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The St Frank's Test Match...

A rousing story of the great cricket match in which three Fourth Formers play for the First Eleven and how it leads to a war between two sections of the school.

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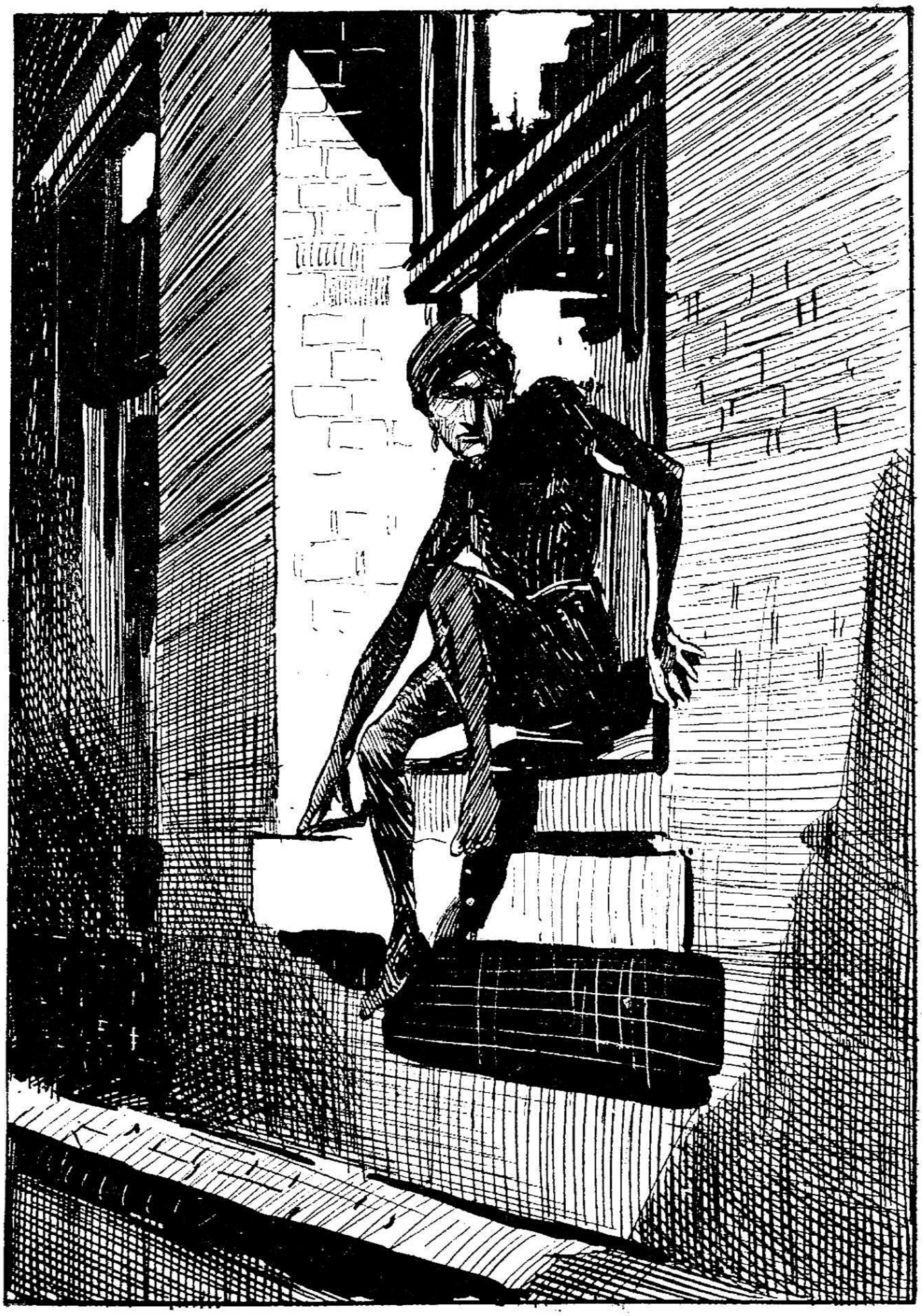


It was hardly possible to associate the rajah with this silently gliding figure. He left the school by the passage window.

ST FRANK'S TEST MATCH!

A grand long ST. FRANK'S cricketing story, in which three well-known players from the famous Fourth Form are selected for the first eleven team against Redcliffe.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

RISING EARLY IN THE MORNING.

ONE—two—three—four—five!

Nipper, lying in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory in the Ancient House, listened to the five solemn strokes of the school clock. And as the last booming note died away, he leapt briskly out of bed.

His first move was to hurry to the nearest window and lean out. It was a glorious morning. The sun had not yet risen, but the school grounds and the surrounding countryside were flooded with the pale radiance which heralded sunrise.

Over in the west the sky was already pink, and not a cloud marred the heavens. Birds were singing gaily, and from the village Nipper distinctly heard the voices of cows, the neighing of a horse, and the barking of a dog. Everything was so quiet that these sounds travelled readily.

"Ripping!" murmured Nipper. "Couldn't be a better morning."

He looked over towards the playing-fields and saw that they were slightly misty. But as soon as the sun rose all this would be dispelled. The few breaths of fresh air at the window had removed all traces of sleep from Nipper's eyes. He turned back into the dormitory with brisk movements.

"Come on—up you get!" he exclaimed, shaking Reggie Pitt's shoulder.

The junior captain awoke, sat up, and blinked.

"Hallo! What's the idea?" he asked, yawning. "My hat! It's only just getting light! Oh! Good! What's the time?"

"Five o'clock!"

"What-ho!" said Pitt, jumping out of bed. "Good old Nipper! Better than any alarm clock! How the dickens do you do it?"

"I told you to rely on me, and there you are!" grinned Nipper. "I see that Handforth has got a clock tied to his bed-rail. The ass wouldn't trust to me!"

"I pity him if he's trusting to that clock," chuckled Pitt. "It's two minutes past five, and there's no sign of it going off yet. What about the others? Better give 'em a dig, eh?"

The others were Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn and Jerry Dodd. They were soon awakened, and the very instant they realised that the time was five o'clock they hopped out of bed as though actuated by springs.

What was the reason for this unusual activity? How was it that juniors who usually clung to their beds like leeches until the rising bell were now turning out at five a.m., and positively enjoying it?

Just listen a moment and you'll know.

"This is our big chance," declared Nipper, as he dressed. "Fenton's trying an absolutely new departure. For the first time in St. Frank's history he's going to include some juniors in the First Eleven. Do you know, I believe old Browne started the thing!"

"Browne of the Fifth?" said Pitt. "I shouldn't be at all surprised. He may be a new chap, and he may be a gasser, but by jingo, he's a dark horse!"

Hussi Kahn nodded.

"I am respectfully inclined to disagree with your honourable remarks," he exclaimed, nodding. "The ludicrous Browne is very dark indeed."

Hussi Kahn had said that he disagreed, but he really meant that he agreed. This was one of his little peculiarities of speech.

"Look at the way Browne played up in the Helmford match," said Jerry Dodd enthusiastically. "By jings! That fellow can knock spots off any other player in the First! He's full of ideas, too!"

"And it's one of his schemes to include juniors in the First Eleven," said Nipper. "Put a hustle on, you chaps, we've got to be on Big Side by half-past! Mustn't be late, you know."

The very thought of being late made the juniors speed up. This was the very first occasion on which they had been put down for early practice. Whilst many seniors regarded early practice as a frightful bore, the juniors considered it an honour.

To have a chance of playing for the school itself was glorious.

Of course, playing for the Junior Eleven was all right, but nobody took much notice of junior cricket. To be in the First Eleven meant the highest of all possible honours. And these Fourth-Formers were grimly determined to show Fenton that they were worthy.

There were two others, too,—John Busterfield Boots and Bob Christine, of the Modern House. This pair had to rely upon a clock to get them up, but it was not likely that they would be missing from Big Side when five-thirty struck.

Boots and Christine were particularly delighted. For just at present Fenton was deeply angered at the Modern House seniors. Indeed, the entire Upper School of both Houses was at enmity. At least, the Sixth Form was. They were bitter against one another.

It had all been caused by the Modern House members of the First Eleven—five in number.

Fenton had unexpectedly discovered that Sinclair—one of his best bats—habitually indulged in whisky to assist him on match days. And Fenton felt that to keep Sinclair in the team was to encourage him in his unhappy vice. The school captain had no alternative but to drop the man at once.

He couldn't very well explain without giving Sinclair away. And the other four Modern House players had furiously told Fenton that unless Sinclair was instantly reinstated they would refuse to play. It had been a bold attempt to force Fenton's hand.

But it failed.

Fenton, like the firm skipper he was, refused to be bullied or intimidated. He accepted the quartette's statement, and dropped them, too. His substitutes from the Ancient House were poor, and in spite of Browne's magnificent playing, the Saturday match against Helmford had been lost.

And then Browne had come forward with a suggestion to include some juniors in the First Eleven, and, in fact, to thoroughly reorganise the whole system of cricket at St. Frank's. And Fenton, who had first regarded the suggestion with doubt, had gradually realised its wisdom.

A new era of cricket, in fact, was at hand.

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Third Series—Fifth Form.

NOTE:—The average age of Fifth Form boys is 17.

No. 1.—William Napoleon Browne.

Although a comparatively newcomer, the great W. N. B. is the Captain of the Fifth. He is possessed of unlimited nerve and confidence, and can accomplish almost anything. A great cricketer.

CHAPTER II.

HANDFORTH ISN'T SATISFIED.

ZINGG!

Just as the four Fourth-Formers were about to leave the dormitory, looking business-like in their flannels, a disturbing racket filled the air. It proceeded from the head of Handforth's bed.

"Help!" gasped Pitt. "That'll wake everybody!"

He made a dash for the clock, but Edward Oswald was already sitting up. He looked a bit dazed, and he grabbed the clock, turned off the alarm, and stared round rather blearily.

"Hallo!" he mumbled. "What's the idea? What the dickens are you chaps doing in those silly togs? By George! It's only ten past five! Are you dotty, or what?"

"It's all right, old man," said Nipper soothingly. "Just turn over and go to sleep again. You haven't had your full supply of beauty sleep, and I can see some horrid lines under your eyes."

Handforth shook himself.

"By George! I've just remembered!" he exclaimed, dashing out of bed. "Cricket practice! You fatheads! Why didn't you wake me up? It's all right, though—I can be down by half-past all right!"

"But you're not needed!" grinned Jerry.

"Eh? Not needed?" repeated Handforth, as he leapt into his clothes. "Don't be an idiot! How the dickens is the First Eleven going to get on without me?"

"Goodness only knows," said Pitt; "but I expect it'll have a struggle!"

The others chuckled, and Handforth glared.

"We were told to turn out for practice, and we've got to do it," said Handforth grimly. "I think you chaps are a lot of rotters for letting me sleep on. That rotten clock went wrong. It ought to have gone off at a quarter to five. I was going to be up first."

"We can't all realise our dreams," sighed Pitt.

Church and McClure, awakened by their leader's tones, were now sitting up and looking on with increasing interest. It surprised them that Handforth was troubling himself to turn out at such an early hour. But he seemed to think that he was needed.

"Wait a minute, Handy," grinned Nipper. "What do you mean—Fenton told us to turn out?"

"So he did!"

"But you included yourself!"

"Of course!" said Handforth. "Why not?"

"My dear chap, your name wasn't down on the list——"

"That's nothing!" said Handforth loftily. "Just an oversight on Fenton's part; he forgot to put it down. My dear asses, didn't you realise that? Fenton's a busy man, and he can't think of everything. It was just an oversight!"

"You babbling ass!" growled Church, from the safety of his bed. "If you turn out with the others you'll get pitched off Big Side with a giddy flea in your ear. We have to stand your rot--but Fenton won't!"

"You wait!" panted Handforth, as he struggled with a white sock. "Just you wait till I've got some time on my hands. I can't slosh you now—but I'll store it up!"

Nipper and the others went out of the dormitory chuckling. Edward Oswald Handforth really and truly fooled himself into believing that he was required. Astonishingly enough, he took it for granted that Fenton had forgotten to put his name down.

And all the efforts of Church and McClure to convince him were unavailing.

"Take my advice and don't go, Handy," urged Church, for the twentieth time. "You'll only make yourself look an ass!"

"I can't help that!" snorted Handforth.

"Of course not—but that's not the point——"

"Eh?" said Handforth suspiciously. "Are you telling me that I can't help looking an ass—"

"Me?" said Church innocently. "Why, you said it yourself!"

Handforth started.

"Well, never mind!" he growled. "I wish you fatheads would go to sleep! My hat! I've been shoving on your rotten shoes, McClure! I thought they seemed idiotically small. You must have got feet like a chicken!"

McClure glared.

"I'd rather have feet like a chicken than feet like a giddy elephant!" he retorted. "I'll bet you've ruined those shoes! They were only new last week, too!"

"Ruined 'em be blowed!" said Handforth. "They're not hurt a bit—there's only one of the seams torn open. The rotten tongue's torn out, too——"

"What!" gasped McClure, aghast.

"Don't make a fuss—you shouldn't leave your shoes under my bed!"

"They were under my bed!" howled McClure.

"Oh, well, I'm not supposed to choose beds when I'm in a hurry like this!" growled Handforth. "My goodness, I've got Church's shoes now!"

"You leave 'em alone!" ejaculated Church in alarm. "I say, what the dickens are these barges up here?"

Handforth's shoes were on his chair, and he showed no gratitude for having them pointed out to him. He calmly slung Church's footgear across the dormitory, and donned his own. Then he dashed out, leaving his long-suffering chums in such a state of exhaustion that they really needed another two hours' sleep.

CHAPTER III.

PRACTISING FOR THE FIRST.

EDGAR FENTON, of the Sixth, gave an approving nod.

"I see all you juniors have turned up," he exclaimed. "Good! We couldn't have a better morning for practice. There's no dew, and the pitch is wonderfully dry. I'm going to concentrate on you youngsters—I want to see what you can do."

"We're ready," said Nipper promptly.

"Yes, I'm confident about you, Hamilton," said the school captain. "And I'm pretty certain of Kahn and Dodd, too; but the others will have to show something special if they want to get into the First."

Reggie Pitt pulled a long face.

"We're among the also-rans, Boots, old man," he said sadly.

"Are we?" snorted John Busterfield Boots. "We'll see about that! If I don't get into the First Eleven, I'll eat my hat!"

Big Side was looking quite animated by now. The sun was beginning to peep over the meadows, and the school was still quiet and undisturbed. These early birds would have everything to themselves for an hour, at least. It was the usual thing to put in practice in the early morning.

William Napoleon Browne was in great evidence. He clung to Fenton like a leech—and practically everybody knew that he was Fenton's inspiration. Although a new fellow, Browne had an extraordinary "way" with him. And Fenton had soon fallen under his influence. Practically all the new ideas that Fenton had put forward had originated in Browne's fertile brain.

This does not mean to say that Edgar Fenton was devoid of originality, or that he was a weak captain.

On the contrary, he was one of the best fellows going, and he had proved his strength in the affair of the Modern House seniors. If he had any fault at all, it was an inclination to be conservative in his views.

First Eleven cricket was not at its best this season. To tell the plain truth, the First hadn't won a match yet. Consequently, Fenton had been greatly worried. For all his best efforts had been of no avail.

And while the First had been losing, the Junior Eleven had gained victory after victory. For Pitt's team contained at least three super-players for their ages. Nipper himself was a reliable batsman—a man who could be trusted to do well under any circumstances. Jerry Dodd fulfilled the promise of his Australian birth, and had long since proved himself to be that comparative rarity, a born cricketer. As for Hussi Kahn, his prowess was celebrated.

Pitt had no delusions about himself. As captain, he was tip-top—even Nipper, in the old days, had been no better. Pitt was a super-footballer, but at cricket he was not so wonderful. He was a good all-round man, but neither a brilliant batsman nor a deadly bowler.

It had never struck Fenton that these stalwarts of the Junior Eleven could be used to advantage in the First. But Browne, who cared little or nothing for conventions, was hot on the scheme. He brushed aside the old order of things with a single sweep, and boldly suggested an entirely new system. And although Fenton had smiled at first, he was now in deadly earnest.

And he was bent upon testing the juniors with a possibility of including the pick of them in the next big match.

This was fixed for the Wednesday, so there was not much time at the captain's disposal. The First Eleven would journey over to Redcliffe, and test its skill against the Redcliffe First.

The game had an additional interest in the fact that on the previous Saturday Pitt and his men had soundly beaten the Redcliffe Juniors. It would indeed be a surprise for Redcliffe if two or three juniors turned up at their own school to play the First!

"Look here, I'm going to give you a twisting, my lads!" declared Fenton. "I might as well know the worst at once. I'll take you first, Pitt. Browne is going to give you some of his hottest bowling."

"Good-bye!" said Reggie, in a hollow voice. "That's done it!"

Browne's fame as a bowler was well known. He was a brilliant batsman, too—but fast bowling was Browne's speciality. He was literally a demon. Fenton was setting the juniors a severe test.

But operations had not commenced when Goolah Kahn appeared, smiling and debonair in flannels and sweater and blazer. The young Rajah of Kurpana—Hussi's elder brother, by the way—was an Oxford Blue, and he was staying at St. Frank's as the headmaster's guest. He had kindly offered to have a look at the cricket, and to do a little coaching. So he had turned out especially early to watch the proceedings, and to give some tips.

And then Handforth arrived. He came fully equipped, for not only was he wearing pads, but he had a cricket-bat tucked under his arm, and he was pulling on his hand protectors.

"Ready?" he asked briskly, as he came up. "Am I going in first, Fenton? Good! Let her go!"

CHAPTER IV.

PUTTING THEM THROUGH IT!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH'S air of confidence was convincing. For a second, even Fenton thought that the leader of Study D was included in the list.

"No, Pitt's first," said the school captain.

"You'd better wait—— Hold on! I didn't put your name down!" he added suspiciously.

"That's all right—you forgot it!" said Handforth.

"Forgot it!"

"You needn't apologise," said Handforth kindly. "We're all liable to make these little mistakes. But look here, Fenton, it's a bit thick, putting Pitt in first! I think I ought to have the first knock——"

"You infernal young ass!" snorted Fenton. "I didn't tell you to come out for practice!"

"Oh, look here——"

"You can look on if you like, but don't interrupt!" added Fenton curtly. "Of all the nerve! It's no good, Handforth—you're not wanted for the First! I don't like to be unkind, but you've got to act straight!"

Edward Oswald looked dazed.

"Not wanted!" he repeated incredulously.

"Not wanted!" said Fenton.

"It could, of course, have been put more delicately, but no matter," put in Browne benevolently. "The idea, Brother Handforth, is simply this. Your excellent services are finally rejected. In that case, be good enough to remove your interesting person into the undergrowth."

Handforth seemed to recover.

"But—but what's the First Eleven going to do without me?" he asked.

"That, Brother Handforth, is left in the lap of the gods," he replied. "It may be a stiff hurdle, but what is this life but a constant fight against adversity? Pray do not think I am rude, but are you aware that you are holding up the entire programme?"

"It's no good, Handy—you'd better chuck it!" said Boots. "It was like your sauce to come here at all—when your name wasn't down!"

Handforth turned red, and he got ready to burst out with furious indignation. But, with surprising suddenness, he grew icily calm. This was one of his little characteristics.

"Oh, all right," he said bitterly. "Do you think I care? Blow the First Eleven! But don't blame me if you lose every giddy match! Fenton! I say, Fenton!"

"What's wrong now?" asked Fenton, looking round.

"Are you going to test me for the First?"

"Sorry, old man—can't be done!"

"All right, then—that's settled!" said Handforth grimly. "You can beg on your knees now, and I won't play! And when the First Eleven goes down, don't come to me and ask me to play! You've had your chance—and you've lost it!"

"That's a sad business!" chuckled Fenton.

"You can laugh now, but you won't laugh later on!" said Handforth tartly. "I know what it is—jealousy! Nothing else! You're afraid that I shall make some of your Sixth-Formers look silly! Rats!"

He stalked off in a huff, and juniors and seniors joined in a roar of laughter. Edward Oswald was a real comedian—but he didn't know it. Unlike other comedians, all his humour was unconscious. He was at his funniest when he least suspected it.

"Well, now we can get on," said Fenton briskly.

And they got on. Reggie Pitt took his place at the wicket, and William Napoleon Browne prepared to bowl. The tall Fifth-Former was looking rather sad.

"It grieves me to do this thing, but duty calls," he said, pained. "Brother Pitt, I would like to send you down some soft stuff, but I fear it would be unfair. I must therefore urge you to prepare for instantaneous annihilation. If I appear to boast, do not think harshly of me. Actions, after all, speak louder than words."

They did. Reggie Pitt stood up to Browne's bowling for five minutes, but he did very little hitting. All his time was occupied in guarding his wicket against those lightning deliveries. Fenton and the other seniors stood round, watching keenly.

At the first attempted stroke, Pitt's wicket fell. The ball whipped under his bat, and ripped out the middle stump. Browne flicked a speck of dust off his sleeve, and waited.

"Hard lines," said Fenton, as Pitt came off.

