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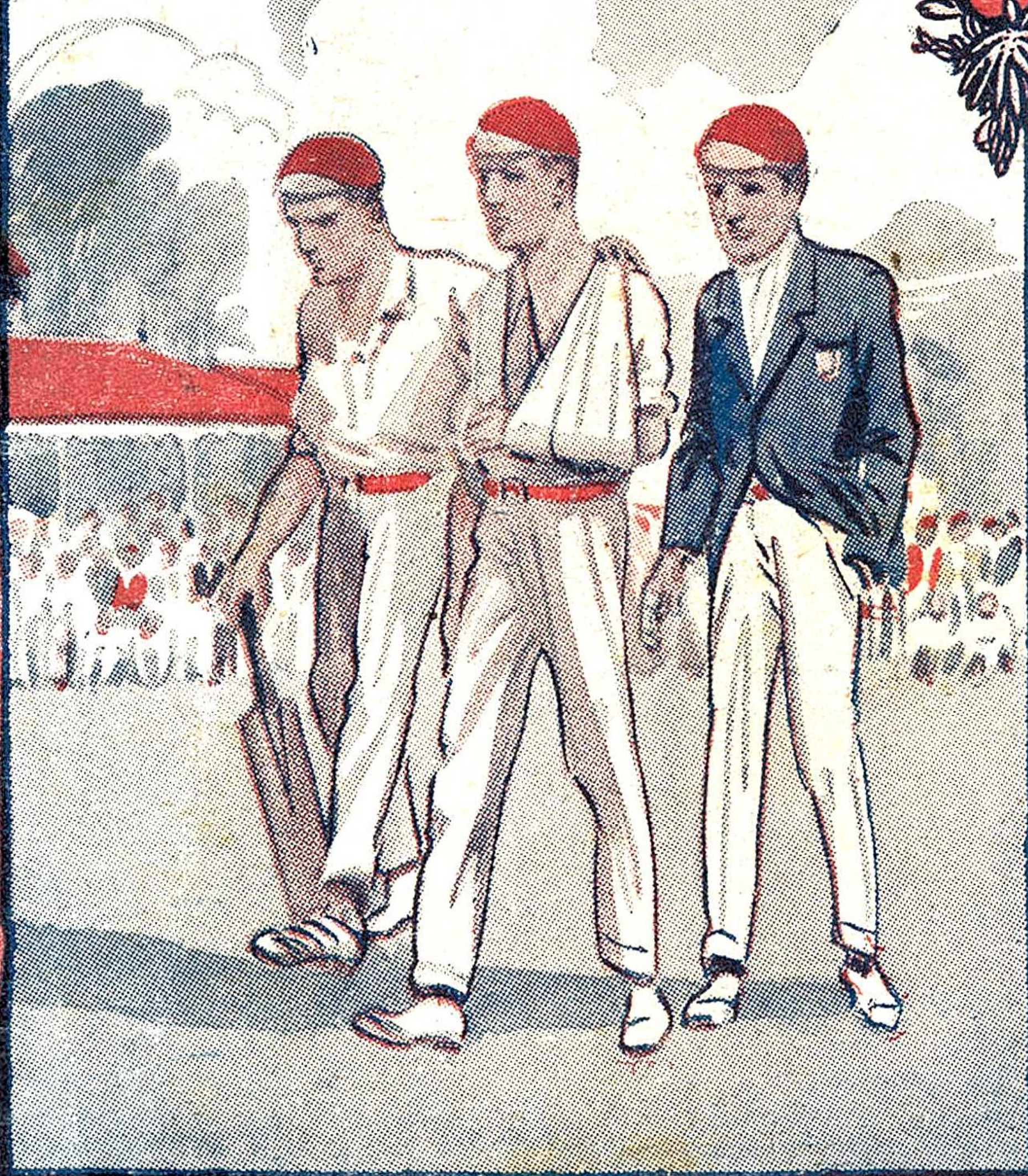


THE THREE SUBSTITUTES

or William the Conqueror

A lively story of St. Frank's, and how the Modern House tries to spoil the cricket match against Yexford.

No. 520. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. May 23, 1925.

Nelson Lee was sitting on the hard floor, with his back to the rock wall. And his right hand was in the grip of a steel collar, which fitted closely round the wrist. A thick steel chain was attached to a heavy stake in the wall.

The Three Substitutes!

OR,

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR!

Because three seniors, belonging to the Modern House, have been turned out of the St. Frank's First Cricket Eleven and three Fourth Formers have been chosen to fill their places, the Modern House is at loggerheads with the Ancient House. St. Frank's are about to play Yexford when the feeling between the rival houses reaches its highest pitch. As an act of revenge, the Moderns mean to spoil the match and take possession of the field. How William Napoleon Browne, the hero of the Fifth, contrives to outwit the Moderns by an ingenious ruse, is one of many interesting situations in this cleverly told story.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

GALA DAY AT ST. FRANK'S.

YEXFORD day!

It didn't sound particularly thrilling, but those words had very special significance for the inhabitants of St. Frank's. For on the occasion of the annual home match against Yexford College the whole school was on holiday.

It was not even an ordinary Wednesday or Saturday. The Yexford match fell on a Monday, and the day was a whole holiday for the entire school. Consequently it was a great occasion.

And it was particularly interesting, since the First Eleven had won a snatch victory from Redcliffe only two days earlier—on the Saturday. Everybody was still talking about it, and the predictions regarding the Yexford match were many and varied.

For Yexford was THE match of the season.

It marked the completion of the team, for all those who played in the Yexford match were regarded as colour men. And this meant enormous things. It meant playing against an M.C.C. eleven; it meant playing in the Old Boys' match; it meant playing at Lord's.

And on Yexford day, too, there were always visitors—mothers, fathers, uncles, brothers, and so forth. It was a kind of carnival affair, with King Cricket as the capital attraction. Throughout the term, the school looked forward to the match against Yexford First Eleven.

And this season it had been particularly attractive to the juniors, owing to the possibility of three Fourth-Formers figuring in the team. For Nipper, Jerry Dodd, and Hussi Kahn had been playing for the First for several weeks, and were in the running for their caps.

But the list was up, and the entire Junior School was in consternation.

For the three juniors were not on the list—their places being filled by Sinclair, Carlile, and Mills, of the Modern House. These three seniors were at last back in the team. Their conspiring and planning and scheming had borne fruit, and Fenton, the skipper, had deprived the juniors of their great and glorious chance.

In spite of Fenton's popularity, there were many hard things said about him

that morning. For he kept the list back until breakfast-time on the Monday. Everybody had taken it for granted that the three Fourth-Formers would be playing, and therefore they were staggered when they found that such was not the case.

"Fenton's played a dirty trick!" said Reginald Pitt bitterly. "I never thought him capable of it. And after the way our chaps played on Saturday, too. It's a shame!"

"Let's get up a deputation and speak to him about it!"

"Hear, hear!"

An excited crowd of Fourth-Formers were shouting in the Ancient House lobby.

"Fenton ought to be boiled for this!" roared Handforth. "Why, it was a certainty that our chaps would get their places! And now they're hoofed out—dropped like sucked oranges. And those three mouldy Sixth-Formers are shoved back!"

"Hard lines, old man!" said Pitt, clapping Nipper on the shoulder.

Pitt was the captain of the Second Eleven, but he took enormous interest in the First, particularly as some of his own chums had been playing for it. Pitt had no match to-day, and his whole interest was centred on the St. Frank's versus Yexford match.

"It's all right, old son," said Nipper ruefully. "Let's be like old Browne, and accept these blows with a good grace. It's no good crying over spilt milk, and it's no good making a fuss. Fenton's the captain, and his word goes."

"It's all very well!" snorted Handforth. "Something ought to be done. I know what Fenton's game is. I never thought he was so rottenly weak. It's all because these visitors are coming!"

"What have the visitors got to do with it?" asked Pitt.

"Why, Fenton thinks it'll look undignified to play juniors in the eleven," said Handforth. "That's why he's knocked our three chaps out!"

Pitt shook his head.

"I can think of a better explanation than that," he said. "Fenton isn't the man to drop three jolly fine players because of their size or age. No, it's the feud!"

"The feud?"

"Well, you know what happened all last week," went on Reggie. "We Ancient House and the Modern House fellows are at one another's throats all the time. First it started in the Sixth, then the Fifth caught the fever, then we joined in, and even the fags took it up. You know as well as I do that an Ancient House man daren't go anywhere near the Modern House for fear of being set upon and attacked. The feud's worse than ever."

"But what's this got to do with cricket?" asked Jack Grey.

"A lot, if you'll only think," replied Reggie. "The Modern House fellows, the seniors especially, are simply furious because Dodd and Kahn and Nipper have been playing in the First, and because Fenton had made up his team completely of Ancient House men. Yesterday there was a lot of talk about messing up to-day's game unless Fenton changed his tactics."

"Yes, but how——"

"Well, with heaps of visitors coming down, it would be pretty awful to have the school fighting and ragging all over the place," went on Pitt. "So as a kind of balm to the Modern House, he's replaced those three seniors. And naturally he was compelled to drop three others. You can't blame him very much for dropping the juniors."

"Can't blame him!" roared Handforth. "Why, he's as weak as a rat!"

"You can bet he considered it thoroughly before he made his decision," put in Nipper quietly. "Perhaps Reggie's right. Fenton had to do something to keep the Modern House quiet, and he thought it was better to drop us than to have an awful lot of trouble in front of visitors. It simply

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Third Series—Fifth Form.

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

No. 13.—Walter Bryant.

The third member of the famous Chambers & Co. He shares the same study as Cuthbert Chambers and Arthur Phillips. A good-natured fellow, fair at sports, and quite popular in the Fifth.

means that Dodd and Kahn and I are the victims of circumstances. It isn't fair to blame Fenton."

All the same, Fenton was blamed bitterly.

CHAPTER II.

AN EASED SITUATION.

THERE was no question about the enmity which existed between the Ancient House and the Modern House.

From day to day it had been growing worse. Originally, the trouble had started with Sinclair & Co., of the Modern House, on a question of cricket. They had been dropped from the eleven, and fury had raged throughout the Modern House seniors.

Naturally, with this feud arising between the two senior sections, the juniors had soon followed suit. And the school had been in a state of tension for days. And with the Yexford match so near, and with distinguished guests expected, the headmaster's anxiety had been considerable.

But on the morning of the match the whole situation was eased.

The inclusion of Sinclair, Carlile, and Mills in the eleven caused not only satisfaction in the Modern House, but a kind of gloating triumph. Fenton had been compelled to come to the Modern House, after all. The seniors openly crowed over their moral victory.

And the headmaster breathed rather more freely.

"I think, after all, that we shall have a peaceful day, Mr. Stokes," he said, as he stood talking to the housemaster of the Ancient House in the cloisters. "Honestly, I have been getting quite nervous of late."

"I don't think there's much need to worry now, sir," said the genial "Barry" Stokes. "The boys are altogether more calm this morning, and the match makes a difference. It has taken their minds off the other business."

"Yes, I was telling Mr. Lee only a few days ago that our school is structurally imperfect," went on the Head. "By the way, Mr. Stokes, I'm rather surprised that we haven't heard from Mr. Lee; he has been away since Friday, and no word has come from him."

"I thought there was a telegram——"

"Oh, that came on Friday evening," said Dr. Stafford. "Since then, I mean. However, Mr. Lee is master of his own actions, and one never knows where he dodges to on these extraordinary investigations of his. Upon my soul, he seems to be actively engaged all the time, even in the midst of his lecturing."

"You were saying something about the school being structurally imperfect, sir," said Mr. Stokes. "I don't quite get your meaning."

"I was talking about that to Mr. Lee, too," said the Head. "Nothing much. But since this unfortunate feud began it struck me that we are unhappily placed in having only two houses. In the event of a general quarrel of this kind it means that the entire school is involved. If, on the other hand, there were nearly five or six boarding Houses here a feud between two of them would not be nearly so grave."

"That's quite right, of course," smiled Mr. Stokes. "But we can't very well carve the school up, can we?"

"Well, no," agreed the Head. "But we might be able to make some other improvements. I understand the governors are contemplating some structural alterations during the summer holidays——"

They went off, talking, the Head easy in mind for the first time for days. And in the meantime visitors were arriving, excitement was growing, and the Fourth was waxing more indignant than ever.

"Blessed if I can make Fenton out!" said Handforth, as he stood discussing the situation with a little knot of fellows on the Ancient House steps. "After what happened last Friday evening, too! He's as weak as water! He's—he's dropped beneath my contempt!"

"I expect he'll survive!" remarked De Valerie.

"Think of it!" went on Handforth indignantly. "You all know the story! Nipper and Dodd and Kahn were grabbed by those Modern House seniors—those blessed hooligans, and pounded and punched until they were bruised all over."

"Yes, by Jove, it was a blackguardly, cowardly attack," agreed Reggie Pitt. "They thought they were going to make our men unfit for the Saturday match. And then Archie brought old Phipps on the scene, and Phipps massaged our three chaps until they were practically fit. Anyhow, they gave a good showing in the Redcliffe match, even if they didn't strike their best form until the second innings. I reckon they deserve to be included in the list for to-day's game."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, rather!"

"And instead, Fenton's put those hooligans back!" exclaimed Handforth. "And Fenton knows all about their beastly trickery, too! Why, if I was captain, I wouldn't have anything to do with three cads like that! I can't make Fenton out! He's ruined his whole character!"

And the Fourth Formers continued in the same way, and proceeded to tear the unfortunate Fenton's reputation to shreds. But it must be acknowledged that they had very good reason.

CHAPTER III

A LITTLE CELEBRATION.

"BETTER go easy on that stuff, old man," said Carlile uneasily.

"Don't be an idiot!" retorted Guy Sinclair, of the Sixth. "If you had an ounce of sense, you'd join me. Come on—don't be shy! There's half a bottle here!"

