, man, don't you realise your responsibilities? Playing for the first eleven of a Public school team isn't a picnic! You've got to be at the top of your form—on tiptoes to do your utmost."

Sinclair nodded.

"That's why I'm having whisky," he replied.

"Don't be an idiot!" snapped Fenton, more enraged than ever. "This stuff is only doing you harm—more harm than you can realise. I'm not a pussyfoot—don't be a fool! But when you're in training for a cricket match, you can't afford to take these risks."

Sinclair drank some neat whisky out of sheer bravado.

"Finished?" he asked. "You don't seem to realise, old man, that whisky has a good effect. On me, at any rate. Why, I always have a good stiff glass before any match starts. And if I can get hold of it, I have another glass just before I go in to bat."

"Are you telling me the truth?" asked Fenton grimly.

"Of course, I am," said Sinclair. "There's nothing funny about it. Haven't you heard of actors who can't act until they've had a few drinks? I'm a bit the same—only in a mild form, of course."

"During the holidays I saw a play called 'White Cargo,'" said Fenton. "There's an old doctor in that play who drinks like a fish. He used to perform operations when he was nearly drunk, and was tremendously successful. Then, one day, a patient died—and he was finished for good."

"What on earth——"

"That might happen to you, Sinclair," interrupted Fenton grimly. "This infernal stuff may have the effect of steadying your nerves in nine cases out of ten, but in the tenth case it'll let you down—just as it did that doctor in the play."

"Rot!" said Sinclair gruffly.

"You can call it what you like—but I've got a say in this matter, and I'll say it," retorted Fenton. "You're in my team, and I mean that team to be clean. Either you give me your word that you don't touch this whisky again, or your name comes off the list."

Sinclair flared up.

"I won't give you my word, and you can go to the deuce," he roared furiously. "I'm not going to be dictated to by you, Fenton! Get out of this study, confound you!"

Edgar Fenton compressed his lips, and went—not because he was afraid of Sinclair, but because he was rapidly coming to the conclusion that Sinclair had taken too much.

Five minutes later the list of names for the Helmford match had undergone an alteration.

CHAPTER XI.

A BIT OF AN UPROAR.

THE captain's action was undoubtedly justified.

It was bad enough to learn that Sinclair drank whisky in his study, but to hear that he sometimes took a glass just before a match forced Fenton's hand.

He couldn't possibly encourage Sinclair by keeping him in the team. It was simply encouraging him to drink more. Moreover, Fenton's faith in the man had completely vanished. It was quite on the cards that Sinclair would make a hopeless hash of things in the very next match.

So Fenton scratched out his name, and substituted that of Conroy major, of the Ancient House. Conroy major was a prefect, and not at all a bad bat. But he was at his best in House matches. In big fixtures he was inclined to display nervousness, and get himself out in the first over.

However, he was the best available man, since Sinclair was positively out of the question.

It wasn't long before the news travelled. It reached the senior day-room in the Modern House five minutes after the notice was changed. Carlile, of the Sixth, came in full of excitement. The senior day-room was fairly crowded at the moment.

"What's this about Sinclair?" asked Carlile.

"What's what?" said Mills. "He was in his study the last time I saw him."

"He's not playing on Saturday!"

"Not playing!"

"His name's scratched off the list, anyhow," said Carlile. "I've just seen it down in the lobby. Conroy major's playing in his place."

There was a shout.

"Conroy major!" exclaimed Reynolds. "He's no good."

"Of course he isn't!" agreed Carlile. "He won't get a couple of runs! And Sinclair's good for thirty or forty! Fenton must be mad, or something. We'd better find out——"

He broke off, for the door opened, and Sinclair himself came in.

"What's all the excitement about here?" he asked mildly.

He was looking a little flushed, otherwise there was no sign of his recent drinking bout. The other seniors regarded him curiously. Sinclair's calmness hinted that he knew nothing of the change.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Mills curiously.

"Heard what?"

"Conroy major is playing on Saturday, instead of you!"

"Instead of——" Sinclair broke off, and compressed his lips. "Oh," he said slowly. "So that's it, is it? Do you mean to say that Fenton has chucked me out of the team?"

"He's crossed your name off the list, anyhow," said Carlile. "Look here, Sinclair, you know something about this—I can see it on your face! We can't afford to be without you! The team's weak enough, in any case! What's the trouble!"

Sinclair shrugged his shoulders, although his eyes glittered.

"Fenton and I had a bit of a row," he growled. "He came in there, ordering me about, and telling me I was to put in more practice. I'm not going to stand that sort of thing from anybody. Fenton's too high and mighty. I expect he threw me out of the team in a fit of temper."

There was an immediate uproar.

"We won't stand it!" ejaculated Swinton, of the Fifth. "It's a slight on the Modern House! He takes out a Modern House man, and substitutes one of his own. That only leaves four of us in the Eleven. If Sinclair doesn't play, I won't!"

"Neither will I!" declared Mills.

"Same here!" agreed Carlile.

Hitchen, of the Fifth, was the other Modern House fellow in the team, and he instantly joined the others. Unless Sinclair played against Helmford, they would take away their support!

"Wait a minute, though," said Carlile. "We'd better go and ask Fenton first. He may have a good reason—something that we don't know of. Unless he can give us a tip-top reason for leaving Sinclair out, we'll force his hand."

"Hear, hear!"

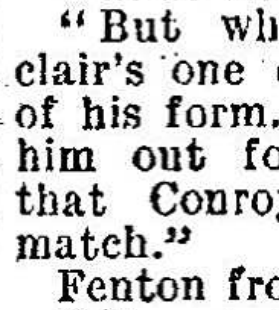
And everybody else in the senior day-room agreed. Sinclair listened to it all, and kept his own counsel. He had an idea that these seniors might change their attitude if they knew the actual truth. A few fellows knew that he indulged in a tot of whisky now and again, but he had never revealed the fact that he needed it before a match. It had slipped out to Fenton in the heat of the moment.

"I'll go and see Fenton," went on Carlile. "No—you'd better not all come."

"I think I'll go with you," said Sinclair. "I'm the man concerned in the whole business, and I'd like to hear what Fenton's got to say."

CHAPTER XII.

FENTON'S DECISION.



CARLILE'S object in going to the skipper was to find out the exact truth. He regarded it as outrageous that the captain should allow his temper to deprive the team of one of its best men.

Sinclair, on the other hand, was anxious to be present at the interview in order to hear Fenton's excuse. If Fenton told the exact truth, the Modern House fellows would probably approve. For cricket was a kind of religion at St. Frank's, and any fellow who treated it lightly was condemned. Hitherto, Sinclair had come in for endless praise. For his confident, forceful batting had stamped him as being a first-class man.

When the pair reached the Ancient House they found Edgar Fenton pacing up and down his study, frowning. He was worried more than ever, but he was convinced that he had taken the right action.

"I say, Fenton, is this true about Sinclair?" asked Carlile abruptly.

"That he's out of the team? Yes."

"But why?" demanded Carlile. "Sinclair's one of our best men—he's at the top of his form. What on earth have you taken him out for? You know as well as I do that Conroy major is no good in a big match."

Fenton frowned.

"I'm captain!" he said coldly. "I'll choose my own team, thank you. If you've got nothing else to say, you'd better go——"

"I'm hanged if I will!" shouted Carlile. "It seems to me, Fenton, that you're in a filthy temper to-night. You've chucked Sinclair out of the team just because you're wild with him. What kind of game do you call that?"

Fenton forced himself to be calm.

"Sinclair has been left out of the team because I don't think he's a fit man to be in it," he said deliberately. "I'm not called upon to give any reasons, Carlile—and I'm not going to stand any dictation from you. We don't want to quarrel, do we? Sinclair's out—and there's an end to it."

"There's nothing more to be said, then," said Sinclair sourly.

"Nothing at all!" agreed Fenton.

Sinclair was relieved. It was clear to him, now, that Fenton was going to act like a gentleman. He had removed Sinclair from the Eleven, but he wasn't going to say why.

"Oh, isn't there anything more to be said!" exclaimed Carlile hotly. "If you think you can chuck our men out of the team, just because you're angry with them, Fenton, you've made a mistake! The Modern House will have something to say about this."

He flung himself out of the room without another word, and Sinclair followed. They hurried off to the Modern House, and found the other seniors waiting eagerly for their return.

"It's no good—he's as obstinate as a mule," said Carlile. "Wouldn't give me any reasons—but simply said that Sinclair was chucked out."

"If we five are left out, the match against Helmford will be a fiasco," went on Carlile. "Fenton knows that. There isn't a man he can put in our places. If we go to him and threaten to stand down unless Sinclair plays, he'll knuckle under."

"Of course, he will—he'll have to," agreed the others.

"He daren't refuse!"

In its own small way, this affair was very similar to a trade dispute. One man was dismissed, and the others were threatening to strike unless he was reinstated! Human nature, after all, is just the same, no matter what walk of life may be involved.

Jacko alighted on the top of Mr. Pycraft's head. In fact, he used Mr. Pycraft's head as a kind of stepping stone.

"That's his rotten temper," said Sinclair.

"It's his rotten nerve!" shouted Mills. "Look here, we've got to do something! With Sinclair out, there's only four Modern House fellows in the team, and seven Ancient House men! That's a rottenly unfair division—particularly as our men are the best!"

"There's no need to get excited!" exclaimed Carlile. "We've got Fenton in the hollow of our hand. He must be mad to provoke us like this! I'm not boasting, but I'm one of the best bowlers in the First Eleven—and, in fact, all of us are better than those Ancient House fellows."

"Hear, hear!"

The four First-Eleven players marched out of the Modern House together. It wasn't necessary for Sinclair to come this time. Carlile, Mills, Swinton, and Hitchin were about the grimmest quartette in St. Frank's. And they were encouraged by the absolute certainty of success. It was more than Fenton dare do to defy them. Once he thoroughly understood that they were in earnest, he would unquestionably give way, and put Sinclair back into the team.

When they got to Fenton's study, they found Morrow and Conroy major also there. They marched in, and for a moment there was an awkward silence. These senior rows were not so noisy as the junior dust-ups.

"What's this?" asked Fenton coldly. "Haven't you fellows simmered down yet? What's the good of making a fuss? I've given you my decision——"

"Then we'll give you ours!" interrupted Carlile tartly. "And remember—we're serious! Are you going to give us a good reason for leaving Sinclair out of the First Eleven?"

Fenton looked at them grimly.

"I'm not giving my reasons to anybody!" he replied.

"In that case, you'd better decide what you're going to do," said Carlile curtly. "Either Sinclair plays against Helmford on Saturday, or we four stand down with him! In other words, we're supporting him in this affair, and mean to get him back! Now then, what's your answer?"

Fenton's eyes literally blazed.

"Here's my answer!" he said thickly, pointing to the door. "Get out!"

"What the——"

"Get out!" thundered Fenton. "Am I captain or not? Understand, once and for all, I won't take dictation from anybody!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW LIST.

CARLILE was rather startled.

"That's no answer!" he retorted. "Are you going to put Sinclair back?"

"No, I'm not!"

"Then we four won't play on Saturday!"

"Then you can do as you like!" replied Fenton, white with anger. "Am I to understand that you absolutely refuse to play?"

"Yes, unless Sinclair——"

"Leave Sinclair out of it!" interrupted the skipper. "As the team now stands, with Conroy major in it, are you fellows going to play?"

"No!" they declared, in one voice.

They waited, fully expecting to see Fenton knuckle under. But Fenton was one of the strongest skippers St. Frank's had ever had. For him to show weakness now would be his undoing. To receive dictation from members of his own team was absolutely impossible.

"All right!" said Fenton quietly. "That's settled."

"Settled?" repeated Carlile, startled.

"You've refused to play, and that's enough—your names come out of the Eleven at once!" said Fenton. "You understand, of course, that your chance of getting your colours has now practically gone. Anything else to say? If not, I'll bid you good-night."

The Modern House fellows were aghast.

"You—you don't mean it?" ejaculated Mills breathlessly. "Look here, Fenton, you can't play Helmford without us——"

"You'll see whether I can or I can't!" interrupted Fenton icily. "As I told you before, I'm not standing any dictation. You fellows have resigned your places, and there's an end of it."

"Why, Helmford will wipe us up!" shouted Carlile.

"Then they'll wipe us up!" said Fenton calmly.

"But it'll be a disgrace——"

"If there's any disgrace attached to the match, everybody will know where to place it," interrupted Fenton. "But why continue this conversation? Thanks for coming and telling me. Again—good-night!"

The four Modern House fellows went out, dazed.

The very opposite to what they had expected had happened. Instead of Fenton giving way, he had been more firm than ever. And now the entire five Modern House men were left out of the Eleven! It was a stupendous thing, and before the evening was out, the whole school rocked with it.

In the Modern House, there was something like a riot. The seniors were up in arms, and there were demands for Fenton's resignation. The juniors got tremendously excited, and Fenton was publicly hooted when he appeared in the Triangle.

Naturally, a great crowd of Ancient House juniors retaliated by cheering Fenton to the echo.

"Nerve!" said Handforth indignantly. "Hooting Fenton! Look here, let's go and smash those Moderns up!"

"Don't do anything rash!" said Nipper. "They're a bit excited—and I don't wonder at it. Goodness knows what the row was about, but Fenton has acted pretty drastically in dropping five of the best men."

"Are you upholding those rotters?" roared Handforth.

"Of course not!" grinned Nipper. "I'd trust Fenton any day—his judgment's always sound. By what I can understand, he only dropped Sinclair. The other four threatened him, and refused to play. He couldn't do anything else but kick them out of the team."