"That man's a terror," said Reggie.

"Perhaps I'm making the test a bit too hard," exclaimed Fenton. "Nobody in the First will be required to face many bowlers like Browne. Still, the others have got to have their shot."

Nipper went in next, and after two or three balls he got the hang of Browne's delivery. Gradually he settled himself, and then he proceeded to hit out strongly and vigorously. Again and again he knocked Browne with terrific force. His cuts were especially impressive.

"Great!" confided Fenton to Morrow. "My word, I had no idea Hamilton was so hot! Look at that! You couldn't do better yourself, Arthur!"

"I don't believe I could do so well!" admitted Morrow.

Nipper certainly gave a fine display. And when he finished, and Jerry Dodd took his place, Pitt was the first to congratulate him.

"I think you're certain for the First, anyhow," said Reggie.

"You'll have to have another shot ——"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Pitt, shaking his head. "I don't make any big claims about my playing—— Hallo! Look at Dodd! He's soon got going!"

Jerry Dodd was settling down rapidly. His test was a complete success. Even the Rajah himself could not refrain from uttering high praise. For Jerry was a superb batsman.

The Rajah was more interested than ever when his younger brother was tried. Hussi Kahn made no mistakes. He showed the

Sixth Formers something they had not suspected. His batting was every bit as good as Nipper's, and nearly as good as Jerry Dodd's.

After these three experts, the work of Boots and Christine was not so convincing. Browne dealt with them fairly easily, and they were unable to make many hits off his bowling.

At a rough guess, it seemed a certainty that Nipper, Jerry Dodd, and Hussi Kahn would be included in the First Eleven for the big Redcliffe match.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW ORDER OF THINGS.

GUY SINCLAIR, of the Modern House Sixth, scowled.

"Confounded kids!" he said viciously. "It's like Fenton's nerve to think of putting them in the team!"

"It's doing 'em a lot of harm!" declared Carlile.

"There'll be no holding them back after this!" grunted Mills.

The three Sixth Formers were standing near the pavilion. They had come down early on purpose to see the juniors tested. But it was now nearly seven o'clock, and some of the regular First Eleven men were at the nets.

Sinclair was the fellow who had caused all the trouble in the first case. And Carlile and Mills were the other Sixth Formers associated in the affair. Swinton and Hitchen, of the Fifth, had also refused to play, but they were not so important.

These three were the principals.

They were now out of the First Eleven. Instinctively, they had pulled together, although until a few days ago they had never been particularly friendly. Since Saturday, they were inseparable.

They had a common grievance—being left out of the team.

They had confidently believed that, sooner or later, Fenton would effect a reconciliation. They had fully expected to play in the Redcliffe match—particularly after the defeat of Saturday. And now these confounded juniors were taking away their last hope!

The three seniors were not only alarmed, but furious. To see juniors stealing their coveted places was absolutely galling. And it did not make matters any better when the aggrieved trio realised that Nipper, Dodd and Kahn were undoubtedly their superiors in form.

In fact, once these three were included in the First Eleven, the trio of Sixth Formers would never be able to get back. So they stood near the ground, bitter and morose.

"We shall have to do something!" declared Sinclair fiercely. "Good heavens! We're not going to stand this sort of humiliation! Think of it! The three picked men of the Modern House—that's what we are—and everybody knows it—being chucked aside to make room for kids!"

"But what can we do?" asked Mills gloomily.

"Nothing!" growled Carlile.

"Don't you be too sure of that!" said Sinclair, with a gleam in his eye. "Fenton may have made up his mind—but I've made up mine, too! Just you wait! If there's any possible way of keeping those infernal juniors down, I'll think of it!"

It was, after all, nothing more than idle boasting—the bitter words of a disappointed player. When all was said and done, the three Sixth Formers would not be able to do much if the juniors were once picked.

After the practice was over, Fenton had a few words with Reggie Pitt.

"Your men have done fine, Pitt," said Fenton. "I shall have you out for practice again this afternoon—I'll see that you miss lessons."

"Good!" said Reggie promptly.

"I'll make the final selection this evening," went on Fenton. "But I think it's a foregone conclusion that I'll use three of you."

"Nipper, Dodd and Kahn, eh?"

"Well, yes, that's what I was thinking," admitted Fenton. "I'm rather sorry I can't include you, Pitt—and yet I'm glad in another way."

"Glad?"

"Well, you see, we're making big changes altogether," explained Fenton. "Hitherto we've had a First Eleven and—— Well, that's about all. You juniors haven't had much chance of doing big things. Well, I'm going to alter all that—although, strictly speaking, it's Browne's suggestion."

"Alter it?" asked Pitt interestedly.

"The idea is to form three elevens—three representative teams," explained Fenton. "It doesn't matter which Form the players come from—they're placed in the elevens according to their merit. I rather think I shall captain the First Eleven, as usual. And I'd like you to accept the captaincy of the Second Eleven. That's why I'm glad I shan't need you for the First. There couldn't be a better skipper than you for the Second."

"Thanks awfully," said Pitt, flushing.

"Of course, the Second Eleven won't be composed of juniors entirely," went on Fenton. "Naturally, I shall leave the selections to you—as you'll be skipper. But I think you'll need one or two Fifth Formers in addition to your own men—particularly as I'm stealing your three best. But you'll still have enough strength in your team to beat most others."

"I think it's a great idea," said Pitt enthusiastically. "It'll suit me down to the ground to be captain of the Second Eleven. And I shan't be so uncomfortable."

"Uncomfortable?"

"Well, about Nipper, I mean," said Pitt awkwardly. "He used to be skipper of my team, you know, and I've always had a feeling that I'm keeping him from where he belongs. But if he's playing for the First, and I'm captain of the Second, everything will be top-hole."

"That's the idea," said Fenton. "Of course, the Second Eleven will rank higher than your Junior Eleven has done. For example, your matches will be full day matches—you'll start at 11-30, just like the First."

"Ripping!" exclaimed Pitt gladly.

"Then there'll be a third Eleven—not the Third Form, let me explain," said Fenton. "There may be one or two Fifth Formers—it all depends upon their fitness. In any case, I can see things going fine under this new arrangement—because the First Eleven will get the pick of the whole school, the Second Eleven will have next choice, and the Third Eleven—— Well, the Third will be a kind of graduating class, as it were."

Reggie Pitt was supremely happy. As far as he could see, everything was tip-top. He didn't mind a bit about failing in the trial. He would be far more contented in the responsible position as Captain of the Second Eleven.

And he would have the satisfaction of knowing that his best men—hitherto wasted in the Junior Eleven—would be given the places they deserved.

CHAPTER VI.

TWISTING GRAYSON'S NOSE.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE lounged lazily against the Ancient House steps, and beamed upon a throng of juniors in the near vicinity. Naturally, everybody was talking about cricket.

"One—two—three——"
The referee, confused and bewildered, counted Browne out—in spite of the fact that time had been called.

Cricket was the only subject of interest at St. Frank's at present. Nothing else mattered. Even the growing hatred between the seniors of both Houses was brushed aside. Among the juniors, the prospect of having three of their men in the First Eleven swallowed every other subject.

It was the interval in morning school.

And everybody was taking advantage of the fine morning to come outside and sun themselves. Browne was feeling particularly happy. He had come to St. Frank's at the beginning of this term, practically a stranger. At his old school, Uxton, he had been a great celebrity in the cricket line.

But he had hardly hoped to do very much during his first term at St. Frank's.

But his attractive personality had already wrought great changes.

Not only was he captain of the Fifth Form, but he was the man behind the First Eleven. Fenton had early recognised Browne's cricket genius. For Browne was not merely a good player, but a superb organiser. It was impossible for him to be captain, but he was in the next best place—by the captain's side.

Cuthbert Chambers, the original Fifth Form captain, had been simply furious at being ousted by Browne. For days he had regarded Browne as a kind of leper, and had studiously avoided him.

But since Browne's feats on the cricket field, the great Cuthbert had thawed. He was now even disposed to be friendly, and in spite of his natural conceit, he admitted that Browne was the best man for the Fifth Form captaincy.

It was astonishing what cricket could do.

The one fact that Browne shone as a cricketer removed all of Chambers' animosity. Browne was a first-class cricketer—therefore he was a fine fellow. Nothing else really mattered.

So the great William Napoleon had every reason to be content. True, he had enemies in the Fifth—particularly Grayson. Grayson was several kinds of a cad, to say nothing of being a bully. And Browne had frequently gone out of his way to gently "take him down a peg or two" in the crowded senior day-room. Browne did these things so calmly and smoothly that it was not until afterwards that Grayson realised the humiliation of them.

During this interval, a little incident occurred which was to lead to rather surprising consequences.

Browne, having bestowed his blessing upon the juniors, turned indoors, and adjourned to the Fifth Form common-room—which was distinct from the senior day-room, inasmuch as it was provided for Fifth Formers alone.

There were two or three fellows in there, and they looked up as Browne entered.

"Hallo! Here comes the great oracle!" exclaimed Grayson, in his nastiest voice. "'The Man Who Saved The School!' Isn't it about time that he realises he's only a new fellow?"

Browne beamed upon the company in general.

"Correct me if I am wrong, Brother Grayson, but do I not detect a slight unfriendliness in your tone?" he asked politely. "Possibly you have a tight shoe? Such trifles cause great irritability. Or perhaps you have sat upon a pin? I have heard on the best authority that this upsets one's temper to no small degree."

"Funny, aren't you?" sneered Grayson.

"If so, I have yet another accomplishment!" smiled Browne. "It is news to learn that I am a comedian. But one lives and learns. I fear, however, that your comment was uttered in a sarcastic vein."

"Go to the dickens!" said Grayson sourly.

"Alas! I fear that your manners are getting worse and worse, Brother Grayson," said Browne. "But who am I to blame you? Knowing nothing of your early upbringing, I can only conclude that you were deprived of many opportunities——"

"Don't you start any of your insults!" interrupted Grayson, turning red. "You haven't got much to boast about! Your pater's a judge, and so you think you can spout as you like! But what was he before he became a judge? A. K.C.—and probably a swindler! All lawyers are swindlers!"

Browne sighed.

"You force these things upon me, Brother Grayson," he said regretfully. "While deploring the necessity, I must, nevertheless, admit that it gives me extreme pleasure to perform the following operation."

He leaned forward languidly, seized Grayson's nose between his two fingers, and twisted it with excruciating force.

CHAPTER VII.

BROWNE INSISTS.

GRAYSON howled wildly.

"There, Brother Grayson, let us now consider the episode closed," said William Napoleon Browne calmly. "Honour is satisfied, and your nasal organ is somewhat improved in appearance. I have heard on the best authority that Zam-Buk is an excellent——"

"You—you confounded idiot!" snarled Grayson.

He backed away, holding his nose, and was acutely conscious of the fact that the other Fifth-Formers were grinning at him. It was always a humorous spectacle to see somebody's nose twisted.

The insult was one of the worst possible. And Grayson, who prided himself upon being a big man in the Fifth, acted rather rashly. He swung his hand round, and caught Browne across the face.

"Take that!" he shouted thickly.

"It appears that I have no choice," replied Browne calmly. "I take it, also, that this little slap is tantamount to a challenge? With pleasure, Brother Grayson. Shall we say immediately after morning school in this very room? Gloves, from my point of view, are quite immaterial."

Browne's coolness of manner belied his inner feelings. He was literally boiling. But he always regarded it as a point of decency to remain icily calm under all circumstances.

"Look here, Browne, you can't fight!" ejaculated Phillips quickly.

"No?" said Browne. "At Uxton I had a reputation as a middle-weight. Indeed, I may say without boasting that many pro-

fessional boxers shiver like a jelly at the very mention of my name."

"I don't mean that—you can box, I know!" exclaimed Phillips. "But you can't fight Grayson!"

"You surprise me, Brother Phillips," said Browne. "Am I to understand that Brother Grayson is a kind of demi-god, whom none can touch?"

"We don't have fights in the Fifth," put in Bryant. "Boxing-matches, perhaps, but a common-or-garden fight—that sort of thing is left to the juniors! We don't allow it in the Fifth."

"In that case, it is high time that a slight modification was made," he observed. "I now perceive traces of daylight. It occurs to me why Brother Grayson was so bold and warlike. Knowing that no fight would result, he indulged in the simple pleasure of slapping my face."

"You twisted my nose!" shouted Grayson.

"Deservedly, Brother Grayson—deservedly," said Browne. "It was done in order to wipe out an insult. I regret that I am unable to let the matter drop. It will give me great pleasure to do my utmost to thrash you. Therefore, much as I hate the expenditure of energy on such an unworthy cause, I must insist upon a meeting after morning school."

Grayson changed colour.

"I won't fight you!" he growled, sullenly.

"In that case, I have no option but to knock you down!" exclaimed William Napoleon, deliberately pushing up his sleeves. "Brother Phillips, am I wrong in assuming that the school keeps a stretcher somewhere? Hasten, for it will be needed!"

Browne was grabbed by two or three other Fifth-Formers.

"There goes the bell!" said Chambers. "Look here, you chaps—I think Browne's right! If he wants a fight, let him have it! Grayson asked for one, anyhow! And Browne's skipper—it's up to him."

"My gratitude, Brother Chambers, for those kindly words," said Browne gracefully. "I take it, then, that all is settled? Splendid! I have no doubt that luncheon will to-day have an added piquancy, since I shall have engendered a healthy appetite for it."

They went in to lessons, and the Fifth was soon agog with the news. All the Ancient House fellows were on Browne's side. Grayson, of course, was a Modern House senior, and he had really had no right to precipitate a quarrel while in the Ancient House quarters. He had asked for a fight, and he was going to get one.

The Modern House seniors, although against Browne as a whole, were more influenced by House rivalry than anything else. Inwardly, they felt that Grayson had acted like a fool.

And immediately following lessons the excitement in the Fifth increased.

Browne was for getting the thing over as quickly as possible. Without any delay, Simms was appointed referee, and Shaw offered to keep time. Nobody objected. And the informal fight began.

The common-room was crowded—mostly with Ancient House fellows. But not more than half the Fifth was present. They hadn't imagined that the fight would take place so quickly.

"Why waste valuable time?" asked Browne, as his gloves were pulled on by Stevens and Hodder. "Far better to settle these little differences without undue delay. Furthermore, it will enable Grayson to recover consciousness before the luncheon-bell rings."

The preliminaries were soon done, and Shaw called time.

And the two combatants, facing one another in the improvised ring—merely a clear space in the centre of the room—went at it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FOUL.

WITHIN three minutes the end of the fight was a foregone conclusion.

Browne's boxing skill was as good to look upon as his prowess at cricket. There seemed to be no end to this fellow's accomplishments. He played with Grayson tantalizingly.

Grayson was a fair boxer, but a much better fighter. He was ramheaded and lumbering. Browne, being an expert in the art of self-defence, easily avoided every one of his opponent's heavy lunges. And his air of bored indifference while actually fighting caused general amusement.

Occasionally he would deliver a tap, and exasperate Grayson to the point of fury. And this only led to further futile rushes on Grayson's part. The fight was Browne's all along the line.

"Time!" called Shaw.

"How are we going, Brother Grayson?" asked Browne, as he retired to his "corner" with Stevens. "Let me urge you to cease your unnecessary expenditure of energy. You'll need it in the fifteenth round. It is then that one's vitality is beginning to ebb."

"You fool!" shouted Grayson. "You won't last two more rounds!"

"Why?" asked Browne, appealing to Stevens, "do people suffer from these delusions? Brother Grayson is unhappily optimistic. Is this massage business really necessary?" he added painfully. "And kindly remember that a wet sponge down the back of one's neck is a sheer superfluity."

The next round was even more in Browne's favour. But just towards the end Grayson managed to get in one drive which rather shook the indomitable William Napoleon. He staggered under the force of the blow.

"Well hit!" shouted Shaw excitedly.

"You look after your timekeeping!" snapped Phillips.

Browne was not slow in retaliating. Grayson got the shock of his life. Instead of the gentle taps which he had been receiving, he was driven round the ring, and punished fearfully.

Slam! Crash! Slam!

Grayson was hopelessly confused. Dazed, bewildered, and hurt, he gave way before Browne's skilful, crashing hits. It was obvious to all that Browne had been playing with him up till now.

It was equally obvious that Browne could deliver the knock-out at any moment he chose.

Shaw stood watching fascinatedly. He was Grayson's pal, and his anxiety for Grayson caused him to forget his duties.

"What about time?" asked Chambers curtly. "It's been more than two minutes this round, hasn't it?"

"Yes, it's time!" said Phillips.

Browne dropped his hands, and glanced at Shaw. It was time all right—and Browne was rather sorry for Grayson because Shaw had forgotten. Grayson needed a rest.

But in that second Grayson acted.

The very instant Browne dropped his guard Grayson leapt forward. His right came swinging up with all the force of his body behind it.

Crash!

His glove took Browne on the chin, and William Napoleon, absolutely off his guard, and unready, went hurtling over into a huddled heap. He lay perfectly still—knocked clean out.

"Time!" gasped Shaw, in the same second.

There was a wild, tumultuous uproar.

"One—two—three——"

The referee, confused and bewildered, counted Browne out, in spite of the fact that time had been called.

"Out!" he concluded excitedly.

"Hurrah! Grayson's won!" yelled Shaw.

"Grayson's knocked Browne out!" shouted Hitchen and Swinton.

"One or two other Modern House Fifth-Formers seized Grayson, and carried him off amid tremendous excitement. Grayson had knocked Browne out—had beaten the captain of the Fifth in a fight!

Within three minutes the Modern House men were rushing off, the whole Fifth was ringing with the news. There were great celebrations among the Modern House section, and sheer consternation in the Ancient House. It seemed incredible that Browne could have been knocked out.

In the Ancient House, however, Chambers was grim.

"It wasn't fair!" he declared again and again. "Look here, you chaps—you saw it! That hit of Grayson's was a foul! It was a rotten, dirty foul! The blackguard! He ought to be slaughtered!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It was a foul!"

Stevens looked up, worried.

"Don't make such a noise, you chaps!" he exclaimed. "Poor old Browne's just coming to; he had an awful swipe!"

Browne looked up, opening his eyes with difficulty.

"Am I right in assuming that we have experienced an explosion?" he murmured. "Or was it merely an unkind blow on the part of Filthy Richard? Alas, I fear the latter?"

"You were fouled, Browne," said Stevens.

"As I suspected, Brother Horace—as I suspected," murmured Browne. "Whilst feeling in need of brandy, I will waive the point, and sip some water. The sponge, Brother Phillips, would be now welcome."

And while Stevens was attending to the unfortunate Browne, Cuthbert Chambers went round like a whirlwind. Chambers was not much good as a leader—he was too fond of slacking. But when he did get going he was tremendously excited, and drove everything before him.

And he called a Form meeting on the spot.

If everybody had known that Cuthbert had called the meeting, many might not have attended, but the Fifth-Formers

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Third Series—Fifth Form.

NOTE.—The average age of Fifth Form boys is 17.

No. 2.—Horace Stevens.

Stevens is Napoleon Browne's great chum, and his confidant in all things. A genial, easy-going senior, with any amount of patience. He shares a good deal of glory with Browne, since he is the latter's study chum.

thought it was an official order—and fellows absented themselves from official Form meetings at their own peril.

CHAPTER IX.

GETTING EXCITED.

THE meeting took place in the lecture hall.

Every Fifth-Former turned up, even Browne himself. Having recovered, he quickly assumed his old manner. He was feeling groggy, and his jaw was aching atrociously. But he managed to squeeze into the back of the hall and watch the proceedings.

"Don't you worry!" whispered Stevens. "Chambers is on the warpath, and there's no stopping him. He didn't like you when you first came, but he's your pal now."

"Ah, my charming personality again!" murmured Browne. "It is no good, Brother Horace; I can conquer wherever I go."

"He'll see that this thing's put right, and that Grayson is punished!" went on Stevens. "A foul blow of that kind can only be answered in one way. He'll be cut by the whole Form!"

"Each one, I take it, will have a slice?"

"You ass! I mean, he'll be—— Well, cut!" said Stevens.

"I fear that lucidity is not one of your strong points, Brother Horace," said Browne. "However, we take your meaning, so all is well. Observe! Things are becoming interesting."

Cuthbert Chambers was on the platform, and he was spouting.

"You Modern House fellows are saying that Grayson knocked out Browne in a fair fight!" roared Chambers. "You're wrong! It was a foul blow—a rotten, caddish——"

"It was fair!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Grayson knocked him out!"

"We'll see what the referee's got to say!" shouted Chambers furiously. "Come on, Simms, up you come! You were referee; you were idiot enough to count Browne out after time had been called."

"I—I didn't hear it!" said Simms weakly.

"What!"

"I—I saw Browne go down, and I thought I had to count!"

"You babbling ass!" roared Chambers. "What's the good of having you for a referee? And there's Shaw, too. You were keeping time, Shaw. You know what happened!"

"Yes, I know what happened!" shouted Shaw hotly. "Browne was knocking Grayson about; and then he dropped his guard for some reason and Grayson delivered the knockout. I didn't call time until Simms had counted Browne out!"