Carlile and Mills were in Sinclair's study, and they looked at Sinclair rather dubiously as he poured himself out a stiff glass of neat whisky, and drank it off.

It was not his first, either.

His flushed face, and the rather heavy look about his eyes told that the bottle had been full in the recent past. And considering that the great Yexford match was due to start within a couple of hours, this orgy hardly seemed wise.

"No, thanks—none for me!" said Carlile bluntly.

"Nor me!" added Mills. "You must be mad, Sinclair! You've got the chance you wanted, and now you're throwing it away."

"My dear man, you don't know what you're talking about!" interrupted Sinclair, setting his glass down. "This is going to make me brilliant. Get that? Brilliant! Another go of this stuff before I start my innings, and I'll make a century!"

"More like a duck!" said Carlile angrily.

"In fact, I'm going to take a flask of it in my pocket," went on Sinclair. "But why should you chaps worry? Mind your own infernal business!"

The other two Modern House seniors were hardly surprised at Sinclair's tone. It went well with his appearance. It was a disgraceful thing that a Sixth Former should so degrade himself. And when he was a member of the First Eleven, it made the offence all the more flagrant.

Sinclair suddenly laughed.

"Why the long faces?" he asked. "My dear old sports, this is a celebration party! We've won the day! We're back in the team, and those infernal juniors are kicked out!"

Carlile and Mills grinned with appreciation.

"Yes, by Jove, we're safe now!" said Mills. "And I suppose we ought to be out on Big Side, putting in a bit of practice. We haven't had much lately, you know."

"We're good enough without practice!" said Sinclair boastfully.

"All the same, it's a bit rummy about Fenton," remarked Carlile. "Our names are on the list, but he hasn't said anything to us—hasn't even asked us to go down to practice."

"That's because there isn't time," replied Sinclair. "He only made up his mind this morning—when he found that there was going to be trouble. Come on, you men! If you won't have a drink, have just a tot."

"I wouldn't touch a teaspoonful!" said Carlile. "That confounded stuff always makes my head swim. About the match. I'm all the more surprised because those juniors did well on Saturday. I thought we were out of the team for good."

"There's something behind it," declared Mills. "Fenton's had a tip from the Head, or something. He's put us in the Eleven for the sake of peace—so there won't be so much bad feeling——"

The door opened, and Grayson strolled in.

"Hallo! All here?" he said cheerfully, shutting the door. "Whisky? Good! After you, Sinclair!"

"Help yourself," said Sinclair.

"Well, our little game of last Friday has borne fruit," went on Grayson, as he poured himself out a drink. "At first I thought it was going to fizzle out, but the juniors didn't do any too well in Saturday's game, and this is the result. You fellows ought to be grateful to me!"

"We are!" said Sinclair promptly. "Take as much whisky as you like, old man! Always welcome!"

Grayson looked at him queerly.

"How much have you been taking this morning?" he asked. "Better go easy, Sinclair—it wouldn't look well to go out to the wicket with your bat to keep you steady."

"Don't you worry about me," said Sinclair thickly.

It was for this very failing of his that he had been sacked from the team in the first instance. Sinclair was a brilliant batsman—a man who had consistently hit well. He had excellent style, and his judgment was well nigh perfect.

But Fenton had unexpectedly discovered that he indulged in whisky—and what was worse, that he steadied himself for his innings by drinking spirits just before he went out to the wicket.

And Fenton, staggered at his discovery, had lost no time in dropping Sinclair out of the Eleven. Carlile, Mills, and a couple of Fifth Formers—not knowing of Sinclair's vice at the time—had gone to Fenton, and had refused to play unless Sinclair was reinstated.

That had been the real start of the present feud.

All the Modern House seniors had found Fenton firm. Instead of giving way under their threat, he had replaced them with other players. And thus, on William Napoleon Browne's advice, the Fourth Formers had been tried.

Since then Sinclair & Co. had hated the junior trio like poison, and had done everything to get them discredited. And at last, after all their efforts, they had got their places back. The two Fifth Form men didn't matter. Their places had been filled by two Ancient House seniors.

Fenton's latest decision, although surprising at first glance, was easily explained

by the circumstances. Rather than precipitate a general quarrel on gala day, he had brought the discredited Modern House trio back into the team.

And they celebrated their victory joyously.

CHAPTER IV.

DISTINGUISHED ARRIVALS.

WILLY HANDFORTH stopped abruptly in the middle of the Triangle, and turned pale. A hunted look entered his eyes. He stared fixedly into the distance.

"My stars!" he breathed huskily.

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, also of the Third, looked at their forceful young leader in astonishment. For him to act in this way was extraordinary. He wasn't afraid of the biggest bully in the school.

"What's up, you ass?" asked Chubby.

"My pater!" ejaculated Willy. "I'd forgotten he was coming down to-day! I shan't enjoy myself a bit now! You've never known such an interfering old buffer! He seems to think I'm an infant, and if I make a face, or anything, he ticks me off!"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon looked round in surprise.

"Your pater ain't here!" said Juicy. "There's only old Cuttle at the lodge, and old Pieface talking to Stocky over by the Modern House——"

"He's gone!" interrupted Willy in a hollow voice. "He just went by in the car—I caught a glimpse of it as it went up the lane. Do you think I don't know the family bus?"

His chums were bewildered.

"But what's the idea of going by?" demanded Chubby.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy. "The next time you go to the butcher's, Chubby, buy twopenno'th of brains! Be sure to get sheep's brains, because they'll match yours——"

"Look here, you insulting ass——"

"Isn't the Moor View school up the road?" demanded Willy. "Isn't my sister there—worse luck? My pater's naturally gone there first, because Ena's coming over for the match. Oh, crumbs! I'm going to enjoy myself to-day! I'd forgotten about Ena until now!"

"She's a bit of a corker!" admitted Juicy.

"You leave my sister alone!" snorted Willy. "She's better than yours."

"You haven't seen my sister," interrupted Juicy.

"No, thank goodness—but I've seen her photograph," said Willy. "Look here! I think we'd better go over to Caistowe, and have a bathe, or something. Anything's better than sticking here."

"Don't be such a duffer," said Chubby. "I wish my pater was coming down! I'd get a tip off him then—and it'd be easy enough to dodge him afterwards."

Willy looked thoughtful.

"Well, that's not a bad idea," he admitted. "If I was Ted, I'd say that I was going to suggest the same thing. But I hadn't thought of it, as a matter of fact. One for you, Chubby! You've hit it! Act 1—Fawn round the pater. Act 2—Wangle a big tip. Act 3—Do the vanishing act. My sons, that's a jolly good programme!"

And Willy, having made up his mind to this effect, felt happy.

The fags went off to the playing fields to inspect the wicket—not that there was any reason that they should. But Willy seemed to imagine that until the wicket had received his scrutiny, it would not be passed for playing.

Visitors were now arriving steadily.

Some came by train, but the majority arrived in their own private cars. Reggie Pitt welcomed his father and mother—Tommy Watson's uncle turned up—Sir Edward and Lady Handforth put in an appearance with Ena. Lady Helen Tregellis-West arrived, and soon afterwards Colonel Glenthorne, Archie's pater, drove in.

In fact, fathers and mothers and relatives of all kinds came in a steady flow. And St. Frank's was looking gay and brilliant in the May sunshine. The feud was practically forgotten. Everybody was so contented about the weather, and about the cricket, and the whole holiday was so welcome, that there was no time for ragging.

And then, of course, there were the Moor View girls.

It was no whole holiday for them, but Irene & Co. managed to come over before lessons, and they promised to arrive in the afternoon—for they were optimistic enough to hope that their headmistress would grant the afternoon off.

Ena Handforth, Winnie Pitt and Violet Watson—who all had brothers at St. Frank's—were lucky enough to have the whole day.

"Like their cheek!" remarked Doris Berkeley, as she was talking with Pitt & Co. "While they look at the cricket, we've got to spend our time in school! Jolly thick, if you ask me!"

"I wish we all had brothers here!" said Irene.

"I'll tell you what," exclaimed Handforth generously, "if you like, I'll buzz along and ask your headmistress to grant you a whole holiday. Miss Bond isn't such a bad sort——"

"I don't think you'd better, Ted," said Irene gently. "Didn't you ask your own headmaster for a whole holiday once? And didn't you get an awful lot of lines, and go off without doing them, and then get a terrific swishing when you got home?"

Handforth turned a beautiful red.

"By George!" he breathed. "You—you see—— I—I——"

"Have pity on him, Irene!" said Doris. "Can't you see the poor chap is in pain at the very recollection? I'll bet some of you fellows get it hot with the Head's birch!" she added sympathetically. "Not, of course, that you don't deserve it!"

And the subject, much to Handforth's relief, was changed.

CHAPTER V.

IMPOSSIBLE!

AT exactly one minute past eleven—just when Big Side was beginning to look gay with spectators—Shaw, of the Fifth, pelted up the Fifth Form passage as though he were chased by demons.

He tore into Grayson's study, slammed the door, and stood there panting. Grayson had leapt to his feet, startled.

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" he asked angrily. "Can't you come into a room decently——"

"They're playing!" gasped Shaw, fighting for breath.

"Playing?" repeated Grayson. "What do you mean, you idiot? Play doesn't start till half-past eleven. There's nearly half an hour yet——"

"Haven't you seen the list?"

"List?"

"On the notice-board——"

"You babbling lunatic, of course, I've seen the list!" snapped Grayson. "What's all this excitement about? Have you gone mad, or what? That list was put up before breakfast."

"There's a new one!" yelled Shaw.

"A new one?"

"Yes."

"You must be mistaken!" said Grayson sharply. "Fenton wouldn't stick up a new list within two hours of the other one. Besides, he's got his eleven fixed, and——"

"Those Fourth Form kids are playing!" roared Shaw.

Grayson jumped a yard.

"They're—WHAT?" he bellowed.

"Playing!"

"Impossible! I tell you it's impossible!"

"The notice is up there, and signed by Fenton himself!" panted Shaw. "I couldn't believe it at first. Nipper and Jerry Dodd and Kahn. They're all in the team again!"

"And who's dropped?"

"Sinclair and Carlile and Mills!"

Grayson gave a kind of gulp, and made no other answer. He tore the door open, rushed out, and fairly flew into the Modern House lobby. There were some excited juniors round the board, but there wasn't much commotion. The distant sound of cheering, however, indicated that a much bigger celebration was taking place in the Ancient House, where no doubt a similar notice was posted.

"Ye gods!" ejaculated Grayson blankly.

There it was, without any question or doubt. It was a notice in Fenton's own handwriting, and ran in the following manner:

> "Cricket Notice.—The First Eleven team for to-day's match against Yexford College has now definitely been selected, and will consist of: Fenton, Morrow, Wilson, Rees, Conroy major, Browne, Stevens, Hodder, Nipper, Kahn, Dodd.
>
> "EDGAR FENTON (Captain)."

"Looks pretty, doesn't it?" asked Bob Christine, of the Fourth. "I don't altogether approve of those Ancient House chaps being in——"

"Go to the dickens!" snarled Grayson.

He was startled and staggered. Five minutes earlier he had been joyously congratulating himself. Sinclair & Co. had been so delighted with the result of Grayson's scheming—for they gave him the credit of that ungentlemanly part of the business—that they had promised Grayson a fiver at the end of the week.

Grayson could see the fiver fading into thin air.

He ran to Sinclair's study, and found it empty. Did they know? Sinclair and Carlile and Mills had been about a short while before. Perhaps they had gone out to the playing-fields.

Grayson hurried out of the study, and was just about to rush off when the three seniors in question came along. They were looking resplendent in spotless white flannels and blazers, and Sinclair was hugging a bat under his arm. Their serene expressions told Grayson that they were unaware of the truth.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Grayson bluntly.

"Heard what?"

"You're out of the team!"

"Don't be funny!" said Sinclair, whose face was looking more flushed than ever. "It doesn't suit you, Grayson!"

"You can sneer all you like, but it's true!" snarled Grayson. "You're out of the team, and those infernal kids are back again. I've just seen the notice on the board!"

The three Sixth-Formers turned pale.

"Rot!" shouted Carlile, struck by Grayson's manner. "You must have made a mistake; it's impossible! The notice was only put up this morning——"

"There's another one up now," interrupted Grayson. "If you don't like to

belie.c me, go and look for yourselves! I tell you, you're dropped. That cad Fenton has tricked you!"

CHAPTER VI.