"Of course he couldn't!" agreed Reggie Pitt. "My hat! If four of my men dictated to me, I'd soon act in the same way! A captain can't put up with that sort of thing!"

Pitt was skipper of the juniors, and his position was a proud one. For in the Junior Eleven there were some truly magnificent players. Nipper himself was a wonderful batsman—and there was Jerry Dodd, the Australian—a coming test-match player. And Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn, the Indian junior. Kahn was a new edition of the once celebrated Ranjitsinhji.

The Fourth Form, in fact, had been enjoying victory after victory—they were unbeatable. Reggie Pitt was a good player, but he was a better captain. He handled his men with a fine tact and a fine judgment.

The uproar in the Modern House continued until bed-time. By then it had simmered down a bit, and everybody was saying that Fenton would change his mind on the morrow.

At present the situation was an impossible one. It was out of the question to provide five substitutes for five men like those who had been dropped. And the Helmford match had been in doubt in any case. With substitutes, it would be a mere farce.

Fenton was bound to effect a reconciliation. This was what everybody thought. The school, therefore, was startled the next morning when another list was found on the notice-board. There were five new names—Conroy major, Phillips, Bryant, Frinton and Simms. The other six—all Ancient House fellows—were these: Fenton, Morrow, Wilson, Rees, Browne, and Stevens.

The sensation was now greater than ever.

For the First Eleven was composed entirely of Ancient House seniors. The Modern House wasn't even represented by one player!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SENSATION OF THE SEASON.

"MAD—that's what he is!" exclaimed everybody.

All the Modern House, at all events, considered that Edgar Fenton had made a terrible blunder. The Modern House seniors who had attempted to force the captain's hand were feeling very sick.

They had failed—and, as a result, they were dropped. One of the fellows suggested going to Fenton and effecting a truce. They would allow Sinclair to stand out, and would play just the same.

But Carlile was totally against this proposal. He didn't want to risk the humiliation of refusal. And Carlile, who was a fairly decent sort of fellow, was beginning to realise that he and his companions had decidedly overstepped the mark.

If Fenton had been firm enough to turn them down once, he would be firm enough to turn them down again. Besides, the new Eleven was out, and practically the whole of Friday was spent in practice.

Fenton's worries were greatly intensified. He could rely on seven men to give a fair showing—but even these were by no means first-class. Some of them would undoubtedly fail. As for the substitutes, they would probably make a hopeless hash of things. A big defeat stared St. Frank's in the face.

The juniors, of course, did not take quite the same interest in the matter that the seniors did. First Eleven cricket was a thing apart from the Fourth. And the juniors had plenty to interest them in their own affairs.

For example, on the morrow they were playing the Redcliffe Junior Eleven. And Redcliffe was supposed to be unbeatable this season. The Fourth was just prophesying how Pitt and his men would disillusion the self-confident visitors. Everybody in the Fourth declared that Redcliffe would get the biggest surprise of its career.

The situation, therefore, was rather peculiar.

While the seniors were going about moaning of a coming defeat, the juniors were celebrating their victory before it happened.

But the sensation was an enormous one. For the first time in the history of the school, the First Eleven was being represented by one House alone. Fenton was infuriated by the overbearing attitude of The Modern House, and he was just proving that the duty of a cricket captain is to be firm.

"I'm not sure that you're doing right, old man," said Morrow, on the Friday afternoon. "Wouldn't it be better to patch it up, somehow? I don't agree with Carlile, and those others, of course—the way they came to you last night was intolerable. But it seems such a rotten pity."

"I'm not going to alter the team again, Arthur," said Fenton quietly.

"But there may be a way——"

"There isn't any way at all," went on Fenton. "Besides, if I make another change now, I shall be a laughing stock. I've made up my mind, and I'm going to stick to it."

Morrow looked distressed.

"Some of the fellows are saying that your first duty is to the school—and that personalities ought to be left out of it," he said. "I don't like to hear those sort of things, Edgar. And the way the juniors were hooting you last night, too——"

"Don't take any notice of that—they change like weathercocks," interrupted Fenton. "At the slightest provocation they'll cheer me. It's this way, old man. I dropped Sinclair out of the team for a good reason. If I think a man isn't fit for the team, I can drop him without being jumped on, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"Well, if you were in my place, would you stand a threat like that one last night?" asked Fenton. "The Modern House members of my team refused to play, and they can't blame me for that. They've brought this thing on themselves."

"But it was all because you dropped Sinclair," said Morrow. "Why on earth

can't you tell everybody why you kicked Sinclair out? He's one of the best men ——"

"I know it—but I don't want to get him sacked," said Fenton quietly.

"Sacked?"

"That's what I said," exclaimed Fenton.

"Look here, Arthur, I advise you not to say anything about this——"

"But you can tell me in confidence, surely?"

"Well, perhaps," said Fenton slowly. "But I can't tell everybody else, because they'll talk. Last night I went into Sinclair's study, and found him smoking and drinking. And, when he was in a temper, he admitted that he always drinks whisky before a match."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Morrow.

"To play a man like that is to encourage him in drink," went on Fenton. "What was I to do? What could I do except drop him? And then, when those other fellows demanded his reinstatement, what could I do but remain firm? I tell you, it's a confoundedly awkward situation."

"Edgar, old man, you did the right thing," said Morrow solemnly. "Good heavens, I never suspected Sinclair——"

"Keep it to yourself, of course," interrupted Fenton. "Well, the Modern House has forced this on me, and we're in for a beating. But I'll fight to the last ditch before I include any Modern House fellow in the team again!"

And in this way began a new and unexpected animosity between the seniors of the two Houses at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HELMFORD MATCH.

SATURDAY morning was gloriously fine, and the Modern House, at least, was greatly disappointed. All the seniors had been hoping against hope for a torrential downpour.

For rain would have meant a postponement, and in the interim a truce might have been possible. But fine weather meant a certain match, and a certain defeat.

The juniors, naturally, were interested in their own affairs. They felt rather jealous of the First Eleven in one respect. The First began its matches at 11.30 in the morning, and thus escaped lessons altogether for the day.

But the juniors could not begin until after lunch, and, consequently, their matches were rather rushed.

The Helmford team arrived just before eleven, and the captain was astonished when he heard of the new formation of the St. Frank's team. He could see that his men would have an even easier task than they had anticipated.

It was some consolation, perhaps, when Fenton won the toss. And he and Morrow opened the St. Frank's innings, with Helmford in the field. But the Saints started the game with a conviction that nothing would go right.

The Helmford bowling was excellent, and for the first two or three overs Fenton and Morrow played with caution. They refused to touch anything unless it was a little loose. And at the end of the third over there were only five runs on the score-board.

Gradually, however, Fenton found his best form, and long before the lunch interval he was fairly set, and batting strongly. His confidence was returning now, and he was glad to see that Morrow was shaping well, too.

Strictly speaking, Fenton was a bowler, and everybody had been surprised that he had opened the innings himself. But Fenton was grim. He wanted to give his men confidence—and a first innings stand would mean much.

He was proving the wisdom of his decision, and proving, also, that he was a much better batsman than anybody had supposed. It was just an example of determination and versatility in an emergency.

Morrow was generally slow for the first hour. After that, if he survived, he grew more confident as time went on, until he was almost invulnerable. It was so in this case.

By lunch-time the score stood at 59, and of these Fenton had knocked up 32 off his own bat. For him it was almost a record, and St. Frank's was feeling that defeat might not be their fate, after all. 59—0 were very good figures.

But immediately after lunch there came the first disaster.

Fenton, in hitting a loose ball, was cleverly caught in the slips, and the score was now 59—1. There were crowds of spectators now, for practically all the seniors were watching. Fenton got a cheer from the Ancient House section, but the Modern House fellows were silent.

William Napoleon Browne was the next man in, and a laugh went up as he left the pavilion. There was nothing comical about Browne, but somehow he generally evoked laughter. He walked out to the wicket with a kind of swagger—not intentional, but nevertheless apparent.

And the very first ball he sent away for a boundary. It was a beautiful cut, and the crowd roared. The Helmford bowler knew at once that he was facing a man of style, and after ten minutes he hadn't any doubts left.

For Browne was literally a demon.

There was no stopping him. He used his bat with terrific energy. In many cases he leapt right out of the crease, and met the leather. And never once did he misjudge it and lay himself open to being stumped.

In half an hour Browne hit no less than eight fours, and he and Morrow were settling down to a magnificent stand. The hopes of the St. Frank's seniors were getting higher and higher.

Fenton, in the pavilion, looked on with intense interest.

"Browne's a marvel!" he exclaimed again and again. "I thought the man was good, but I had no idea that he had form like this! He's worth half a dozen ordinary players!"

"Wait until you see him bowling!" said Stevens. "I tell you, Browne's hot stuff! He'll almost make up for those Modern House chaps."

But Fenton shook his head. He felt that Stevens was unduly optimistic. And a few minutes later, when the total stood at 135 for 1, Morrow was clean bowled. He was given a great ovation—and this time many Modern House seniors joined in the applause.

Wilson was the next man in, and Wilson brought disaster.

Browne was set—and seemed certain for his century. He was batting freely, vigorously, with perfect confidence. The Helmford bowlers could do nothing against him.

It was just a piece of bad luck that Browne had the misfortune to be run out—bad luck combined with Wilson's bad judgment. For Wilson, after hitting a single—or what seemed to be a single—ran down the crease and yelled for Browne to run.

Wilson was half-way down the pitch, and at the same moment a fieldsman threw in the ball. It missed the wicket, and shot away. And Wilson ran on.

Browne was compelled to run, and he deemed there was little risk in it, since it was almost impossible for a fieldsman to get the ball in time. But one of the Helmford team did it. His throw-in was perfect. It shattered the wicket just a second before Browne reached the crease.

"How's that?"

"Out!" said the umpire promptly.

And from that point the collapse commenced.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DISASTER.

REES joined Wilson, after Browne had received the biggest ovation of the day; and for five or ten minutes the cricket was very slow, for neither Rees nor Wilson took any risks.

"Hard luck, old man!" said Stevens, when Browne joined him, after removing his pads.

"A somewhat blistered affair, Brother Stevens, but no matter," said Browne lightly. "We must accept these tragedies in good spirit. The fortunes of war. Even Napoleon himself cannot always conquer."

"Wilson was a born idiot to run like that," growled Stevens.

"I agree, Brother Horace, that Brother Wilson was somewhat rash," admitted Browne. "But do not deal harshly with him. He acted with the best intentions, for was he not striving manfully to break his duck? And is he not striving still to obtain that great achievement? Alas! I fear not! Correct me if I am wrong, Brother Stevens, but do I perceive Brother Wilson's wicket in sections, or is it an optical illusion?"

"The ass is bowled!" said Stevens, with a snort.

"Alack, I thought as much!" sighed Browne. "I may even say that I thought much more, but let us give the returning warrior a friendly cheer. Doubtless he is feeling exhausted in the marrows."

Stevens himself was the next man, and he had the misfortune to return his very first ball back to the bowler, and he was back by Browne's side in less than five minutes.

"Very neat, Brother Stevens—very neat!" commented Browne. "How do you manage these deft little touches?"

"I was deceived by that rotten ball!" said Stevens indignantly. "I thought it was going to break to leg, and it——"

"Say no more!" interrupted Browne. "I suffered the same thing myself, only my wonderful eye detected the ruse. But what is this? I fear, Brother Stevens, that Brother Conroy is looking somewhat pale."

It is idle to enumerate the tragedies which followed. The St. Frank's team fairly collapsed. Man after man went in, and man after man came out. It was just a procession.

Browne's dismissal had been the signal for a general debacle. While the score had stood at 135 for 1, it had climbed no higher than 162 when the last man was out. The early promise was not fulfilled, and the St. Frank's total was by no means formidable.

Helmford proved this when they went in. Their batsmen were splendid. The bowlers could do nothing against them, and there was a perfect understanding between the opening pair. The way they stole singles was most exasperating, and the St. Frank's fielding was none too good.

Even Browne, with all his skill, could not dismiss the batsmen. He undoubtedly kept down the scoring, for the batsmen were reluctant to take any chances with Browne's deliveries. But from the other bowlers they scored rapidly.

Helmford had full command of the match well before tea-time, when their score stood at 118 for 3. After the short interval, they got to work harder than ever, and knocked up the runs with consistent ease and skill.

In less than an hour the match was over, and Helmford had won by the comfortable margin of five wickets. It was not such

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.

No. 27—Harry Dawson.

A weak-willed young gentleman of a particularly lazy disposition. Always in trouble with his Form-master, and too slow to be of much use to Willy Handforth. Just one of the "crowd."

a heavy defeat as everybody had predicted, but it was bad enough.

"A sad, sad occasion, but we must not be downhearted," observed Browne. "We may truthfully term this the end of an imperfect day. However, there are other days, Brother Stevens, and the season is yet young and sprightly."

"All the same, it's rotten, being whacked on our own ground," said Stevens, with a grunt. "I'm sorry for old Fenton."

Naturally, the Modern House seniors were full of triumph. If only they had played, instead of the "duds," St. Frank's would almost certainly have won.

Why, with Sinclair and Carlile to help the batting, the result would have been a foregone conclusion. Nobody had suspected Browne of such prowess, and with the whole team working together, Helmford would have gone down.

Fenton himself was thinking this now.

He was miserable. After the Helmford crowd had gone, and Big Side was empty, he mooched about with his hands in his pockets, thinking things out. The team had done so well with the duffers that Fenton was convinced that they could have won with the normal eleven.

Was he doing right? Wouldn't it be better to effect a truce? No matter how much practice Conroy major and the rest got, they wouldn't equal the five Modern House men.