Chambers stared at him in blank amazement.

"What!" he gasped. "Why, you—you fearful liar!"

"It's true! We believe Shaw!" roared the Modern House seniors.

"Then you're mad!" yelled Bryant. "We were there; we saw it all. I'll tell you what happened, and there are eight or nine chaps here who can prove that what I say is the truth. Shaw forgot all about his timekeeping, and Chambers asked him about it. Browne dropped his hands, thinking the round was over, and looked aside. And while he was looking the other way Grayson knocked him out!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed a dozen.

"It was about the filthiest thing I've ever seen!" shouted Bryant indignantly. "It was a cad's blow—a hooligan's piece of work. If you Modern House fellows support Grayson, you're nothing else but worms!"

There was another uproar, and if Cuthbert Chambers imagined that he was going to obtain peace or any understanding he was unduly optimistic. If ever he had proved his incapacity as skipper he was proving it now.

Calling a Form meeting, in the excited condition of the Fifth, was about the last thing that should have been done. For it led to arguments, to wrangling, and bitter feeling. And now that the whole Fifth was in a kind of storm, to quell it was out of the question.

"I fear that Brother Chambers has adopted the wrong policy," sighed Browne. "Perhaps it will not be too late for me to restore peace."

"Better not try," urged Stevens. "I'll admit I thought Chambers was going right; but I can see your point of view now. It's no good going into these things ramheadedly. That's why you're such a fine skipper, I suppose?"

"Surely, surely this is not the moment for such compliments?" asked Browne. "Keep your kindly thought for more fitting moments, Brother Horace. Let us now attempt to bring about peace and understanding."

But the uproar in the lecture hall was growing worse and worse.

"It's no good you Ancient House fellows trying to make out that Browne was badly treated!" shouted Swinton. "Grayson won the fight fairly, and you're a set of cads for trying to deprive him of the honour."

"Grayson acted like a hooligan!" roared Chambers.

"He must have been dragged up in the gutter!" said Phillips hotly.

"You rotter!" panted Hitchen, who was next to him.

"Who's a rotter?" snapped Phillips.

"You are!"

"Oh, am I?" roared Phillips. "All right—take that!"

Crash!

Hitchen staggered back, and that one blow finished all William Napoleon Browne's chances of effecting a settlement. Within ten seconds the lecture hall was in a state of riot.

CHAPTER X.

THE RIOT.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE stood at the window of his study and adjusted his monocle. Phipps, his valet, was putting a few books straight on the other side of the room.

"Good gad!" exclaimed Archie, as he leaned out of the window. "Phipps, laddie, kindly trickle hence and listen. What is that frightful din? I mean to say, all this shouting, and so forth?"

Phipps joined his young master.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," he said, looking out of the window. "It appears to be coming from the lecture hall. Possibly some of the young gentlemen are having a little argument."

"What? I mean— I say, dash it all, Phipps!" protested Archie. "A little argument! It sounds more like a representation of Bedlam, by gad! And it's all the more surprising because most of the lads of the village appear to be in full view!"

"That's true, sir," said Phipps, looking out into the Triangle. "But I don't see any of the young gentlemen of the Fifth——"

"Oddslife! You're not suggesting that the Fifth——" Archie paused, and shook his head. "Laddie, the young master refuses to believe it!"

And there were many others who refused to believe it, too. The Fifth Form fellows were seniors, and for them to engage in any wild brawling was practically out of the question. That sort of thing was left to the juniors, and even the juniors didn't indulge in it often.

But the impossible had happened.

And, to tell the plain, straightforward truth, the entire Fifth Form was now engaged in nothing more nor less than a free-fight. The Ancient House fellows were tackling the Modern House fellows with tremendous energy.

The lecture hall resembled a shambles.

It was really a most disgraceful scene. Chambers, in all innocence, had undoubtedly precipitated this riot. His intentions had been good, but his method had been bad. And now it was altogether too late to restore peace.

The Fifth-Formers were at one another's throats.

The noise was so terrific that prefects and others were attracted from all quarters. Juniors gathered outside the windows, and stood there in little knots, awed and amazed. They knew that the Sixth were coldly disposed towards one another; but it was something new to find that the Fifth had joined in the feud. And the Fifth was doing it thoroughly.

Mr. Beverley Stokes brought the thing to an end.

A prefect hurried up and gasped out to him that murder was being committed in the lecture hall. And Barry Stokes, although he didn't quite believe this exaggerated statement, thought it necessary to investigate.

He did so, and walked into the lecture hall to find it in a fearful state. Cuthbert Chambers, usually sedate and languid, was rolling on the floor in the firm grip of Hitchen and Swinton. The latter was punching Chambers in the face, and Hitchen was doing his best to tear Chambers' clothes from him, garment by garment.

Round about the floor, in assorted groups, were other combatants. They had sorted themselves out into little parties, and were fighting with a fine abandon. All thoughts of dignity had long since flown, and if they had hated one another from birth, they couldn't have hit harder.

"Stop this at once!" shouted Mr. Stokes, aghast.

The fight went on in the main, although a few who heard ceased hostilities.

"Stop!" thundered Mr. Stokes. "Good heavens! Have you boys forgotten all sense of decency and good conduct? Hitchen! Get up at once! Chambers! What is the meaning of this? Browne! You are captain of this Form, what have you to say?"

"A great deal, sir—a great deal," replied Browne. "But I fear you are in no mood for a lengthy discourse. Let me place it in a nutshell. Grayson and I had the misfortune to have a little misunderstanding. We fought——"

"You fought?" repeated Mr. Stokes sharply. "Here?"

"No, Brother Barry, not here, but in private," replied Browne. "At least, there were only a few hand-picked spectators. This little disagreement is the outcome of our fistic argument. I fear, sir, that nothing short of dynamite will bring it to an end."

"In that case, I'd better supply some dynamite!" said Mr. Stokes grimly.

He pushed his way through the room, and at length his authoritative voice succeeded in reducing the Fifth-Formers to sanity. They looked a sorry crowd. There wasn't a single fellow who remained unmarked.

"I shall make no inquiry into this disgraceful affair now," exclaimed Mr. Stokes coldly. "Go away, and clean yourselves. Later, you may be sure I shall require full explanation. And you will all be punished as you deserve. I am amazed that boys of your age should so far forget yourselves."

The Fifth, now cooled down, were positively aghast at their own actions. And by the time they had changed and washed, they could hardly believe that the riot had actually taken place.

As for the inquiry, this came to nothing—for Mr. Stokes realised that no good would come of a long investigation. He thought it better to keep the disgraceful affair as quiet as possible. Nevertheless, the Fifth was deprived of many liberties for the next two or three weeks—and during this time they would probably repent.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPREADING OF THE FEUD.

IT was rather hard on Browne that he should be compelled to suffer with the rest. But he took it philosophically. After all, the whole Form had been engaged, and it was impossible for the housemaster to make any exceptions.

"We must learn to bear these trials with fortitude, Brother Horace," said Browne, in Study No. 10 that evening. "But I have an idea that many moons will shine before we embrace our colleagues of the Modern House again."

"The rotters!" said Stevens, with feeling. "They're all the same! Fancy backing up that cad, Grayson! They're supporting him, mind you! Supporting a blackguard like that!"

"It is mainly bitter feeling between the two Houses," said Browne. "That is the root of the whole trouble, Brother Horace. Under normal circumstances, many of the Modern House stalwarts would not touch Brother Grayson with a punt pole. But at present they are drawn towards him by a mutual feeling of brotherly love. Alas, that human nature should be so fickle! But what can we do? We are but feathers in the storm."

"We weren't like feathers this morning!" growled Stevens. "I'm bruised all over—and I know my eye will be black in the morning!"

"Trophies of battle, brother," said Browne. "Honourable scars, if the truth must be known. But to change the subject. Let us discourse upon matters of less painful recollection. I hear that history this day has been made."

"What do you mean?"

"Cricket, Brother Stevens—cricket!" said Browne, lying back in his chair. "Have you not digested the news? The master-men of the Fourth have been showing Fenton exactly what cricket consists of. I understand that Nipper, Kahn, and Dodd are certainties for the Redcliffe match on Wednesday. My cup of joy is filled to the brim. Which reminds, me, brother, that you are somewhat backward with the teapot!"

They continued their tea, and in the meantime the entire senior school was seething. Actual warfare had come to an end, but there was not the slightest doubt about the bitter feeling. The enmity had spread from the Sixth to the Fifth. The latter Form was now divided—the Modern House seniors hated the Ancient House seniors like poison, and vice versa. The affairs of the Fifth had greatly increased the animosity of the Sixth.

Not a single Modern House senior was on speaking terms with a rival. Indeed, it was fully understood that if any personal armistice took place, the fellows involved would be cut by their own Form.

The headmaster, of course, knew all about it, and to say that he was worried would be to put it mildly. On previous occasions the juniors had had spells of warfare, but the present business was practically unprecedented. Never before had the Fifth and Sixth been at one another's throats.

"Is there nothing we can do, Mr. Stokes?" asked the Head, when the housemaster visited him during the evening. "I am appalled at this present situation. It may lead to something truly grave."

"It is possible, of course, but I shouldn't worry too much," said Mr. Stokes. "But here is Mr. Lee—he may be able to advise us."

Nelson Lee came in, and could see that the Head was concerned. It was rather late now, and the school had gone to bed. Lee himself, in fact, was thinking about turning in.

"You know about the feud, of course?" asked the Head.

"Yes, and I am rather distressed," said Nelson Lee. "It all seems so needless—so unnecessary. Boys who have always been good friends, are now sworn enemies."

"Can you suggest any remedy, Mr. Lee?" asked the Head.

"Well, I should advise no action at the moment," said Nelson Lee. "If you take official notice of the affair, it may cause a sudden outbreak. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the boys will realise their folly, and settle their differences. It would be more serious if the entire school was involved—for I fear that the juniors are hot-headed."

"There is no sign of animosity among the juniors?"

"None at all, at present," replied Nelson Lee. "The Fourth-Formers are on the best of terms, and so, too, are the Third. I think we can wait a while. No doubt the seniors will patch things up."

It was really good advice, though events were to prove that Nelson Lee was wrong for once. There was to be no patching up of the quarrel. In the future, indeed, the trouble was liable to spread.

But Lee was certainly right in advising inaction. If the headmaster had lectured the school on their enmity, it would undoubtedly have had a bad effect. The seniors would have been more bitter than ever. It is always a grave matter to control a great school like St. Frank's when a general quarrel is running its course.

Nelson Lee stayed with the Head for some time, and then went off to his own bed-room. In the corridor, upstairs, he met Goolah Kahn, the young rajah.

"Wonderful news, Mr. Lee!" said Goolah Kahn, smiling with his usual geniality. "Fenton is forming an Eleven which, in my opinion, will be unbeatable. Your junior boys are wonderful!"

"Fenton is playing some of them?"

"Three, at least," replied the rajah. "The move has my entire approval, and I predict a victory on Wednesday."

They exchanged a few more words, and Lee went to bed. He was very thoughtful, for his meeting with Goolah Kahn had brought memories back to his mind.

Was the rajah all that he seemed to be?

CHAPTER XII.

GOOLAH KAHN'S STRANGE ERRAND.

AS Nelson Lee got undressed, his mind ran on the rajah.

A few days earlier a very queer incident had occurred. Nelson Lee had not seen anything strange personally, but he had Nipper's word for it—and Lee knew that Nipper would not bring him a false story.

It seemed that Nipper and Willy Handforth had witnessed a surprising thing in Bellton Wood. In one of the deserted clearings a portion of the earth had risen like a door. And out of this had come three Indians, accompanied by Goolah Kahn himself. The young rajah had returned to St. Frank's, and the other Indians had re-entered the tunnel, closing the earth door behind them.

On the face of it, it seemed a fantastic story, and if anybody else had told him, Lee would not have believed it. But Nipper never exaggerated—in these sort of matters, at all events.

Lee wondered if he should sit up and keep a watch. But he didn't quite like the idea. It seemed to smack of spying upon one of the headmaster's guests. And, after all, there was nothing whatever against Goolah Kahn of a tangible sort.

He was quite a pleasant fellow, a gentleman in every way, and the idea of watching him did not appeal to Lee in the least. Until he had good cause to investigate, he would not do so. Perhaps Nipper and Willy Handforth had made a little too much of the affair.

Nelson Lee might not have thought so if he had witnessed the movements of Goolah Kahn at midnight, when the whole of St. Frank's was finally settled down for the night.

Even Lee, with all his experience of detective work, might not have been aware that anything unusual was taking place. A shadow appeared in one of the upper corridors.

But it was so slight, so intangible, that it hardly seemed possible that the shadow could be caused by a human being. It moved with absolute silence, and appeared to be more or less spectral.

Yet, in all truth, the shadow was Goolah Kahn.

The young rajah, strangely attired, had left his bed-room, and was noiselessly making his way downstairs. He was now dressed in sombre black—a curious kind of native costume, with a black turban on his head.

A meeting with this figure would have startled anybody at the hour of midnight. And the young rajah seemed such an open, modern sort of young man in the daytime that it was hardly possible to associate him with this silently gliding figure.

He left the school by means of a passage window, and even when he had reached the exterior, his movements were no less mysterious. One thing was obvious. He had every desire to keep his errand a secret. He was engaged upon some mission which apparently wouldn't bear the light of day.

Once clear of the school grounds, the rajah's movements were freer.

He passed down the lane, arrived at the stile near the bend, and then plunged into the heart of Bellton Wood. Although he was unfamiliar with his surroundings, he had no difficulties with the course he was taking.

After proceeding for some distance he turned off the footpath into the dense wood itself. And soon he arrived at the clearing. This was one of many, but it was distinguishable by its close proximity to a woodland track which ultimately led out somewhere near Edgemore Lane.

When Goolah entered the clearing there was a certain amount of activity. There were one or two figures moving about the starlit gloom. After the intense darkness of the forest, there seemed a fair amount of light in the clearing.

Goolah Kahn approached the centre, and

there stood the earth door wide open, with a black tunnel leading into the recesses of the ground beneath the wood. It was rather an extraordinary business.

Two or three Indians were there, and they showed much deference. In low tones Goolah Kahn conversed with them. Who were these Indians, and what was their object in the wood? These were questions which seemed to require a lot of answering. It was hardly possible that their mission was an honest one.

The cavity in the ground was not so extraordinary.

Many of the St. Frank's juniors knew that there were underground caverns stretching under this section of the countryside. There were tunnels, too, leading even as far as Willard's Island, and to the old vault beneath the monastery ruins near the Triangle.

At one period some criminals had made use of the caverns, but at that time more than one of these strange places had been blocked. Nobody knew if there were any remaining.

They extended in the other direction as far as the old quarries on Bannington Moor. Most of them were ancient, disused workings—for in some remote period there had been active quarrying in progress. But for many years no business of this kind had been carried on.

Goolah Kahn left the entrance of the tunnel, and made his way to the woodland track near by. And here stood a heavy lorry—a great covered motor vehicle. And it was fully loaded.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAVERN BENEATH THE WOOD.

HALF an hour later there was greater activity than ever.

The lorry was being unloaded. Heavy cases were being carried from it, and all were carried down into the mysterious tunnel. There was something unreal about the whole affair—but it was none the less actual, for all that.

There seemed to be three men concerned in the work. They were all Indians, however, and whenever they spoke they used their own language. Not one word of English was uttered.

And this, happening in the heart of a quiet Sussex Wood, was certainly a peculiar circumstance. It was all the more strange when one of the chief actors in the business stood revealed as Hussi Kahn's brother—the future Maharajah of all the great Indian province of Kurpana.

When the last of the heavy cases had been carried down, one of the Indians mounted the lorry, started the engine, and drove slowly off. It was a very quiet vehicle, but nothing could subdue the pure

Crash!
Hitchen staggered back, and that one blow finished all William Napoleon Browne's chances of effecting a settlement.

of its engine. Not that there was much danger. The wood itself confined the sound, and if any of the neighbouring inhabitants heard the sound, they would think nothing. Lorries frequently passed through Bellton along the main Bannington Road in the dead of night.

Goolah Kahn stood listening until the sounds had died completely away. He judged that the lorry had reached the road by this time, and if anybody saw it, or heard it, no suspicions would be aroused. There is, after all, no method better than boldness. Even if somebody had met the lorry coming out of the wood itself, nothing would have been thought. But the heavy vehicle had come and had gone without a soul being the wiser.

And Goolah Kahn entered the tunnel, and one man on guard closed the earth door, and at the same instant switched on the electric torch.

"You will lead the way," said Goolah Kahn shortly.

They went down a wide earth tunnel, the sides of which were supported by timber struts. The tunnel was new. It seemed a certainty that these Indians had been on the scene long before Goolah Kahn himself had arrived at St. Frank's.

They had prepared things in advance.

Commencing operations from an underground cavern, this tunnel had been excavated, and had been deliberately planned

so that the exit should come out in the clearing, near to the woodland track. Those who had designed the tunnel had been very careful.

After a while the subterranean passage did not look so fresh. And presently the two men emerged into a small cavern. There were lights here—gleaming electric lamps which twinkled and glowed. On the other side was an arched cavity, leading into a still bigger cavern.

Goolah Kahn walked through, and found himself confronting another Indian—one who, to judge by his appearance, was in charge of the entire undertaking. He was dressed in an ordinary European serge suit, but over this he had donned a native garment, and a turban gave him additional impressiveness.

He was a strange, mysterious-looking individual—very dark, and with glowing eyes. There was something about his eyes which caused even Goolah Kahn to look away. The man was strange—sinister. His face was long, clean-shaven, with high cheek-bones.

"All is well, Chandra Jungh?" asked the rajah.

"As far as we have progressed, all is well," said the other. "By the morrow, master, everything will be in readiness for your work. It but remains for my men to unpack, and then the rest is for you."

"I am ready," said the rajah.

They spoke, of course, in their own language, and Goolah walked up and down looking at the various cases. At present the cavern was in a state of confusion. But at one side stood a great bench, and here some electric lamps were gleaming.

"The light is poor," said the rajah. "I can do nothing——"

"Have no fear, master, there will be light by to-morrow," interrupted Chandra Jungh. "We are preparing lamps in many numbers. This cavern will be gleaming brilliantly from end to end."

"That is well," said Goolah. "To perform my work thoroughly I must see well. But I am by no means convinced, Chandra, that we are acting wisely. From the first I have doubted the wisdom of this move."

"What causes you to worry, master?" asked the other.

"We are near the school, and if we are seen——"

"Is there any such possibility?" asked Chandra Jungh. "You are here at night. We are private—there are none in this sleepy village who suspect. Do not fear that I allow my men to be seen by day. There is not one soul who knows of our presence. And you, whilst apparently enjoying yourself in the big school, can perform the greatest service to your country any man is capable of doing. Be at ease, master, for all is as it should be."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS CHANDRA JUNGH.

GOOLAH KAHN continued his inspection of the cavern for some little time.

He was comparatively a stranger to his surroundings, but the others were undoubtedly very familiar with them. Chandra Jungh, the mysterious leader, escorted his master from place to place.

"And what lies beyond here?" inquired the rajah.

They had arrived at a tunnel entrance, and it loomed black and forbidding before them.

"Nothing, master," said the other. "A tunnel—merely leading into the disused quarry workings. Have no fear that we shall be disturbed by unwanted prowlers. There is but one passage which leads anywhere. And this has been blocked, so that none can pass."

"The only entrance or exit, therefore, is our own door into the wood?"

"Yes."

"It is as well to be safe," said Goolah. "But I repeat, Chandra Jungh, that I am losing my interest in this affair. If I could be convinced that I am doing good ——"

"Fear not, master—there is no doubt," said Chandra Jungh. "Are you weakening? What of the greatness of your country? What of your undertaking? Think what you can do! Think of the wondrous changes you can bring about! It is within your power, and no other man's! Is it not for you to work, and to achieve this great end?"

While speaking, he was looking at the rajah with his peculiarly burning eyes. And they underwent a subtle change. They became more intense; and Goolah Khan changed, too.

The other man talked to him—and Goolah became more and more intense. His own eyes gleamed, and the influence of the other gripped him. If anybody had been watching, they would have seen an extraordinary change.

Presently Goolah himself began to talk.

And the alterations in his voice and manner were startling.

His calm air of refinement had vanished. As he spoke, his face distorted itself, and he gave way completely to the emotions which filled him. Into his eyes there came a fanatical light.

"You are right, Chandra!" he exclaimed tensely. "As always, you are right. It is my duty—my aim in life! I must proceed with this work as you have directed."

"You are wise, master," said Chandra Jungh impressively.

There was something rather terrible about the rajah now.

His Oxford acquaintances would never have recognised him. He had the reputa-

tion of being a singularly pleasant fellow—a good companion—a thorough sportsman. And people had remarked upon his thoroughly English outlook on life. But for his colour, he had seemed to be a clean-limbed young Englishman.

But now!

There was quite another picture to look upon.

Under the mysterious, subtle influence of Chandra Jungh the young rajah had apparently changed his personality. He was an Indian now—a wild, gesticulating fanatic.