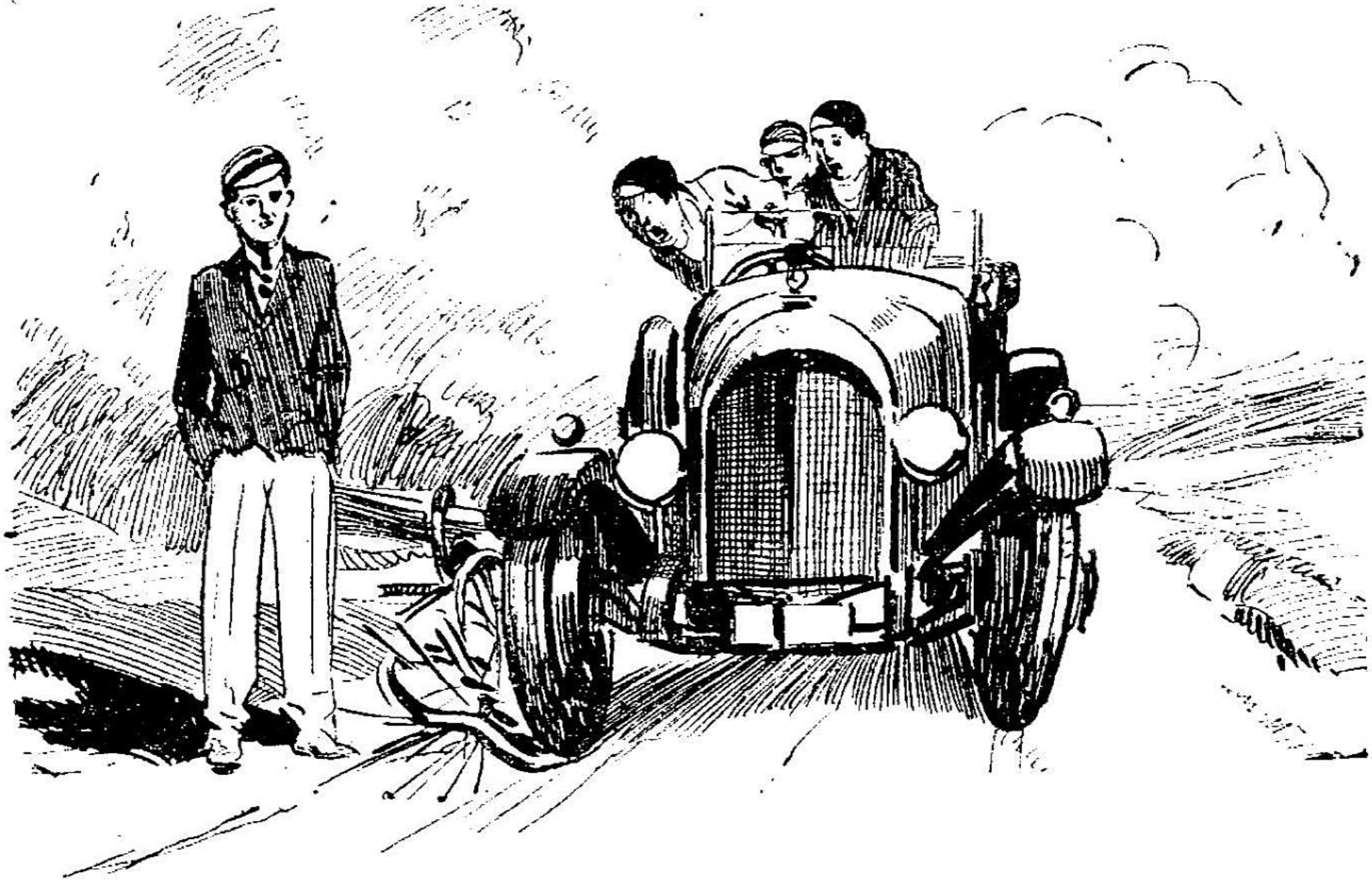
FENTON EXPLAINS.

EXACTLY two minutes later the Sixth-Formers knew the staggering truth in all its bald horror. There could be no mistaking that notice. At the last moment Edgar Fenton had wiped them out of the team.

was looking quite calm, although deadly serious. Crowds of Ancient House fellows were cheering him to the echo as he mounted the Modern House steps.

For the Ancient House had at last realised the truth. Fenton had not played a dirty trick on the three juniors—players who had served him well. Instead, he had hoodwinked the Modern House cads. And the Fourth, at least, was not slow to appreciate the joke. They knew that Fenton had not come to this decision as an afterthought. He had planned it all along.

The captain entered the Modern House lobby, and he was at once surrounded by an angry, menacing crowd. Sinclair pushed



A part of the bicycle fell in front of the off-side front wheel of the car. And the car still had just sufficient movement on it to carry the wheel forward another yard. Then followed a crunch of buckling metal.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Grayson fiercely. "Hadn't you better call a meeting of the Sixth, or something? Are you going to let this insult stand?"

"Shut up!" snapped Sinclair, his face set and his eyes glittering. "If Fenton thinks he can do this sort of thing he's made a mistake! By thunder! It's not only an insult to us, but an insult to the whole House!"

There was already an uproar in the lobby.

But at this moment Fenton himself was observed approaching. The school captain his way forward, his features working convulsively.

"What's the idea of this trickery?" he asked furiously.

"I've just come to see you, Sinclair—but what I've got to say is private. Carlile and Mills, too. I'd like to go to one of your studies. And make haste—I haven't got much time!"

"Come to my study!" said Sinclair thickly.

They went, followed by a mob. But upon arrival Fenton closed the door, and put his back against it.

"It isn't up to me to give you any

explanation at all; but I'm doing it for my own satisfaction," he said icily. "By the way, Sinclair, you've been drinking again. You smell like a distillery!"

Sinclair went white with fury.

"Mind your own infernal business!" he panted. "And what do you mean by chucking us out of the team? Our names were down on the list this morning, and now——"

"And now they're off the list!" interrupted Fenton. "You say that it's trickery? Perhaps it is; but when I'm dealing with scum, I mustn't be surprised if I get my hands a bit soiled!"

"Scum!" shouted the three Sixth-Formers in one voice.

"Scum!" repeated Fenton icily. "You can deny it if you like; but I'm in a position to know the truth. I needn't remind you that you attempted to keep my three junior players away from the Helmford match; that you literally kidnapped them. I needn't remind you that you acted like blackguards on Friday night, and attacked those three players until they were bruised in every muscle——"

"You're mad!" gasped Carlile hoarsely.

"You don't like to hear the truth, do you?" said Fenton, giving Carlile a cold stare. "I'm amazed at you, Carlile. I thought you were a better sort of fellow. But it's not my business to give you any advice. I'm simply here to explain my action in removing you from the team."

"It'll need some explaining!" snapped Sinclair.

"Not at all—it's simple," replied Fenton. "I had every reason to suspect that you were contemplating some further hooliganism this morning. You've done it twice; it's only reasonable to suppose you'd do it again. So I put your names on the list in order to keep you quiet. You thought you were going to play, and you left my junior players alone. Why, I wouldn't have you in my team at any price!" he added contemptuously. "The St. Frank's First Eleven consists of gentlemen!"

Carlile and Mills had the decency to lower their eyes under Fenton's flashing gaze.

"That's all!" went on Fenton. "Those three youngsters had to be protected, and I chose my own way of protecting them. They're in the pavilion now, and you'll have no chance of getting at them. It may interest you to know that I fixed this all up at a cricket meeting yesterday, and everybody agreed. When I'm dealing with men of your sort I've got to fight trickery with trickery. But I pride myself that my hands are still clean."

He turned on his heel, opened the door, and walked out. And Sinclair and his companions looked at one another blankly. Carlile and Mills were somewhat shamed, but Sinclair was as bad as ever.

"Well, it's over, and we'd better make the best of it," growled Carlile. "Fenton's a cad, of course——"

"He'll pay for this!" snarled Sinclair. "By gad! He'll pay for this! He needn't think that he can insult the Modern House with impunity!"

But Fenton was quite happy in mind as he walked away. He had deliberately hoodwinked the Modern House seniors, and he felt that he had been justified.

As for the Ancient House, everybody was praising Fenton to the skies, and the juniors were fairly gloating. Their three champions were to play in the great match after all! And it meant that they had won their caps—that they were now regular members of the big school team!

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOMBSHELL.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE met Fenton as the latter came out of the pavilion.

"Ah, Brother Fenton, do I perceive the light of battle in your eyes?" he asked genially.

"I've just been talking to those Modern House cads!" said Fenton.

"Alas, why was I not told?" asked Browne in distress. "What would I not have given to observe their unhandsome countenances during the interview? But all is well, Brother Fenton. The Yexford bravoes have arrived, and await your coming with some anxiety. I take it there is the little matter of the toss, and much depends upon the spin of the coin. Let me urge you to make no mistake in your call."

Fenton smiled, and went to the visiting teams' quarters in the pavilion. He knew that Nipper and Jerry Dodd and Hussi Kahn were quite safe with the other members of his team, and he felt that he had protected them in the best possible manner.

He certainly did not suspect that a tremendous conflagration was even then being stirred up.

In the first place, Fenton had no idea that Sinclair would receive any serious attention. He gave the Modern House credit for more level-headedness, and more sense of decency.

But the Modern House was inflamed—and Sinclair saw to it that the seniors, at least, were stirred into a positive revolt. Such a thing had never occurred at St. Frank's before. Fenton had no precedent to go by, and he would have been a magician if he could have foreseen what was now about to happen.

Sinclair went about the Modern House, and Grayson and Shaw assisted him. Carlile and Mills, although stunned by the news, were heartily in agreement with the plan which Sinclair was adopting. Their momentary sense of shame had left them.

A great meeting was called.

All the Modern House seniors were drawn into it—the Fifth Form and the Sixth Form. The meeting took place in the lecture-hall, and although there were one or two absentees, these did not matter.

"You've heard the news—there's no need for me to repeat it," shouted Sinclair, as he jumped up and down on the raised platform. "The Modern House has been insulted! Fenton has tricked us!"

"It's no good getting mad about it, Sinclair——"

"I'm not mad—I've got the honour of the Modern House at heart!" retorted Sinclair. "He's made a fool of us—that's what Fenton's done! He's made a fool of the whole House! Don't you realise that?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Sinclair's right!"

"After putting my name down for the Yexford match—and Carlile's name and Mills' name—he scratches them out and substitutes Ancient House juniors!" raved Sinclair. "I know it's not the thing to make trouble in the senior school, but this affair is too big to be ignored. It's an exception—and it's always the exception that proves the rule!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The Modern House has been insulted!" repeated Sinclair. "We've got to stand down to make way for those Ancient House kids. If we let Fenton get away with this, we shall never be able to hold up our heads again! The Modern House—particularly the seniors—will be the laughing-stock of the school."

"Sinclair's speaking the truth!"

"Of course he is!"

"Not only that; but we shall be the laughing-stock of every other school!" continued Sinclair fiercely. "The whole country will be yelling at us! Sixth Formers chucked out to make way for kids! We've got to force Fenton's hand—make him revert to the original Eleven!"

"But how?"

"It can't be done, Sinclair!"

"Can't it?" roared Sinclair. "Well, I can tell you a way!"

"Which way?"

"Follow me out on to the cricket field, and take possession of the pitch!" shouted Sinclair furiously. "There are enough of us to hold it! And don't forget the juniors will join in, too! They're always quick to get into any trouble. We'll hold the field until Fenton agrees!"

Sinclair's daring suggestion took the seniors by surprise.

Many of them shook their heads and vigorously protested. It couldn't be done. It was altogether too drastic. It was without dignity—and these level-headed fellows registered their protests in vain.

For the hotheads were in a large majority.

At any ordinary time this would not have been the case. Sinclair's suggestion would have been laughed to scorn. But at present the school was in a state of feud—and that was where Sinclair gained his advantage. The Modern House fellows hated the Ancient House with a deep, bitter hatred. And the insult of being left completely out of the team for the Yexford match was like a spark to a gunpowder train.

Earlier in the morning the feud had died down; but now, fanned by this breeze, it burst out into redoubled flame. The warlike feeling which affected the whole school caused usually sensible fellows to throw sanity to the winds.

And Sinclair's lead was followed by scores!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TROUBLE ON BIG SIDE.

BIG SIDE was looking gay and brilliant. The pavilion was thronged with distinguished visitors who had no inkling of the St. Frank's internal trouble. The sun was shining, the grass looked deliciously green, and round the entire enclosure there were crowds of spectators, with many gay splashes of colour.

It was altogether a gay scene.

It was only just 11.20—events had been moving fast—and the Yexford captain was looking slightly anxious as he stood talking to Fenton in front of the pavilion. Browne was there, too—Browne generally was next to Fenton's side. He regarded himself as Fenton's right hand.

"I expect they'll turn up any minute now," said Keble, the Yexford captain.

"They're late already," remarked Fenton. "Why didn't those three men come with the rest of your team?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Keble, with a frown. "There was a lot of fooling this morning when we started. Wilkinson had planned to come over in his own car, and a puncture was being repaired. Gunby and Bird decided to wait for him—and they promised to be here before us. There's nothing to worry about—they know we don't start till half-past eleven, and they're bound to be along within five or ten minutes. They wouldn't let me down."

"Haven't you got any extra men?"

"Yes, two; but the idiots are coming along after lunch," said Keble. "Of course, it'll be all right. I thought I heard a car just now—— I say, what's this procession coming along?" he added curiously.

"I may be in error," said Browne, gazing across the turf, "but it seems to me, Brother Fenton, that a large quantity of trouble is approaching. Is it possible that Brother Sinclair and his uncouth companions are daring to make a public display of our trifling tiffs?"

Fenton looked across, and started.

The "procession" which Keeble had referred to was more like a mob. Fenton recognised the leader as Guy Sinclair, of the Modern House Sixth. Behind him came practically the whole contingent of Modern House seniors.

It drove right across the playing fields in a body, paying no respect to the wicket. And Fenton, who went out to meet the demonstrators, turned pale with anger.

He was startled—staggered.

At the same time, he was filled with alarming shame at the thought of these seniors disgracing themselves and the whole of St. Frank's by such conduct. It would have been bad enough on an ordinary day. But on this particular Monday there were crowds of visitors.

"What does this mean, Sinclair?" demanded Fenton, striding up.

Sinclair halted, and the other Modern House men crowded round. People in the stand were up in their seats, startled. Round the ropes, the juniors and other spectators were gazing on in dumbfounded astonishment.

"What does it mean?" repeated Sinclair triumphantly. "It means that the Modern House is tired of your bombastic actions, Fenton! We demand those three junior boys to be thrown out of the team."

Fenton compressed his lips.

"We?" he repeated. "What does that mean?"

"The Modern House!"

"We all agree with Sinclair, Fenton!" shouted a dozen angry voices.

"And what if I refuse?" asked Fenton grimly.

"Well, there's only one thing we shall do," replied Sinclair instantly. "We'll take possession of Big Side, and we won't shift until you agree to what we say. That's final."

"You fool!" shouted Fenton, almost beyond control. "Are you daring to threaten me? Do you think you can force my hand in that way?"

"I know it!" said Sinclair calmly.

If ever Fenton had felt like flying at anybody, he felt like hurling himself upon the sneering Sinclair at that moment. But he refrained. He took a firm grip on himself.