And Fenton could see a whole season of disasters in front of him.

And yet, at the same time, he was convinced that he had done the right thing. After what he had learned about Sinclair, he couldn't replace him in the team. And without Sinclair, the others wouldn't come. It was a dilemma.

And while Fenton was deep in thought, Browne joined him.

CHAPTER XVII.

BROWNE'S STARTLING SUGGESTION.

"PARDON me if I have made a mistake, Brother Fenton, but do I perceive the signs of old age creeping over you?" asked Browne with concern.

Fenton turned.

"Sorry, old man, but I don't feel much like conversation now," he said. "Congratulations on your splendid work. I don't think I've said much about it before. You were great."

Browne shrugged his shoulders.

"Why mention such trifles?" he asked. "My only regret is that Helmford should have been allowed to depart with even the single leaf of a laurel. Between ourselves and the daisies, Brother Fenton, it seems a wicked shame that we should have lost the match with so much material at our disposal—I might even say, with so much material waiting to be grabbed and put into action."

"You mean those Modern House men?" growled Fenton.

"On the contrary, Brother Fenton—on the contrary," said Browne. "Who am I to discuss that affair with you? Although, if you must have my opinion—I give it entirely at your own request—I consider you treated Sinclair and his satellites with the exact stuff. To be somewhat coarse, you gave them the push. A bold, forceful move."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Fenton.

"No? Am I so involved in my conversational abilities?" asked Browne, pained. "Let us change the subject, Brother Fenton. Perceive the youth of our great school disporting itself upon the green. Am I not correct in saying that much adroitness is being displayed?"

They had wandered close to Little Side, and here there was intense excitement. The ropes were crowded with juniors, for the Redcliffe match was not yet over.

At the moment Jerry Dodd and Hussi Kahn were batting, and they were doing practically as they liked with the Redcliffe bowling. The roars of delight which went up from the crowd echoed and re-echoed on the still evening air.

Nipper had lately concluded a sensational innings. He had made 75, and his innings throughout had been faultless. Browne had watched for some time with the keenest interest.

To be exact, the Redcliffe junior eleven was being nothing more nor less than wiped up. Their bowlers were in a bad way—indeed, desperate. No matter how they worked, it seemed impossible to dismiss these tremendous batsmen.

Fenton, who hadn't given a thought to the junior cricket, now looked on in an abstracted fashion. But after a few minutes his attention became fixed, and he found himself taking keen interest.

There seemed little to choose between the Australian junior and the Indian. They were both batting with confidence, skill, and forcefulness. Every stroke they made was perfect. It was a keen delight to watch them. It was school cricket at its best.

The Redcliffe bowlers were no mean exponents of the game, either. They were men whom Redcliffe were proud of—bowlers who were the terror of most elevens. But Nipper and Jerry Dodd and Hussi Kahn liked it, and asked for more.

Reggie Pitt, too, had done well, and even Handforth had knocked up a swift 25 in record time. Edward Oswald always batted at express speed, as though there was some desperate haste. His policy was to hit out with all his strength, and he had no use for caution. Consequently, the great Handforth was not a perfect player.

But Jerry Dodd and Hussi Kahn were. They never gave the field a chance. Their placing was superb. It really seemed as though they were batting against weak, incompetent bowlers, so splendid was their display.

"Somewhat edifying, shall we say, Brother Fenton?" asked Browne at length. "Without exaggeration, I think I may say that I have seldom witnessed such great doings."

"They're certainly good," agreed Fenton. "By Jove! Look at that stroke! Perfect - perfect! A boundary, Browne—a boundary!"

"As you say, Brother Fenton, a boundary—and by no means the first in this remarkable game," said Browne. "Which, I take it, leads us to our original point of conversation. You may remember, some short while ago, that I referred to a certain amount of material which was waiting to be grabbed. You are now gazing upon it, Brother Fenton."

Fenton looked at Browne rather queerly.

Browne received the biggest ovation of the day.

"These juniors?" he asked. "You don't mean——"

"Your brain is evidently working at its normal pressure again," said Browne, nodding. "Why, oh, why—I ask you—do you include such pitiful specimens of humanity in your team when there are these brave stalwarts ready and eager to do your bidding?"

Fenton laughed.

"My dear fellow, you're talking nonsense!" he exclaimed. "These boys are juniors—they can't be included in the first eleven."

William Napoleon Browne sighed.

"And why, brother?" he asked, as though he were putting a riddle. "Why? If you will answer me that pert and concise question, I shall for ever be your humble and obedient servant."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROWNE EXPLAINS.

EDGAR FENTON frowned slightly.

"Why?" he repeated. "But the question's impossible, Browne. You know as well as I do that the juniors play their own games—they have their own fixtures.

Besides, we never accept juniors for the first eleven."

Browne thoughtfully flicked a fly off his blazer.

"And yet," he murmured, "there are many great public schools in our domain which have a more fitting system. Do not imagine for a moment that I am casting aspersions upon the system at St. Frank's. At the same time, I may say, in passing, that it is the most benighted and blistered system of school cricket which it has ever been my misfortune to encounter."

"Look here, you idiot——"

"A moment, Brother Fenton—a moment," urged Browne. "Hear me out! It may cause you some pain, and it may end up in a gory battle in full view of the entire school. But no matter. Let us discuss this system. Let us expound upon its merits. This, I assure you, will be a brief task, since it has no merits whatever. The subject is thus dismissed——"

"My dear fellow——"

"To proceed, let us now expound upon its more blighted aspects," continued Browne. "For I can assure you, Brother Fenton, that the whole system is not only blighted, but little short of cankerous. Do not imagine that I am attempting to criticise—far from it——"

"Not at all!" interrupted Fenton tartly. "You're only telling me that our system of cricket is rotten to the core."

"I am wounded that you should think such base things of me," said Browne. "However, at the same time, I must admit that you have tapped the nail somewhat accurately upon the head. I am not going too far in saying, Brother Fenton, that unless you effect a rapid change, you will blot your copy-book irretrievably this season."

"Blot my copy-book?" echoed Fenton, staring.

"A mere metaphor, Brother Fenton—but no doubt you gather my meaning," said the loquacious Fifth-Former. "Try, for a moment, to concentrate. It will be hard, I know, but do your best. We do not all possess brains like mine. I am not blaming you—Nature is very uneven in her distribution of gifts. However, to proceed. We will take this cricket system, and gently but firmly tear it to shreds."

"All right—go on!" said Fenton, resigned at last.

"For example, take the first eleven," said Browne. "Here we have a team composed of two Forms—the Fifth and the Sixth. An excellent arrangement, I will admit, since it allows of my own inclusion. At the same time, I must press the point that all is not right. The first eleven comes near to the ideal, but the rest of the school is in a sad way."

"It doesn't look like it," said Fenton, nodding towards the juniors.

"I fear you misunderstand me," said Browne. "But a little further persistence may possibly effect a change. Having dismissed the first eleven we will now go down the scale, and we arrive with a thud upon the next point. The junior eleven, I believe, is composed entirely of the Fourth Form?"

"That's right."

"And what comes after the junior eleven?"

"There isn't one, strictly speaking," said Fenton. "The Third-Formers have some games of their own, but I don't know what they are. More or less farcical, I believe—sometimes with only eight or nine men a-side. There's no telling what the fags get up to."

"Fags," agreed Browne, "are remarkable creatures. I am living in dread of the day when I shall arrive in the Sixth—for then, in order to keep in fashion, I must necessarily take a fag unto myself. But I fear we are digressing. Let us stick to the point, Brother Fenton. That is the cry. Let us, I urge you, stick to the point."

"I can't see the point yet," said Fenton, grinning.

Browne had restored his good humour completely.

"Then let me explain all," said Browne. "You have admitted, although you may not perhaps be aware of it, that your cricket system is no good. For there are only two elevens at St. Frank's, the first eleven and the junior eleven. The former is made up of two different Forms, whilst the latter must needs claim its talent from only one. I will admit that there are House elevens, and so forth, but these are trivial. We are speaking of greater things, brother—we are discussing the representative teams of our great and glorious school."

"What exactly are you getting at?" asked Fenton bluntly.

"A straight question, and I can do nothing but give a straight answer," said Browne. "Other big schools, more enlightened, select their teams upon a different plan. It is high time that St. Frank's fell into line, and allowed its cricketers to have a fair chance."

"But——"

"Listen!" interrupted Browne. "Listen carefully, Brother Fenton, and you will hear many wise things. The First Eleven should consist of all the picked players of the school. What does it matter where they come from? Irrespective of Form or age, the First Eleven should have the best. Then there should be a Second Eleven—where the lesser lights disport themselves, and from whose number the First can borrow a player as the occasion demands. Lastly, there should be a Third Eleven for the smaller fry to pass their elementary stages. That, in a nutshell, is the scheme."

CHAPTER XIX.

FENTON MAKES UP HIS MIND.

"OF course, there's something in what you say," said Fenton, after a short pause. "I dare say we could maintain three representative Elevens at St. Frank's, Browne——"

"My dear man, there's not a doubt of it," declared Browne. "Before you pass any comments, let me go into a few further details. My suggestion in your present difficulty is this. Mind you, I am putting this forward entirely for your own benefit—free, gratis, and for nothing. The amazing Browne Organising Service is entirely at your disposal. Once tried, never forgotten! Success! That is the watchword, Brother Fenton!"

"Well, what's the suggestion?" smiled Fenton.

"Ah, yes, the suggestion," beamed Browne. "What a fellow you are, Brother Fenton, for brevity! Stop me if I seem inclined to wander off at a tangent. I will admit it is one of my little failings. But now, the suggestion—— Gadso! Did you see that, Brother Fenton? Over the roof, mark you—over the roof!"

"A terrific hit!" said Fenton enthusiastically.

It had been one of Jerry Dodd's—a superb drive, which sent 6 up on the board. The juniors were cheering themselves hoarse. The incident gave Browne an opening for his next remark.

"I ask you," he said solemnly. "I ask you, as man to man, what chance has that stalwart of ever gaining public school fame? Playing for a Junior Eleven—he has already reached the high-water-mark possible under this present half-baked system. Will these master-players as juniors ever figure in a St. Frank's versus M.C.C. match? Will they ever take part in a St. Frank's versus Old Boys match? Never—if the old order continues! But certainly, if you reveal that soundness of judgment I give you full credit for, Brother Fenton."

"There's something in it," admitted Fenton, becoming serious. "It is a bit of a pity that we can't play these juniors—they're altogether out of their class. As you say, they'll never figure in an M.C.C. match until they're out of the junior school——"

"And by that time their form will be lost," sighed Browne. "A sad, sad prospect, brother! The time is now! While they are making history, it is for you to seize them firmly by the throttle, and push them with considerable vim into the bosom of your team."

"But—but they're juniors!"

"And what of it?" demanded Browne. "What, if I may ask, the thunder does that matter? My contention is that our talent should be picked according to its merits. If a Sixth-Former is inclined to be wonky on the wicket, then let him be placed, in spite of all his protests, in the Third Eleven, there to mingle with mere juniors. If a Fourth-Former displays wondrous prowess—as we are now witnessing—then by all means let him be levered into the First Eleven. You see my point, Brother Fenton? Merit! That is the watchword. Make up your First Eleven according to merit! And instead of selecting your players from the senior school, search the entire contingent for the necessary material. Do that, and your troubles are over. For I can safely assure you that the Fourth contains a sufficient number of first-class players to fully compensate for the loss of Sinclair, Carlile, and the various other blisters of the Modern House!"

Fenton started.

"By Jove!" he said under his breath. "And these juniors are Ancient House fellows, too!"

Browne's suggestion rather took his breath away. Often enough he had watched the juniors playing, and had regretted his inability to use them. The question of age really did not matter. There were fellows in the Junior Eleven who were not needed there. The Fourth had plenty of good players to beat other junior elevens without these tip-toppers.

"Action!" said Browne. "That, Brother Fenton, is the cry! Do not shelve this matter, and continue in the old rut. Get a move on—show some speed. In other words, and to put it bluntly, do it now! I am always at your elbow to advise and instruct! Let there be three representative elevens. Shall we say, for example, that you are captain of the First? Naturally, your first inclination is to present this honour to myself, but I will waive the point entirely. The Second Eleven will be controlled, surely, by that sturdy sportsman, Reginald Pitt? He is now skipper of the juniors, and to blossom forth as captain of a real second eleven would be a decided rise in the social scale. As for the Third Eleven, this could doubtless be formed of the riff-raff."

"Not Third-Formers?"

"Certainly not!" replied Browne. "Do not mistake me! When I say Third Eleven I mean an eleven composed of third-class talent—a kind of C 3 affair. There will doubtless be Third-Formers in the team, but there will also be Fourth-Formers, and probably a man or two from the Fifth. The whole point, as I keep on insisting, is this—merit! Choose your teams by merit, and no matter what sections of the school may be represented."

Fenton took a deep breath.

"Browne, I believe you've hit the thing on the head!" he exclaimed tensely. "By Jove, I've half a mind to try it!"

William Napoleon Browne beamed.

"While admiring your intelligence, may I point out that your enthusiasm does not seem to be over exuberant," he said gently.

"Half a mind is of very little use in such a vital question. Remember Uxton! Uxton next to St. Frank's, the finest public school in England. I make no claims of originality—I have merely been telling you the cricket system of Uxton! It is, indeed, the cricket system of many great schools."

"I've thought of this before—and you're right, Browne," said Fenton, his imagination stirred. "By Jove, yes! We'll play these Fourth-Formers! And I'll call a cricket meeting of all sections of the school, and face the whole thing out! We'll form our three representative Elevens, appoint our captains, and then go ahead!"