As he talked he paced up and down, his eyes glittered with a burning light, and he flung his arms about with complete abandonment. And the change grew more and more marked as the minutes passed.

It was awful to witness—but Chandra Jungh watched unemotionally.

His voice growing higher and higher, his movements more and more excited, Goolah Kahn worked himself into an absolute frenzy. He shouted, he raved, and, finally, he ran round the cavern, gasping out strange, droning incantations. Without question, the man was demented—driven so by the very fire and enthusiasm of his fanatical purpose.

What this was remained a mystery.

But Goolah Kahn cooled at last—he was compelled to do so, for his energies were exhausted. He sank down, muttering to himself, his features twitching. His breath came and went in great gasps. And, gradually, he recovered. And with his recovery came his normal sanity.

But when, at last, he rose to his feet, he was haggard and drawn. Chandra Jungh stood by, still and silent—as he had stood by throughout the entire grotesque scene.

"I'm here still!" muttered Goolah Kahn. "Tell me, Chandra, what has happened? I am ill—I am exhausted. Have I given way yet another time? Have I been mad? I remember nothing—it seems but a few minutes have passed since I stood talking to you."

"The fire entered your soul, master, and fanned your enthusiasm," replied Chandra quietly. "It is well that you should have these enthusiastic periods. For it strengthens you to complete your mission."

"And yet, at the same time, it weakens me physically," muttered Goolah Kahn. "I must go, Chandra. The air stifles me—it is close. I need the cooling air of the night. Do not detain me."

"I am but here to obey your commands, master," said Chandra Jungh.

Once again he gazed straight into Goolah's eyes—and the rajah seemed to shiver throughout his whole being. Then, with an effort, he turned aside, and walked away. Ten minutes later he was out in the open.

The night air, as he had predicted, restored him to his usual mental state. But he was still exhausted. The young Indian had no knowledge of what had happened during his fanatical outburst. His mind had apparently snapped during that extraordinary scene.

But he did know that he had acted fanatically. He was fully aware of that. And now, in his sane common sense, he was filled with worry. He did not like to think that on such occasions he descended to the mere primitive. With all his education, with all his Western notions, he was liable to revert to the primitive East.

And Goolah Kahn returned to St. Frank's with a frown upon his brow, and with a heart which was heavy. But somehow, he felt himself drawn irresistibly towards that cavern, and the mysterious men it contained.

As he had left the school, so he had re-entered. Like a shadow, he stole to his bed-room and retired.

But Goolah Kahn was unaware of the fact that a keen pair of eyes had watched him down the corridor—had seen him enter his room.

Those eyes belonged to Nelson Lee. The great detective had heard the faintest of faint sounds—the creak of a board in the corridor which even Goolah Kahn had not been able to avert. And Nelson Lee had seen.

Lee was provided with much food for thought. And he was now convinced, beyond all question, that Nipper's story of Bellton Wood was a true one. There was work to be done here!

CHAPTER XV.

THE GREAT DAY.

WEDNESDAY morning!

All St. Frank's was agog—but the juniors, in particular, were tremendously excited. For the First Eleven was going off to Redcliffe immediately after breakfast.

And with them were included Nipper, Hussi Kahn, and Jerry Dodd. For the first time, three Fourth Formers were in the First! Everything depended upon their showing in this match.

It was, indeed, a real test match for the juniors.

If they did well against Redcliffe, it was a certainty that they would become permanent members, and ultimately gain their colours. But if they failed, they would never have another opportunity, and the old order of things would be automatically reverted to.

But the entire Fourth was confident. They had any amount of faith in their three representatives. The only regret was that the match was not taking place at home.

After morning lessons, of course, the fellows would be able to go to Redcliffe, but it was a considerable journey, and a good deal of the play would have happened before any St. Frank's spectators could arrive.

Handforth was quite excited about it.

"It's all rot!" he declared, as he stood in the Ancient House lobby. "I never heard such piffle! The whole day ought to be a holiday! What's the good of a half-holiday on an occasion like this?"

"No good at all," said Church. "But what can we do?"

"Do?" repeated Handforth. "Why, demand a holiday, of course! I vote that we get up a deputation to the Head, and ask him for it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody roared at this humorous suggestion.

"It's all very well to cackle, but I'm serious!" continued Handforth. "Look at the weather! Absolutely perfect, and we shall have to stick in class, swotting away at lesson! Who ever heard of such rubbish!"

"Wait a minute, old man—don't get excited," grinned Reggie Pitt. "In the first place, the weather isn't absolutely perfect. It's been raining, and the sky looks pretty doubtful even now."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "It's going to be fine!"

"Oh, well, if you say so——"

"I don't only say so—I know it!" roared Handforth. "I've made a study of the weather, and I tell you there's going to be no more rain to-day——"

De Valerie came hurrying in from the Triangle.

"Rats! Raining again!" he announced dismally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What?" asked Handforth, startled. "Raining?"

"I'm afraid you're no good as a prophet, old man!" chuckled Pitt. "And as for going to the Head and asking for a whole holiday, you might just as well ask that wall to speak to you! The Head's got funny ideas about whole holidays!"

"But this is an important occasion," argued Handforth. "It's the first time that the Fourth Form chaps have played for the First Eleven. I consider we all ought to be let off! Anyhow, who's coming with me to the Head?"

There were no takers.

"Nobody?" asked Handforth, glancing round with withering scorn. "Well, of all the weak-kneed rotters! Ain't you game, Nipper?"

"My dear chap, I'm going in any case!" said Nipper blandly.

"You lucky beggar!" growled Handforth. "I'd forgotten that! But what about Pitt? He's not going——"

"Neither are you!" said Reggie. "And if you take my advice, you won't go to the Head either! Of course, if you deliberately ask for trouble, I expect you'll get it."

"It all depends upon the way it's put!" said Edward Oswald. "This is where you want some tact! As everybody knows, I've got tons of that——"

"My hat! Who's been spoofing up my major?" asked Willy, appearing at that moment. "Poor old son! He thinks he's got tact!"

Handforth turned on his minor and glared.

"You clear out!" he roared. "I don't want any criticism from you."

Willy grinned.

"It isn't what you want, it's what you'll get," he replied calmly. "Did I hear you saying that you're going to the Head?"

"Yes."

"To ask for a whole holiday?"

"Yes."

"Poor old chap!" said Willy sadly. "I'll bet I know what happens! Instead of getting a whole holiday, you won't get a holiday at all! You won't even get half! You'll be kept in all the afternoon."

And Willy, having made that sage remark, thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets, and sauntered off, whistling.

CHAPTER XVI.

MUTINY!

BREAKFAST was over, and Handforth's proposed visit to the Headmaster had not materialised. Everybody thought he had abandoned it, Church and McClure, in fact, were so happy that they were going about the place singing.

And then, just after breakfast, they got the shock.

Handforth led the way into Study D, closed the door, and looked mysterious. Church and McClure exchanged uneasy glances. They had an idea what was coming. Whenever Handforth looked mysterious it meant trouble.

"Ready?" asked Edward Oswald.

"Ready for what?" asked Church cautiously. "The team's going off soon, you know—we'd better get outside and give 'em a cheer——"

"The charabanc's arrived already!" hinted McClure.

"Never mind about the charabanc—blow the charabanc!" said Handforth. "You know what I said about seeing the Head?"

Church and McClure groaned.

"What's that noise?" asked Handforth, glaring. "Indigestion, or something? And what the dickens are you looking so gloomy about? I'm going to get the Fourth a whole holiday, my sons! I've been thinking things over, and I've come to the conclusion that a deputation would be a mistake. The Head doesn't want a whole crowd in his study."

"Oh, good!" said Church happily. "You're going to see him alone?"

"That's a brain wave!" declared McClure, with enthusiasm.

Handforth eyed them coldly.

"Not exactly alone," he said, dashing their hopes on the instant. "You two chaps are coming with me."

"Are we?" asked Church faintly. "I—I mean—— Look here, old man, for goodness' sake show some sense! You don't want to drag us into this potty idea. We want to go to Redcliffe this afternoon."

"You idiot! You'll be able to go this morning!"

"Not if we go to the Head first!" roared Church. "You'll dish us completely—we shall be kept in all the afternoon! Blow you! I'm not going to the Head—you can jolly well eat coke!"

"Same here!" shouted McClure, catching Church's mutinous fever. We don't mind supporting you in a sensible plan, Handy, but we're not going to make asses of ourselves! You can't help it—you were born like it!"

Handforth took a big gulp.

"Why, you—you——"

"Why not ask old Browne to go and interview the Head?" put in Church quickly. "Browne can talk the hind leg off a donkey! He wouldn't mind either—he's got nerve enough for anything! I believe he'd wangle it, too."

"Or Archie!" suggested McClure. "Even Archie's got a way with him."

Handforth found his voice at last.

"And what about me?" he hooted. "Can't I convince the Head? If those other fatheads could do it, I'm jolly certain I can! Now, look here! I'm not going to ask you again—are you coming, or are you not?"

"I thought you weren't going to ask us again."

"Are you coming or are you not?" thundered Handforth.

"That's twice," said Church.

From this point the interview ceased to be verbal.

Handforth made a lunge at Church, and Study D became a miniature copy of the lecture-hall when the Fifth had let itself loose. But it must not be imagined that Handforth got the best of everything.

For once Church and McClure were thoroughly aroused.

They had made up their minds that they weren't going to see the Head on such a foolish mission as Handforth outlined. And once Church and McClure made up their minds, they could be firm.

Handforth delivered a certain amount of punishment, but after that he lost a certain amount of interest in the proceedings. He remembered getting Church's fist in his face, and he had a hazy recollection that his whole head was pushed into the coal-box. Then it seemed to him that he was carried through the air. And a kind of thud followed.

Anyhow, he found himself sitting in the Triangle, with his back to the wall. He was dazed and bewildered, and very much of a wreck. And above him, two faces looked out of the study window.

"Now go to the Head!" said one of the faces coldly.

"And see if you can get a whole holiday," added the other face. "And if you think you can mess us about, you're mistaken!"

By the time Handforth fully recovered and rose to his feet his victorious chums had departed. Their one object now was to make themselves scarce until the bell rang for lessons. Once in class, Handforth couldn't touch them, and by the time lessons were over he would have cooled down. They knew him of old.

CHAPTER XVII.

INTERVIEWING THE HEAD.

BUT was Handforth discouraged?

Nothing short of dynamite would have prevented him carrying out his purpose. For he was firmly convinced that he would succeed. This was one of Edward Oswald's little characteristics. He always took everything for granted. Experience taught him nothing.

He had made up his mind that the Head would give the Fourth Form permission to take a whole holiday, and there was an end of it. It only needed a brief interview with Dr. Stafford and the thing would be done.

Handforth changed in record time. He washed himself, brushed his hair, but in his excitement and hurry he rather unfortunately omitted to put a tie on. Furthermore, he had chosen one of Church's collars, and it was so small that the tab was nearly giving way.

Handforth gasped with alarm when he found that lessons were due to start in a quarter of an hour. And the charabanc would soon be going, too. He badly wanted to see it off. So it was up to him to put some speed on.

He arrived at the headmaster's study, hot and breathless. Another omission on his part had been in connection with his shoes. They were still dusty and sooty, after the affair in Study D. To put it plainly, he was in no fit condition to visit the Head.

He hammered on the door with terrific vigour.

"Come in!" came the Head's startled voice.

Handforth plunged in, and in his excessive energy he tore loose the tab of his collar, and it sprang out like a piece of elastic. Confused and startled, he grabbed it, and held it in position. But it was hardly an ideal attitude for facing the Head.

"Is something the matter, Handforth?" asked Dr. Stafford in surprise. "Why did

you knock in that alarming fashion? And what is the matter with your neck? Are you hurt?"

"No, sir. Not at all, sir!" said Handforth huskily.

"Then take your hand from your neck!"

"Yes, sir."

But he didn't take it away. He daren't. He was filled with horror by the thought of what the Head would say when he saw that horrible elastic-like collar sticking out. He decided to get straight away with the subject in hand, in order to distract the Head's attention.

"About the cricket, sir," said Handforth hastily. "We all ought to have a holiday! I mean—— That is—— What about it, sir? Can we all go to Redcliffe?"

He paused, turning red. It was really extraordinary. During breakfast he had mapped out the entire interview. He had planned exactly what he would say, and knew it by heart. But for some strange reason his mind was now a blank.

The Head looked at him astonished.

"Are you ill, Handforth?" he asked concernedly. "Can you all go to Redcliffe? What on earth do you mean? And take your hand away from your neck. I told you once before."

"Yes, sir. I—I——"

"Take your hand away, Handforth!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

"At once!" ordered Dr. Stafford. "And don't use those ridiculous expressions in my presence! Good gracious, boy! Must I tell you yet again? Remove your hand at once!"

Handforth dug his neck into his collar, hoping to keep it in position by this device. He removed his hand, and was greatly relieved to find that the trick worked. But he looked as though he had suddenly contracted a stiff neck.

"Upon my soul!" said the Head. "I cannot understand your actions at all, Handforth. You are behaving in the most extraordinary manner. Is something the matter with your neck, that you must hold your head in that position?"

"Nunno, sir!" gurgled Handforth.

He was horrified afresh, in his restricted position he couldn't talk properly. And to add to his trouble the collar shot out, and the worst had happened.

"It's all right, sir!" said Handforth hurriedly. "The tab's broken! That's the worst of these rotten collars! It's about time they had something new, instead of these idiotic Eton suits! In this weather we ought to be able to wear soft collars always——"

"I am interested to hear your criticisms, Handforth," said the Head coldly. "Am I to understand that you have come here to make a complaint? And is it usual for you to go about without any necktie?"

"Necktie, sir?" repeated Handforth faintly. "My goodness! I must have forgotten it! Sorry, sir! Just an oversight—I remember now. It fell into the bath, and I forgot to pull it out!"

"Stand over here, Handforth!" exclaimed the Head sternly. "Good gracious! Your boots are in a disgraceful condition; you have no necktie, your collar is broken, and yet you dare to come into my presence! Am I to assume that this is a deliberate attempt to affront me?"

"Not—not at all, sir!" moaned Handforth. "It's all right about my shoes, sir—I'll give 'em a rub when I go out. Half a minute. I can do it here!"

He picked up a duster and flicked his shoes, sending soot into the air. The Head rose to his feet, looking quite dangerous.

"Handforth, you will write me five hundred lines for studied impertinence!" he thundered. "I shall require them by teatime!"

Handforth started.

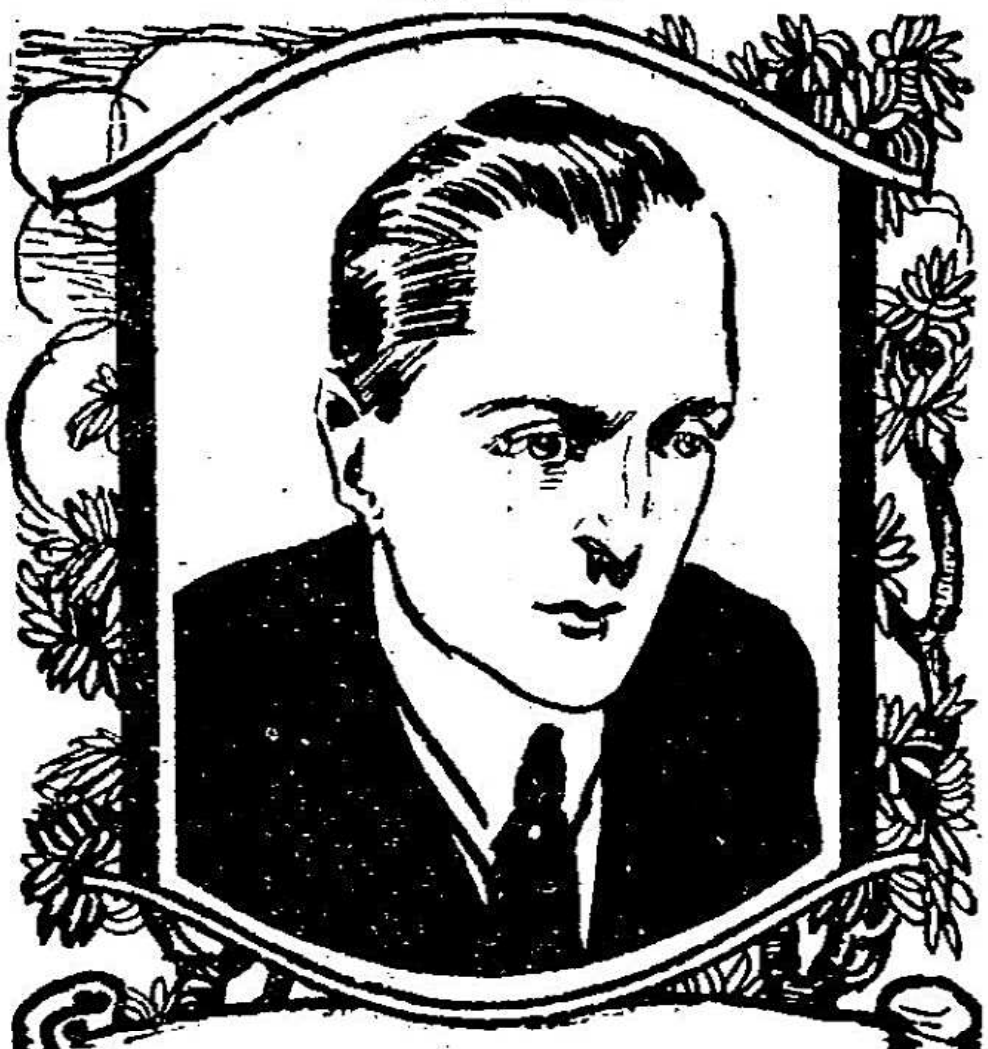
"Teatime!" he gasped. "But—but I can't do it, sir!"

"You can't do it?"

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Third Series—Fifth Form.

NOTE.—The average age of Fifth Form boys is 17.



No. 3.—Walter Hitchen.

A fairly unpopular senior, owing to his shifty, unstable nature. He is a great busybody, his chief delight being to pry into the affairs of others, and then discourse upon them

"There isn't time, sir!" bleated Handforth.

"There is this afternoon, and you must stay in until the lines are completed!" said the Head coldly. "And now go! You have wasted quite enough of my time."

Somehow Handforth felt that his interview hadn't panned out as he had planned. It had gone wrong from the very start. He made one last effort, and looked at the Head with haggard eyes.

"But, please, sir, I want to get your permission——"

"Leave this study, Handforth!" ordered the Head coldly.

And there was something in his voice which told Handforth that it would only be inviting disaster to remain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SURPRISE FOR REDCLIFFE.

EXACTLY how Handforth got out of the Head's study he couldn't remember. He found himself leaning weakly against the door-post outside. And one thought throbbed through his brain insistently.

His half-holiday was gone.

And to make things a thousand times worse, he remembered that Willy had predicted this precise disaster. Exactly how Willy could have known this fact struck Handforth as being uncanny. All he wanted was to find his minor and reduce him to powder.

He dragged himself away at last, a wreck in appearance, and a wreck in spirit. Down the passage he came across Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey. They both regarded him with astonishment.

"Hallo! Handy's ill!" said Grey. "What's happened to him?"

"Great Scott! He must have interviewed the Head, after all!" said Pitt. "I say, Handy, why didn't you come and see the charabanc off? The team's gone!"

Even the simple pleasure of witnessing the team's departure had been denied him. Handforth gave a hollow, bitter laugh.

"What's the good?" he asked. "Everything's gone wrong! The Head wouldn't listen to me, and I'm detained for the afternoon, and Church and McClure have deserted me, and I'll bet I shan't be able to find my minor!"

Pitt and Grey hadn't the heart to say, "I told you so." Handy looked so thoroughly miserable that they were acutely sorry for him. They allowed him to pass on, looking thoroughly broken.

"Poor old ass!" said Jack. "He means well; but he's such a blundering chump! We all told him that he'd get detained if he went to the Head."

But Handforth had an extraordinary capacity for recuperation. By the time morning lessons were fairly started he was practically himself again, and he had finally decided to go to Redcliffe during the afternoon and risk whether the Head remembered those lines.

Handforth's optimism again came to his help. The chances were that the Head would demand an explanation as soon as he arrived back. It would mean a flogging, of course; but Handforth was willing to risk it. It was worth a flogging, anyhow. Besides, the Head might forget.

In the meantime, the First Eleven was well on its way to Redcliffe.

The members of the team were as follows: Fenton, Morrow, Wilson, Rees, Conroy major, Browne, Stevens, Hodder, Nipper, Kahn, and Dodd. Conroy major had shown greatly improved form during practice, and Fenton had hopes that he would develop well.

In any case, it was inevitable that there should be one or two weaker men in the team. But with such fine cricketers as Fenton, Morrow, and the three Fourth-Formers, there was every hope of success.

Fenton was more keen than ever to win this match, because it would constitute the first victory of the season.

Redcliffe was reached a minute or two after eleven. And by this time the showery weather had improved. There had been no heavy downpour, and the ground was still hard. The wicket, upon inspection, proved to be in good condition.

Although the sky was not exactly threatening, there were many clouds. And the players hoped for the best.