"Look here, Sinclair, I'm not going to lose my temper," he said tensely. "Can't you have the decency of a fly for once? There are visitors here—this is the biggest game of the season. Are you going to deliberately force me to abandon it?"

"It's up to you," said Sinclair. "Carlile and Mills and I are willing to play——"

"I won't have you in my team!" interrupted Fenton curtly.

"Then we stay here!"

"If you stay here, you'll be causing acute distress to the Head," shouted Fenton. "I appeal to all you others! Can't we let these House differences drop for the time being? This is a special occasion. Are you going to be ungentlemanly enough to keep to this course? Go off this field quietly, and let things go on. I'll deal with your grievance later."

"Don't take any notice of him!" shouted Sinclair. "Remember how he tricked us this morning! And after today's game is over it'll be no good! It's up to Fenton to settle this question. He's only got to cut those three juniors out, and make the team as it originally was, and we'll all be satisfied."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's up to you, Fenton!"

Edgar Fenton took a firm grip on himself again.

"I refuse!" he said grimly. "The team stands as it is!"

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.
Third Series—Fifth Form.

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

No. 14.—William Simms.

A bit of a bear. Possessing a touchy disposition, he is generally discontented with somebody or other, and nearly always goes about with a surly expression. Nothing ever pleases him.

CHAPTER IX.

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

REGINALD PITT whistled.

"So that's the game, is it?" he ejaculated. "They've taken possession of the field, and won't go off until those three

seniors are reinstated! Fenton's in a tight fix!"

"You don't think he'll weaken?" asked Jack Grey.

"No, I think he'll remain firm," replied Pitt. "But it's going to be a fight—and he'll need to be careful, too. Things are looking pretty ugly."

Edward Oswald Handforth came up, red with excitement.

"Come on, you chaps!" he shouted. "Let's get together, and make a rush! It won't take us long to sweep those rotten Modern House chaps off the field."

"Hurrah!"

"We're not going to stand this sort of thing from Carlile!" thundered Handforth. "The Fourth can take this affair in hand——"

"For goodness sake stop that!" shouted Pitt sharply.

"Eh?"

"I was just telling Grey that things were looking ugly—and it seems that I was more right than I thought!" snapped Pitt. "Keep calm, Handy! You're going the right way to work to create a riot!"

"But those rotten Modern House chaps——"

"I know all about it—and the best thing is to leave matters to Fenton," broke in Reggie. "He'll have quite enough trouble without any of us butting in. Don't you realise that if once we attack that crowd, there'll be a general fight, and the whole school will be disgraced?"

"By George! I hadn't thought of that!" said Handforth.

"Well, it's time you did!" broke in Pitt. "Things are serious enough now—but thank goodness the seniors haven't started any rioting. That's what we've got to be afraid of. As long as they keep their heads, the thing may be settled. But if once some blows are exchanged, it'll be all up. There'll be a free fight, and more trouble than I care to think of."

Reggie Pitt's point of view was a common-sense one.

The thing to do was to avert any possible fracas, and allow Fenton to deal with the situation in his own way. If the juniors entered into the affair, and started a fistic encounter, nothing on earth could stop a general melee and the abandonment of the match.

As it was, there was a slight chance that an agreement could be reached.

Fenton was firmly determined to keep his team intact, and Sinclair was just as determined to have Nipper and Dodd and Kahn thrown out. So there was a deadlock.

And, without any particular excitement, the Modern House seniors remained in possession of the pitch. Fortunately, the juniors kept to the ropes, and made no attempt to precipitate a fight.

The Head, who was in the pavilion, did his utmost to look unconcerned. And the other masters took care to be engaged in other matters. If there was to be any peace at all, the cricket captain must bring it about.

Browne, of the Fifth, didn't think so, however. He drew Stevens aside, and looked at him rather earnestly. Browne and Stevens shared the same study, and had been old friends long before Browne had arrived at St. Frank's.

"It seems to me, Brother Horace, that duty calls in no uncertain voice," remarked Browne. "This is undoubtedly one of those occasions when my own particular gifts are required."

"Leave it to Fenton, old man," said Stevens anxiously.

"Alas, have you no faith in me?" asked Browne. "Am I to leave this matter in the hands of Brother Fenton, and see our hopes come crashing about our ears like snowflakes on a June afternoon? No, Brother Horace! It may surprise you, but I have an idea!"

"Better not interfere——"

"It is no exaggeration to state that ere long the entire school will rise in a body, and cheer me to the echo," went on Browne modestly. "Thus I shall be rewarded for saving the game. It is not for nothing, Brother Horace, that I am called William the Conqueror."

"I didn't know you were called William the Conqueror," said Stevens.

Browne shook his head.

"Which merely proves, Brother Stevens, that you are sadly ignorant of the mere gossip of everyday life—the mere tittle-tattle which passes from study to study! It pains me to learn that you wander through your existence with hermetically sealed ears. But enough!"

"Quite enough!" agreed Stevens.

"Do I detect a note of impatience in your tone?" asked Browne concernedly. "If so, Brother Stevens, let me urge you to listen. It rests upon me to solve this knotty problem. Go, therefore, to the worthy Mrs. Poulter and beseech her to supply you with sundry lengths of bandage."

"Do what?" asked Stevens, staring.

"This is no occasion for needless questions," went on Browne swiftly. "Obey, Brother Stevens, and for once in your life be useful and not merely ornamental. Meet me in the Triangle, 'neath the old chestnut trees. And fail in your mission at your peril!"

Browne rushed off, and Stevens, suspecting that the brainy Fifth Former had a scheme of his own on hand, lost no time in hurrying to Mrs. Poulter. He got what he wanted at once, and found Browne waiting impatiently in the Triangle, his bicycle by his side.

CHAPTER X.

BROWNE'S EXTRAORDINARY BEHAVIOUR.

"COME, Brother Stevens, for I am straining at my leash!" exclaimed Browne urgently, as Stevens hurried up. "I am awaiting the word to go. Already the time is running short, and I must needs step on the gas."

"You've always got plenty of gas!" admitted Stevens, handing over the bundle of bandage. "But what on earth do you want this for? Are you preparing yourself for being run over, or something?"

Browne wagged his finger.

"A shrewd guess, Brother Stevens, but several points away from the true mark," he replied "Wait patiently, and you will receive your reward. Anon I shall return. Be good enough to prepare the school for cheering purposes. It would be a good scheme, possibly, to rehearse the brass band in readiness for my eagerly expected return."

He leapt upon his machine, and cycled out of the gateway. And Stevens looked after him, frowning. Stevens had the Triangle to himself. There wasn't a soul to be seen. The school was deserted, except for the ordinary staff. For every boy, senior and junior, was out on the playing fields.

Browne, in the meantime, was cycling rapidly down the lane. It was now close upon eleven-thirty.

He had timed things to a nicety, it seemed. Almost before he reached the first bend of the dusty road, he espied a motor-car coming along. It was a sporting-looking vehicle, and it contained three youths in flannels and blazers.

"Ah, 'tis well!" murmured Browne. "Brothers Wilkinson, Gunby and Bird. It seems that I am only just in time. It is fortunate that they left matters so late. Had they arrived earlier, my masterly scheme would have been lost to the world for ever."

His movements were now somewhat peculiar.

He leapt from his machine, and stood there, waiting. The sporting car came on, with a trail of dust behind it.

Browne needed no telling that it contained the three members of the Yexford Eleven whom Keeble had referred to. They would have arrived due on time but for Browne's intervention. And, although it was leaving things very late, these Yexford men probably had a good explanation. The puncture, no doubt, had not been repaired as early as Wilkinson had expected.

Browne's fertile brain had evolved a scheme. Whether it would succeed remained to be seen. It was daring, it was original, and no harm could be done if the Yexford men failed to see eye to eye with him. If, on the other hand, they acceded to his requests, the cricket match would be a certainty.

Browne was holding up his hand in a manner which could not be mistaken. He was summoning the car to come to a standstill, and the driver slowed down. The car was only just moving—and on the point of stopping altogether—as it drew level with Browne.

And then he acted.

With a deliberate movement he tipped his bicycle over, and flung it forward. The affair was timed to perfection. A part of the bicycle fell in front of the off-side front wheel of the car. And the car still had just sufficient movement on it to carry the wheel forward another yard. There was a crunch of buckling metal, and the driver —Wilkinson—leapt out of his seat and stared.

"What the thunder did you do that for?" he demanded blankly.

"It is a pity that it should be necessary to thus damage so fine a bicycle," murmured Browne. "However, a detail. I fear Brother Horace will be somewhat annoyed. But surely he is willing to suffer a slight loss in such a good cause?"

Wilkinson was still startled. If the car had stopped two feet shorter no damage would have been done—and it was the deliberate nature of Browne's action which amazed him. Nobody had been in the slightest danger for a second, and the car wasn't scratched. Only the bicycle was damaged.

"I think we can safely and truthfully describe this as a motor-car accident," observed Browne benevolently. "Ah, brothers, good-morning! I trust I find you well? I take it that you are no less than Brother Wilkinson, Brother Gunby, and Brother Bird?"

The motor-car trio stared at him blankly.

"He's an escaped lunatic!" said one of them.

Browne bowed.

"Under the circumstances, I realise that my actions are somewhat inexplicable—but all will soon be well," he remarked. "I am Brother Browne, of St. Frank's. Indeed, the Great Browne."

He paused to observe the effect.

"I don't care who you are!" snorted the driver. "What did you push your bike under my front wheel for? Are you mad, or what?"

"Browne?" said one of the others. "Never heard of you!"

"I can only conclude that Yexford is a singularly benighted establishment," said Browne regretfully. "Of what avail is fame? But, to work! Away with these trifling matters! Brother Wilkinson?" he added inquiringly, glancing from one to the other.

"I'm Wilkinson," said a tall, fair-haired youth.

"Splendid!" said Browne. "I trust I have not damaged your car in any way?

The bicycle is of no matter. For one thing, it does not belong to me, and, for another thing, it's fate was already settled.

Wilkinson and the other two Yexford seniors glanced at one another warily. They were quite convinced that they were dealing with a harmless lunatic.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCHEME.

WILKINSON decided that it would be better to humour the patient.

"It's all right, old man," he said soothingly. "Just come with us, and we'll see that you come to no harm. From. St. Frank's, eh? Of course! We could see that at a glance."

"Then all is well," said Browne. "At the same time, let me impress upon you that there is no sanatorium near by—neither have I escaped from one. My sanity has never been questioned. And at the moment my brain cells are working overtime."

"Browne, eh?" put in Bird. "You must be the chap we've heard about! You used to be at Uxton? You know, Wilkinson—he's a terrific bowler."

Browne beamed.

"Then Yexford is not so benighted as I had at first imagined!" he exclaimed. "That is all to the good. I must inform you that there has been severe trouble at St. Frank's, and that the match itself is in question."

"Yes, by jove, we've got to hurry!" said Bird. "We're late! They must be waiting for us——"

"One moment!" interrupted Browne. "The game has not yet started, and there is no immediate haste. Certain misguided braves have taken possession of the field, and are holding it in a state of siege. This is one of the reasons I have come down to meet you. I desire your help and co-operation."

"What are you talking about—the field's in a state of siege?" demanded Wilkinson.

"Listen, brothers, and I will expound," replied Browne. "Allow your head orifices to expand, and be good enough to soak it all in. I can assure you that the situation is desperate."

And then, in an unusually concise manner for him, he told them the story.

Briefly he explained the feud, and gave the Yexford men an excellent word picture of Sinclair, Carlile, and Mills. Then he went on to describe Fenton's action, and the dramatic effect it had had.

"Thus, you see, the matter needs a master hand to set it right," concluded Browne. "It is hardly necessary for me to add that failure does not even occur to me. And speed is the watchword. Swiftness is the cry. In this affair we can all do our bit."

"I don't see what we can do," said Wilkinson. "It's your affair, not ours."

"The truth of that remark I will readily admit——"

"If these seniors won't get off the field, we shan't be able to have a match," put in Bird. "That's a bit rotten, isn't it? Of course, it can be postponed."

"That won't amount to the same thing," put in Gunby.

"I agree!" said Browne. "It will certainly not amount to the same thing. Do you realise that various old buffers and numerous fair ladies are awaiting to see our prowess upon the greensward? Is it meet that we should disappoint them? Let me urge——"

"But how can we help?" asked Wilkinson bluntly.

"By converting yourselves into the unfortunate victims of a sad accident," replied Browne blandly. "The scheme, I may say, is one that must rank among the master brainwaves of the century. Simple, but subtle. Easy, but exceptional. Rash, but rational. Doubtless you grasp my point?"

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about," said Wilkinson. "And that reminds me. What did you push your bike under my car for?"

"A slight error on your part, Brother Wilkinson, which I must pause to correct," said Browne. "The bicycle actually belongs to Brother Stevens——"

"But why did you deliberately wreck it?"

"Because," said Browne, "an accident is necessary in the interests of truth. Come, Brother Wilkinson, you would not have me tell a lie? I may be advocating a little harmless deception—but what of that? We Brownes draw the line at lying, however."

"I wish you'd explain!" said Wilkinson impatiently.

"It will be simple," said Browne. "As things stand, there will be no match. If I know anything of Brother Sinclair, he and his brother blisters will retain their grip on the field with no uncertain clutch. Our duty must be to conciliate him."

"But can't you chuck the idiot off?"

"Such a course would be fatal," replied Browne. "For it would immediately precipitate a battle royal, in which the whole school would joyously engage. I may say that it would give me great personal pleasure to fight with one Brother Grayson, but I curb these animal spirits. All must be set aside in the interests of cricket."

"Even now I don't understand."

"Possibly my scheme will fail to appeal, but the match comes before everything else," said Browne. "In a word, I desire you to become three casualties, thus leaving your team three men short. Then I shall make the brilliant suggestion that Carlile,

Sinclair, and Mills shall be included in your team as substitutes."

"What!" shouted the three Yexford men.