Browne sighed happily.

"Peace!" he breathed. "My cup of joy is brimming!"

CHAPTER XX.

A SURPRISE FOR FULLWOOD & CO.

NOTHING was said that night.

Neither Fenton nor Browne breathed a word about the proposed drastic change in the school's cricket. But everybody had quite enough to discuss without this.

The seniors were full up with the Helmford match. In the Modern House there was a bitter grievance. If only the five Modern House fellows had been played victory would have been certain! In the Ancient House, the seniors were more and more inclined to approve of Fenton's strong action. The Modern House men had refused to play—and they had got their deserts.

It was different with the juniors. There was no need for criticism. Reggie Pitt's Eleven had trounced the hitherto unbeaten Redcliffe in no uncertain manner. The Redcliffians had gone home, metaphorically speaking, with their tails between their legs. They had never received such a licking in all their experience. And, naturally, the juniors celebrated.

Even Fullwood & Co., who took no interest in cricket whatever, seized upon the occasion as an excuse for a celebration of their own peculiar kind. Just before bed-time they made a whispered arrangement to arise at the dread hour of eleven, to steal forth, and to make merry in a certain hostelry known as the White Harp.

Nipper, crossing the Triangle just before bed-time, happened to catch sight of the Nuts prowling about the bicycle-shed. And Nipper, who knew Fullwood & Co's habits of old, suspected things.

"I believe those cads are planning to break bounds to-night," he confided to Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, when he went indoors. "Anyhow, I'll keep my eyes open—and I've got a little plan, too!"

Nipper didn't usually appoint himself guardian for Fullwood & Co. It wasn't his business if they risked expulsion by breaking bounds after lights-out. At the same time, he considered that a little lesson wouldn't do them any harm.

And so, at eleven o'clock, when Fullwood crept out of bed in the Fourth-Form dormitory, Nipper awoke on the instant. He was an exceedingly light sleeper, and had the knack of arousing himself at the slightest unusual sound.

Lying in bed, he observed Fullwood & Co. quietly dressing. It was a calm, warm night, but very dark. Clouds obscured the sky, and there was no moon. Nipper could only just see the shadowy forms of the Nuts as they prepared for their visit to the rustic night club.

They crept out at last, and then Nipper sprang into activity. He leapt out of bed, pushed his feet into his slippers, and whisked his dressing-gown round him. Then he dived for the nearest window, and climbed through.

He had placed a rope out there in readiness, and in next to no time he was in the Triangle. He reached the shrubbery long before Fullwood & Co. emerged from the window of their study.

Nipper chuckled to himself.

He was rather enjoying this little adventure. Fullwood & Co. had been fairly normal this term, but it seemed that they were beginning their old tricks. And if only they received a good, healthy scare, they would probably think twice before indulging in further escapades.

They appeared at last, creeping like shadows towards the bicycle-shed. And at this point Nipper emerged from the shadow of the shrubbery. He was almost invisible in the gloom. Certainly, the Nuts would never be able to recognise him. At the most, they could see a blurred form.

"Stop!" exclaimed Nipper sharply. "Who's that?"

Fullwood & Co. halted in their tracks, frozen.

"By gad! Stokes!" gasped Fullwood.

He and his companions were taken utterly by surprise. The voice that commanded them to stop was undoubtedly the voice of Mr. Beverley Stokes. The cads of Study A shivered at the knees.

"Quick! Let's bolt!" breathed Gulliver. "He can't spot us in this darkness——"

"Yes, let's make a bunk for it!" panted Bell.

But "Mr. Stokes" had approached rapidly, and stood indistinctly near by.

"Ah, Fullwood, Gulliver, and Bell!" he exclaimed grimly. "Boys, what is the meaning of this? What are you doing out of your dormitories at such an hour?"

Fullwood & Co. were speechless. The dazzling light from an electric-torch had played upon them, revealing their features with startling distinctness. But behind that point of light they could see nothing; but the voice was unmistakable. Their hearts sank like lead.

It was a grave offence to break bounds after lights-out, unless one had the very best of reasons. Fullwood & Co's reasons could hardly be described as worthy ones.

They were caught red-handed by their own Housemaster!

CHAPTER XXI.

GETTING OFF LIGHTLY!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD recovered some of his nerve.

True, it was an ordeal to stand there, in the full glare of that torch-light. Flight was now obviously useless. Indeed, it would only make the situation worse.

Mr. Stokes remained invisible. The Nuts had only been obeying a voice. They could see that dazzling point of light, but nothing beyond it. Never for a second did they suspect an inkling of the truth.

Nipper was enjoying himself hugely. He knew that there was a certain amount of risk attached to the affair, for he himself might be spotted by a master. But it was worth risking for the sheer enjoyment of it.

"I am waiting!" came Mr. Stokes' voice, full of that quiet grimness which it always contained upon such occasions. "Do you realise, young men, that you are breaking one of the school's most stringent rules? I fear that it will be my duty to report this incident to the Headmaster! Expulsion is the only adequate punishment——"

"Please sir!" gasped Fullwood. "We've got a good reason!"

"Yes, rather, sir!" babbled Gulliver.

"A good reason?" repeated Nipper, still speaking in the same tones. "Is that so? I'm afraid that I may not regard it in the same light. But proceed. Let me hear this reason. And I advise you to make haste, for there is a possibility that the Head himself will be aroused."

"We—we were goin' down to the village to see somebody, sir," said Fullwood, racking his brain for some plausible explanation.

"Somebody?" repeated Nipper curtly.

"Yes, sir."

"In the village?"

"Yes, sir."

"The landlord of the White Hart?"

"Yes, sir. I—I mean, no, sir!" gasped Fullwood desperately. "There's—there's somebody ill over by Holt's Farm. We—we thought we'd pop down an' see if we could do anythin'."

"Yes, we were sorry for him, sir," said Bell, taking his cue. "There—there was some talk of him dyin' to-night, an'—an'——"

"What is this man's name?" asked Nipper sharply.

"Tom Belcher!" said Fullwood.

"Joe Catchpole, sir!" said Gulliver, in the same breath.

There was a short, tense silence.

"Very interesting!" said Mr. Stokes, from behind the light. "So the poor fellow has two names? Or is it possible that there are two patients?"

"Gulliver's wrong, sir!" said Fullwood, longing to give Gulliver a punch, but not daring to in that light. "It isn't Joe Catchpole who's ill, but one of his mates——"

"You have already lied sufficiently, Fullwood!" interrupted Nipper grimly. "I am well aware that both Joe Catchpole and Tom Belcher are in perfect health, having met them this evening. You have not improved the situation by these deliberate falsehoods."

The Nuts were miserably silent.

"Upon second thoughts, I will deal with this affair personally!" went on Nipper, his voice hard and cold. "Go back to your beds at once! And each of you will write me one thousand lines, and deliver them into my hands within two days! Go!"

"Thank—thank you, sir!" gasped the Nuts dizzily.

The way they streaked back to the Ancient House made Nipper chuckle with huge amusement. He had expected the practical joke to pan out well, but he had hardly hoped for such success as this.

Fullwood & Co. re-entering their study window, were almost breathless with relief. A thousand lines! A heavy imposition, but a trifle compared to expulsion. In their relief they even found it in their hearts to refer to Mr. Stokes in kindly terms.

Nipper decided that he would say nothing. He had prevented the Nuts breaking bounds, and it would be rather a neat scheme to keep them busy for the next two days. And he wondered what Mr. Stokes would say later on, when they all took in their lines. But he wouldn't let it come to this, Nipper concluded. Mr. Stokes might ask awkward questions, and Fullwood & Co. would inadvertently reveal the truth. No, Nipper would go and whisper the truth to them during the last lap.

And so, feeling thoroughly satisfied with his work, Nipper prepared to return. He would have to be cautious. Fullwood & Co. would hardly be asleep yet, and if they saw him climbing through the window they might suspect things.

So he waited near the wall, deciding to give the Nuts five minutes to get settled down. And during the ensuing minutes Nipper lounged there, thinking of many things.

He was just about to climb the rope when he became fixed. A dim, shadowy form was moving out from the Ancient House into the Triangle. It was silent and indistinct.

Who was this new prowler?

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.

No. 28.—Jimmy Hope.

Throughout the Third, he is known as a fathead. Always untidy, always late, and always in trouble. A pal of Freddy Mason and Edgar Button, and just about the same "mark."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ADVENTURE IN BELLTON WOOD.

NIPPER moved out quickly.

At the first glance he could see that the newcomer was a mere boy—quite a small junior, in fact. He was evidently up to the same kind of trick as Fullwood had been. Nipper flashed his light on, and centred the white glare upon the figure.

"Halt!" he commanded. "What are you doing—— Well, I'm jiggered!"

The newcomer was no less a person than Willy Handforth of the Third! Nipper was startled. Willy was about the last person he had expected to see. For Willy was a thoroughly decent sort, and not addicted to the habit of prowling off after lights-out.

"Oh, hallo, sir!" said Willy, with amazing coolness. "Lovely night, sir! Just taking a stroll?"

"What—what are you doing out here, Handforth minor?" asked Nipper.

"Me, sir? Oh, just strolling round!" said Willy. "It's a bit late, I know, but you needn't worry about that. I've heard that a good walk before turning in is jolly beneficial."

Nipper switched off his light and chuckled.

"You young bounder!" he whispered.

"Great pip! Nipper!" gasped Willy. "You—you awful spoofer! I thought you were old Barry Stokes. How the dickens did you wangle your voice like that?"

"What are you doing out here?" asked Nipper curiously.

"I'd give a term's pocket-money to imitate old Barry's voice like that," went on Willy. "Jolly useful when you're in a corner. But about being out here—if it comes to that, what are you doing? It seems to me we've caught one another on the hop!"

Nipper briefly explained his own little jape.

"Jolly good!" said Willy approvingly. "I shall have to remember that; I can use it in a different form on some of the chaps in the Third! And now about me, eh? Don't get scared. I'm not off to meet a bookie!"

"You young ass!" grinned Nipper. "I know that well enough!"

Willy, in turn, explained things. He gave an account of his chase after Marmaduke during the evening. Then he told Nipper what he had seen in Bellton Wood. And as Nipper listened he grew more and more sceptical.

"A trap-door—in the earth?" he repeated. "Indians? My dear kid, you've been dreaming!"

Willy gave a snort of disgust.

"I knew it!" he said tartly. "That's the only reason I kept it to myself. I knew I couldn't get anybody to believe the yarn. So I decided to sneak out after everybody was asleep, and have a look for myself. There's something fishy about this business."

"You're absolutely sure you saw what you say?"

"Certain!"

Nipper considered. After all, Willy wasn't an imaginative junior, neither was he prone to see a trivial thing, and exaggerate it into a big one. As a rule, his judgment was sound.

"But Indians!" protested Nipper. "I'll tell you what, Willy—I'll come along with you, and we'll both examine the clearing together. How's that?"

"Fine!" said the fag promptly.

"As far as I know, the only Indians in this district are Hussi Kahn and his brother," said Nipper. "But Goolah Kahn, the Rajah of Kurpana, is a jolly decent sort."

"I've been thinking about the rajah, too," said Willy. "It's my belief that these men are enemies of his. Perhaps they want

to get him out of the way, so that some other rotter can pinch his throne! You never know with these Indians—they're a murderous lot!"

Nipper grinned.

"You've been reading some highly-coloured romances, my lad!" he chuckled. "At the same time, I'll admit you've got every reason to be suspicious—if you actually saw that thing in the wood."

They got over the school wall, and made their way into Bellton Wood by the shortest cut. Willy was confident that he knew the exact clearing, even in the darkness.

Fortunately, the wood was familiar to them in every detail. Owing to their many rambles, the juniors knew each clearing by heart, and its exact location. When Willy led the way into the particular one, he knew that he had made no blunder.

But there was nothing mysterious here. The clearing was empty and deserted. It was just the same as it had always been. Except for the sounds of one or two night creatures, the wood was silent.

And a most vigorous search failed to reveal any trace of the extraordinary earth door which Willy Handforth had seen from the tree top. It was hardly surprising that Nipper became sceptical.

"You must have dreamed it, Willy!" he murmured, at length.

"I've been waiting for that," growled Willy. "But you're wrong. I'm not the kind of idiot to imagine things——"

He broke off, for at that moment there came a sound within four feet of them. Instantaneously, they dropped behind a little bush, and lay flat against the ground.

The sound had been caused by something in the earth—a kind of mysterious thudding noise. And the next moment, Nipper and Willy saw a great slab of the grassy bank rise upwards—exactly as Willy had seen earlier.

And from the opening came four figures. It was almost impossible to distinguish their features in the thick gloom, but they were obviously Indians—for they were conversing in their own tongue.

And, most startling of all, one of the Indians was Goolah Kahn, the Rajah of Kurpana!

CHAPTER XXIII.

HANDFORTH BRINGS THE NEWS.

NELSON LEE stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"I will admit, Nipper, that the affair is most unusual—indeed, singular in the extreme," he said slowly. "You say that nobody knows of it except Willy Handforth and yourself?"

"That's right, sir," said Nipper.

"Take my advice, Nipper, and attempt no theories," interrupted Nelson Lee. "On the face of it, the circumstances seem suspicious."

"I can rely on your discretion, I know, but do you think that Willy will keep quiet?" asked Lee. "It will be a pity if he talks to his Third Form companions. We don't want a story of that kind to be handed round the school."

"Willy's given me his promise to keep mum, sir, and that's good enough," replied Nipper. "We're both at sea, and we know that nobody would believe us if we said anything. But I thought it just as well to tell you."