As usual in school matches, everything was very quiet and desolate-looking when the St. Frank's team turned up. The Redcliffe fellows were at lessons, of course, and only the actual team was waiting on the playing-fields to receive the visitors.

There is always something rather unreal about playing in a big match with an empty pavilion and no spectators round the ground. Some players find it a trying ordeal.

Sanders, the Redcliffe skipper, was considerably surprised when he saw the team. Eight members of the Eleven were obviously seniors, but the other three were just as obviously juniors.

"What's the idea, Fenton?" he asked. "You're not playing juniors, surely?"

"Yes, I am—why not?" asked Fenton. "It may not be the practice at Redcliffe, but there are plenty of school teams with juniors in them. And you needn't think these three are duffers."

Sanders smiled.

"I don't mind, of course," he said. "But I always hold the opinion that a man needs weight and strength to play effectively in

a First Eleven. The advantage is with us."

"Permit me to disillusion you, Brother Sanders," said Browne smoothly. "But why should I trouble? Upon second thoughts —and many great decisions are taken upon due consideration—I will allow our merry young friends to disillusion you themselves."

"We'll risk it," said Sanders, with a queer look at Browne.

Nearly everybody gave Browne a queer look upon first meeting him. His peculiar method of address was arresting, and there was nothing much about him to indicate his true character.

At eleven-thirty prompt, the umpires appeared, and St. Frank's took the field, Fenton having lost the toss.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TEST MATCH.

FENTON was looking rather grave as he placed his field. He had hoped against hope that he would win the toss, for so much depends upon it in big cricket matches. More often than not, the side that wins the toss is the side that wins the game.

The weather, too, added to Fenton's anxiety.

It would be unlucky if Redcliffe made a big first innings, and then the rain came along to spoil St. Frank's chances. But, after all, it was no good letting such matters distract him.

The opening batsmen were good men. They soon settled down, and scored steadily. There was nothing sensational to watch, but this was not unusual. The first hour of a match is generally slow.

And the absence of spectators made a difference, too.

Nipper, at mid-on, had a sense of unreality. It seemed an enormous distance to the pavilion, and he felt that if the ball came his way he would never be able to get to it. And yet, a moment later, he fielded the leather so smartly that one of the Redcliffe batsmen was nearly run out.

Gradually the game settled down.

Fenton and Browne were bowling. They were both good, but the Redcliffe men took absolutely no chances. Consequently, the score mounted rather slowly.

At 18, Browne delivered an unusually loose one, and the batsman snicked it away, and it looked like a boundary. But there was a sudden "click," and Jerry Dodd held it.

"Oh, good catch!" shouted Fenton enthusiastically.

"Good old Dodd!"

The Redcliffe skipper was not looking so satisfied about the juniors in the team. It was rather a nerve, he considered, that his first man should be out by a junior catch.

And this was not the only disaster.

In the same over, Browne clean bowled the next man, who hadn't added a single run to the score. 18 for 2. It wasn't so bad, although it was rather early to feel satisfied.

Until the luncheon interval it was Redcliffe's hour. The next batsman settled down, and even Browne couldn't shift him. What was more exasperating, he scored freely.

When play stopped, the score stood at 92 for 2. This was far more satisfactory for Redcliffe, and Sanders was feeling elated. At one time he had feared the worst, but now he was full of confidence.

By this time the school was out, and crowds of juniors were round the ropes, looking on. And as the St. Frank's men came off the field, Nipper and Jerry Dodd caught sight of Mitchell, the Junior captain. He had only recently brought his team over to St. Frank's, and the Fourth had soundly trounced it.

"What on earth's the meaning of this?" asked Mitchell, staring.

Nipper and Jerry Dodd and Kahn were together, and Mitchell gazed open-eyed at his late opponents. He had every reason to respect these particular players, for they had caused the collapse of his side.

"Hallo, Mitchell!" said Nipper. "Surprised?"

"Are you fellows playing for the First now?"

"By jings, we weren't on the field just for ornament!" exclaimed Jerry. "We were selected for this match, and if we do pretty well, we shall probably get our First Eleven colours later on."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Mitchell. "I say, this is a bit thick, you fellows," he added, to some of the other juniors. "No wonder St. Frank's whacked us! We were playing First Eleven men!"

"That's just where you've got it wrong," corrected Nipper. "You played the regular Junior team. It's your seniors who are playing against juniors. You ought to be feeling happy."

"I look it, don't I?" growled Mitchell. "Of course, you won't have such an easy time against our First Eleven! They've got some hot men in the team. You'll find it a different thing to playing against us!"

The Redcliffe juniors were all surprised to find Nipper and Dodd and Kahn in the Eleven. It gave the game an added interest for them, for they wanted to see how these players shaped against their senior heroes. So far, the three St. Frank's juniors had had very little chance.

After lunch, however, they had more opportunities.

Going out on to the field, Fenton tossed the ball to Jerry Dodd.

"From the pavilion end," he said briefly.

"Thanks awfully, Fenton!" said Jerry. "By jings, I've been waiting for this! I hope I make something move."

"If you don't, you'll soon move yourself!" replied Fenton drily.

There were big crowds round the field now, and everybody watched with interest when the game re-started. The Redcliffe fellows were astonished to see a junior about to open the bowling.

A minute before the re-start, a sound of cheering and shouting announced the fact that the first contingent of St. Frank's juniors had arrived. They had come straight away from lessons, without waiting for any lunch. On such an occasion as this, a couple of sandwiches en route would suffice.

Handforth was one of the first in the enclosure.

"How's the score?" he demanded eagerly. "Hallo, ninety-two for two! That's not so bad! Not so good, either!" he added reflectively. "What's the matter with our giddy bowlers?"

"There's never much done before lunch," said Church. "Blessed if I can understand why you're so happy, old man! You're in for a flogging this evening——"

"Do you think I want to be reminded of that all the time?" interrupted Handforth, glaring. "That's about the tenth time you've told me! Talking about flogging, I owe you chaps a licking—and you'll get it soon! I've only patched things up for this afternoon!"

"Hallo," said McClure, "they're just starting! I say, Jerry Dodd's bowling, too! Look out for fireworks!"

Anyhow, Handforth found himself sitting in the Triangle with his back to the wall. He was dazed and bewildered.

CHAPTER XX.

SHOWING THEM HOW TO PLAY CRICKET.

JERRY DODD was on tiptoe. He was grimly determined to bowl as he had never bowled before. He had put in endless practice, and he was at the top of his form.

He had never felt fitter; his limbs had never been more supple; his fingers never more cunning. As he took his first run, he fingered the ball lovingly.

Then, down it went! There was a flash, a click, and the batsman's number was up. His off stump was sagging.

"Out!"

"Well bowled!"

"By Jove!" said Fenton, staring.

Much as he had expected from these juniors, he had firmly told himself that there would be nothing sensational. It was one thing to do wonders in a match against juniors, and it was another thing to do wonders against seniors. But it seemed that Jerry Dodd was quite impartial.

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly. What did I tell you? I knew we should see some fireworks as soon as Jerry started."

"Why, you ass, I said that!" snorted McClure.

"Don't talk rot!" said Handforth. "Do you think I can't remember my own words? I like the way you chaps take things out of my giddy mouth! I'm beginning to be sorry I brought you!"

"Brought us?" asked Church, staring.

"Well, who paid the fares?"

"I did!" said Church warmly.

"My hat, so you did!" gasped Handforth. "I'd forgotten I was broke! I'm so used to paying your fares that I made a natural mistake. I suppose you took returns?" he added anxiously.

"Yes."

"That's good; because we don't want to walk home," said Handforth. "By the way, you've got my ticket——"

"No, I haven't—I gave it to you before we started."

"Gave it to me!" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. "Was that ticket a return? I gave all of it to the collector——"

"I thought that was because you didn't want to go back at all!" said McClure. "You know what's waiting——"

"Don't mention that flogging again!" roared Handforth.

"I didn't say a word!" snorted McClure. "Look here, are we having an argument, or are we watching this match? Next man in!"

"Next man out, you mean!" yelled Church. "Oh, great! Well caught, Browne!"

Something like a sensation was caused by Jerry Dodd's second ball of the over. It was a regular teaser, and the new man didn't seem to realise it. Finding a mere junior facing him, he probably felt reckless. But he paid the penalty by seeing Browne reach idly upwards, and pick the ball out of the air as though this sort of thing was a pleasure to him.

"He's going to do the hat trick!" said Handforth excitedly.

Church and McClure groaned. They had been hoping the same thing, but it was a peculiar fact that if ever Handforth prophesied anything it never came off.

And it didn't come off this time. With the score at 92 for 4, the new batsman took no chances. He fully realised that Jerry Dodd was not so harmless as he looked, and he merely protected his wicket. And for the rest of the over he played for safety.

After that the Redcliffe men got busy. The bowling was excellent, but so was the batting. It was a grim struggle. When the score had risen to 108, Fenton took Browne off for a rest, and put Kahn on.

Having changed his field accordingly, the next over started with added interest. There is generally more tension when a new bowler is put on. The batsmen were cautious until they got the hang of the new man.

Kahn did nothing sensational to start with. His first over was a maiden, and he got a round of applause. Handforth, however, was not inclined to approve.

"What's the matter with old Hussi?" he asked. "Fancy—six balls, and not anybody out! I've a good mind to ask Fenton to let me play—then I'd show 'em something!"

Church and McClure thought it unnecessary to make any comment. Besides, they didn't want to precipitate a free fight on the Redcliffe playing-fields.

Hussi's next over was not treated with quite the same respect, and the batsmen took more chances. A single was scored, then a two, and after that a tricky delivery came down which completely deceived the Redcliffe player. He leapt out at it, but missed. The next instant there was a slap as the wicket-keeper caught the ball, and a click as he lifted the bails off.

"How's that?" shouted square leg.

The man was out—neatly stumped, and the Redcliffe score was not looking particularly healthy. It stood at 116 for five, and all the picked men of the Redcliffe team were out. It afforded Sanders no consolation to realise that these St. Frank's juniors were equally as dangerous as the seniors.

CHAPTER XXI.

A QUESTION OF CASH.

THE Redcliffe tail practically collapsed.

Kahn took two wickets in quick succesion, and the others appeared to be unnerved. Kahn and Dodd were still bowling, and Dodd was deadly. He was playing better than ever, and Edgar Fenton's heart was light.

Nine men out, and only 127 runs scored. It was much better than Fenton had ever hoped for. For the Redcliffe seniors were good—there was nothing weak about their team. And when the last man was dismissed by Dodd, with only another run added, Fenton felt like cheering.

Redcliffe had been dismissed for a comparatively small total by sheer good play—and not by any luck of the weather. And Fenton was as pleased as Punch. He fully realised what he owed to the juniors.

"Well, Brother Fenton?" asked Browne, as they walked in.

"Thanks, old man, for your good advice," said Fenton. "I don't think I shall ever regret playing these juniors. If they bat as well as they've been bowling, it'll be almost too good to be true. I don't even expect it."

"I am sorely afraid, Brother Fenton, that you are inclined to pessimism," said Browne. "Do you realise that Brother Dodd is famed more for his batting than his bowling? Do you realise that Nipper has yet to show his paces? So far he has done practically nothing. Brother Nipper's act will commence when he goes in to bat."

There was not much delay. The interval was only a short one, and then the Redcliffe men took the field, and Fenton and Morrow opened the St. Frank's innings.

They soon found that the Redcliffe bowling was first class. It was impossible to take any liberties. But, after the first few overs, they settled down, and Fenton scored steadily. Morrow was really the better man, but he always made a slow start.

"What's the matter with that fathead, Morrow?" asked Handforth. He's been in ten minutes, and he hasn't broken his giddy duck! These bowlers aren't particularly good!"

"You can't tell by just looking at them, Ted, old man," said a voice near by. "I thought I should find you somewhere here ——"

"My only hat!" said Handforth, turning.

Willy was standing near by, chewing contentedly. Somehow or other, the sight of his minor always made Handforth irritable. And the sight of Willy chewing made him

feel hungry. Handforth suddenly remembered that he had missed his mid-day meal.

"Jolly good!" said Willy. "Fancy our chaps getting Redcliffe out for 112! Now we shall have to see what Nipper and the others'll do in the batting line."

"Don't be greedy!" said Handforth. "If you've got something to eat there, hand it over!"

"You're welcome to it—it's a piece of chewing-gum!" retorted Willy, placing his hand to his mouth, and producing a long, elastic length of mauve-coloured gum.

"You disgusting little rotter!" snorted Handforth. "Don't do that! If one of the batsmen catches sight of you, he'll go off his form! And get away from here! How can I enjoy the match with you standing there, chewing gum?"

"I've heard that you're broke, old man," said Willy. "You lend me money sometime, so I want to return the compliment."

"Lend you money?" repeated Handforth. "Why, you little fathead, I never lend you a penny! I don't believe in lending."

"Well, give it to me—it's the same thing," said Willy. "You wouldn't get it back, in any case. But if you're stony just now, I don't mind lending you a bit. I shan't ask for it back—you needn't let that worry you. When you're flush, I'll come and take it."

"I wouldn't touch your money if I was starving!" said Handforth tartly. "It's likely I'm going to borrow any tin from my own minor! How much have you got?"

"Seven bob!"

"Seven bob!" roared Handforth. "Then give me five bob, you young rotter! Of all the nerve! Going about with seven bob, and me starving! I thought you only had a few coppers!"

Willy handed over five shillings, with a grin.

"There you are! Don't ever accuse me of letting you down," he said kindly. "By the way, I've got an idea this money is really yours."

"Mine?"

"Well, I found it on your study floor!" explained Willy.

"On—on my study floor?" gasped Handforth blankly.

"Over three days ago," said Willy blandly. "As a matter of fact, there was thirteen-and-six, so I thought I might as well take care of it. I asked Church and McClure if they'd lost anything, and as they said they hadn't, I knew it must be yours."

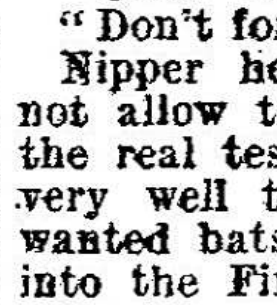
"My only hat!" breathed Handforth. "I wondered why I was so hard up on Monday! You burgling young rotter! And now you've got the nerve to come here and lend me five bob of my own money! Give me that other two bob!"

"Rats! You ought to be jolly thankful to get five!" said Willy tartly. "There's gratitude for you! For two pins, I'll refuse to lend you anything, and take that five bob back!"

He walked off, leaving Handforth speechless.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE REAL TEST.



IN the meantime, the match was going on steadily.

Fenton and Morrow were still in. The score stood at 25, and Fenton was responsible for 18 of these runs. Morrow was just getting into his stride, and hitting out strongly.

Then he met with bad luck. He got his leg in front of the wicket, and the umpire decided against him. Morrow retired, rather gloomy. He had hoped to make thirty or forty, at least, and it depressed him to go back with only seven to his credit.

There was a general cheer when the next man came out. It was Nipper. The Redcliffe fellows were inclined to be rather ironical. It struck them as being ridiculous to play junior boys in the First Eleven—for most members of the team were big fellows of eighteen and more.

"Good old Nipper!" yelled Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West.

"Go it, old son!"

"Show 'em what you can do!"

"Don't forget to make 'em quickly!"

Nipper heard these shouts, and he did not allow them to disturb him. This was the real test, and he knew it. It was all very well to be good bowlers—but Fenton wanted batsmen. Even Dodd wouldn't get into the First on his bowling alone.

So Nipper took guard with the grim determination to sell his wicket dearly. Curiously enough, he wasn't at all nervous, as he had half-expected to be. He felt supremely confident.

"Poor chap!" said Handforth, shaking his head. "If Morrow can't stand up to the bowling, it's a certainty that Nipper can't. Morrow's supposed to be the best bat in the First."

"The best men get out sometimes," said Church sagely.

"I don't wonder at it—against bowling like this," said Handforth. "These fellows are hot stuff!"

"Not long ago you said they were rotten!" McClure reminded him.

"Did I? Don't you believe it,!" said Handforth. "You idiots are always imagining things! Who wants another bun? And what have you done with those sandwiches, Church?"

Handforth & Co. were enjoying themselves—on the money which Willy had so generously presented them with. But they even forgot to eat when Nipper commenced his innings.

At first Nipper played with extreme care. But his nerves were steady, his eye was keen, and he felt splendidly fit. After three deliveries, he opened out a bit. And then, when a loose ball came down, he leapt out and met it with a terrific drive.

Clack!

The leather went soaring away over the pavilion—the first 6 of the match.

"Hurrah!" said Handforth splutteringly.

He was in the middle of a bun, and he was so eager to shout that he forgot all about his mouthful, and he distributed crumbs in a shower before him.

"Steady on!" gasped Church. "Don't be rude!"

"Sorry!" said Handforth, with a start. "My hat! Was anybody looking? That's the worst of these buns—they're so jolly stale that they all go to crumbs!"

"Hallo! I believe I can see the Head!" said McClure, shading his eyes against the sun.

"The Head?" said Handforth, turning pale.

"I mean the Head of Redcliffe——"

"You—you babbling ass!" gasped Handforth. "You gave me a turn! I thought you meant old Stafford! I should have had to scoot! By George! Did you see that? Well hit! Go it, Nipper!"

Handforth forgot all about the fact that he ought to have been playing, in his excitement. For Nipper was settling down into the most sensational innings of the day.

When the 50 mark was reached, Fenton's score was 29, and Nipper had knocked up the rest—for he was getting runs freely and rapidly. From the point of view of the St. Frank's fellows, the cricket was delightful.

But Redcliffe wasn't quite so keen.

It was exasperating to see their best bowlers knocked to the boundary every minute or so. And Nipper was performing even better than the school captain himself. He was proving his worth as a "big game" man. He was just as comfortable in an important match as he was in an insignificant House game.

Unfortunately, the partnership was broken a few minutes later, for Fenton was bowled without adding to his score. But the St. Frank's onlookers didn't mind much, because Browne took his place.

And Browne was almost as spectacular as Nipper. The pair of them provided some of the prettiest cricket imaginable. The Redcliffians were now giving them full credit, and cheers were continuous as they watched delightful outs and superb drives.

Nipper was playing better than usual. Somehow, he felt spurred on to do tremendous things—and he was doing them.

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Third Series—Fifth Form.

NOTE.—The average age of Fifth Form boys is 17.

No. 4.—Bertram Love.

Popular with everybody. Being stoutish, Bertram is the butt for all kinds of humorous remarks. But he never takes exception, and his sunny good nature has made him one of the favourites of the Upper School.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WINNING THEIR PLACES.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE made a splendid 45, and was then caught out in the long field. He was given a great ovation as he came back. Nipper, in the meantime, had raised his own total to 52, which was indeed superb.

And he seemed to be absolutely set.

Stevens came out next, and all the St. Frank's fellows were looking happy and cheerful.

"Why, it's all over!" declared Tommy Watson. "They've got 126 already — they only need three runs to win!"

"Nipper will get them with the next ball, dear old fellow," beamed Sir Montie. "Begad! I hope they continue playin', you know. It would be a frightful pity to stop now, just because we've won—it would, really."

"They're bound to carry on," said Watson. "That's the worst of these one-day matches. We only have one innings each, and there's not much chance for any particular excitement."

Stevens was very cautious to start with, but he stole a single, and then Nipper cut the leather away to the boundary for another

four. And that stroke won the game for St. Frank's.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"You'll get your colours, old man!"

As the spectators had hoped, the game was continued. After all, it was good cricket, the weather was fine, and there was no earthly reason why they should stop playing. But Redcliffe had been decisively beaten, and the St. Frank's First Eleven had proved what it could do when it had some good men in the team.

Now that there was nothing to worry about, Nipper played more brilliantly than ever. It was fascinating to watch him. And after Stevens had been clean bowled, Hussi Kahn came out and showed Fenton what he could do in a big game.

Nipper had most of the bowling for nearly three overs, and his batting was phenomenal, practically every ball being sent away for a 4. His score mounted by leaps and bounds.

Then the Indian junior had a look in. He soon gave an indication of his style. And he and Nipper batted perfectly, with a clear understanding between them.

"Browne, old man, it was a brain wave of yours to suggest having these juniors in the Eleven," exclaimed Fenton in the pavilion. "I'm amazed—literally amazed. Look at Nipper out there! Upon my word, he's the best man of the lot!"