"Do I detect delight in your tones?" asked Browne. "Splendid! You are realising the subtlety of the idea. Your team will be intact, we shall have the game, and Brothers Sinclair, Carlile, and Browne will be only too ready to sign the armistice, seeing that they will have their game—and will be playing against their sworn enemies. As far as I can see, the plan is sparkling with brilliance."

CHAPTER XII.

CONVINCING THEM.

WILKINSON looked at his two companions, and they all glared at Browne. Apparently they did not see eye to eye with him. It was as he had feared it would be.

"You're mad!" said Wilkinson. "Do you think we're going to give our places up for three of your men?"

"Not likely!" ejaculated Bird. "The idea's insane from start to finish!"

"Harsh criticism, but due consideration will convince you that it is totally undeserved," murmured Browne. "Consider, brothers! Would you have the match abandoned? Which is better—for you three to be out of the match, or for the match to be positively and definitely off?"

The Yexford players were looking impatient. They could see what Browne was driving at all right. From his point of view, it was a cert. But they hated the thought of giving up their places.

They were not Keeble's best men by any means—indeed, two of them were Second Eleven players, having been included owing to the illness of the regular men. The Yexford team would suffer no disadvantage if Browne's plan was carried out.

Obstinate though Sinclair was, he would probably jump at the suggestion which Browne had to offer. He and Carlile and Mills would not get their places in the St. Frank's team—but they would at least play. And Browne, who knew something of human nature, could picture the eagerness of the disgruntled trio when they had an opportunity of playing against the Ancient House Eleven—for that was what it really amounted to.

Sinclair & Co. hated the Ancient House and everybody in it. They would prefer to play with the Yexford team than with their own. For it would give them real delight to knock up high scores, and possibly be the cause of the First Eleven's defeat. Carlile, who was a bowler, would undoubtedly gloat over the prospect of dismissing the three juniors for low scores.

But these three Yexford men were the stumbling-block.

It meant them giving up their own places.

But Browne's eloquence was extraordinary.

He earnestly urged them to consider the matter carefully. He pointed out to them how the whole game would be ruined unless they agreed. It was the only possible way to save the match. And it would be better for them to sit in the stand as spectators than to go back to Yexford without a game at all.

Browne assured them on his honour—and he could safely do so—that he was speaking the truth. And he qualified this by promising that if any other solution was reached, he would tell the whole truth, and confess his own part in the little deception.

"For example, if we arrive, and find peace restored, then I will explain all," said Browne. "If a more brilliant idea comes to somebody during the negotiations, then I will explain all just the same. Let me make it quite clear that you are only required to abandon your places in your team as a last resort. Make your choice. Agree to this, or return to Yexford without a match of any kind."

Wilkinson and his companions considered.

Browne's convincing manner had appealed to them. And it was certainly far better to watch the game from the pavilion than to go back to Yexford without any match.

They had very little to lose. When it came to batting, they seldom did anything spectacular. As for the rest, none of them enjoyed the hot, perspiring toil of fielding. When they came to think of it, the prospect of watching the match comfortably from the pavilion was rather good.

And so, at last, Browne had his way.

He succeeded where many another would have failed. Once he saw his men wavering, he pressed them. He used all his powers of eloquence, and in the end they succumbed.

After that the rest was simple.

There was a brief retirement behind the nearest hedge. Here Browne produced his bandages, and got to work. Wilkinson's left hand was swathed in white cotton, and a sling was made. He would be quite comfortable, and his right hand would be free. But he was obviously no good for cricket.

Bird was treated in a different way. Only two fingers of his right hand were bound up—but this would be quite sufficient excuse for him to be out of the game. And Gunby reluctantly removed one of his shoes, and his foot was put in bandages.

"It'll be all right if you just limp a bit," said Wilkinson. "There's no need to make too much fuss. A man is easily crocked for cricket. And later on we can

chuck the bandages away—after the game's fairly started."

A brilliant scheme," agreed Browne. "At the same time, it may look somewhat noticeable. However, a small point. Once our object is gained, and the match is a reality, why should we worry over a few idle comments from the multitude?"

A few minutes later all was ready, and they returned to the car.

CHAPTER XIII.

BROWNE, THE STRATEGIST.

DEADLOCK continued. The scene on the playing-fields at St. Frank's was remarkable. Sinclair and the other Modern House seniors stubbornly remained in possession of the pitch, and they refused all offers.

Only one thing would satisfy them—the dropping of Nipper, Jerry Dodd, and Hussi Kahn, and the substitution of Sinclair, Carlile, and Mills. To this demand they remained steadfast.

Three times Fenton consulted with his team, and three times he went to Sinclair, accompanied by deputations. But in answer to all arguments, Sinclair reiterated that the juniors would have to go.

Even the Rajah of Kurpana tried his hand. Goolah Kahn—Hussi's elder brother—was an excellent speaker, and he argued with Sinclair for some time. But still Sinclair refused.

Goolah Kahn was the Head's guest, and he had been coaching the St. Frank's cricket. He could make no impression upon the obstinate Modern House senior. His words went for nothing.

Fenton went back to his own Eleven, grim and desperate.

"There's only one thing to be done—we shall have to abandon the match," he said gruffly. "It's getting on for twelve o'clock, and the people in the pavilion are growing impatient. I don't wonder!"

"Why not give in, Fenton?" asked Nipper quietly.

"Give in?"

"I've been having a talk with Jerry Dodd and Kahn," said Nipper. "We'll stand down if you like—anything to save the match. If Sinclair's so stubborn, the only thing we can do is to knuckle under to him."

Fenton slowly shook his head.

"It's decent of you, young 'un—it's decent of all three of you," he replied. "You needn't think I don't appreciate it. But I'm not going to have those cads forcing me into a position like that. I'd rather chuck the match up and resign the captaincy."

"Nipper says that Nelson Lee's been captured by Fakirs, and they've gone along to rescue him," continued Teddy Long.

Nipper, who would have done the same thing himself in similar circumstances, fully understood.

"Then I don't see what else can be done!" he exclaimed. "It's particularly unfortunate, as——"

He paused and stared across the playing-fields.

"There seems to have been an accident," he went on. "Here comes Browne with three Yexford fellows."

"They must be the three Keeble was talking about," said Fenton. "You're right! Had a spill on the road, I suppose—that's why they're late."

Fenton went off, and he was watched by everybody. He stood talking to Browne and the three "injured" Yexford players for at least five minutes. Keeble, the Yexford captain, joined him.

There was a consultation, and everybody waited impatiently.

The juniors round the ropes were getting fed-up. Every other minute there were shouts for something to be done. Fenton could see, in fact, that unless he moved quickly the temper of the crowd would become so high that nothing would avert a catastrophe.

At last, with a flushed face, he hurried across to the pitch.

"Settled something?" asked Sinclair languidly. "No hurry, of course. We're willing to stop here for hours, if necessary. But we're not going to shift until you agree to our——"

"Look here, Sinclair, I've got a suggestion to make," said Fenton coldly.

"Don't make it if it's different to our demands——"

"You see those three Yexford men?" asked Fenton. "There was an accident down the road. They're not going to play in this match. Keeble is willing to accept you and Carlile and Mills as substitutes for his own men. Will you play?"

Sinclair laughed unpleasantly.

"No, we won't!" he retorted promptly. "We've told you what our wishes are——"

"Confound you!" shouted Fenton, exasperated beyond measure. "I'll give you just three minutes to decide. If you'll play for Yexford against us, we can have the match. But if you still stick out for your original demand, I'll announce that the match is abandoned. That's final!"

He took out his watch, turned his back, and walked several paces away.

"He means that, too," said Carlile.

"Let him mean it!" sneered Sinclair. "He can abandon the match——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Mills. "Why not play? It'll be rather good to find ourselves up against those Ancient House cads. We might be able to give them a twisting. Anyhow, if we don't agree to this, there'll be no game at all."

"Yes, play!"

"Hear, hear!"

Most of the seniors had gathered round, and were eager for Fenton's new arrangement to be accepted. They didn't want to be swindled out of their game.

But Sinclair remained as stubborn as ever.

Not that it really mattered. He found himself in a minority of one. Carlile and Mills decided to accept the offer, and to play, and they were supported by all the other Modern House malcontents. So if Sinclair liked to stick out, he would be left in the cold. He couldn't very well retain his hold on the pitch single-handed.

"Well?" asked Fenton, turning and putting his watch away.

"All right, Fenton, we agree," said Carlile promptly. "I'm sorry there's been all this trouble——"

"It's rather late to be sorry, isn't it?" interrupted Fenton curtly. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to get off the pitch now, so that we can start the game."

"I won't agree to it!" shouted Sinclair.

But the crowd of seniors were moving off already, and Sinclair gnashed his teeth. He hated to be done. In the end he decided that he would play, but by the time he announced this decision Bird's injured fingers had miraculously recovered, and he announced that he could play quite comfortably.

So Sinclair, much to Fenton's satisfaction, was completely dished.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MATCH.

FATE, however, was getting quite busy on its own account. It decided that it was high time that it took a hand in this affair—just to show how easily it could undo all the scheming of mere mortals.

William Napoleon Browne had "wangled" everything so that the match should take place, and the crowd at last settled down to watch the play. They were prepared to accept two substitutes in the Yexford team.

At the same time, it could hardly be admitted that the arrangement was a satisfactory one. In such an important match as this it was a pity that there should be two men playing against their own school.

And Fate decided to put a spoke in the wheel.

Nipper and Jerry Dodd and Hussi Kahn, after all, had now got their colours. They were certain. They had won them the previous week—for their inclusion in the team for the Yexford game was all sufficient, whether they did well or not. They had won their laurels previously.

Nobody had any idea that Fate was working in the affair. St. Frank's won the toss, and at last, soon after twelve, the game commenced. And Browne and Morrow started the first innings with skill and dash.

Then, just before the luncheon interval, when everybody was beginning to feel happy, Handforth noticed a low band of inky black clouds on the horizon. The air was sultry and not a breath of wind stirred.

"Naturally!" said Handforth. "There's a thunderstorm coming."

This was the first indication that some other force disapproved of the match.

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Church. "Only a few clouds—they'll soon vanish."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Reggie Pitt. "I've been watching those clouds for some time. They're creeping higher. I think you're right, Handy, old man. The game's going to be messed up, after all."

"And a good thing, too!" retorted Handforth. "I don't care if it's postponed.

It'll probably mean another whole holiday, anyhow! Fenton smoothed things over, and our paters and all the rest of the people don't know there's anything wrong. If the match is spoilt by the weather, they'll just moan a bit and go home. It won't matter."

There was something to be said for this point of view.

Practically everybody felt that it would be a good thing to have the Yexford match put off until St. Frank's was in its normal state. And although the black clouds were regarded with apprehension, a great many fellows had a sneaking hope that the storm would burst.

Lunch-time arrived, and everybody adjourned for the interval.

There were some ominous rumblings during lunch, and by the time play was due to restart the slow-moving clouds had come practically to the zenith. The sun was blotted out, and there was a murky, threatening look about the atmosphere.

The rumblings had now increased to rolls of thunder, and every now and again the sky was split by lightning. But no rain had fallen, and the wicket was still perfect.

The umpires consulted with the two captains, and it was decided to carry on with the game.

But it was really of little use. For after ten minutes a number of big, pattering drops came down. And the field hardly had time to rush for the pavilion before the downpour arrived.

It was accompanied by blinding, dazzling lightning and thunderous crashes. And the rain fell in a solid sheet—so fiercely, in fact, that it caused an eighteen-inch high haze over the playing-fields.

"Well, that's done it!" said Fenton, as he stood in the pavilion, listening to the drumming of the rain on the roof. "I say, what a downpour!"

Even now, during the first two minutes, sufficient rain had fallen to make further play absolutely impossible. If the rain stopped by magic at this moment the game would have to be abandoned.

"If you ask me, I'm glad!" said Morrow. "It's a big disappointment for the visitors, and the day's properly messed up, but even this is better than a fiasco—and that's what the match would have been. I say, either have all Yexford against all St. Frank's, or nothing at all."

And Fenton, although he didn't actually say so, heartily agreed.

For a solid hour the rain descended in torrents—until Big Side was like a quagmire, and the whole countryside running with miniature rivers. And then, the air clearing, the storm passed completely away.

Long before teatime the sky was a perfect azure blue; a gentle breeze was blowing, and the sun was shining gloriously on the fresh, glistening foliage. The match was finished with, but most of the fellows took every care to thoroughly enjoy themselves. The river was the greatest attraction now, for that was wet, anyhow.

As for the match—well, nobody could help the rain coming. And those Modern House fellows were dished, anyway.

The juniors of the Ancient House, at all events, were quite satisfied.

CHAPTER XV.

NIPPER MAKES A DECISION.

TEA in Study C, in the Ancient House, was in progress.

"Pity about the rain, but it's gloriously fresh now," said Watson. "You might pass the jam, Nipper, old son!"

Nipper went on eating, taking no notice.

"Jam, please!" said Tommy. "I say, Nipper!"

Nipper started, and seemed to come out of a reverie.

"Really, old boy, you're frightfully absent-minded this afternoon—you are, really!" observed Tregellis-West. "I shouldn't let the match prey on your mind. You've got your colours, practically speakin', an' I expect the match will be played some other time——"

"I'm not thinking about the match, Montie," said Nipper slowly.

"Begad! No? Then what is on your mind, Nipper boy?" asked Sir Montie, with concern. "I trust there is no frightful worry botherin' you? No secret cares of any sort?"

"I was thinking about the guv'nor," said Nipper.

"Oh, the guv'nor!" repeated Watson. "Pass the jam!"

Nipper passed the jam and smiled. His chums did not seem to share his anxiety regarding Nelson Lee. When he mentioned "the guv'nor," they didn't look at all anxious.

"You needn't worry about Mr. Lee," said Sir Montie. "He's often goin' away for days at a stretch——"

"He'll be back to-night, possibly," said Tommy.