It was Sunday afternoon—the quiet hour just before tea, when most of the fellows were out for a sedate walk, or reading in their studies. Nipper had taken the opportunity to have a few words with his celebrated governor.

He had explained what had happened the previous night. The Indians, it seemed, had taken leave of Hussi Kahn's brother in the clearing. And while the rajah had made off through the wood, the three mysterious Indians had re-entered the tunnel, and had closed the earth door. Nipper and Willy, examining the spot immediately after, had failed to find any trace of the remarkable door.

"What I can't make out," went on Nipper, "is why the rajah was there. Is

it possible, guv'nor, that he's mixed up in some fishy business? By what I could see, he was quite friendly with these Indian chaps——"

"Take my advice, Nipper, and attempt no theories," interrupted Nelson Lee. "On the face of it, the circumstances seem suspicious. But you mustn't always judge by appearances. As far as my personal knowledge goes, the rajah is a thoroughly decent, clean sort of fellow. He has just come down from Oxford, his record there is unimpeachable, and his cricket activities do him great credit."

Nelson Lee was quite right. The young rajah was staying at St. Frank's of his own free will. Being an Old Boy, he was and perhaps you and I may be able to make some personal investigations. But for the next few days let the affair rest—and urge Handforth minor to keep his own counsel."

And so the singular mystery of Bellton Wood was shelved.

Certainly, Nipper had little opportunity of thinking about it, for that very Sunday evening the full force of Fenton's cricket sensation was let loose upon the school.

During the evening Edward Oswald Handforth seemed to go insane. At least, he displayed every sign of insanity. He rushed down one of the corridors, yelling at the top of his voice, and making a tremendous din.

"Handforth! Stop that noise at once!"

naturally welcomed, particularly as he had offered his services as cricket coach. Just now the First Eleven could do with an expert.

It was altogether a surprise to find that Goolah Kahn was mixed up in any mysterious business. But Nelson Lee knew that Nipper would not bring him such a story unless it was absolutely true.

"Then we're to do nothing, sir?" asked Nipper.

"For the present, that is my suggestion," said Nelson Lee. "I shall certainly look into this affair as soon as possible, Nipper,

Handforth ran right into the arms of Mr. Beverley Stokes, and the House-master was rather shocked.

"Good gracious, Handforth, do you realise that this is the Sabbath?" demanded Mr. Stokes. "What are you shouting like that for? I don't object to a little exuberance now and again, but this——"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Handforth. "But I've just seen a notice on the board."

"And do notices generally affect you in this way?"

"It's about the cricket, sir."

"That is no excuse, you young ass!"

snorted Mr. Stokes. "Write me a hundred lines for disturbing the peace of the evening! And don't let me hear you again!"

Handforth rushed off, yelling just as hard as ever. And if Mr. Stokes thought that he could quell the noise, he was an optimist. For in about three minutes the entire Lower School was creating pandemonium. No master had enough pluck to attempt any sortie.

Handforth reached the Junior Common-room, and burst in. The room was crowded.

"Heard the news?" gasped Handforth excitedly.

"Great Scott! What's the matter?" asked a dozen voices.

"Some of our chaps are down on the list to play in the First Eleven!" shouted Handforth breathlessly. "They've got to be out at the nets at half-past five to-morrow, for practice!"

And then the excitement really began.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ABSOLUTELY TRUE.

THE Fourth simply wouldn't believe it.

"Rot!" said Cecil de Valerie. "Juniors playing for the First? I'll admit it's a good idea, but Fenton hasn't got enough sense to do it!"

"No fear!"

"I tell you the notice is on the board!" roared Handforth. "Nipper, Dodd, and Kahn have got to turn out! And there's going to be an entire re-arrangement of the Elevens!"

"You're kidding!"

"You read the notice wrong!"

"Of course he has!"

"All right, go and read it for yourselves!" snorted Handforth. "It's a fearful nerve, now I come to think of it! Why isn't my name down on the list to play for the First? It's only just struck me! I shall have to go and see Fenton and ask him what the dickens he means."

Nobody took any further notice of Edward Oswald. There was a general crush to the door, for all the fellows wanted to go and have a look at the notice board with their own eyes.

And they were soon convinced.

There it was, as clear as daylight, and signed by Edgar Fenton:

"CRICKET NOTICE.

"IMPORTANT!—The following will turn out at 5-30 to-morrow, Monday morning, for practice for the First Eleven:—Morrow, Wilson, Rees, Conroy major, Browne, Stevens, Hodder, Hamilton, Kahn, Dodd, Pitt, Boots, Christine.

"An immediate change of policy regarding cricket is proposed, and a further announcement on this subject will be made at the earliest moment.

"EDGAR FENTON (Captain)."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Reggie Pitt. "I'm down, too!"

"And so is Christine—and Boots, too!" said Nipper.

"You're not there, Nipper!" exclaimed somebody. "Handy told us that you were down——"

"So I am," said Nipper. "There's my name—Hamilton."

"By jove, so it is!"

Everybody was tremendously excited, and in the midst of it all Edgar Fenton himself came along, accompanied by William Napoleon Browne. Fenton was looking rather severe, but Browne gazed upon the throng with his usual benevolent air of kindliness.

"The excitement waxes high!" he observed. "You notice the result of our little conference, Brother Fenton? The Young Minds are considerably stirred. The possibilities are enormous."

"What's all this row about?" demanded Fenton practically.

"Is it true, Fenton?"

"Are you going to play juniors in the First?"

"I didn't put that notice up for fun!" replied Fenton grimly. "I don't suppose those six juniors will all play for the First, and perhaps they'll all be turned down! But I'm going to give them a chance! If they shape well against senior bowling, they might get a place in the team."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Fenny!"

"What's this about a new policy?"

"You'll hear more about that later," said Fenton. "By the way, Pitt, you're Junior skipper. There'll be a conference to-morrow, and you'll be needed. We're going to make some big alterations."

"In fact," said Browne, "it is no exaggeration to state that a revolution is now brewing in the cricket affairs of this noble old edifice. Whilst making no claim on my own account, I think I may safely say that a trivial amount of credit is due to my own masterly scheming."

"Chuck it, Browne!"

"Cheese it, old gramophone!"

"Dry up, ass!"

William Napoleon Browne looked distressed.

"And thus great men get their rewards!" he said with a sigh.

He walked off, shaking his head. As nobody took any notice of him, his words were of no account. But one thing was certain. The juniors would work their hardest to earn their places in the First Eleven!

A great new era of cricket dawned for St. Frank's!

THE END.

IN REPLY TO YOURS

Correspondence Answered by Edward Oswald Handforth.

(NOTE.—Readers of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY can write to me, and I will reply on this page. But don't expect a reply for three weeks or a month. Address your letters or postcards to E. O. Handforth, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.—E. O. H.)

IRENE H. (Chiswick): As you request, I'm giving you an ENORMOUS answer—just about as enormous as those millions of letters you've written me!

MISS CRITIC (Bradford): I like your few lines! Only 56! But I'm so short of space, Miss Critic, that I'm obliged to give your criticisms a miss!

J. H. B. (Golcar): You insulting rotter! But as you've admitted that I'm a jolly good goalie, you can thank your lucky stars you've got this nice reply.

SCARED (Wimbledon): So I'm "slightly cracked in the top storey," am I? You do well to be scared, and you'd better keep right out of reach of my fists!

TRACKEM GRIM (Nottingham): What! Another abomination by the same post, young Harris? You must be rolling in pocket-money! But what a waste of good stamps!

T. C. JONES (Brecon): As you have so kindly advised me not to work too hard in future, you won't grumble over this short reply. All the same if you do!

IRENE MARTIN (Sudbury, Mddx.): That other letter you promised me hasn't turned up! Answering you all has been my chief hobby for the past year! It's a bit thick!

ATTA BOY (Oldham): If you think you're going to get an answer out of me by daring me like that, you've made a bloomer! So you can go on wanting!

ENRICHETTA GREGORIO (Burgess Hill): If mine's some name, what about yours! And, as you only wrote me to waste time, I'm not wasting any over you!

LINDSAY ROY (Aberdeen): Do I mind girls writing to me? Rather not! The more the merrier! And the oftener they write, the better I like it! So go ahead!

JOHN J. DELL (Warrington): A fat chance I've got now to thrill you with detective tales! Even these wonderful Replies of mine are getting crowded out!

BRAINY BILL (South Africa): That sketch of yours is disgraceful! You may be brainy, but the brains haven't got down as far as your brush!

W. J. S. (Toronto): It's like your cheek to call me lazy! Why, I can't even spare the time to answer your nice letter—especially as you were too lazy to use ink!

CLAUDE COURAGE (Winnipeg): Fancy you having the same name as one of my heroes in "IN QUEST OF GOLD"? This is your first letter, so I couldn't have pinched it!

H. BOYD (Jersey): You ask me to give Larry Scott "a word" from you. But, as you don't say WHAT word, how the dickens can I give it to him?

RONALD HYDER (Glasgow): It's like your cheek, expecting a long reply, when you only send me a measly post-card with twelve words on it!

DOLLY K. (Pinner): Don't wait till you have another cold before you write to me again! Have a look at my answer to that girl in Aberdeen—and act on it!

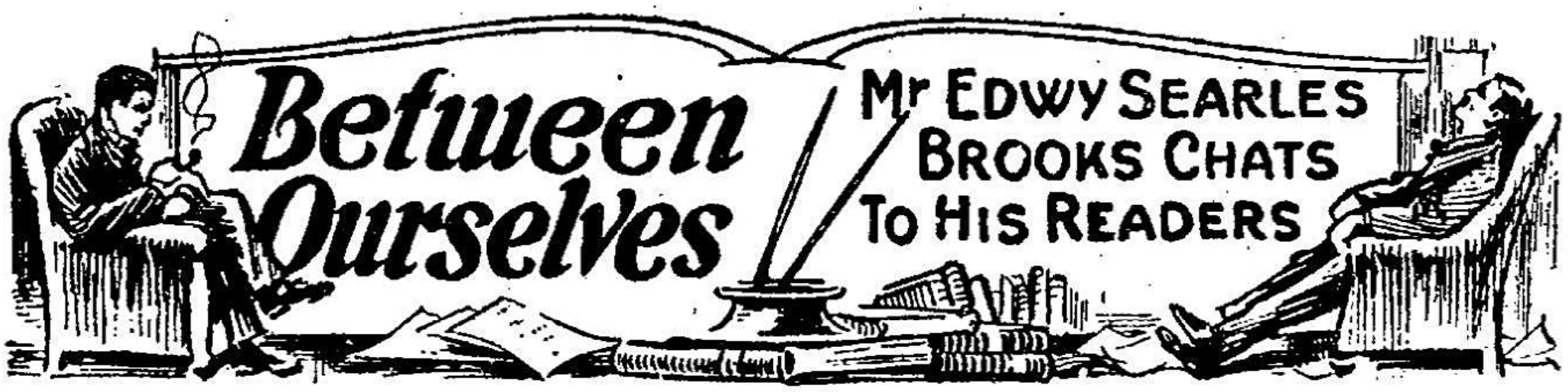
P. G. and D. S. (Kilburn): You silly fat-heads! How is it queer about Nipper being in "THE INVISIBLE GRIP" as well as the St. Frank's story? The former was a serial, and the incidents happened at a different time. What's the good of having brains if you don't use them? You're not the only two chumps who've blundered over this.

FUTURE WORLD'S CHAMPION (Ringwood): By George! You don't think much of yourself, do you? Learn to be modest, like me!

RONALD MARSHALL (St. Leonards-on-Sea): There's no room in the Old Paper now for Clarence's rotten poetry. Why, even Trackett Grim's been banished for the time being!

STAN and BILL (St. Helens): You're quite right! I AM bothered enough! And I'm so bothered for want of space that this is all you'll get!

TED.



(NOTE.—If any readers write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. If you have any suggestions—send them along. If you have any grumbles—make them to me! All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Remember, my aim is to please as many of you as I possibly can, so it's up to you to let me know your likes and dislikes.—E.S.B.).

Letters received: Archie II (Torrington), The Seventeenth Girl (Barnes), Regular Reader (Pelton), Higgie (Clitheroe), Jack Farrar (Halifax), Herbert G. Slatford (Brentford), T. J. Breen (Waterford), A Constant Reader (Holloway), Alfred Starbuck (Canning Town), Bertram (Twickenham), Thomas Treadwell (E.C.2), Arthur Roberts (Portmadoc), J. Pratchett (Pontypridd), A Life-long Reader (Chester), Edmund S. Hills (E.16), G. T. V. Harris (Prestwich), Monty Blake (London), Norman H. Latham, (York), William George White (Nuneaton), W. Sayer (Canterbury), T. Allen East Grinstead), W. Bishop (St. Neots), Ernest L. Holliday (Welwyn), Frank R. Martin (No Address), Tom Brown (Wood Green), Pitt II (Rathmell), Solomon Caro (Birmingham), S. R. Finn (Gosforth), C. S. J. Bridges (Harrow), H. Humphries (Wolverhampton), J. H. Walford (Penge), John Ulster (Putney), J. Harker (Bradford), Cyril (Exeter), Jos. Follows (Bilton), L. Starley (Maidenhead), Frank H. Goodson (Tring), Helen of Troy (Willesden), Ben Brooke (Stockport), Rolf Inglis (Northampton), Nom-de-Plume (Manchester), J. Spalding (Blackburn), F. Clarke (Manchester), W. G. Johnson (Folkestone), Victor Stainer (Mayfair), Billy J. B. (Hythe), Ernie Fletcher (Tweedmouth), S. St. Ledger (Carrington), A. J. Southard (Bristol), H. Mathys (Louvain), Percy Young (Liverpool), George Burgess (Selsey), C. L. Field (Folkestone), L. Holland (Gravesend), Sylvia Ward (Liverpool).