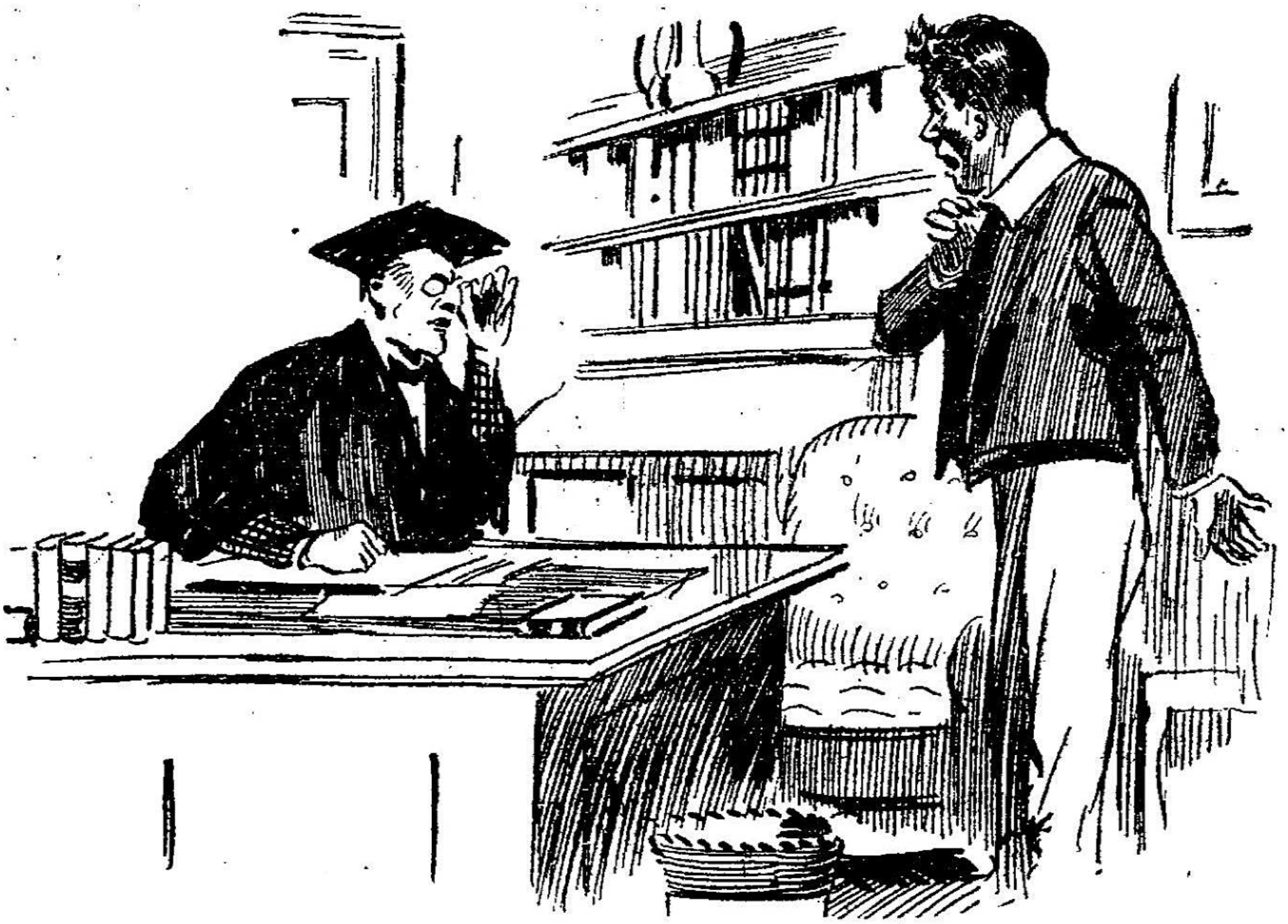
"It grieves me to hear you speak thus, Brother Fenton," said Browne. "You are surely forgetting that I'm here? However, to give Nipper his due, I must confess that his prowess is highly developed. And what of Dodd? We have yet to see him wield the weapon of run-getting in his grasp. As for Kahn——"

"There's not much wrong with Kahn," interrupted Fenton. "Another boundary, by Jove! It's beyond me why I failed to see these juniors in the true light before. Just imagine the strength they're giving to our team! Of course, I shall play them regularly—and if they keep up this form, they're certain of their colours."

"I can imagine them wearing the caps already," murmured Browne.

"Of course, I don't suppose they'll give this performance always," went on Fenton. "They're on tip-toe to-day—doing their utmost to win their places. Well, they've won them all right."

He broke off to rise in his seat and cheer, for at that moment Nipper had knocked another boundary which raised his own



"Is something the matter, Handforth?" asked Dr. Stafford, in surprise. "Why did you knock in that alarming fashion? And what is the matter with your neck? Are you hurt?"

score to 102. The cheering was general. The Redcliffians gave the junior batsman as much applause as his own chums.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson shook hands about six times, hugged one another, and generally went dotty for about ten minutes. Even Handforth clapped Church and McClure on the back so vigorously that they nearly fell. Church, indeed, was half-choked, for he had a chunk of sandwich in his mouth at the moment.

"A century!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "Good old Nipper! By George! He's showing 'em!"

But Nipper's innings was practically at an end, for in the next over, without adding to his score, he was neatly caught in the slips.

Conroy major was next man in, and although he shaped much better than in the previous match, he only added a modest 8. After his dismissal, Jerry Dodd appeared, to the accompaniment of much cheering.

Jerry Dodd and Hussi Kahn continued the victorious innings.

Kahn was out after he had made 24—a good sound innings, and he had been rather unlucky to be caught by the bowler. He had returned the leather at lightning speed, and only the Redcliffe man's quickness brought off the catch.

Jerry Dodd worked like a demon—for he realised that his own chances of doing great things were diminishing. Rees and Hodder were not particularly brilliant players, and unless they kept their ends up, Dodd would have very little opportunity of hitting.

But Fenton spoke to his men before sending them out, and it soon became evident that Rees, who took Kahn's place, played with the one object of giving his partner the bowling.

For his part, Jerry generally managed to keep it. Rees did not feel particularly complimented by the fact that he was required to do practically nothing. But he sunk his own feelings entirely. He was a cricketer, and nothing else mattered.

And Jerry, having proved his worth as a bowler, proceeded to show Fenton what he could do with the bat. It was indeed a triumph for the Fourth Form. Their men were winning their places in the First Eleven in no uncertain way.

"Well, we're showing these Redcliffe chaps what's what," said Handforth enthusiastically. "It's a rotten shame we couldn't have two innings each—then we'd show 'em."

"There isn't time for two innings in one day, you ass," said McClure. "By the way, have you used all that money?"

"I've got about tenpence left."

"Only tenpence!" said McClure. "What about your ticket home?"

"I'd forgotten all about it—but it doesn't matter," said Handforth. "I just caught sight of Archie, and I believe he's come in a car. We can go back with him—and enjoy ourselves."

Archie Glenthorne, who had forgone his afternoon nap to come along and see the game, was quite agreeable to Handforth's proposal. So one worry was settled.

"By the way, Handy, old tulip, there seems to be a frightful amount of bother about you," said Archie. "Mr. Stokes was quite worried when I came away. I mean to say, he was looking everywhere. Wanted to see you on urgent business, or something of that sort."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GREAT GAME.

"WANTED to see me on business?" repeated Handforth. "Oh, I know! I expect a registered letter came for me—it ought to have been here yesterday. The first prize of a hundred quid in that competition, you know," he added, turning carelessly to his chums.

"Don't you be too sure!" grinned McClure. "I'll bet Mr. Stokes was looking for you because the Head had been on your track."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Now that you come to mention it, old tea-cup, Mr. Stokes did say something about the Head being anxious."

"Oh, corks!" groaned Handforth. "They're looking for me already! Anybody might think I was an escaped convict, or something! Who cares? I can only get a flogging, anyhow!"

"It's a pretty serious thing to ignore the Head's orders, you know," said Church uneasily. "It might even mean the sack."

"Rot!" said Handforth, frowning. "I'm not scared!"

At the same time, he continued watching the match with a decidedly harassed look. It took away some of the enjoyment to realise that a flogging, at the very least, awaited him upon his return. At first it had seemed so remote that it really didn't matter.

But now that the evening was drawing on, and the journey home was getting nearer, Edward Oswald was not feeling quite so easy in mind. However, the excellence of the game served to make him forget.

He was particularly pleased because the most striking performances of all were executed by the three juniors in the First Eleven. And when the game was over at last, with all honours for St. Frank's, Edgar Fenton was filled with enthusiasm.

"Splendid! Miles and miles better than I ever hoped for!" he declared, as he faced his team. "As for you juniors, you've covered yourselves with glory. If Redcliffe had put up a better total, I honestly believe you'd have risen to the occasion just as well—if not better."

"We'd have tried, anyway, by jings!" said Jerry Dodd.

"Your honourable praise is most disturbingly delightful," beamed Hussi Kahn. "But it causes us to blush with the modesty of excessive arrogance. Your words are singularly preposterous in our beautiful ears."

"Well, that's one thing!" grinned Fenton. "Keep up your present form, and you'll win your colours with ease. I've got to admit you've taken me by surprise."

William Napoleon Browne smiled happily.

"It delights me to hear you using such candour, Brother Fenton," he exclaimed. "It is widely believed that open confession is good for the soul, and you are evidently intent upon honouring me. Much as I hate to remind you, it was my own suggestion that these youthful stalwarts should be included in the First."

"Yes, old man, and I shall never regret taking your tip," replied Fenton handsomely. "I've got a feeling that everything's going right."

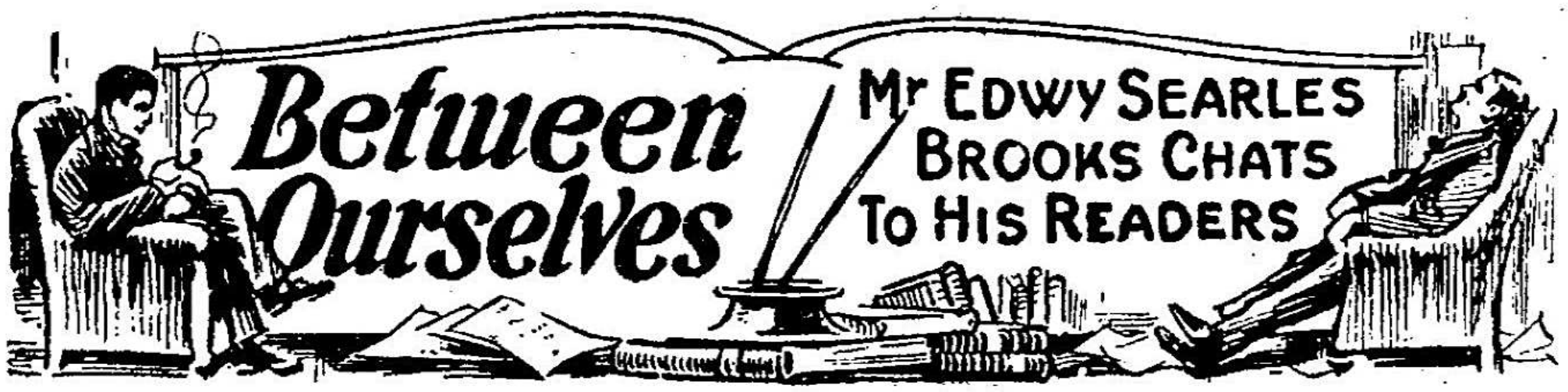
Fenton was so pleased that he simply couldn't keep his feelings to himself. He was positively radiating with delight as he left the pavilion with the old Uxton senior.

"There's no doubt, Browne, that our policy is the right one," he exclaimed, as they strolled along. "We'll keep it up, and to-day marks the beginning of a new life for the cricket of St. Frank's. Thanks to you, old man, we look like having a good season!"

Browne bowed gracefully.

"Say no more!" he pleaded. "Enough! Surely, Brother Fenton, you realise that this sort of thing causes me nothing but embarrassment? However, we must prepare for our return. Already the whole of St. Frank's is waiting to cheer me. And I shall not be at all surprised if a brass band is waiting our arrival."

THE END.



(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: A Nelson Lee Reader (Dudley), G. Desmond Richardson (Burton-on-Trent), An Artist Admirer (Birmingham), David Knight (Sheffield), Felix (Bolton), W. G. Sims (W. Ealing), William A. Lester (Walsall), Harry Cooper (Sheffield), Ivor Wyn Jones (Morfa Byncha, Portmadoc), An Old Reader (Herne Hill), W. O. Riddle (Penshurst), Florence Hetherington (Gateshead), Percy Young (Liverpool), Ethel Jowsey (Scarborough), Joe Krietzman (Stepney), P. Roy Pearson (Dudley), Charles A. Richardson (Liverpool), A Staunch Reader (Sefton Park, Liverpool), Graham Watson (Basingstoke), James McAlphine (Greenock), A. Albone (Wood Green, N.22), Albert Hughes (Tenbury Wells), K. Paton (Good Green), Reginald Rushworth (Gateshead), F. Betteridge (Taranaki, N.Z.), M. Horsley (Auckland, N.Z.), An Aussie Bushite (Minnipa, Aus.), A. J. Warford Mein (Toorak, Aus.), Edwin F. Ebborn (Mount Leyshon, Aus,), M. Revelman (Melbourne), J. H. Robinson (Northcote, Aus.), Clifford Sparks (Wigan), The Hooded Unknown (Luimneach), J. D. F. (Newcastle), William Thomas (Bridgewater), Nipper II (Thornton Heath), Nipper II (Accrington), Alf C. Grant (Reading), Lionel Moxom (Rochdale), A. C. Cleeve Sculthorpe (Errington, B. C.).

* * *

Glancing at the copy of my last week's Notes, I see that I promised to give Sylvia Ward a few lines. Well, here goes. Tell your friend from me, Sylvia, that she is paying me no compliment when she says that these replies are all pretence. Every letter acknowledged in these pages is a genuine letter. The Editor has no idea of gaining cheap advertisement by any kind of fakery in connection with this feature.

* * *

Glad to hear that you are on the job, G. Desmond Richardson. When you tell me that this expression, being interpreted, means that you are getting new readers, I am naturally delighted with you. Give my thanks to your young brother, too, for his own good services in this respect.

* * *

Where did you learn to draw, Artist Admirer? Either you are a professional, or a remarkably clever amateur. That sketch of Irene Manners is splendidly done, and I shall take you at your word and keep it. I've got an album, you know, containing all the sketches that readers send me, and I shall take care that your impression of Irene occupies a first place.

* * *

Hallo! So you've got some doubting friends, too, W. G. Sims. They've told you that when you get you reply they'll all become regular readers? They think that these columns are purely imaginary? Upon my word! It seems to me that I shall have to sign an affidavit and have it specially reproduced in the Old Paper. What a lot of doubting Thomases there are!

* * *

Well, Florence Hetherington, what a question to ask. Do I enjoy doing my work? If I didn't enjoy doing it, I shouldn't be much of a sportsman, considering all the encouragement I get from you and your fellow-readers. I don't mind telling you that when I'm in the middle of one of my stories I simply revel in it. Occasionally I don't feel in the mood, and perhaps my work suffers a bit; but on the whole, I write my stories with the keenest possible enjoyment.

* * *

I see there are two or three questions you want answering, Ethel Jowsey. I'm afraid you're not a very careful reader,

or you wouldn't need to ask me if Irene's hair is bobbed. I have frequently mentioned that Irene has blue eyes, and fair bobbed hair. Her parents are Mr. and Mrs. Hobart Manners. When you ask me how many pets Willy has got I find it difficult to answer. He generally has so many. But the most prominent ones are Marmaduke the Monkey, Septimus the Squirrel, Rupert the Rat, Sebastian the Snake, and Ferdinand the Ferret. Goodness knows what his next will be! Yes, there is a porter at St. Frank's—Josh Cuttle, he of the bow legs. But he isn't mentioned very often, because I don't believe in featuring unimportant characters.

* * *

Joe Krietzman wants to know when I'm going to write some more fourpenny books. As a matter of fact, there's one on sale now—or it'll be published on Friday of this week, anyhow. It's called "THE FIGHTING FORM OF ST. FRANK'S," and it is one of "The Schoolboys' Own Library" series. I originally referred to this as "THE FIGHTING FAGS OF ST. FRANK'S," but the title has been slightly altered. Before long I shall have another item of news, but I'll give a whisper of it now. It'll be about a story featuring Hal Brewster & Co., of the River House School.

* * *

Yes, Charles A. Richardson, I'd like to see that small magazine you are editing. You needn't worry yourself—I'll return it to you just as soon as ever you want it.

* * *

I don't pretend to be an expert on tortoises, Graham Watson, but I think I can give you the information you require. At any rate, I kept a tortoise when I was a boy—until I lost it, but that's nothing to do with the point. In the winter time you needn't worry about these pets at all. They don't require any attention, for they find a corner in the garden somewhere, and sleep—probably under a pile of leaves—until spring comes along. If you want to get a tortoise as a pet, you can buy one quite cheaply, and I advise you to put it in the garden and let it look after itself. It may go out of sight for a few days, but don't worry about this—it'll almost certainly turn up again. With regard to feeding, you can easily tempt it with greenstuff, such as cabbage and lettuce and dandelion. And I shouldn't be surprised if it would even partake of bread-and-milk if you offered it some.

* * *

You make a bold suggestion, Albert Hughes. And you're not the first one to make it, either; quite a number of other readers have written to me on the same subject. You want me to write a series in which Ralph Fullwood is reformed, and converted into a decent chap. Well, there's certainly something in the idea. Fullwood isn't all bad, for he possesses plenty of pluck, and has his finer feelings if only they can be brought to the surface. I'll think about this idea.

* * *

With regard to putting you in touch with an Australian reader, Reginald Rushworth, I'm afraid I shall have to disappoint you. Others have made similar requests, and my time is altogether too completely occupied for me to spend any of it in that way. Later on, perhaps, the Editor may start a special bureau for the exchange of letters between overseas and home readers. I advise you to take FULL notice of your parents, and accept their judgment as the best.

* * *

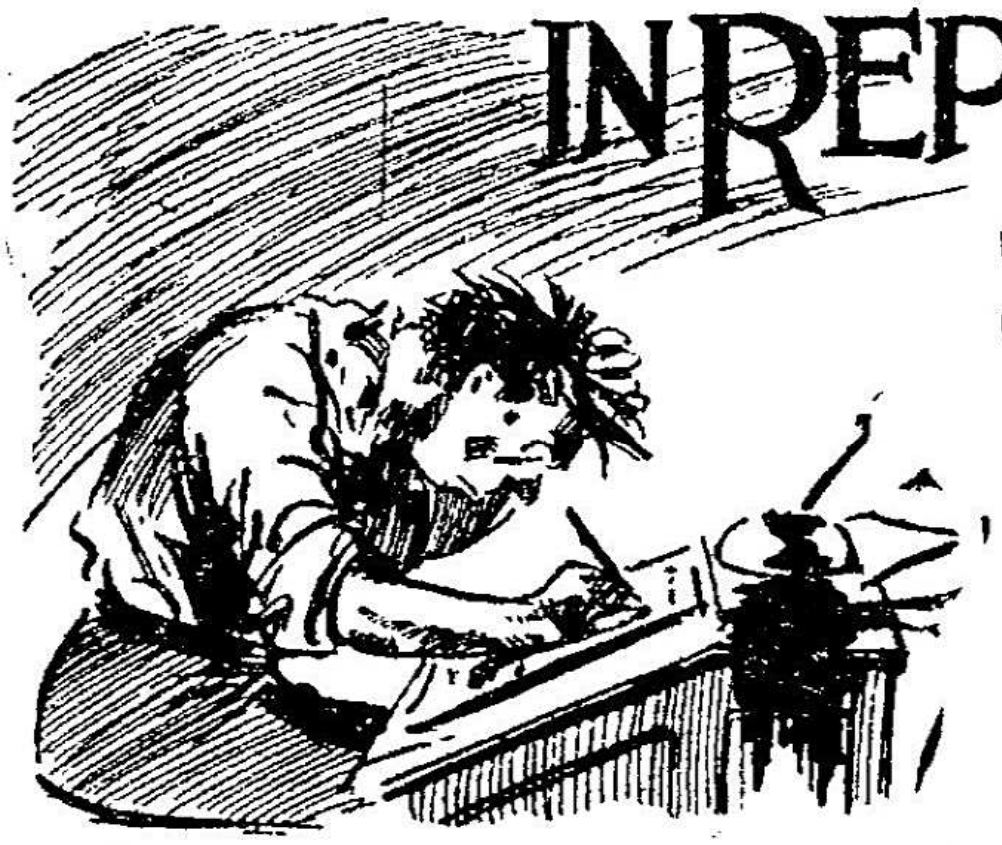
In your postscript, M. Revelman, you ask me to let you know what I think of your letter. Well, I think you have adopted the wrong tone with me. Perhaps you had an idea that you were writing to the office-boy. But even HE isn't under your orders, you know!

* * *

I'm going to quote a paragraph from a reader's letter—he's bound to recognise it—but I'd like others to see it, too: "From the first page to the last, the N.L.L. is relished by members of this family with the utmost possible maintained interest. This goes to show that it is, and should be enjoyed by both old and young alike." I have repeated the above because so many readers ask me if they are too old at sixteen or seventeen to read the Old Paper. I like to feel that my tales are interesting to ALL, and that age is a purely secondary matter.