But Nipper was not relieved by these remarks. He had not seen Nelson Lee since the previous Friday. True, it was only Monday, and Nelson Lee had a habit of going away for days—when detective work called him. But in this particular case Nipper had every reason to be gravely concerned.

He had thought it rather peculiar that Nelson Lee hadn't said good-bye to him on the Friday. He had worried a bit that

same evening, but the Head had shown him a telegram from Lee, dispatched from London.

It seemed reassuring, but Nipper had heard nothing personally. He had thought, at least, that Lee would let him know something, particularly after what had happened.

And he had decided that he would take his chums into his confidence on this very day—Monday. If Nelson Lee turned up, all well and good, but if he didn't Nipper meant to act. And the first thing was to make his chums acquainted with the situation.

"Look here, you chaps," said Nipper slowly, as he pushed his cup aside. "Now that the match is finished with I can think, and I've been thinking pretty hard, I can tell you. I'm worried, beastly worried. I've got an idea that the guv'nor's met with foul play. I'm wild with myself for not acting yesterday, or even Saturday."

"Foul play?" repeated the other two, staring.

"Yes," said Nipper. "I couldn't very well do anything on Saturday, though. There was the Helmford match. Then yesterday I decided to wait until this evening. I've been telling myself all along that the guv'nor must be all right; but I've got a conviction he isn't!"

"What makes you think he's met with foul play?" asked Tommy curiously.

"Look here, you know those old tunnels underneath the vault?" asked Nipper suddenly. "I've decided to tell you everything now; I must relieve my mind somehow. You know those tunnels?"

"Of course we do."

"There are caverns leading out of those tunnels—old disused quarry workings——"

"Begad! We've had all sorts of adventures there, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "What are you gettin' at?"

"One night last week I went into the main tunnel with the guv'nor, and we came upon a cavern," said Nipper quietly. "There were some Indians in it—Hindus!"

"Hindus!"

"I'm not kidding; this is true!" went on Nipper. "There were all sorts of machines—an engine, dynamo, a white hot electric furnace, a bench, with chemicals. And while the guv'nor and I were looking through a hole in the tunnel, one of the Indians crept up behind us and tried to stick a knife into the guv'nor's back!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Watson.

"You've been dreamin', old boy," said Tregellis-West.

"I haven't; and now perhaps you can realise why I'm so jolly concerned," went on Nipper. "Nelson Lee told me he was going to make some investigations, and I'm afraid he's been collared. For all I know he might be killed!"

"I say, can't we do something?" asked Watson eagerly.

"We can, and we will!" replied Nipper. "These matches have detained me, and they've been occupying my time. But we shall have the whole evening to ourselves now, and we can easily slip down to the tunnel without anybody seeing."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Watson. "I say, it'll be ripping if we can rescue your guv'nor! But who are these Indians? What are they doing out there?"

"I don't know, but that's one thing I want to find out," declared Nipper grimly. "I'm fed-up with waiting. The guv'nor told me not to do anything, but I can't help that. I'm so uneasy that I simply must. It's getting worse and worse every hour. He doesn't write; he doesn't come back; he doesn't let me know anything. We've GOT to investigate!"

Nipper kept one thing back from his chums.

He did not explain that he and Nelson Lee had seen Goolah Kahn, the young Rajah of Kurpana, down in that strange cavern. He thought it wasn't necessary to tell them that yet. His main concern was for Nelson Lee.

And as soon as tea was over they sallied out on their errand.

CHAPTER XVI.

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD lay back in the easy chair in Study A, and blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"It's all right; no need to be careful to-day," he said languidly. "Everythin's free an' easy. It's holiday-time, an' we can do as we like. Care for a cig., Gulliver?"

Gulliver was just selecting one when the door opened and Teddy Long looked in.

"Clear out!" ordered Fullwood curtly.

"Please, Fullwood——"

"Get out!" roared Ralph Leslie.

"But—but I've got something to tell you!" burst out Long. "It's about Nipper. He's doing something down in the old disused tunnels. I think you ought to know about it!"

"All right; come in an' shut the door!" said Fullwood, sitting up. "How do you know that Nipper's gone to the disused tunnels?"

I—I happened to be passing Nipper's study, and the door was ajar——"

"You mean you put your ear to the key-

hole!" interrupted Fullwood tartly. "Now, out with it!"

Teddy Long was looking flushed. The sneak of the Fourth was excited, too, and he hesitated before going on with his story.

"Please, Fullwood, I was going to ask you to lend me three bob!" he blurted out. "I'll tell you all about Nipper if you'll promise——"

"I don't promise anythin'; but if this information's any good, I'll give you sixpence," said Fullwood generously. "I expect it's all a yarn, anyhow."

"It isn't. I heard everything."

"Well, let he hear it, an' I might spring a shillin'!" said Fullwood. "But it's no good inventin' a string of lies——"

"Look!" interrupted Teddy. "There they go now! That'll prove what I say. See 'em?"

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell looked out of the window, and caught sight of Nipper & Co. strolling casually and unconcernedly towards the shrubbery. They disappeared amid the trees.

"That doesn't prove anythin'," said Bell, with a sniff.

"It proves that they're goin' to the old ruins," said Teddy eagerly. "And that's the way down into the vault, and into the tunnel. You know that as well as I do. They've gone down there to have a look for Nelson Lee."

"You silly young idiot——"

"It's true—honest!" gasped Long, dodging. "Don't you believe me?"

"No, I don't!"

"But—but it's true!" insisted Teddy, in anguish at finding that when he did have a true story his listeners wouldn't believe it. "They were saying something about some Indians. And one of those caverns is all fixed up like a laboratory, with an electric furnace, and engines, and a whacking great big Hindu idol."

"Rats!" said Fullwood sourly. "Piffle!"

"Look here——"

"Clear out of this study!" interrupted Fullwood curtly. "If you think you can fool me with a string of lies like that, you've come to the wrong place! Clear!"

"But listen, Fullwood——"

"GET OUT!" thundered Fullwood.

Teddy Long bolted like a rabbit, disgusted beyond measure that his story was disbelieved. It was, in the main, quite true. For the despicable Teddy had listened at the keyhole of Study C during Nipper's conversation with his chum. It was a habit of Teddy's to go from study to study, gaining all sorts of private information.

This he generally turned to account. He was a blackmailer on a small scale. Occasionally he would hear one boy referring to another in the most scathing terms. And then Teddy would come along and extract some small silver in order to keep quiet.

But this story about the caverns and Hindus and a white-hot electric furnace struck Teddy as something extra good. And he naturally went to Fullwood as his best customer. It was disgusting to find that Fullwood wouldn't even listen to him.

He mooned along the passage, wondering who he could tell now. He was broke, and he would willingly sell his information for a mere sixpence, or even a few coppers, if necessary.

Then he thought of Handforth. After that he hesitated. He considered the matter. There was for and against. On one hand, he knew that Handforth was dotty on detective work, and it was easy to spoof him, too. But on the other hand Handforth had a short way with Teddy as a rule, and he was liable to do some damage. Teddy decided, after due consideration, that he would chance it. Mrs. Hake had some particularly fine pastries this evening, and Teddy was desperate.

He went into Study D, and found Handforth telling Church and McClure exactly how Guy Sinclair ought to be dealt with. And Church was just remarking that a coffin would be necessary for Sinclair if all the schemes were carried out.

And then Teddy Long sidled in with his wonderful story.

CHAPTER XVII.

HANDFORTH ACCEPTS THE BAIT.

"HOW did that creep in here?" asked Handforth, as he turned round and looked at Teddy Long. "Did it get under the door, or has it come out of one of the cracks? That's the worst of this hot weather—it always brings out the insects!"

"Please, Handforth——"

"It can speak!" said Edward Oswald, with sarcasm so heavy that Church and McClure were grinning. "You've come here for tea, I suppose, you little worm? Well, you're too late!"

"I haven't come for tea at all!" said Teddy indignantly. "I know how keen you are on detective work, Handforth, and so I thought you'd like to know about those Hindus."

"What Hindus?"

"Nipper & Co. have just gone off to the cavern, down in the tunnels," said Teddy, getting it out as quickly as he could. "I heard them talking about it just now—quite by accident, of course. Nipper was telling the other chaps that there are some Hindus in that cavern—and a great electric furnace, as big as this room, and an Indian idol, and there's incense burning all over the place, and all that sort of thing. Nipper

says that Nelson Lee's been captured by fakirs, and they've gone along to rescue him. As you're the best detective in the Fourth, I thought you'd like to know."

Handforth's eyes were gleaming.

"By George!" he said, taking a deep breath.

Church rose grimly to his feet, seized Teddy Long by the scruff of the neck, and led him gently but firmly outside. He gave him a push, and sent him along the passage.

"Cut!" he said curtly.

"Oh, but look here, Church——"

"Cut!" repeated Church ominously.

"But ain't you going to gimme something?" roared Teddy. "I've told Handforth the story, and I think I ought to have five bob——"

"You'll have a thick ear unless you get out of my sight!" exclaimed Church indignantly. "Telling Handforth all that rot! You know jolly well there's not a word of truth in it!"

"I tell you——"

Teddy turned and fled. Church was looking very dangerous, and Long thought it just as well to take no further risks. In the lobby he found Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. He told them the same story, and was laughed at uproariously for his pains, and gave it up as a bad job.

The fact was, the story sounded so preposterous that nobody believed it. Coming from Nipper, it was convincing; but from the false lips of Teddy Long, it was merely humorous. And finally he gave it up in sheer disgust, and contented himself by hovering round the door of the school shop, hungrily sniffing the air.

In the meantime, Church and McClure were having an awful time.

Church went back into Study D, giving no further thought to Teddy and his extraordinary story. He dismissed it on the instant. Like everybody else, he regarded it as a mere fabrication—invented for the sole purpose of making money.

Church sat down, poured himself out another cup of tea, and then found there wasn't any milk.

"I say, Handy, you might have left some milk——" he began.

"Hindus!" said Handforth dreamily.

"What?"

"An electric furnace!" said Handforth, his eyes suddenly gleaming. "By George, I've got it! There must be a criminal gang at work down in that cavern. That's what it is! Nelson Lee's been collared, and Nipper & Co. have gone to rescue him!"

Church and McClure stared at him aghast.

"You—you don't believe that piffle?" asked Church dazedly.

"Coiners!" said Handforth impressively.

Church nearly fainted.

"Coiners!" repeated McClure. "My giddy aunt! Your mind always runs on coiners when you hear about something mysterious!"

"If that gang aren't coiners, what's the electric furnace doing there?" demanded Handforth triumphantly. "I expect they're making Indian rupees! Anyhow, we're going down there to have a look! And after we've captured the gang, I shall see that my photograph comes out in the papers."

"You—you hopeless idiot!" roared Church. "Teddy Long told you that story!"

"What about it?"

"You know what a liar he is!"

Handforth started.

"Of course, he does tell a few whoppers," he admitted. "Still, there's something about this story which smacks of the truth!"

"Smacks of his usual idiotic rot, you mean!" growled McClure. "You don't seriously mean that you're going down into that tunnel?"

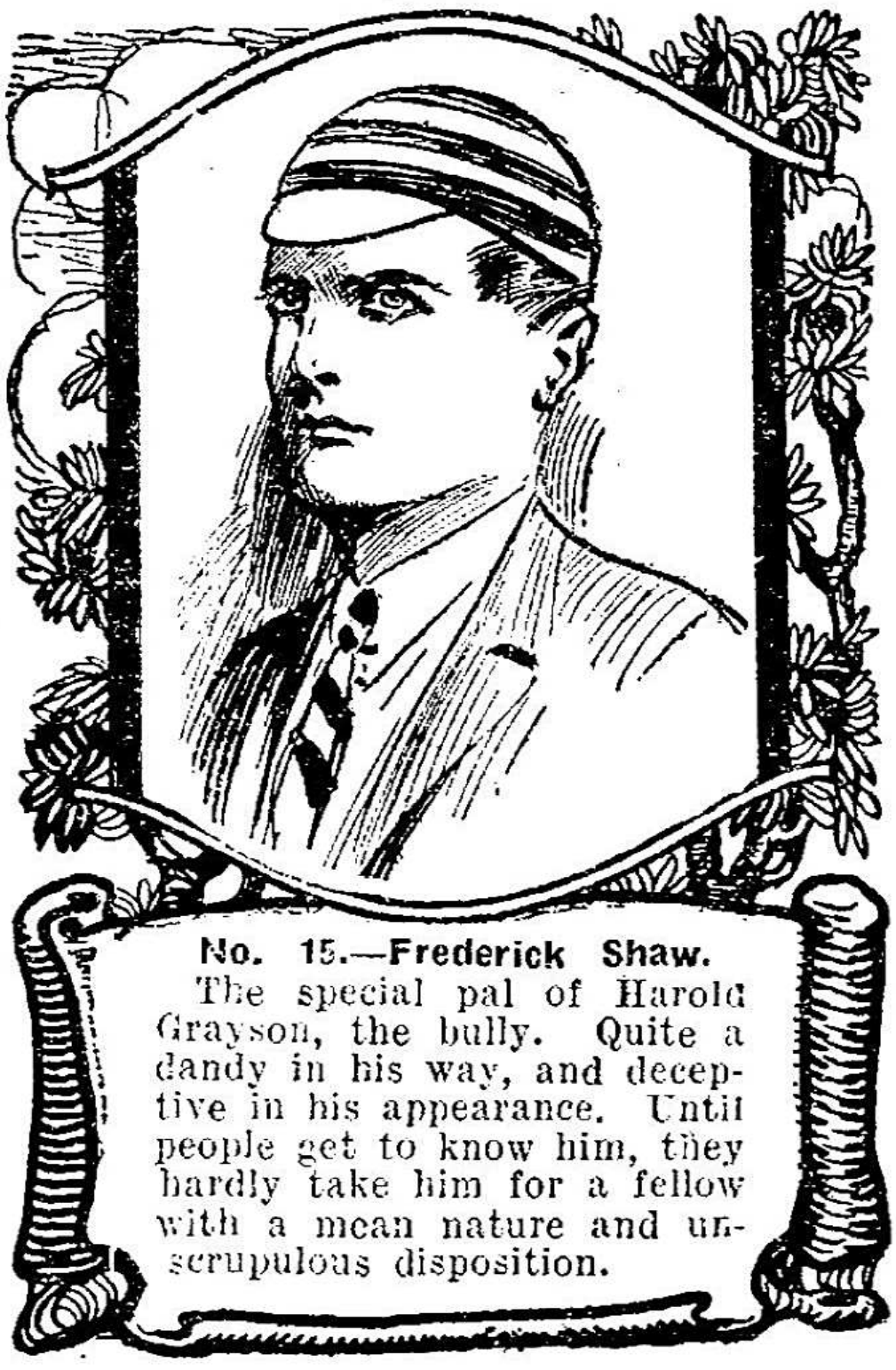
"Handforth rose to his feet.