* * *

After reading your second letter, Archie II, I am still unconvinced. You tell me that you don't read my holiday adventure stories because they are too far-fetched—and you admit that you only judge by the illustrations. That's not playing the game with me, is it? The very art of authorship consists of making an improbable theme seem possible and commonplace. If you READ my adventure stories, instead of just judging by the illustrations, you will be more fitted to pass judgment upon them.

* * *

Thanks for those sketches, Higgie. They are all exceptionally good, and if you go on at this rate you'll be a great artist one of these days.

* * *

I was quite interested in your letter, Jack Farrar. You tell me that some of your friends were not readers, and so you lent them one of your old series. And now they are all converted, and regular readers. It wouldn't be a bad idea if a few other fellows copied your example. How about it, everybody? Why not lend out a few old series—the complete set—and see what results you get? The more readers we get, the merrier we shall all be.

* * *

Oh, by the way, Jack Farrar tells me that his mother and father are happy to see him reading the Old Paper. I wish all mothers and fathers were as well informed as to the nature of my stories!

* * *

I see that your girl friend, Herbert G., Slatford, is NOT well informed! You say she is strongly opposed to your reading THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and she even calls it a "twopenny rag." I am glad you say that this "cuts no ice" with you. Judging from the photograph you enclosed, the young lady looks quite charming, and if she sees this, may I prevail upon her to read a few of my stories? I should then be interested to hear her opinion.

* * *

This is the kind of thing I like to see in a letter: "I have read the Old Paper ever since I was able to read, and father read it before me, so you can guess I am not jesting when I tell you of my 455 copies." Thanks, Norman H. Latham, for your very nice, long letter. I'll do what I can about

those back numbers. It's quite a sensible idea to bind your N.L.L.'s into volumes of 12. You want Dick Goodwin to tell you how to make a miniature billiard-table, eh? I wonder if other readers would be interested in this?

* * *

You needn't worry about that detective class, William George White, and imagine that Nelson Lee and Nipper will be pushed into the background. To all intents and purposes, the stories in future will be just the same as the old ones, with Nipper well to the fore—even though he isn't skipper of the Fourth.

* * *

Would you really like Archie to "grow out of his long-winded way of talking," Tom Brown? Surely not! Practically all Archie's attractiveness would vanish if he developed the ordinary way of speaking. I don't think many readers will urge me to make any alteration.

* * *

Being Jewish yourself, Solomon Caro, I'm not surprised that you want to hear more about Solomon Levi. At the first opportunity, I'll bring him out strong. It's about time he had a showing, anyhow.

* * *

I have already referred to the map, and the St. Frank's Annual, S. R. Finn, so I needn't repeat my remarks. You want to know whether you should address me at the beginning of your letters as "Sir," or "Mr. Brooks." My dear old chap, you can please yourself entirely. Quite a few readers are as chummy as anything, and begin, "Dear Edwy," and one was even intimate enough to start his letter, "Dear Fathead." I'll admit the latter gave me a bit of a shock, but you couldn't offend me if you tried—at least, not in that way. I only get wild when some swelled-headed ass starts dictating to me and telling me my own business.

* * *

As time goes on, I'm more and more convinced that ninety per cent of the populace regard the Old Paper as a rag. Isn't it simply awful? I'm always getting letters from fellows who started reading the paper by accident. Just listen to what this reader says: "I was coming home in the train one day from school, when I noticed a boy reading THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and very shortly he left the train, and also left THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. So I looked at it for a moment, and then picked it up and started to read it. You can imagine what a surprise I got when I had read through the first two chapters. For I had thought it would be a RAG—but no, it wasn't. I was so impressed by it that I decided to take it always." That was very nice of you, C. S. J. Bridges, and I think it was very thoughtful of the other fellow to leave the Old Paper behind for you to read!

I am not sure whether I ought to give you any advice, Cyril. It's always a risky thing to do. Your ambition is to become an author, and you ask me if publishers will accept a story written in longhand. Well, I can answer that. Certainly they would—if the story was a good one. But I'd better warn you that you'll probably have a heart-breaking struggle before achieving any success. It's quite likely that you'll write stories for months, or even years, and have every one sent back. When I first started writing I was sixteen, and it was not until I had put in two solid years of work that I met with any encouragement. Then an editor paid me thirty shillings for a three thousand word story! Even after that I worked for another two years before gaining any kind of market for my stories. I can tell you, it's about the hardest thing in the world to gain a footing as a story writer, and the best qualification is DETERMINATION.

* * *

Your grumbles are a little too late, W. G. Johnson. Long before this appears the stories will be of an even greater length than they were originally, and I think most of your other complaints will be complaints no longer. Your chums are quite wrong in saying that I only reply to letters that I agree with. It's the complaints I welcome, you ass! If I hadn't received tons of them, why do you think the stories are now longer, and Nelson Lee and Nipper back? As I've told you before, I'm doing my best to please all readers.

* * *

For a new reader, Ernie Fletcher, you are certainly enthusiastic. I am going to quote a few lines of your letter for the benefit of others—just to show what a new reader thinks (once again, I'd like to make it clear that I'm not doing this in a spirit of self-advertisement, but, rather, in a spirit of self-defence): "The stories are couched in the best of English, and set a high standard—a remarkably high standard—of good work. . . . I sincerely hope you will take my word for it that my compliments are not empty ones, but the verdict of a boy who has read every paper going. . . . I have noticed, in your replies to readers, that one or two people have run down your stories. I would like to know what would happen if every father or mother examined the fiction paper his boy was wont to read. I guess many papers would find a remarkable decrease in their circulation! But of one thing I am certain—the Old Paper would NOT!" With regard to your postscript, Ernie—yes, rather! Of course we're going to be great chums!

* * *

There isn't enough space left to give you a good answer to your nice letter, Sylvia Ward, so I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to wait until next week.

or, THE SECRET OF THE GHAUTS.

By WILLIAM MURRAY.

A Wonderful Romance of the Adventures of Two British Boys in India.

FOR NEW READERS.

Pink Triscott, a private of the Bedfordshire Regiment, stationed at Mysore, learns the secret hiding place of the lost opal, the possession of which by the rajah is the signal for a rising in the province. Myles Chesney and Jack Wynward, two brave British lads, with Paltu, a native stable lad, accompany Pink on an expedition to recover the opal. They are closely pursued by the rajah's mounted troops. At length, they reach a walled-in village, where they destroy two man-eating tigers which had been preying on the inhabitants, and for this service the headman offers them protection from the rajah's troops, who are preparing for an attack on the village.

(Now read on.)

THE villagers wanted to open the gate and make an attack, but their more sensible leader managed to dissuade them. Truth to tell, they were a villainous and sinister-looking set of ruffians, and well bore out the evil reputation of the natives of Goorg. Pink and his party were well satisfied to have such valiant protectors, even though they stood a little in fear of them.

At the end of an hour the situation was unchanged. The troopers could still be dimly seen gathered about their camp-fires on the edge of the forest.

Then the monotony was broken by a startling incident. From the far side of the village came a human cry of agony—loud and blood-curdling. Not a sound preceded or followed it.

"That must be looked into!" exclaimed Pink. "Who's going with me?"

The boys were the first to offer, and then the head man and three or four others volunteered. They hastened in a body to the end of the narrow street, and cautiously mounted the platform on each side of the rear gate.

It was a thrilling scene that met their eyes. On the moonlit road outside the wall crouched a huge tiger on the body of a man whose uniform stamped him as one of the rajah's troopers. Close by lay the torn carcass of Myles' black charger.

Before a shot could be fired the tiger seized his human victim in his mouth, and bounded lightly into the jungle with a roar of defiance. Pursuit would have been useless and hazardous, for the man was probably dead.

"Any more of the spies about, eh?" muttered Pink, peering to right and left.

"I don't think so," replied Jack. "The fellow was alone."

"He must have worked around through the jungle to discover if the village was equally well protected on this side," said Myles.

"And walked right into the jaws of the man-eater, who 'appened to prefer 'im to 'orseflesh," added Pink, with a graphic gesture. "Serves the 'eathen right, too. Mogul Mir won't send another spy in a hurry. We're safer than ever, lads."

The inactivity of the troopers now appeared in a plainer light. No doubt they

were waiting for their absent companion to return.

In spite of protest, Pink opened the gate and slipped out. He took two coils of rope from the saddle-bags of the dead horse, and as soon as he returned the gate was closed and barred.

"We 'ad to 'ave this," he said. "We won't burden ourselves with the other stuff. The grey mare carried off the spades, but we can easily get two more from the villagers."

"Are we going to start now?" asked Myles.

"Not till near daylight," Pink responded. "We're going to 'ave a good sleep if the 'ead man can provide quarters."

On being consulted, the head man declared that he could, and he furthermore assured his guests that they might rest in perfect safety for as long a time as suited their convenience.

The party first returned to the other gate, where Pink made sure, by a personal inspection, that the troopers were still bivouacking by their camp-fires.

Then he and his companions were led to an empty hut near the centre of the village. They dropped wearily on the rude charpoys of straw, and were soon sleeping as soundly as though no bloodthirsty foes were near.

After what seemed but a brief time, Jack and Myles were awakened by the sound of voices. They sat up, stupidly rubbing their eyes.

Paltu was already on his feet. In the doorway stood Pink and the head-man, engaged in earnest conversation. The latter had a torch in his hand.

"What's wrong?" cried Jack.

Pink turned quickly to the boys, showing a very troubled face.

"Stir yourselves," he said. "We've got to start right away. What do you think 'as 'appened? Those sneaking cut-throats out yonder were waiting for reinforcements, who must 'ave left Mysore a few hours later. The 'ead-man says about twenty more troopers arrived just now."

The boys turned pale at this startling piece of news. They were amazed to learn that they had slept till nearly daylight.

Pink went on to explain that an attack was shortly expected, and that the village could not long hold out against so large a force.

"The 'ead-man says 'e and 'is people will parley as long as they can," Pink added, "and then they'll 'ave to let the troopers in or suffer for it in the end. So we'd better leave at once."

"Of course," replied Myles. "We don't want these poor Hindoos to be massacred for protecting us."

"But won't the troopers be at our heels in a short time?" Jack questioned anxiously.

"That depends on what sort of a start we get," replied Pink. "The 'ead-man told me a bit of a secret just now, but this ain't the time to repeat it. Come, lads!"

No demonstration had yet been made by the besiegers when Pink and the boys gained the rear gate. The head-man and a dozen villagers accompanied them that far. The former gave Pink two light spades, and a bag of provisions.

Then the gate was unbarred, and the fugitives slipped out. After a brief survey they waved farewell to their generous protectors, and hastened forward into the gloomy and narrow road.

Before they had gone half a mile the grey, misty dawn broke. They were in good marching order, having shared the equipments equally, and for more than an hour they travelled steadily and fast. Behind them the solitudes of the great forest echoed to no more terrifying sounds than the chatter of monkeys and parrots.

The road showed traces of ancient usage, and Myles expressed the opinion that it had been made hundreds of years ago.

"I believe it, lad," said Pink, "and likely it leads to the very place we're bound for now."

This seemed all the more probable when a brief view of the twin mountain peaks was had straight ahead from the crest of a ridge.

"They don't look far," exclaimed Jack.

"The distance is about seventeen miles," Pink answered, "for the village is three miles behind. If all goes well, we ought to reach our destination about the middle of the afternoon."

Down the rugged slope the little party hastened with light hearts and feet. From ahead now grew a dull, roaring sound, and presently the road ended on the brink of a gorge, which was fifty feet across and about twenty-five in depth.

Through its stony bed brawled a foaming torrent, and from mid-channel a pier of masonry, with a fragment of an arch attached, reared itself.

The abyss was now spanned by a native bridge. To a tree on each bank was screwed a cable nearly a foot in diameter, made of twisted vines. A little higher up were two hand-rails of the same material. It was a rude and perilous-looking contrivance.

"Is this your secret, Pink?" asked Jack.

"That's it, lad," was the reply. "There was an ancient bridge 'ere until a few weeks ago, when the floods washed it away. But the troopers don't know that. They'll 'ave to go three miles down-stream to a fording place. Yonder, on the right, you can see where a sort of bridle-path branches off. It's been made by mounted travellers since the bridge was carried away."

"It's wide enough for horses, then?" asked Myles.

"Yes, in single file. And before long it will be trodden by Mogul Mir's troopers. We 'ave no time to waste, so come on."

The swaying bridge proved to be stronger than it looked, and one by one the fugitives crossed safely to the other side. Then Pink

drew his knife, and severed the two hand-supports.

"Now the ruffians are sure to go around by the ford," he muttered, as he led the way forward. "They might 'ave taken a notion to pursue us on foot."

"And wouldn't that give us the better chance of keeping ahead of them?" said Myles.

"I don't believe it, lad," Pink answered. "The rest of the road is likely to be so rough that a 'orse can't travel any faster than a man."

Herein Pink erred, as the future was destined to prove. But he was correct so far as related to the ruggedness of the path.

Pink rose suddenly up and drew a bead on the Zemindar's breast. Almost as quickly, Myles and Jack had the servant and the mahout covered. The latter trembled so violently that he let his goad fall to the ground.