* * *

It seems that quite a number of readers are pleased with my proposal to create more Houses at St. Frank's in the autumn. "The Hooded Unknown" is quite enthusiastic about the idea, and so is J.D.F. One or two readers have disapproved, but they are in a minority. If we have four Houses at St. Frank's, we can find junior captaincies for Nipper, Pitt, Boots, and Christine, and so everybody will be satisfied. Naturally, I shouldn't interfere with the numbering or lettering of studies, and the familiar groups of juniors would remain unaltered. But think of the new interest. Keen rivalary between the four Houses in sport; House japes in which three Houses combine against the other one, and so on. I'm afraid a good many of you are old-fashioned and don't like changes. I've got to fight down this prejudice, and show you that Progress is the order of the day!



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 an answer for several weeks—perhaps five or six. 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.).

STANLEY KERTON (Peckham), VIOLET D. (Galway), H. E. DAVEY (Southend-on-Sea), WARWICK (Royton), W. BISHOP (Hail Weston), BETTY M. (Banbury), E. M. A. D. (Banbury), S. MYLES (Ringwood): As I've only got room to give you one line apiece, you'll jolly well have to be satisfied with being answered in a clump like this.

M. E. W. K. (Shoreditch), GRACKETT TRIM (Hail Weston), BRISTOLIAN (Bristol), DORRIE (Melton Mowbray), FRED KERRIDGE (Haggerston), H. J. W. (Poplar), CHARMIAN (Cranbrook), FREDERICK HILL (Clapham): As I told you about a month ago that I couldn't promise answers in future, you'll all be potty with joy to get a reply at all.

SMITH THOMPSON (Bradford), DORIS (Hove), A LOYAL SUPPORTER (Chelsea), EZA LIAR (Bristol), HOPEFUL I. C. Y. (Bradford), THE PHANTOM 'TEC (Wood Green), ARCHIE (Ealing), H. BALDWIN (Stonebridge): Of course, the real reason why I'm answering you all so shortly is because my space has been cut down to next to nothing.

AN ASS LIKE YOU (Morecambe), NIPPER (Radford), BILL EDWARDS (Eketahuna, N.Z.), R. SPELLERBERG (Ashburton, N.Z.), PATRICIA DERANNY (Wellington, N.Z.), WALTER R. S. (Fleet), FINGER PRINTS (Bootle), SYDNEY C. C. (Kilburn): Your addresses have taken so much room that there's no space left for a reply. Sorry!

A. A. R. (Radford), AUDREY JOEL (S. Hayling), JOHN JAMES JEREMIAH JEROLEUM JIMSON JOEL (S. Hayling), J. A. SURRIDGE (Rushden), HERMIA (E. Finchley), IVY IRENE MASON (Birmingham), ANOTHER UNKNOWN (Oxford), J. RICKETTS (Hayle): Hallo! Worse than the last! Never mind, you've got your one line each!

T. YOELL (Leyton), TOMBOY (Leeds), GEORGE BURGESS (Selsey), FEENEY HARRIS (Rainham), J. J. (Lewes), NELSON LEE FIEND (Finningham), BINGO (Downham Market), LEON de ROMAUT (Paris): As so many of the readers have been bothering for a longer story and a shorter Magazine, you've got to suffer for it.

O. U. J. (Great Yarmouth), J. McALPINE (Greenwich), HARRY B. (Pontefract), L. H. F. A. H. B. (Bildeston), BERT SMITH (Tamworth), LONELY EVA (Hull), A. G. A. (Wood Green), A. R. E. (Willenhall): By George! This is the way to polish you chaps off! I shall have to buck up, even as it is. Cricket!

A LOVER OF HANDY IN THE OLD PAPER (Sandbach), H. WOOD (Tottenham), BEAVER (Carnarvon), FRED THOMAS (Bridgwater), A. BRUISER (Durham), JOE BUSTARD (Whitehead), TWO PEACHES (Liverpool), BELLE (Market Drayton): I'm getting too generous. I didn't even promise acknowledgements, and yet I haven't missed one!

W. HARDING (Croydon), LEO LOGAN (Bradford), L. S. (Reading), N. S. W. (Sydney, Australia), ALLEN NEILSON (Parramatta, N. S. W.), V. A. W. C. (Sydney, N. S. W.), E. R. HARRIS (York, W. Australia), A. C. LANCASTER (Kroonstad, S. Africa): Here you are—eight words—just one each. You're unlucky!

GOOD NEWS! Now I'm going to cheer you all up! The acknowledgements above are only to be going on with. When I've got more time—and more space—I'm going over all your letters again. So it's quite possible some of you will get another reply later!

TED.

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, after many exciting adventures, they come to a mountain gorge, which gradually converged until a great impassable barrier rose up before them. At the foot of this barrier was an arched grating, and beyond, a black cavity. It is through this grating our adventurers must pass.

(Now read on.)

PINK stopped, and looked in a troubled way at his companions as he wiped the perspiration from his face. He was about to renew the attack when he suddenly discovered that the grating was only an inch or two under water.

With a laugh at his own stupidity, he bobbed out of sight like a flash, and an instant later his dripping head and shoulders emerged on the inner side of the bars.

"Your turn next, lads," he shouted. "It ain't 'ard. 'Ere, give me your traps first."

The boys passed everything through the bars to Pink, until he fairly staggered with the weight. Then, one by one, they took the cold plunge and came up inside the vault.

For several minutes they huddled together with shivering limbs and chattering teeth.

Along each side of the vault was a platform of masonry raised a few inches above the water. On the one to the right Pink deposited the weapons and other articles. Then he waded to the foot of the waterfall and looked up at it with a smile of satisfaction.

"No man could scale that," he muttered to himself; "and I doubt if there's a clean outlet above."

As he returned to his companions he drew a waterproof matchbox from his pocket, and snapped the lid open.

"Now, lads," he exclaimed, "we must 'ave a little light for the next figure of the combination. You'll feel warm enough when the climb begins."

The match had scarcely been scraped when it dropped with a hiss into the water. Pink's face turned ghastly white, and he made a mad dash for the platform.

The boys were astounded for an instant, but a quick glance through the bars revealed the awful truth. Every sense of chilliness left their veins as they saw Mogul Mir's ugly face and scarlet jacket emerge from the edge of the forest.

Behind him came trooper after trooper, all on foot, and all bristling with rifles and tulwars.

It seemed a long time—though it was really scarcely five seconds—until Pink was back at the grating, a rifle in his hands and a brace of revolvers in his bosom.

"I'll attend to these devils," he shouted hoarsely. "You'll find a stone with a 'andle to it on the right side. It must be there.

Pull it 'ard. Quick, lads, for 'eaven's sake."

But the boys stood still in the water as though petrified. A spell seemed to be upon them. They heard a thunderous report at their ears, and saw Mogul Mir spin around and clap one hand to his arm.

Crack! Crack! A trooper went down like a log, and another pitched head-first into the stream.

Then drifting powder-smoke partly hid the scene, and the roar of the cataract was drowned in shrill cries, and the angry belch of firearms.

"Are you mad?" yelled Pink, seeing that the boys were still there. "Off with you! Open that stone."

He stopped shooting long enough to thrust his matchbox into Jack's hands and jerk him violently to the right.

This broke the spell, and the three lads splashed hastily away from the bars; bullets were whistling overhead and behind them.

They climbed out upon the stone platform, which was a yard beyond the grating, and thus out of range. They vaguely remembered Pink's instructions, and ran their hands up and down the slimy wall.

With nervous fingers Jack scraped a match, and right in front of his breast he saw an iron handle protruding from a block of masonry two by three feet in dimensions.

His shout of joy brought Myles and Paltu to his side, and all three took hold. For half a minute they tugged and pulled in vain.

No aid could be expected from Pink. His repeating-rifle was empty now, and he was blazing away at the troopers with a revolver in each hand. The curtain of smoke was all that saved him from the hot return fire.

"Pull harder!" cried Jack.

"I can't," Myles yelled; "my fingers are breaking."

Paltu lost his hold, and staggered back.

"Try a gun, lads," roared Pink, as he dodged to one side of the grating. "I can't keep them back much longer."

Then he thrust both pistols out at the bars, and emptied the chambers in rapid succession.

The command to try a gun was understood by the boys. In a trice they had a rifle through the iron handle, and were tugging at stock and barrel.

Harder and harder they pulled, and suddenly the stone swung far enough out to show it was only six inches thick.

"All together!" yelled Jack; and now, with a creaking noise, the big slab grated clear around on a rusty pivot, revealing a yawning black hole, through which surged a damp current of air.

The boys cheered loudly, and shouted to Pink that the hole was open.

"In with you, quick!" came the hoarse reply.

Myles and Paltu were the first to enter, and three feet back in the passage they found room to sit upright. As quickly as possible Jack passed in the spades, weapons, and ammunition.

Then Pink sprang to the lad's side, having fired the last charge of his revolvers, and both plunged into the hole.

For a few seconds all four were huddled together in confusion, panting hard for breath in the stifling atmosphere.

Jack had mislaid the matchbox, and could not find it.

Pink crawled forward, and fumbled about with his hands until he found an iron handle, similar to the other, that was riveted to the inner side of the slab.

He called for help, and Myles instantly responded. Just as both began to pull the troopers swarmed up to the bars, and an instant later half a dozen of them dived under the grating, and rose inside the vault.

But the great slab was now moving on its rusted pivot in response to the vigorous tugs of Pink and Myles. Nearer and nearer swung the outer end.

"Only 'alf a foot more," cried Pink; and, as he spoke, there was a scraping noise and a flash of yellow light. Jack had found the matchbox.

Alas! just then the slab stuck obstinately fast, and through the narrow gap that was still open the glare of the burning match shone on the dusky, ferocious faces of two of Mogul Mir's troopers.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH A THRILLING TRIUMPH TURNS TO BLACK DESPAIR.

AT this critical moment Paltu's promptness and ready wits saved himself and companions from a terrible fate. Quick as a flash, the little Hindoo snatched up a loaded revolver, and thrust it at Pink.

The latter let go of the handle to seize the weapon, at the same time pushing Myles to one side.

By this time one of the troopers had hold of the slab, and the other was making ready for a deadly stroke with his tulwar.

The blow fell, but Pink cleverly dodged it. Then, in rapid succession, he emptied three chambers of the revolver point blank.

The stunning reports put out the match and filled the passage with smoke. Above the thunderous echoes were heard two loud splashes as the dead or dying ruffians reeled off the platform.

The outer vault was now swarming with troopers, and their fierce yells made the boys shudder.

Pink grabbed the iron handle, set his teeth hard, and threw all his strength into one mighty effort.

With a harsh creaking the ponderous slab started to move. Thud! It swung sullenly shut, and instantly the wild uproar on the outer side faded to a low, indistinct hum.

Pink dropped limply back, exhausted and panting. But he instantly struggled to his knees, and called hoarsely for a light.

Jack quickly struck a match and crept forward. The flame revealed two massive vertical bolts on the face of the slab, and under each, in the floor of the passage, was a deep socket.

The bolts were warped and rusty, but Pink attacked them with a spade, and soon drove them home.

directed, "and don't lose the box. It never entered my stupid 'ead to bring lanterns."

At a distance of ten feet from the slab the low corridor terminated in a small square chamber, from which a flight of stone steps ascended into gloomy blackness.

Pink led the way up very slowly, so that Jack, who was next him, could easily manage the supply of light.

At short intervals the steps twisted and zigzagged in a most bewildering manner, and the higher the party mounted the purer and cooler they found the air.

Their admiration was aroused by the strength and solidity of the stonework, and

Ah! What a sight was beheld then! Precious stones, dull and tarnished though they were by their long burial, flashed and sparkled in the red firelight.

"Safe at last, lads," he cried. "A hundred men won't open that slab now. I'm glad this part of the work is over."

"You must have shot a good many of the troopers," said Jack. "I'll never forget the faces of those last two."

"A little more, and they would have pulled the slab wide open," added Myles.

"It 'ad to be," Pink muttered. "It was their lives or ours. And now we must be off, lads. The air in 'ere ain't any too pure."

The boys were eager to ask more questions, but Pink was already crawling deeper into the passage on hands and knees.

"Keep a match burning, Jack," he

by the intricate planning of the cavernous passage.

Suddenly they saw a glimmer of grey light overhead, and a few more steps brought them to an arched exit from the barrier.

Passing through, they found themselves on a small, projecting balcony surrounded by a low parapet.

For several minutes they stood in mute wonder and delight. Beneath them the great barrier dropped sheer seventy feet to the ground, while its summit was thirty feet overhead.

To right and left the grim mountain walls seemed to pierce the sky as they converged far in the distance. Between them lay the

continuation of the gorge which Tippoo Sahib had so effectively barred to man and beast. From such a height, and in the murky light, the narrow strip of forest resembled a long, black ribbon.

"I wonder if the troopers have gone," said Myles. "I'd like to have a peep down the other side of the barrier."

"Is there no way by which they can cut around and get at us?" inquired Jack.

"Not unless they travel about thirty miles on foot and over the toughest kind of country," Pink replied; "and I 'ardly fear they'll try that, since they've got dead and wounded to care for. If I 'ad aimed a little better Mogul Mir would 'ave a bullet through 'is 'eart instead of 'is arm."

"And how about the opal?" exclaimed Myles. "I hope we don't have to go down there after it," pointing into the valley.

"But we do, lad," said Pink quietly. "That's why I brought the rope along."

"And how will we get back? We can't shin up a seventy-foot rope."

"We could if we 'ad to," answered Pink; "but it would be 'ardly safe to return through the barrier. We might find the troopers waiting on us outside the grating.

"Our best plan is this, lads," he added: "We'll get the opal, and then push on through the gorge and the mountains to the coast. That's about fifty miles, and when we strike a seaport we can telegraph to Mysore."

"Just the thing," exclaimed Myles. "We'll try to hit Bangalore and come home from there on horses. It is a military station, and we're sure to get an escort."

"Exactly," asserted Pink; "and, as the troopers might take it into their 'eads to cut around through the ghauts, we won't lose any time in finishing things up and getting clear of the gorge. So 'and over the rope."

Jack had one coil and Paltu the other. Pink unwrapped them, and knotted each at short intervals.

Then he tied the two together, and fastened one end to the crenelated parapet. When lowered to its full length, the rope dangled within several feet of the ground.

The boys glanced uneasily at one another.

"I don't like the looks of it," said Myles. "If it sways much I know I'll grow dizzy."

"It's bound to do that," said Jack.

Pink knotted his brows thoughtfully for a moment. Then he hauled up the rope and made it six feet longer by means of the rifle-straps.

"We're all right now," he declared, as he deftly fashioned a running noose in the end.

"Which of you will go first?"

Jack pluckily volunteered, and the noose was tightened under his arms. His companions lowered him over the parapet and slowly paid the rope out.

The lad safely reached the ground, and the noose was drawn up. In like manner Paltu was then lowered.

Pink looked critically at Myles.

"I'm afraid you're too heavy for me," he said. "Can you go it alone now?"

As there was obviously no other course, Myles declared that he could. Pink leaned over the parapet, and shouted down to Paltu and Jack to draw the rope taut.

In fear and trembling Myles began the descent, not daring to gaze into the dizzy gulf over which he was dangling. But the rope swayed very little, and confidence grew as knot after knot slipped through his hands.

At last the ordeal was over, and he stood on firm ground, flushed with triumph.

Pink now hauled up the noose, and lowered all the traps in a bunch. Then the three lads held the rope tight for him, and he slid safely and quickly down.

"I'm glad that's over!" he exclaimed. "You chaps showed lots of nerve. If we go right ahead with the rest we may finish before dark, and snatch a bit of sleep to freshen us for the long tramp."

"How about the rope?" inquired Myles.

"We'll leave it 'ang 'ere," Pink replied. "No use to tear it down. Right about turn, lads. Forward, march!"

In single file the little party followed the stream up the gorge. It was now late in the afternoon, and the gloom was intense. The narrow strip of blue sky beyond the lofty mountain walls was beginning to pale.

Now and then weird, blood-curdling cries were heard in the distance, and once some huge animal, stirred from its lair, bounded away through the jungle.

"That proves the gorge to 'ave no outlet," remarked Pink, who had his rifle on the half-cock as he went along.

When Tippoo Sahib's barrier was nearly a mile behind, Jack suddenly stood still, trembling like a leaf.

"Look!" he yelled hoarsely. "A tiger!"

"Two of them!" cried Myles; and, sure enough, a pair of huge yellowish animals were seen facing each other from opposite sides of the path, and only a dozen feet ahead.

Pink's rifle went to his shoulder, and he fired at the nearest of the beasts. The loud report startled a swarm of monkeys and birds, who chattered among the tree-tops.

But the tiger never moved, and the next instant Pink ran boldly up to it and clapped it on the back.

"What an idiot I am!" he cried to the horrified lads. "I might 'ave remembered where we are. The beast is made of stone, and yonder stands a whole troop of them."

Their fear banished, the boys were disposed to laugh at Pink's hasty shot. When they had joined him they were amazed to find themselves at the entrance to an avenue of stone tigers which stood in a double line about ten feet apart.

Each one was of enormous size, and was magnificently carved out of yellowish rock.

The avenue was carpeted with wavy grass, and through the centre rippled the stream. At the farther end a domed temple loomed still and dark out of the twilight. Behind each row of tigers the forest was like a black wall.

It was a weird and solemn place, and as the little party went slowly forward a feeling of superstitious awe stole over them—a reverence for the remote antiquity to which these imperishable monuments testified.

Pushing on, they reached the end of the avenue. Here the torrent deviated from its straight course to describe an arc around one side of an oval-shaped patch of earth and rock which rose three or four feet from the centre of the valley. It was about ten yards long, and it looked as though nature had intended it to be an island.

But, instead of flowing both ways around it, the stream washed only the left side. To the right was a sort of semi-circular, dry gully, and, of course, its bottom was somewhat higher than the level of the water.

On the centre of this raised, mound-like formation stood the temple, surrounded by tall, rank grass. Being on the right bank of the stream, Pink and his companions were able to reach it without wading.

The once majestic structure was now in ruins. Fallen columns and stones obstructed the floor, and in the carving of the cornices birds and bats had made their nests. The roof was still supported by a number of gigantic stone figures, whose grotesque faces looked lifelike in the misty gloom.

"How old do you suppose this place is?" asked Jack.

"Hundreds of years," replied Myles. "Many of the Hindoo temples were built in the twelfth century, and likely this is one of them."

"That's about right, lads," chimed in Pink. "Long before Tippoo Sahib's time the Hindoo rajahs used to be buried 'ere. Every tiger stands for a tomb, and that's why the place is called Tiger's tomb. It was sort of sacred to the people, and they came 'ere on pilgrimages. Tippoo was a Mohammedan, so 'e built the barrier out of spite."

"And why did he make the passage through it?" asked Myles.

"So 'e would 'ave a safe place to take refuge in if the people rebelled against him," was the ready reply; "and partly on account of the opal. Anyhow, that's 'ow Pershad Jung explained it in the palace that night."

An indefinable something in Pink's manner suggested that the object of the long, perilous journey was about to be fulfilled.

"Is the opal here?" Jack eagerly demanded.

Pink solemnly nodded his head. Then he led the boys to the right side of the temple and showed them a flat, peaked rock jutting a foot out from the bank. Beneath it the restless stream had scooped out a sort of pool, where the blue waters swirled and eddied in a circle.

"Straight under the point of that rock," said Pink, "Tippoo Sahib buried the opal and the other treasure in a brass box."

The boys stared down with dazzled and eager eyes. For a moment they were speechless.

Then Myles cried, in a tone of disappointment:

"I'd like to know how we're going to dig the box out."

"The water must be pretty deep," muttered Jack, "and it boils like a whirlpool."

Pink winked one eye, and whistled:

"Old Tippo 'ad a way fixed for everything," he remarked. "That document of 'is 'as proved true so far, and it won't fail us now. 'Ere, lads, I'll show you something. Drop the guns, but keep the pistols 'andy in your belts."

This order having been carried out, Pink shouldered the two spades, and led the boys to the extreme upper end of the mound.

"Now," he said, turning around, "'ere flows the stream to one side, and there on the other is a dry gully which ain't very much lighter. Now what's the reason the water never tore that dry channel open in time of flood, and made an island of this place?"

The conundrum was too much for the boys, and they frankly said so.

"Well," added Pink, "I'll tell you why. Under the gully, and running clear along the side of the mound, is a square drain of masonry. Tippoo Sahib built it, and turned the stream in while 'e buried the treasure under the overhanging rock on the other side. Then 'e 'eaded the stream back to its original channel by stopping the mouth of the drain with a 'eavy stone floodgate, and to 'ide the work 'e covered it with a layer of earth."

Pink paused, and looked triumphantly at his companions.

"All we've got to do," he went on, "is to cut open the lower end of the drain, dig the slab out of the upper end, and let the stream pour through. Just about as quickly as you say Jack Robinson the other channel will be 'igh and dry. And then won't we dig the opal up in a 'urry!"

The boys cried out with wonder and delight—Paltu as lustily as any. They complimented Pink on his cleverness, and praised old Tippoo Sahib's ingenuity.

They clamoured to begin work at once, but Pink vetoed that by saying:

"No, lads; we'll eat what's left in the bag first. Then we can 'andle the spades all the better."

He marched them back to the temple, and, sitting upon a fallen column, they shared and ate the scanty bits of food.