"I'll admit that there's a doubt about it," he said condescendingly. "I'd almost forgotten that Teddy Long told us the yarn. But we can't leave it to chance. We've got to make sure. So we'll go down to the tunnel and have a look round, and if there's nothing there we'll come back and smash Long into smithereens!"

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Third Series—Fifth Form.

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



No. 15.—Frederick Shaw.

The special pal of Harold Grayson, the bully. Quite a dandy in his way, and deceptive in his appearance. Until people get to know him, they hardly take him for a fellow with a mean nature and unscrupulous disposition.

And although Church and McClure did their utmost to dissuade Handforth from his purpose, Edward Oswald had made up his mighty mind. Little did he dream of what this adventure was to ultimately lead to!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DESERTED CAVERN.

NIPPER led the way down the crumbling, circular stairs, which descended from the monastery ruins into the ancient vault. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West followed.

They knew all this ground by heart.

Many times had they used this vault. They could remember all sorts of adventures and escapades there. The tunnels, too—the grim, disused quarry workings, with the quaint natural caverns. All this ground was familiar to them.

Tregellis-West and Watson were actuated by curiosity. But Nipper was anxious—seriously, agonisingly anxious. The conviction was strong upon him that Nelson Lee had fallen a victim to those strange, mysterious Indians. And he wanted to make sure.

Reaching the vault, they made their way into the wide tunnel. This led straight through the hillside, and eventually came out in the old quarry. But after the juniors had progressed some little distance, they were faced by a barrier of rock and stone, where the tunnel had collapsed.

Nipper flashed his electric-torch on the obstruction, and his chums uttered exclamations.

"Begad, we can't go any further, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "I'd forgotten that this tunnel was blocked up—I had, really!"

"We might as well go back——" began Tommy.

"Don't be in such a hurry," murmured Nipper. "And don't talk loudly, either. I don't know whether I ought to have brought you two chaps. I've got an idea I'm leading you into danger. These Indians are desperate chaps—there's no question about that. I told you how they tried to stab the guv'nor in the back."

"Yes, but we're not scared," growled Watson. "You don't think we're afraid of a bit of danger? What are you going to do about this barrier? Pull it all down, I suppose?"

"Not all of it, old man," smiled Nipper. "If you'll stand back a bit, I'll show you something."

Watson and Tregellis-West did as they were bid, and Nipper went down on all fours. The obstruction seemed absolutely solid and immovable. But Nipper knew the secret of it—Nelson Lee had shown it to him when they had come on that previous trip.

As he was speaking, Chandra Jungh suddenly flashed a knife from behind his back. In the same instant, Lee knew that the Indian had come here on purpose to assassinate him in cold blood.

Almost at a touch, a great block of stone moved back. It was not hinged in any way, but just cunningly balanced. By pushing it aside, a black cavity was revealed. Crawling into this, Nipper vanished. He had moved another block, and was now in the other part of the tunnel.

"Come on!" he whispered.

His chums joined him, both of them having a sensation that the immense amount of rock was about to fall on them. But it was really quite strong. They stood upright, and looked into the darkness strangely. They couldn't help an eerie, uncanny sensation creeping over them.

"No talking now, mind!" breathed Nipper. "And when you walk, move as quietly as mice. We may have to make a dash for it, and if so I'll give you a warning. But let me lead the way. You hold my coat, Tommy, and let Montie hold yours."

Nipper had already switched off the light, and they were now in black Stygian darkness. They went along in single file, Nipper cautiously feeling his way along the wall. His chums followed behind, keeping in contact by sense of touch.

And, after what seemed an age, Nipper led the way down a low, narrow side tunnel.

Along this they proceeded for some distance, bumping their heads occasionally,

and knocking their elbows. So far they had heard no mysterious sounds—nothing to indicate that these tunnels were occupied by others.

At length Nipper called a halt. He was in exactly the same place where the attempt on Nelson Lee's life had been made. And now there was some light on the scene. It was only a glow, but it enabled the juniors to see a good deal.

The tunnel ended abruptly. There was a chasm—a long drop into the biggest of the caverns. For the tunnel came out near the cavern roof, and from below it looked just like an oblong hole.

Nipper was at this opening now, gazing down.

When last he had been there the cavern had been ablaze with light, and the Indians had been at work. But his heart leapt into his mouth. For now everything was deserted and silent.

A single light glowed, but that was all.

Nothing moved below in the cavern. The bench was still there, and the electric furnace, but there were none of the Indians, and the silence of the place was heavy and oppressive. The atmosphere was charged with a peculiar, pungent odour of mixed chemicals.

"Nobody here!" murmured Nipper. "The place is absolutely deserted! I wonder if we'd better go down into the cavern itself?"

"Why not?" whispered Watson.

"Hold on!" said Nipper. "I've got an idea!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DISCOVERY OF NELSON LEE!

NIPPER was thinking deeply.

The discovery that the cavern was empty had surprised him. He hadn't expected anything of this sort. And it became fairly clear to him that the Indians were either in another cavern, or had left the place altogether.

The probability was that they were asleep, that they worked at night. And, if asleep, the assumption was that they were in some special chamber near by. But even this was not certain.

He knew that they feared no intrusion. And it occurred to him that it might be a good scheme to call softly. If Nelson Lee was imprisoned somewhere, he would possibly hear, and would answer. And if the call raised an alarm, he and his chums would easily be able to get to that obstruction in the tunnel before they could be overtaken.

It was worth risking.

"Look here, you chaps!" he breathed. "I'm going to call out to the guv'nor. But if there's the slightest alarm, you've got to bunk, and don't forget to use every ounce of speed, because it may mean a race between life and death."

"All right," muttered Watson. "I'm game!"

"Go ahead, dear old boy," said Sir Montie softly.

Nipper leaned over the ledge, and took another look.

"Guv'nor!" he called in a loud whisper.

He listened, and there was no response.

"Guv'nor!" shouted Nipper, raising his voice.

Again they listened, tense, ready to run if necessary. And this time there came a sudden clink of a chain—a sound which seemed enormous after the previous silence. The three juniors felt their skin tighten in a peculiar way.

"Nipper!" came a clear but soft answer. "Is that you, my boy?"

"Guv'nor!" shouted Nipper, his voice nearly cracking.

"He's there!" panted Watson. "That was Mr. Lee!"

"Begad!" gasped Tregellis-West. "But—but what was that sound of a chain?"

"I don't know. But we'll soon find out," interrupted Nipper, his eyes gleaming. "We won't waste time in going round—we'll get down direct!"

Swiftly he uncoiled a length of rope he had provided himself with. A loop of this he hooked round a great, jagged projection of the rock. It was as firm as a steel hook, and a moment later Nipper went slithering down.

His chums followed, and they cared nothing for any possible danger now. Nipper fancied that the sound of his master's voice had come from one of the corners, and he went over with quick footsteps.

"Guv'nor!" he called again.

"This way, Nipper—through the narrow hole near the floor!" came Nelson Lee's voice, uncannily near.

And then Nipper saw that there was a kind of crevice in the rocky wall near the floor. He dived down, wormed his way through, and switched on his electric torch. Then he uttered a startled, pained exclamation.

Nelson Lee was sitting on the hard floor, with his back to the rock wall. And his right hand was in the grip of a steel collar, which fitted close round the wrist. A thick steel chain was attached to a heavy stake in the wall.

"Oh, guv'nor!" muttered Nipper. "How—how long have you been here?"

"Need I tell you, Nipper, how glad I am that you have come?" asked Lee. "And I can do nothing but admit that my utterances to you last week were little short of bombastic. I told you I could look after myself, didn't I? You can see how I performed that simple duty."

Lee was looking drawn and haggard. But the sight of Nipper had brought a smile to his face, and when Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West came crawling through the crevice he greeted them with a warning shake of his head.

"You ought not to be here, boys—there is

terrible danger!" he exclaimed. "I urge you to go at once!"

"Not likely, sir!" exclaimed Nipper quickly. "What about you? We've got to get you free from this! We're not going to leave this place until you come with us!"

"I admire your spirit, Nipper, but I'm afraid you can do nothing," said Nelson Lee. "Do you think I have not tried to conquer this chain? My wrist is nearly raw with wrenching and twisting. I am a prisoner, and the whole position is ridiculous."

"But how did it happen, sir?" asked Watson, with wide eyes.

"Quite simply—absurdly so," replied Lee ruefully. "I came down here to make an investigation, and again those Indians proved the better men. They did not stab me in the back this time, but I was stunned by some heavy implement from the rear. When I recovered I was as you see me."

"But haven't they given you any food or anything?" asked Nipper blankly.

"Nothing except a little water."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Not that it matters," smiled Lee grimly. "Two or three days' fast will do me more good than harm. Boys, I want you to go from here and inform the police. Let them do this work——"

"Not until we've got you free, sir," interrupted Nipper firmly. "Look here! There's a bench in that cavern. There may be some tools there. What about the Indians? We saw no sign of them."

"I think they sleep in another cavern, some distance away, and there is not much chance of any disturbance now," said Nelson Lee. "But I don't like your being here. At any moment they may come!"

While he was speaking, Nipper dived for the crevice, and wormed his way out. He made his way to the great bench, and searched it closely. There were no sounds of the enemy.

And then, with a little gasp of joy, Nipper spotted a big steel file. It was along with a number of other tools. He picked it up with trembling fingers.

CHAPTER XX.

NEARLY FREE.

"HERE we are, sir!" said Nipper briskly, as he came back into the little inner cave. If this doesn't make some impression on those links, I shall be jolly surprised. Shove your hand on my knee, sir! That's right! Hold it, Tommy, and keep it steady!"

Nelson Lee could see that Nipper was determined, and he offered no further resistance. He held his hand on Nipper's bent knee, and both Watson and Tregellis-West kept the chain taut. It was impossible to file the steel cuff without injuring the imprisoned detective's hand; but Nipper chose the nearest link, and commenced work with the file.

At first he seemed to make no impression, for the steel was of a fine quality. But when he examined his handiwork after a few minutes, he was aware of a distinct groove.

"It's all right—it's cutting!" he muttered tensely.

"Have you found out anything about these Indians, sir?" asked Watson anxiously. "We don't know what they're doing down here——"

"Neither do I, Watson," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I only know that they are making some big experiments. They are using chemicals and electrical apparatus, but what their object is I cannot say."

"Are they criminals, sir?" asked Nipper. "I mean, are they doing something against the English law?"

"Even that I cannot tell you," replied Lee. "Your presence here worries me. I would rather you went while you are safe. These men may return when least expected ——"

"Shan't be long now, sir," said Nipper briskly.

He filed away with redoubled vigour, and for three or four minutes there was complete silence in the cavern except for the rasping bite of the file.

Nipper made another inspection after a further effort, and now his eyes were gleaming.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated. "It's through!"

Lee examined it closely by the torchlight. One side of the link was completely severed, and the file had bitten deeply into the other. Freedom was near.

"There's no need to file any more," said Watson quickly. "If you give your hand a jerk, sir, you'll snap it!"

"Yes," said Lee. "That will be the best way. And then we will lose no time in——"

He paused and held his arm.

"But one moment!" he went on softly. "Boys, I want you to go—to get out in the same way as you came. Now that freedom is almost mine, I might as well tell you that I do not expect those Indians back for some hours."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Nipper indignantly.

"I want you to go and leave me here."

"Leave you here?" they exclaimed.

"Exactly!" replied Lee. "The advantage is with me now. I can free myself whenever I choose, and I can select the exact moment I want. It will be far better if I remain. Thinking me a fast prisoner, they will not concern themselves about me."

"But we don't want to go like that, sir," said Nipper. "You come with us!"

"And if I come, and these men find that I have gone, what then?" asked Lee keenly. "Before I can return with a force of police,

they will probably have fled. And there are other reasons why I do not want you boys to be seen here—urgent reasons!"

He gave Nipper a significant glance, and Nipper knew that his master was referring to Goolah Kahn, the young rajah. And so at length, in obedience to Lee's orders, the juniors took their departure.

But they knew that Nelson Lee was now free, to all intents and purposes. He was better than being free, for he held the trump card in his hand, and when his moment came he would size it.

Having definitely decided, the three juniors made all speed.

They scrambled up that rope, and arrived breathless at the tunnel entrance. Then, unfastening the rope from the projection, Nipper recoiled it, and this time he did not hesitate to use the electric torch.

And so, without any adventure, they reached the obstruction in the main tunnel. They got through, replaced the rocks, and at last found themselves in the familiar vault.

Here they mounted the circular stone steps, and reached the open air. It seemed strange to come out into the broad daylight of the summer's evening.

CHAPTER XXI.

NELSON LEE ACTS.

LEFT to himself, Nelson Lee remained seated in his recent position, and was relieved when all sounds of his late helpers died away. He concluded that they had come to no harm.

And then he settled himself down for a long wait.