It led in zig-zag fashion up and down the endless and lateral spurs that formed the foothills of the ghauts; it wound through dense jungle and forest, where the trees were festooned with creepers of brilliant red and blue blossoms; it was obstructed by rocks of all sizes, and by tough, outcropping roots.

Thus it happened that noon found the fugitives only half way to their destination. In the shadow of a great mountain peak they sat down for a short rest and a snatch of food.

A few feet ahead the road they had been pursuing was crossed at right angles by another ancient path. The latter was very narrow, and its growth of tangled vegetation showed that no traveller had passed over it for months.

Just as Pink opened the bag of provisions a faint sound was borne from the rear. All started up in alarm.

"That was the clatter of hoofs," cried Jack. "The troopers must be spurring their horses like mad."

"Hurry!" Myles shouted. "We must get out of this!"

"Yes," muttered Pink; "it means a 'ot chase, and there is no telling—— Stop, lads!" he added, in a hoarse whisper. "Drop flat and keep out of sight. I 'ear someone coming down the cross road."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT AT TIPPOO SAHIB'S BARRIER.

QUICK as he gave the command, Pink was crouching deep in the wayside vegetation. The boys dropped clumsily beside him. For a second or two their hearts seemed to stop beating, and they felt an icy chill creep through their veins.

At no time had the fugitives been in a tighter place than now. It was terribly trying to lie there and listen to the ominous voice of danger in both directions—from the rear the faint, metallic ring of iron-shod hoofs, from in front a louder and duller sound that as yet baffled recognition.

Pink cocked his rifle, and glanced sideways at Jack and Myles. They understood, and two more hammers rose with a sharp click.

Paltu was busy at something else. He had one ear to the ground, and his hand was behind the other.

"An elephant, sahibs!" he whispered; and just then an elephant actually did lumber into sight a short way up the cross-road. It was handsomely caparisoned, and bore on its back a square howdah, in which sat two persons, evidently servant and master.

The latter was a stout, full-bearded Oriental, with the dress and pompous bearing of a rich zemindar or land-holder. The other was an aged Hindoo, grey-haired and dignified. In front of the howdah was perched a thin and wiry little mahout.

The hidden watchers drew long breaths of relief. Three rifle-hammers were softly lowered to half-cock.

"They're only travellers," whispered Myles; "but they chose a mighty awkward time to drop along. Oh, why don't they hurry?"

"They can't disappear too soon," replied Jack. "Hark! The troopers are coming nearer."

But, as ill-luck would have it, the mahout halted the huge quadruped on the intersection of the two paths. The zemindar and his servant glanced uneasily down the cross-road. They had heard the tramp of the approaching troopers, and were discussing it in low tones.

It was a critical time for the fugitives; but their suspense was happily cut short by the conception in Pink's brain of a stupendous idea.

"Lads," he whispered, "'ere's a chance for us. Obey orders, and do as I do. That's all."

With this Pink rose suddenly up, and drew a bead on the zemindar's breast. Almost as quickly Myles and Jack had the servant and the mahout covered. The latter trembled so violently that he let his goad fall to the ground.

"Down with you," commanded Pink, forgetting to speak Hindoostanee. "No fooling. We're in a 'urry."

The zemindar was a plucky fellow, and his face flushed with rage.

"Dogs, ye shall pay dearly for this," he cried, in fairly good English. "I am Holkar Singh, a land-holder of Mercara, in Coorg. I am journeying peaceably homeward through the territory of Mysore——"

"Get down!" persisted Pink angrily. "You're not going to be murdered or robbed. We only want to borrow your elephant for a while."

With an evil scowl on his face, the zemindar nodded to the mahout, who instantly made the elephant kneel.

Master and servant climbed out of the howdah and stood a few feet to one side. Both bristled with swords and daggers, but neither had firearms.

"Up with you!" cried Pink. "Lively now!"

Myles and Paltu scrambled into the howdah, and, as Jack followed them, he caught the servant's eyes fixed strangely upon him. There was no malice in the look. It expressed sudden amazement and incredulity—even a touch of affection, as though the sight of the lad vibrated some long-forgotten chord of memory in the old Hindoo's heart.

"Your elephant will be back 'ere by sunset," added Pink, turning to the zemindar. "If you want satisfaction, apply to the British Resident at Mysore in about a week from now. And you'll be all the more likely to get it if you detain these cut-throats coming yonder as long as you can."

The next instant Pink was in the howdah, and as quickly the mahout tried to wriggle to the ground.

But Pink leaned forward, and caught the fellow by the back of the neck, at the same time pressing the cold muzzle of a pistol to his forehead, and jabbering angry Hindoostanee into his ear.

This gentle style of argument was effective, and the mahout instantly became as tractable as a lamb.

At a word from him, and a touch of the goad, the elephant rose from his knees, wheeled to one side, and plunged up the mountain path with long and rapid strides.

Holkar Singh glared vindictively after his stolen quadruped, and called down fearful maledictions on the thieves.

The aged Hindoo stood with uplifted hands, straining his eyes to get a last glimpse of Jack. Then a curve of the road hid them from view.

The daring act had transpired in a very brief time, and the fugitives now realised that they had once more eluded their bloodthirsty pursuers.

The tramp of hoofs grew fainter and fainter in the distance, until it could be heard no more. On and on went the elephant, striding clumsily over rocks and logs at a pace no horse could equal on so rough a road.

The howdah swayed and shook dizzily, but the straps held as fast as did its occupants. The mahout clung to his perch like a monkey.

"It won't do the zemindar any 'arm to rest a bit," said Pink. "We treated 'im badly, lads, but it 'ad to be. Jove! 'Ow nearly the troopers nabbed us. Now we're out of danger. From 'ere the road pierces

the ghauts, and I doubt if the 'orses can follow at all."

"It was rare luck to get the elephant," replied Myles; "only I'm sorry we had to take it in that way. I can hardly believe that we are near our journey's end."

"Two hours at most ought to see us there," declared Pink. "And then——"

He knit his brows, and appeared to be pondering some knotty question.

The boys did not disturb him. They kept a close watch on the mahout, and discussed the strange conduct of the old Hindoo, which all had observed.

"He wished to cast an evil spell upon you, Wynyard sahib," said Paltu.

"More likely he was a thug," suggested Myles, laughing, "and was sizing up your neck for the sacred noose."

"I don't pretend to account for it," replied Jack, in a grave tone, "but I know I shan't forget that look of his in a hurry."

Pink now came out of his brown study, and proposed that the interrupted lunch should be finished. So half of the bag of provisions was shared, and quickly eaten.

The howdah was well stocked with food, but this the boys did not touch.

Meanwhile the elephant kept up its clumsy pace over wooded mountain spurs, and through deep ravines. The path was at times imperceptible, but occasional glimpses ahead from hill-tops gave Pink all the guidance that he needed.

By two o'clock in the afternoon the fugitives had travelled ten miles on elephant-back, and were now in the very heart of the ghauts.

A few minutes later they emerged from a dense forest at the base of the twin peaks, which reared their stony heads two thousand feet in air, and stood guard over the entrance to a narrow and sombre valley.

The mahout made the elephant kneel at Pink's command, and the weary travellers climbed out of the howdah. They were stiff and sore from the violent jolting, and it was good to feel the ground under foot again.

The mahout was the picture of fear, for he evidently believed that his captors were going to kill him. When Pink spoke a few words to him in Hindoostanee, his dusky face beamed with joy, and he salaamed profoundly.

He made the elephant rise, and wheeled him about. An instant later both had vanished in the forest, and the fugitives were alone.

"Well, what next?" asked Jack.

"Tippoo Sahib's barrier," replied Pink, as he stiffly led the way into the mouth of the valley. "Once we pass that we're safe."

The boys looked at one another mysteriously.

"What is it like?" exclaimed Myles.

"Not 'aving seen it I can't say exactly," was Pink's answer. "But we'll soon be there, unless what I 'eard in the palace that night was all lies."

With this the lads had to be content, and silently and in single file they followed their guide.

For nearly an hour they traced the upward course of a brawling torrent that flowed through gigantic trees and dense vegetation. Here and there signs of a path were visible, but it had evidently not been trodden by human feet for many years.

The valley was less than a quarter of a mile wide. It was really a gorge, for it was hemmed in and deeply shadowed by parallel walls of sheer rock only slightly lower than the twin peaks of which they were a continuation.

It was a weird and dismal place, and the gloom was like that of twilight. Except for hissing serpents, that wriggled away before the travellers, there was no sign of life.

Presently the walls began to converge, and when they were twenty yards apart Tippoo Sahib's barrier rose suddenly from the trees and jungle.

The boys uttered cries of amazement, and even Pink was impressed by the wonderful sight. Here was a fit monument to the ancient Mohammedan rajah—a massive granite wall one hundred feet high that stretched across the gorge from cliff to cliff.

The stones were of vast dimensions, and had been well fitted together. Not a crevice or projection offered hope of scaling the barrier. Its frowning front was sheer and smooth, and above its flat summit the mountain walls towered nearly two thousand feet higher.

At its base a rusty, arched grating served as an outlet for the stream, which here rested tranquilly in a sort of pool before beginning its turbulent flow down the valley. Behind the grating was pitch blackness.

"What did Tippoo Sahib mean by building such a thing?" was Jack's comment, after a critical survey of the barrier.

"Partly to keep the treasure safe," replied Pink, "and no doubt partly for other reasons known only to 'imself."

"You don't mean to say that we must climb that wall to get at the opal?" exclaimed Myles. "We can't do it, that's all."

"We might as well try to scale the cliffs," added Jack, laughing.

"'Old on, lads," said Pink, a little sharply. "Did I say we were going over the wall? There's a way through it, according to old Tippoo's written document, which I 'eard read and discussed in the palace——"

"By the grating?" cried Myles and Jack in one breath.

"Yes; that's the beginning of the combination. Come on; there's no time to waste. The troopers will kill their 'orses to overtake us."

Pink glanced uneasily down the gorge, and listened for a moment. Then he waded into the icy pool, and the boys followed him.

As the water rose to their hips they removed their cartridge-belts and revolvers, and held them overhead. They were waist-deep when they reached the grating, and peered curiously between the rusty bars.

They saw a vaulted space, with slimy walls to right and left. At the farther end, three or four yards distant, a broad sheet of water fell noisily from a height of six feet.

The place where the stream entered the barrier was invisible, though a dusky gleam of light quivered on the brink of the cataract.

The barrier was evidently enormously thick—four yards at the least. It was equally clear, from the presence of the waterfall, that Tippoo Sahib had chosen a building site just where the stream dropped to a lower level.

While the boys were looking within, Pink had given his attention to the grating. Now he handed one of the spades to Paltu, and his rifle and equipment to Jack and Myles.

"'Old these," he shouted loudly enough to be heard above the roar of the water. "Don't mind the wet. We'll 'ave a fire to-night."

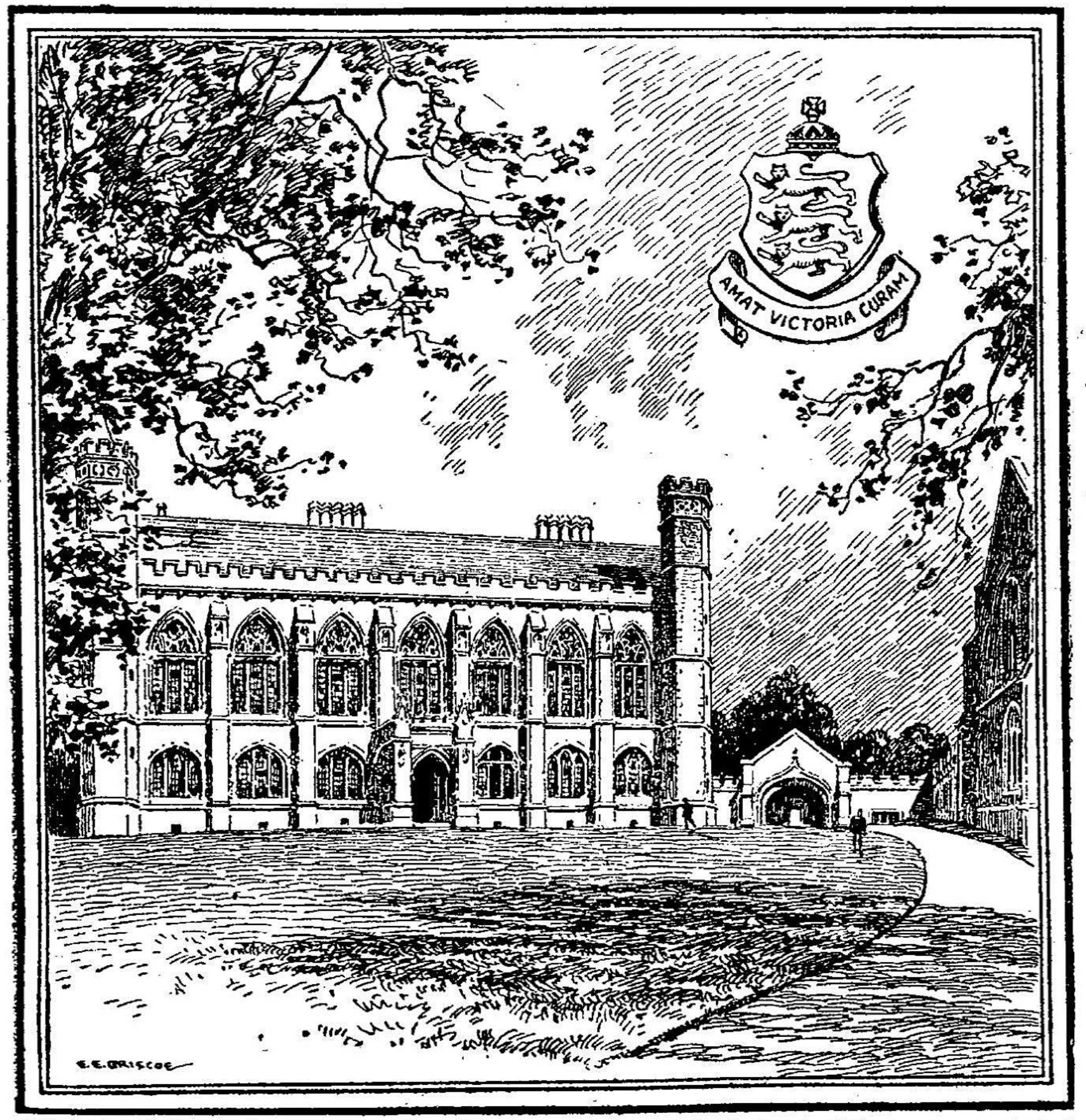
Then, with the other spade, he vigorously attacked the arched grating. But all in vain he twisted and pried and jammed the stout iron bars. In spite of nearly a century of service, they were welded as tightly as ever into the masonry.