The daytime—meagre and grey as it was—still filtered into the depths of the gorge when they rose, and crept down to the lower end of the mound.

To properly attack the supposed exit of the drain they had to stand knee-deep in the stream. Pink used one spade, while Jack and Myles took turns with the other.

They were soon so heated with the vigorous exercise that they felt no discomfort from their damp clothes and wet feet.

Rapidly the roots of the grass and the underlying strata of earth and stone were cut away. Suddenly a mass of loosened debris slid down into the stream, laying bare the yawning mouth of the drain.

It was three feet wide by two in height, and was built of great slabs of stone. It's floor was a few inches lower than the surface of the stream, and as soon as Pink cleared away the rubbish the water backed in.

"That's enough 'ere," he said. "Now for the next cut."

He hurriedly led the boys to the upper end of the gully. Here again they were compelled to enter the stream, only this time the water was hip-deep, and they caught the full force of the current as it swirled round the point of the mound.

After five minutes of hard work the edge of a long, upright stone slab was uncovered.

"'Urrah!" cried Pink. "That's the floodgate, lads."

Now the spades were handled briskly, and clod after clod of earth and gravel dropped into the current, and was washed away.

A moment later the stream was beating against the face of the stone, and the suction of their feet told the boys that the water was already leaking into the drain.

"'Ere goes!" shouted Pink. "Out of the way, now!"

He drove his spade into a crevice between the slab and the roof of the drain, and prized it still wider.

One mighty jerk, and then down toppled the stone floodgate, with a tremendous splash.

Instantly the stream was diverted from its course, and the mad waters leaped and roared into the artificial channel.

So swift and sudden was the rush of the current that Pink had barely time to spring upon the mound, and drag Jack with him.

Myles scrambled to land on the opposite side, but Paltu lost his footing, and, with a shrill cry on his lips, he was whirled into the mouth of the drain.

But Pink had seen the little Hindu slip, and he anticipated the catastrophe by running to the lower end of the mound. He threw himself flat over the exit of the drain, and made a grab with both hands in the raging waters.

An instant later he staggered to his knees, dragging Paltu along with him.

The accident and rescue were over so quickly that Myles and Jack had scarcely time to be alarmed. Now they hurried to the spot with cries of joy.

Paltu was none the worse for his adventure except a bad scare. He quickly recovered from that, and began dancing about to dry his scanty garments.

"It's lucky we didn't all go spinning through the drain" said Pink. "It wasn't a second after the floodgate fell till the rush came. And now let's 'ave a look at the other side."

In a trice he and the boys were across the mound, and clustered on the rock. They shouted with delight to see that the channel was empty except for a tiny, trickling stream in the centre of the bed of sand and pebbles. One or two inches of placid water covered the bottom of the pool.

"Shall we begin digging?" cried Myles.

"Not till we start a fire," replied Pink. "It's too dark without it, and, besides, we don't want wild beasts prowling about."

He jumped down into the channel, and splashed across to the low, timbered shore. The boys followed him and started to gather wood and dry grass.

Black night had fallen by the time the blaze was flashing ruddily up and down the gorge.

It was a thrilling moment when Pink advanced into the pool, and took his stand under the jutting rock. Every eye was on him as he began to dig. The excavation grew larger, but nothing could be seen for the murky water that filled it.

When the sides began to cave in Pink called on Jack for assistance, and both dug steadily for ten minutes, tossing up a great heap of sand and gravel.

Suddenly a ringing, metallic sound was heard. Pink dropped his spade and fell on his knees in the water. With both arms he groped to and fro in the submerged hole.

"I 'ad 'old of the box," he cried hoarsely, as he rose to his feet. "It's anchored down with chains at each end, so the floods couldn't wash it away. Look under yonder bank for a stake, lads, while I examine this side."

On the edge of the pool nearest the temple, and covered with rank weeks, Pink quickly discovered the head of a thick spike. A moment later Myles made a similar find on the other shore.

Both were loosened with blows of a spade, and when they were hauled up, a rusty chain was seen fastened to the extremity of each, and running deep into the sand.

Pink grabbed one spike, and Myles and Jack the other. They advanced towards the centre of the pool, ripping up the chains as they went along.

They met at the hole, and paused a moment. They were breathing quickly now, and their faces were flushed and eager.

"'Eave away, lads," Pink whispered huskily.

The boys set their teeth and pulled hard. Paltu ran, and took hold with Pink.

Slowly the chains rose up, dragging a great weight. Soon a shadow was seen under the water, and then a square, brazen

box, corroded with the rust of years, came slowly into view.

Eager shouts rang through the gorge as Pink and his companions dragged box, chains, and all, over to the side of the fire.

"Open it! Open it!" cried Myles.

"Stand aside, lads!" commanded Pink, seizing a spade and swinging it overhead.

He struck the box a terrific blow on the side, and the rusted lid flew in two parts.

Ah, what a sight was beheld then! Precious stones, dull and tarnished though they were by their long burial, flashed, and sparkled, and glittered in the red firelight.

Here were rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, moonstones, diamonds, and all the other varieties that the jewel mines of ancient India had ever yielded. It was like a chapter from the "Arabian Nights"—a reincarnation of the fabulous treasure of Golconda.

For a moment Pink and his companions were speechless. Jack and Myles trembled with rapture, and Paltu's eyes seemed starting from his head.

"'Ere's a mine of wealth," muttered Pink; "enough to buy Buckingham Palace and the Tower regalia—ay, and the Mansion 'Ouse in the bargain!"

"And they are ours," gasped Myles. "We will all be as rich as any millionaire."

"No, lads, they belong to the Government," protested Pink gravely; "to his Majesty the King."

He stared a moment at the glittering heap, and then thrust his right hand deep down amid the jewels. Almost instantly he drew out a great, milky-blue stone as large as a hen's egg.

"The magic opal," he cried, in shrill excitement. "Mysore's saved, lads."

Hardly were the confident words uttered, when a dozen unhorsed troopers sprang with a yell from out the thick timber, and surrounded the little party on all sides.

The leaping flames shone on a cordon of swarthy, helmeted heads and levelled rifle-barrels, and drawn tulwars—on the tall figure of Mogul Mir, standing with his arm in the bloody sling, and a gleam of satanic triumph on his mutilated face.

"Dogs of liars," he muttered. "Never will you see Mysore again! Your allotted hour of punishment has come!"

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH PALTU CHECKMATES MOGUL MIR.

SWIFTLY indeed had the shadows of death blasted the triumph of Pink Triscott and his young comrades. The noiseless stealing up of the troops had precluded the possibility of flight or defence. All was lost beyond hope.

Jack and Myles shrank close to each other, trying to avoid the merciless glances of hate that were levelled at them from all sides. Paltu crouched mutely at their feet.

At first Pink had very nearly let rage get the better of him, and his hand was already at his pistol-belt when he woke to the folly of resistance. Now he stood with folded arms, gazing fixedly at the fire. All colour had fled from his face, leaving it stamped with mingled defiance, and terror and heart-rending compassion for the lads who had trustingly followed him on so perilous a mission.

Suddenly he remembered the opal, which had fallen at his feet, and a desperate idea flashed through his brain as he stooped quickly to pick it up.

But Mogul Mir saw the movement, and, pushing Pink brutally aside, he seized the stone and thrust it into his bosom.

"What good can it do you now?" he demanded, with a mocking leer.

"I would have thrown it so far away that you and your men could never have found it," Pink boldly answered.

Mogul Mir's face became distorted with wrath.

"Dog, you still defy me!" he cried, unsheathing a glistening sword. "This is your work, and this."

He pointed to his bandaged arm and to a couple of half-healed scars on his forehead.

"They shall be wiped out in blood!" he added ferociously.

But just then his purpose was diverted by the greedy, envious glances with which his men were regarding the open box of jewels.

He slipped his sword back into the scabbard, and gave a couple of hasty orders, in too low a tone for Pink to hear.

A couple of the troopers at once set to work with bayonets and managed, with some difficulty, to pry the chains off the box. Then they fitted the broken parts of the lid into place, and wrapped the box around with stout straps.

Meanwhile, three ruffians had taken a brand from the fire, and crossed the dry channel to the mound. After poking about in all directions, they returned triumphantly with the rifles which Pink and the boys had concealed behind the temple.

At a word from Mogul Mir, the prisoners were roughly seized, and stripped of their revolvers and ammunition-belts. They offered no resistance, nor did they beg for mercy.

Too well they realised the futility of pleading or persuasion. Harder than stone were the hearts of the soubadar and his troopers.

There was a moment of thrilling silence. Then Mogul Mir stepped back a few paces, and instantly, as though this were a preconcerted signal, every ruffian flashed out his naked tulwar.

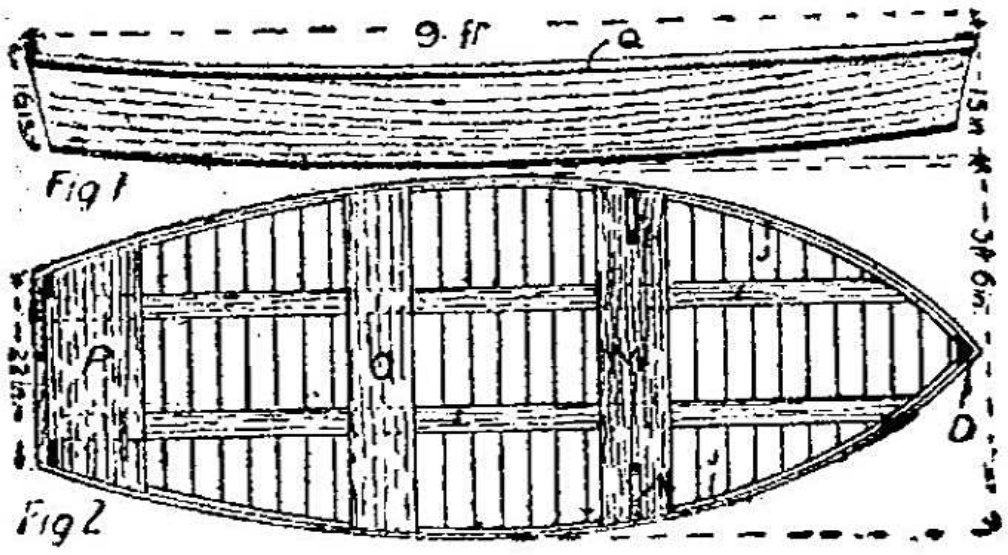
Paltu fell on his knees with clasped hands, and Jack and Myles could hardly restrain a cry of terror. The fire shone on their ghastly white faces, stamped with the fear of death.

(Another instalment of this exciting story next week).

HOW TO MAKE A FLAT-BOTTOMED BOAT

By DICK GOODWIN.

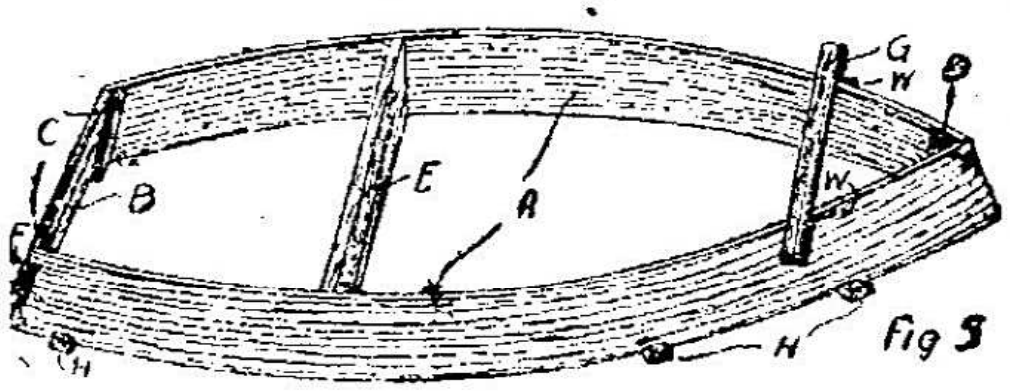
The boat shown in plan and side view at Figs. 1 and 2 is built on the same lines as a punt, and is suitable for shallow water with a pole or oars. The sides are of best yellow pine, free from knots, each side being made from two 9 ft. 6 in. lengths of 9 in. by ¾ in. planed boards glued together as at Fig. 3. The



ends of the boards are 3 in. higher than the centre.

SHAPING THE SIDES.

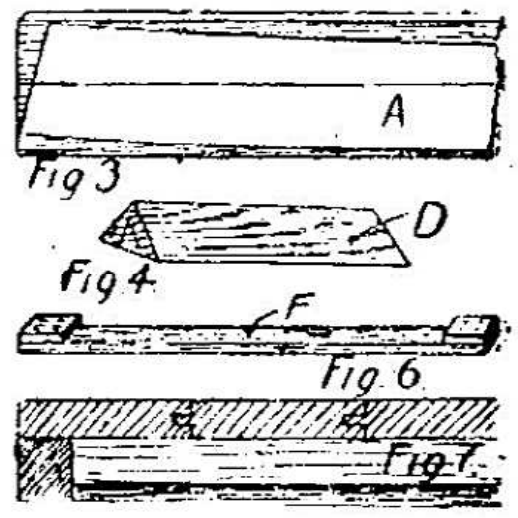
The straight piece at the stern called the transom, is shown at B, and is 22 in. by 16 in. by 1⅛ in., with 2 in. by 1 in. battens at the ends, marked C. The best wood to use is elm because it holds nails firmly. The chock at the bow, marked D and shown at Fig. 4, is also of elm and 17 in. by 6 in. by 4 in., planed to an approximate angle of 90°. The method of securing the sides to the transom and chock is shown at Fig. 5, but before the sides are bent to shape it will be necessary to prepare a length of stout board, 3 ft. 4½ in. by 15 in., to place between the sides as at E. Two wooden clamps, made as at Fig. 6, are needed at the places marked at F and G, suitable wedges being provided as at W. A few small blocks of wood as at H should be provided for screw-



ing on to the floor, in order to keep the sides in position as they are bent to the required shape.

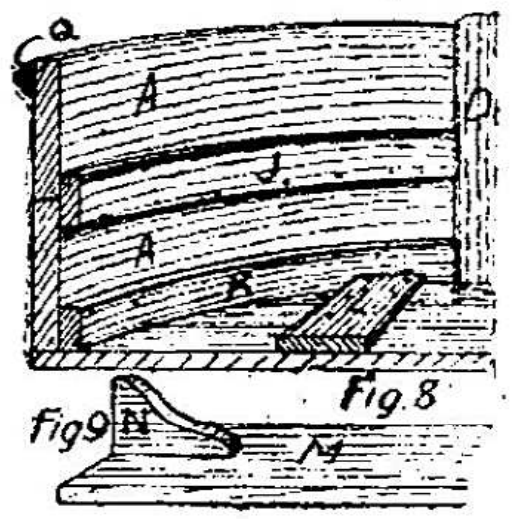
USING COPPER NAILS.

Copper nails are best as they are not liable to rust; if they are not easily procured, brass screws can be used instead. Iron nails or screws should be avoided in boat-building. The nailing or screwing should be done as close as possible, owing to the strain caused by the curved sides. When the sides are secured the bottom should be filled in with selected pine boards, tongued and grooved and 4½ in. by ¾ in. This method of making the bottom of the boat, shown to an enlarged detail at Fig. 7, gives a watertight bottom; but the boards must be free from knots. To strengthen the glued joint a 3 in. by ½ in. strip is nailed or screwed on the inside, as at J and a 1½ in. by ¾ in. strip K is nailed or screwed to the inner corners, as shown at Fig. 8, which represents a sectional portion of the bow-end of the boat. To further strengthen the bottom two 3 in. by ¾ in. lengths are nailed on in the position shown at L.



FITTING THE SEATS.

The thwart M should be 8 in. by 1⅛ in., and secured with oak or elm knees as at N; these give strength to the sides. A portable thwart O is made to the same dimensions as the other, and fitted about the same distance from the stern as that at M; about 3 ft. will be found a suitable distance. The stern seat at P should be 11 in. wide, and can be made to form a locker by boxing the front and hinging the top. The gunwales are of half-round wood about 1 in. wide, screwed to the outsides as at Q. Extra strength can be imparted to the bow by nailing on a capping of thin sheet copper on the outside; this will prevent the edge of the wood being damaged. The whole of the bottom and halfway up the side should now be coated with hot pitch, and the outside and remainder of the wood painted with at least three coats of good oil paint.



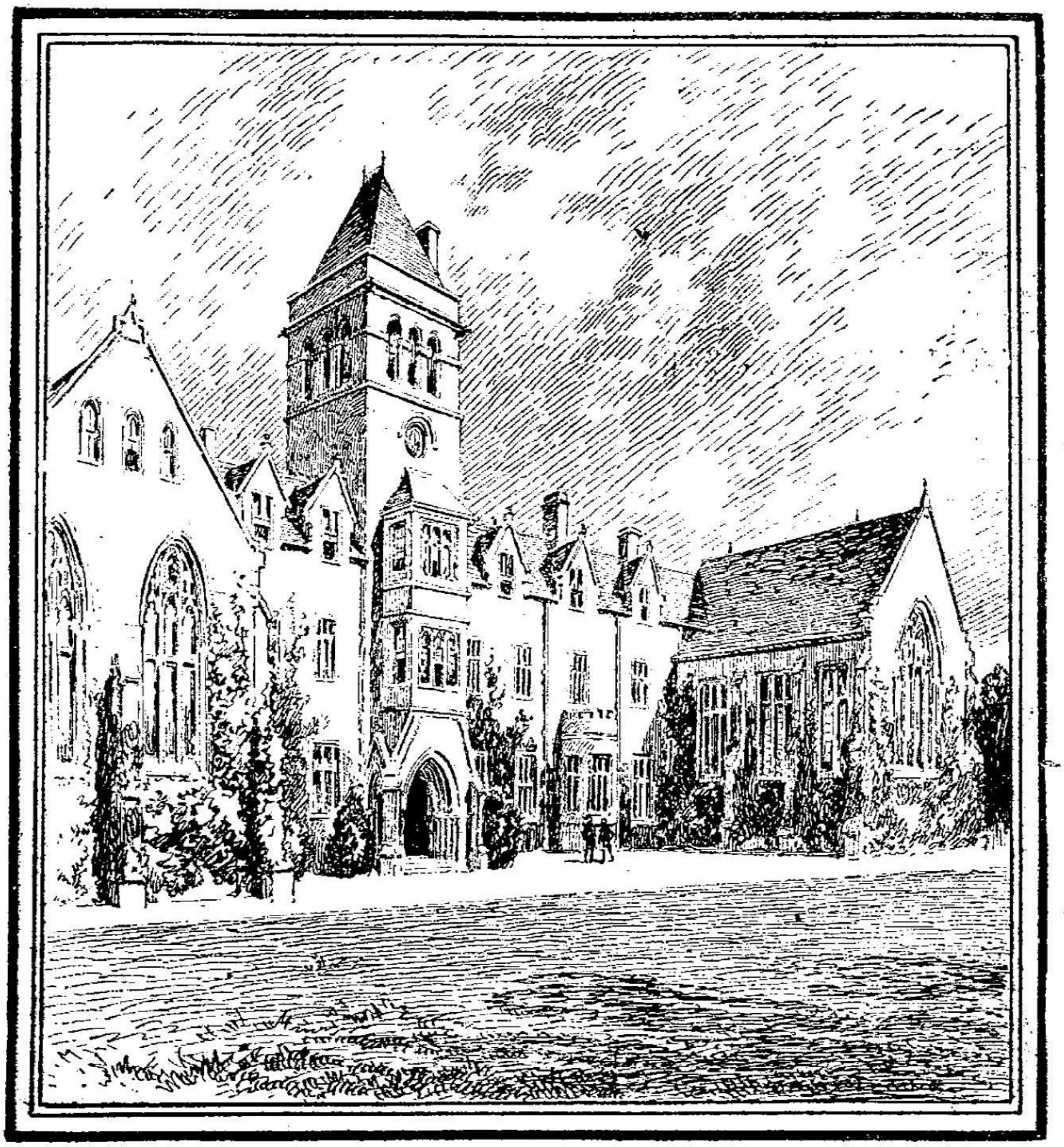
THE FOOTBOARDS.

Footboards should be made in sections for easy removal, 1¼ in. by ½ in. strips should be nailed to 2 in. by ¾ in. battens, and shaped to the bottom of the boat so that the strips can rest on the lengths L. One or two iron rings are fastened on the bow and stern for mooring, and rowlocks fixed at convenient positions. The boat should not be allowed to get very dry as the wood will shrink, and probably open the joints. It should be regularly painted, and after a year or so the joints at the bottom can be caulked if the boards shrink to any extent.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special Sketch by Mr. Briscoe, for "The Nelson Lee Library," of

TAUNTON SCHOOL.



Not far from Bristol, Taunton School lies on the outskirts of Taunton, standing in 27 acres of its own grounds. There is accommodation for about 700 boys and additional playing fields have been leased near the school. There are four houses and a separate Junior School. The colours are blue and black. Chief sports are cricket, football and swimming. The school has Classical and Modern sides, and boys are prepared for the universities, Civil Service, the professions and business life

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