(Another Long Instalment of this Grand Story Next Week.)

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Series of Art Sketches specially drawn for our readers by Mr. E. E. Briscoe.

VICTORIA COLLEGE—JERSEY.



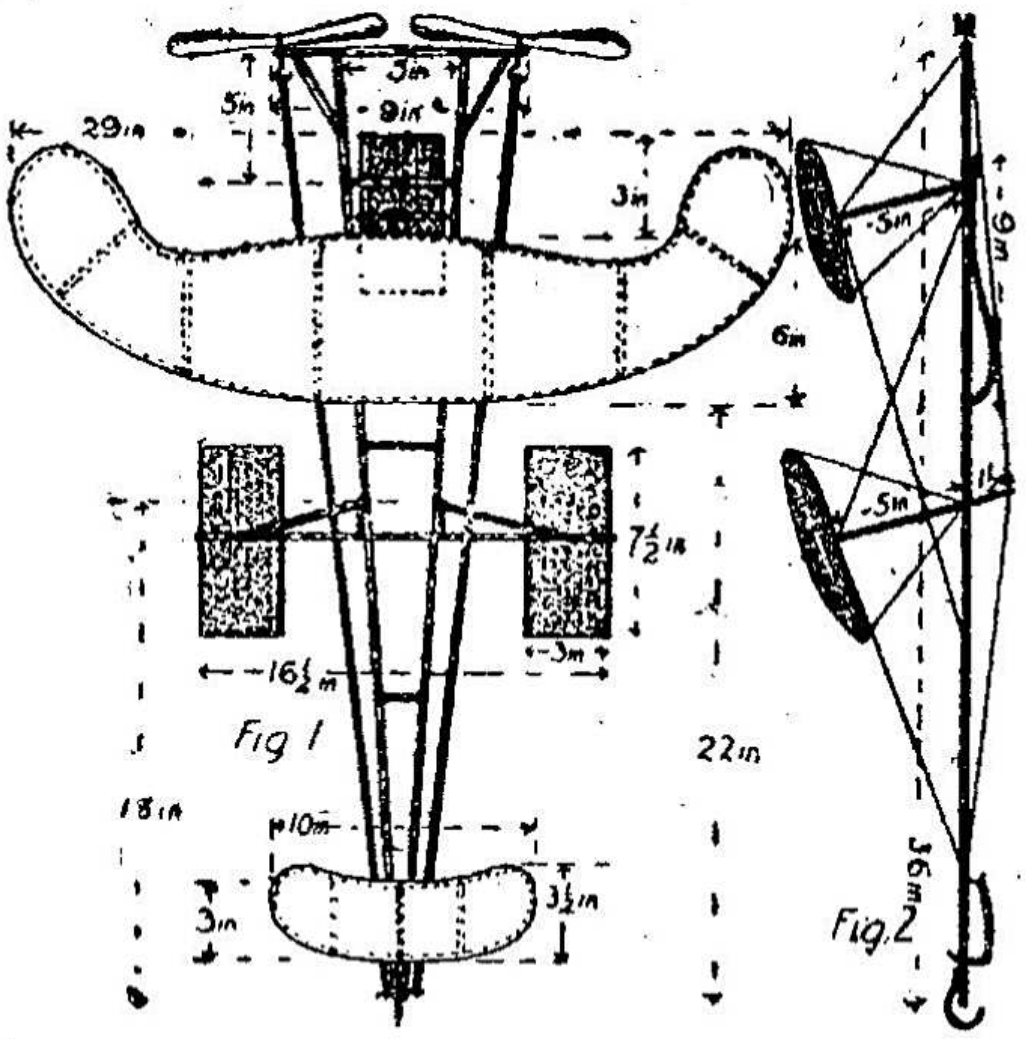
Victoria College, Jersey, was founded in commemoration of Queen Victoria's visit in 1849. The building was completed and opened in 1852. It stands on thickly-wooded grounds, with a detached gymnasium. The school possesses fine chemical and physical laboratories, and a lecture-room. The eastern part of the building was erected in 1912. There are 250 boys at the school. The O.T.C. and Scout Troop provide military training.

The above particulars have been sent in by a reader, to whom we tender our grateful acknowledgment.

HOW TO MAKE A HYDROPLANE

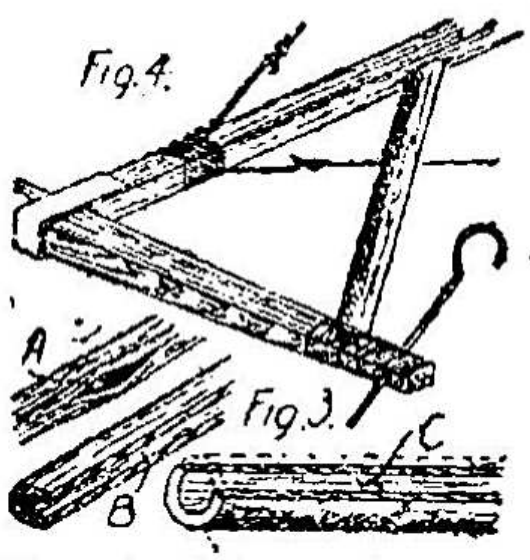
By DICK GOODWIN.

The construction of a waterplane is little, if any, more difficult than an ordinary aeroplane, and it is certainly a very interesting model, both as regards making and flying. It is necessary to obtain considerable strength in the framework, but the model must not be heavy; this combination of lightness and strength is achieved by the use of straining wire. The general design of the model can be seen from the plan and side views shown at Figs. 1 and 2; it will be seen that the main plane is curved with tipped ends, and that three floats are provided, two situated about the centre of the framework and one behind the plane.



THE FRAMEWORK.

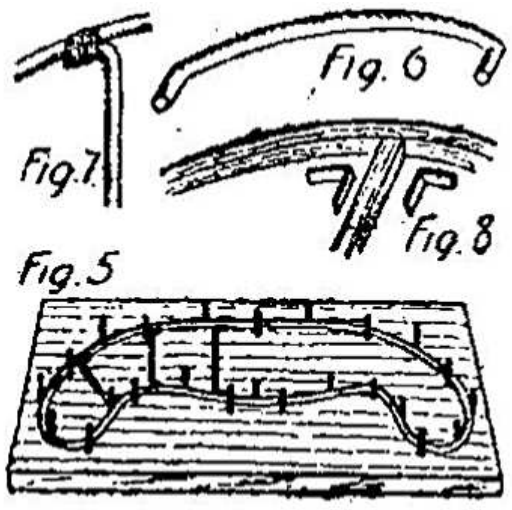
The framework is triangular in shape with a total length of 36 in., it can be composed of bamboo which can be split for the insertion of the cross-pieces as at A, Fig. 3, it can be made of straight-grained spruce or poplar channelled out as at B, or to obtain the same effect of strength and lightness, small bamboo rods can be planed down on one side as at C. The end spar is strengthened with struts as shown in the enlarged detail at Fig. 4, and short spars are placed between the two main spars at intervals as shown in the plan. All spars should be bound with either glued thread or narrow tape, and the end spar further strengthened with strips of thin tin as at D, before binding. The straining wires are fastened to stouter wire loops tied to the spars as at E. The triangular frame should be finished completely with rubber hooks and a protecting hook of bamboo in front.



THE MAIN PLANE.

The method of making the main plane is shown at Fig. 5, No. 18 S.W.G. piano wire being used for the purpose. A piece of wood, measuring about 2 ft. 8 in. by 11 in. by ¾ in. is provided with a smooth surface and then the shape of the plane as shown in the plan is drawn out full-size. A sufficient length of the piano wire is cut off and allowed to open out, and nails are driven in the board so that they just confine the wire to the shape. On no account should the wire be twisted in any way; it should be guided round the shape and lie flat on the board. The joint should be tied with flower wire and soldered. The ribs are formed with the same wire shaped to the curve at Fig. 6 and bent at right angles at the ends so that it can be bound as at Fig. 7 and soldered. If the wire has not been twisted in the process, the frame will remain quite true. The covering should be of silk proofed with celluloid dissolved in amyl-acetate. The finished plane is attached to the frame with fine wire.

THE ELEVATING PLANE.



The shape of the elevating plane is similar to that of the main plane, but the ends are not carried back so far. Wire of the same gauge should be used. The plane is attached to a framing of wire or bamboo as shown in the side view at Fig. 2, but adjustment should be possible and can be obtained by using a short length of cycle spoke with its nipple, the latter is cut in half with one portion above and the other below the framing. A suggestion is given at Fig. 8 for the use of ⅛ in. bamboo in making both planes, the ribs should be bound to the spar with little angle pieces cut from thinnest tin sheet. The bamboo framing for the planes is more liable to break than the wire, and it takes longer to make owing to the necessity of heating the material to obtain the curves.

THE FLOATS.

Very careful workmanship is required in the construction of the floats, not only to make them light enough, but also to make them watertight. The framework is shown to a larger scale at Fig. 9, and although it is possible to make them with wire in the same way as the planes, it is better to use ⅛ in. poplar or spruce. The sides should be marked out to the shape and sawn out with a fret-saw to a length of 7½ in. and a depth of 1¼ in. As there are three floats, the six pieces can be cut out at the same time, but it will generally be advisable to cut them in pairs. The pieces joining the sides on the top and bottom should be ¼ in. by ⅛ in., but those at the front and back should be shaped from ¼ in. wood to the end curves. The joints should be bradded with fine brads as well as glued, and then the covering made from proofed silk as for the planes, but the material can be a little stouter and attached with seccotine coated over with the proofing solution or varnish instead of being sewn as done in attaching the plane covering.

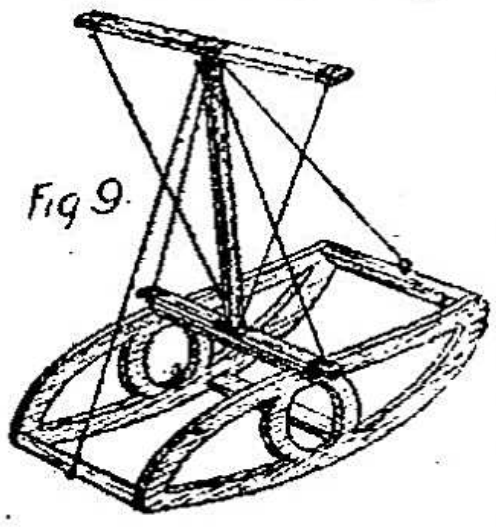


Fig 9.

ATTACHING THE FLOATS.

The method of attaching the rear float is clearly shown in Fig. 9, the arrangement for the centre floats is shown at Fig. 10. For this part of the work, ⅛ in. square bamboo will be found suitable. The total length of the bottom spar is 17½ in. and the two uprights 6½ in. The floats are attached to the bottom spars by means of small metal angle brackets which are bound to the spars with glued thread. The uprights are firmly lashed to the main spars of the framework and the tops of the centre uprights provided with hooks for the straining wire. The whole of the work should be varnished with celluloid or shellac varnish to keep out the wet, this should be carefully done, especially with the floats.

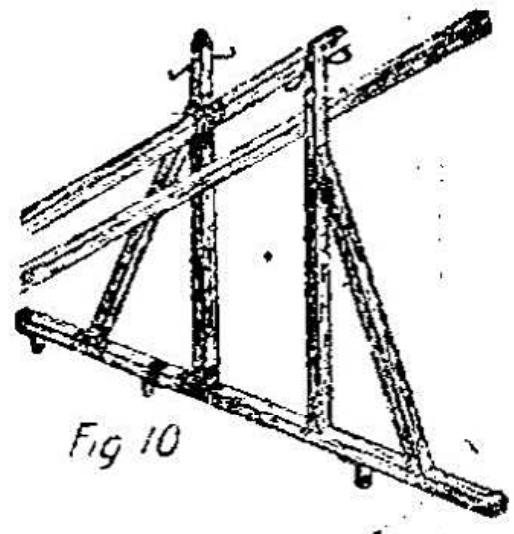


Fig 10

THE STRAINING WIRES.

The various straining wires, formed from ordinary thin flower wire, can be followed from the various diagrams, the wires should be fitted with beads for simple adjustment, but, if desired the wires can be fastened direct to the loops, the latter being turned in with a pair of round-nose pliers for tightening purposes.

The propellors should be 9 in. diameter, and preferably carved from the solid, if they are built up from glued strips; they must be varnished. Eight strands of ¼ in. strip elastic will be required for each propeller. The total weight of the finished model should not be more than 10 oz.

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