It was not quite such a long period as he expected. In a little under two hours sounds came through the crevice. The light in the cavern increased, and the steady purr of the motor and the hum of the dynamo throbbed through the air.

The Indians were beginning their activities again.

Nelson Lee thought about snapping his chain and going to the exit and watching. But he refrained from this move. He wanted to wait awhile, until everything was going full swing. These operations, as he know from past experience, sometimes continued for hours into the night.

Nelson Lee possessed infinite patience, and he exercised it now. And the first move came from the enemy. A scuffle sounded near the crevice, and then, a moment later, a form rose upright.

It was the figure of an Indian, and he was holding a small electric torch. He flashed this upon the prisoner, and in the reflected light Nelson Lee could see the man's face. He was an impressive-looking man—gaunt, with high cheek-bones, and strange, burning eyes.

"There will be not much waiting now," he said, in a deep voice. "But two or three days, and then your liberty may be restored. But even that is not yet certain. I am awaiting orders."

"That is very interesting," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I have been expecting you to do something drastic——"

"My great master has forbidden such a course," interrupted the other.

And this, as Nelson Lee knew, was the reason for his preservation. It was Goolah Kahn who had given the orders for him to be preserved. Somehow, Nelson Lee could not picture the clean young rajah as the murderer. But this man now before him—whose name, he knew, was Chandra Jungh—would not have hesitated a moment had he had his own way.

The Indian suddenly leaned forward.

"But sometimes it is better to ignore what my master tells me," he said, in a low voice. "And to-night I have decided that it is time I acted. It is not well that you should be here. Your presence is a hindrance. And so there must be——"

As he was speaking, Chandra Jungh suddenly flashed a knife from behind his back. In the same instant Lee knew that Chandra Jungh had come here on purpose to assassinate him in cold blood. He was going against the orders of his master, and was determined to get rid of the prisoner.

Lee acted as swift as lightning.

With one jerk he freed the chained arm. The Indian was still out of his reach—had he been chained—but it was different now.

The detective leapt forward and gave one terrific uppercut. It was a beautifully placed blow, and Chandra Jungh had no chance of avoiding it, and he was taken by surprise.

Crash!

Nelson Lee's fist thudded upon the Indian's jaw, and the man crashed over with terrific force. The back of his head struck the rock floor, and Lee felt momentarily ill at that sound. Chandra Jungh lay perfectly still, but he was breathing heavily.

The torch had fallen, but had not gone out, and in a moment Lee was examining the prostrate man.

It was a case of concussion—fairly serious, although by no means fatal. But it would be hours before the murderous brute recovered consciousness. And this scene had taken place without anybody in the main cavern being a word the wiser.

Nelson Lee realised how helpless he would have been but for that filed link. At the Indian's mercy, he would have perished. And he was amazed that the millionaire Rajah of Kurpana should associate with such companions. What was the explanation of the mystery?

Switching off the light, Lee crept to the

exit, and silently wormed his way through. But he did not go completely out. He paused, peering across the cavern.

And he saw a startling, amazing sight.

There was only one man in view—and this man was Goolah Kahn himself. He was in front of the electric furnace. There was no sign that it was heated, but Lee felt convinced that it was. For Goolah Kahn was standing there, rocking himself to and fro, and acting in an insane, fanatical manner.

He was talking to himself—and now and again his voice would rise almost to a shriek. Lee was startled. The rajah was not himself—he was transformed.

Lee did not pretend to understand the ways of the East. He knew them to be weird and extraordinary. He had seen Indian fakirs in frenzies of sheer religious madness. It struck him that Goolah Kahn was in one of these frenzies now.

And, acting upon impulse, Lee pulled himself upright, and strode forward. He would get the truth of this matter now!

He went right up to the rajah before the latter saw him. A flash of recognition came into his eyes, but they were bloodshot and fierce. His usual aristocratic demeanour had gone.

"You are too late—too late!" he shouted wildly. "I have succeeded—my experiments are successful beyond my wildest dreams!"

"Calm yourself!" ordered Lee sternly. "Man alive, do you not realise that——"

"See!" shouted Goolah Kahn, pointing to the electric furnace. "The atom is in control! One touch and the whole countryside for miles in every direction will be in smoking ruins! It is within my power to destroy nations—to gain control over the whole world!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FANATIC.

NELSON LEE took a quick glance at the electric furnace.

Goolah Kahn had paused in his attitude, and was still staring at the furnace with blazing, fanatical eyes, and his whole figure tensed. Lee was quite convinced that the unfortunate young man was beyond all reason and rational thought.

Yet he knew that he was facing Nelson Lee—for he spoke in English. But his mind was so obsessed with the result of his recent labours that he could think of nothing else.

The electric furnace was ominously glowing. Lee could see nothing, but he could feel the heat radiating from it. And Lee could hear faint sounds of something within.

What demoniacal contrivance was this?

Thoughts were passing through Lee's mind quickly. He knew that the young rajah had been experimenting for days—even weeks. And by pure chance Lee had confronted him at the very moment of his ultimate success. The experiment was triumphant—he had won!

At least, so Goolah Kahn thought. But was it true, or was he merely the victim of some frenzied delusion? Nelson Lee remembered Chandra Jungh's visit to him. The man had meant to kill him. And this, too, indicated that a certain crisis had arisen.

Goolah Kahn had mentioned the atom. Lee was more than ever convinced that he was demented. The engine—the dynamo—the electric furnace—the laboratory outfit—all this meant that Goolah Kahn had been experimenting with the object of controlling the atom. And, according to his now fevered words, he believed he had achieved his end!

Some fiendish contrivance was in that electric furnace. At any moment it might explode, and kill them both. Not that Lee believed that there was any danger.

But Goolah Kahn half-convinced him soon afterwards.

"You think I am mad!" he shouted, coming up to Nelson Lee, and peering closely into his face. "I can see it in your eyes! You think I am insane! But I am not—I am not!"

"Control yourself, Kahn!" said Lee grimly. "Steady, man! This sort of thing won't do you any good. You are a victim of your own imagination, and you had better come away——"

"So!" exclaimed Goolah Kahn, suddenly leaping from Lee's side. "You think I am imagining, eh? You are wrong! In that furnace there is the most marvellous scientific secret of the world. I tell you, I have discovered the method of controlling the atom! I can destroy this cavern, the whole countryside, the entire county! Even as we stand, my experiment may fail—and it may be too late to avert the disaster."

Nelson Lee made up his mind quickly.

The unfortunate young man had given himself away. Almost in the same breath he had stated that he had discovered how to control the atom—only to add that it might be impossible for him to avert the disaster. What that furnace contained Lee did not know. But he was certain, now, that there was danger.

He did not wait to argue.

"Come!" he shouted, grasping Goolah's arm.

The rajah wrenched himself away.

"No, no!" he shouted. "No, no! I will not come! I will remain—and if I have failed, then I will perish——"

"Come out of this at once!" ordered Lee.

But the young Indian gave a wild laugh, and sprang off. The electric furnace was now making alarming sounds. And Lee was fully expecting to be blown to pieces at any moment. He valued his own life, but it went against the grain to flee and leave

this fanatical young Indian scientist to his fate.

With two bounds Lee reached the rajah, and then lifted him clean off the floor.

"Fool—fool!" screamed Goolah Kahn.

He went off into a wild string of his own native words. But Nelson Lee took not the slightest notice. He had Goolah Kahn in his grasp, and although his captive kicked and struggled and clawed, he carried him away.

Goolah's cries were terrible, and his madness was getting dangerous. And then, just when Nelson Lee thought it would be impossible to carry out his purpose, Goolah Kahn's cries ceased, and he became suddenly limp.

His spirit had been stronger than his body—for the latter, unable to stand the strain, had succumbed. Goolah was not dead, but he had swooned in the excess of his frenzy.

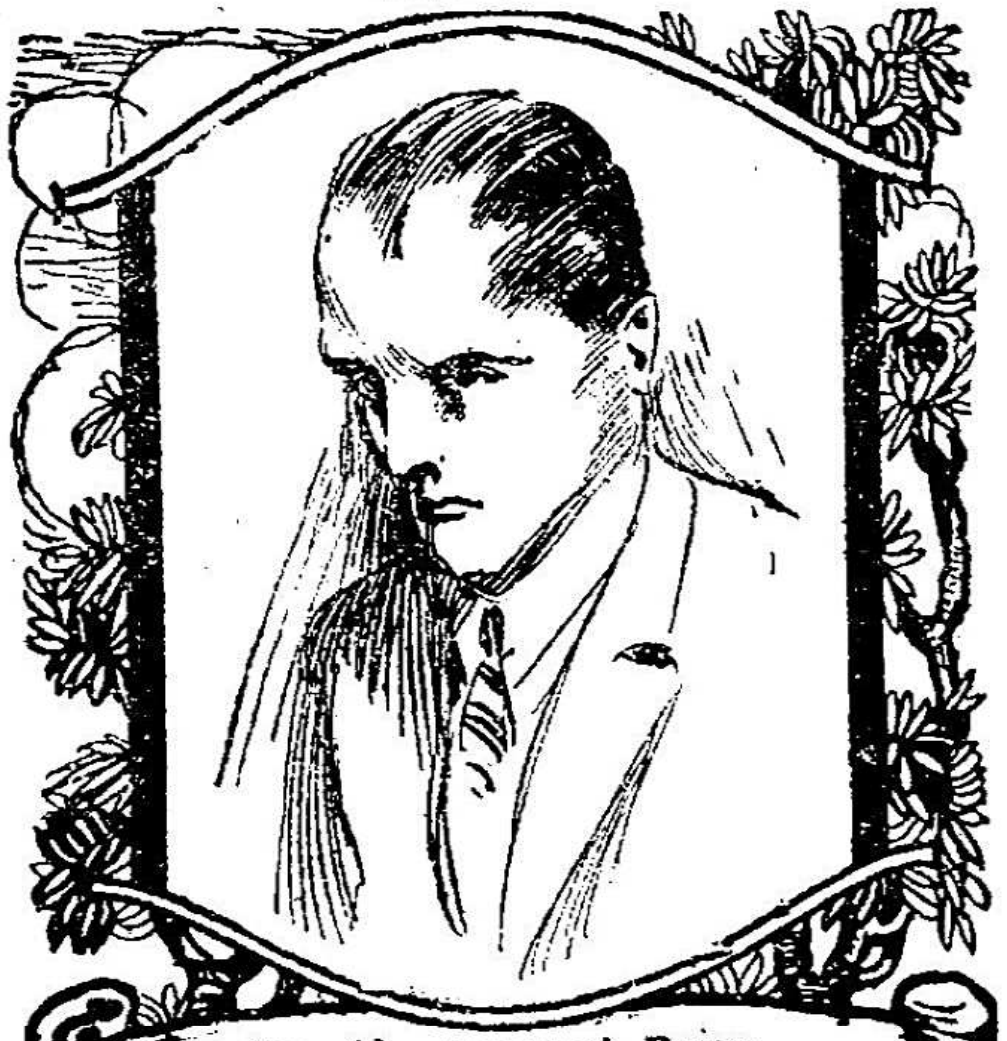
And Lee was relieved.

For now he was able to fight his way out of the cavern, into the tunnel, and thus towards the exit and normal, commonplace surroundings. This dreadful cavern was like some ghastly nightmare.

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Third Series—Fifth Form.

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



No. 16.—Howard Rowe.

Known in the Fifth as the "library haunter." An intellectual fellow, who spends practically all his time poring over books. One of the Fifth Form's real lecturers, and positively unbeatable in a debate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HANDFORTH INVESTIGATES.

CHURCH and McClure were worried.

The evening was getting on, but so far Handforth had not gone on the expedition which he had outlined. For one thing, his father had detained him—Sir Edward dragging him off just when he wanted to start.

His chums were hoping that he would have cooled down by the time his filial duties were over. And at first they thought their hopes would be realised.

But as soon as Handforth entered Study D he stood looking at Church and McClure for a moment, then he glanced at his watch, and after that he went to the window.

"Yes, now's just about the time," he murmured.

"Coming along to the common-room, Handy?" asked Church casually. "I think there's some talk going on about the Yexford match——"

"The Yexford match is finished with for to-day!" interrupted Handforth suddenly. "And we've got no time for that, anyhow. We're just going off on that investigation."

"But look here, old son——"

"I've been thinking it over, and I've come to the conclusion that there's something in it!" went on Handforth. "My dear asses, you've forgotten—Teddy Long says he heard about that cavern and the Indians and all the rest of it from Nipper."

"He said he overheard Nipper talking to Watson and Tregellis-West."

"Exactly!" said Handforth. "Isn't there something about that that strikes you as significant, my lad?"

He spoke as though he were Sherlock Holmes talking to Dr. Watson, and the question he put was a poser.

"Significant?" repeated Church.

"There you are!" said Handforth. "It just shows you that you don't think! That's where I score—all good detectives think! I have discovered, by acute deduction, that for once Teddy Long was telling the truth!"

"What deduction?"

"A simple thing—but a big one!" replied Handforth impressively, and feeling more and more pleased with himself. "Teddy Long was telling us the truth for the simple reason that he's a brainless ass!"

"That doesn't sound sense!" objected McClure.

"Of course it doesn't!" said Handforth triumphantly. "But it is sense! And I'll explain how. Teddy Long was telling us the truth because he hasn't got brains enough to invent a yarn like that. See the point? Do you mean to tell me that that young donkey could fake up a marvellous story of that kind?"

Church and McClure were slightly startled. Handforth was becoming brilliant all of a sudden—but even he himself did not realise how close he was to the truth.

"I hadn't looked at it like that before," admitted Church.

"Well look at it like it now!" retorted Handforth grimly. "We're going on that trip at once—there's a full hour before supper. I mean to have a look into that cavern, find out everything, and have the whole gang arrested."

"All before supper?" asked McClure sarcastically.

"I don't know about that—but I'll have a shot at it!" said Handforth, with his usual optimism. "But the first thing is to get our facts. After that we'll go to the police."

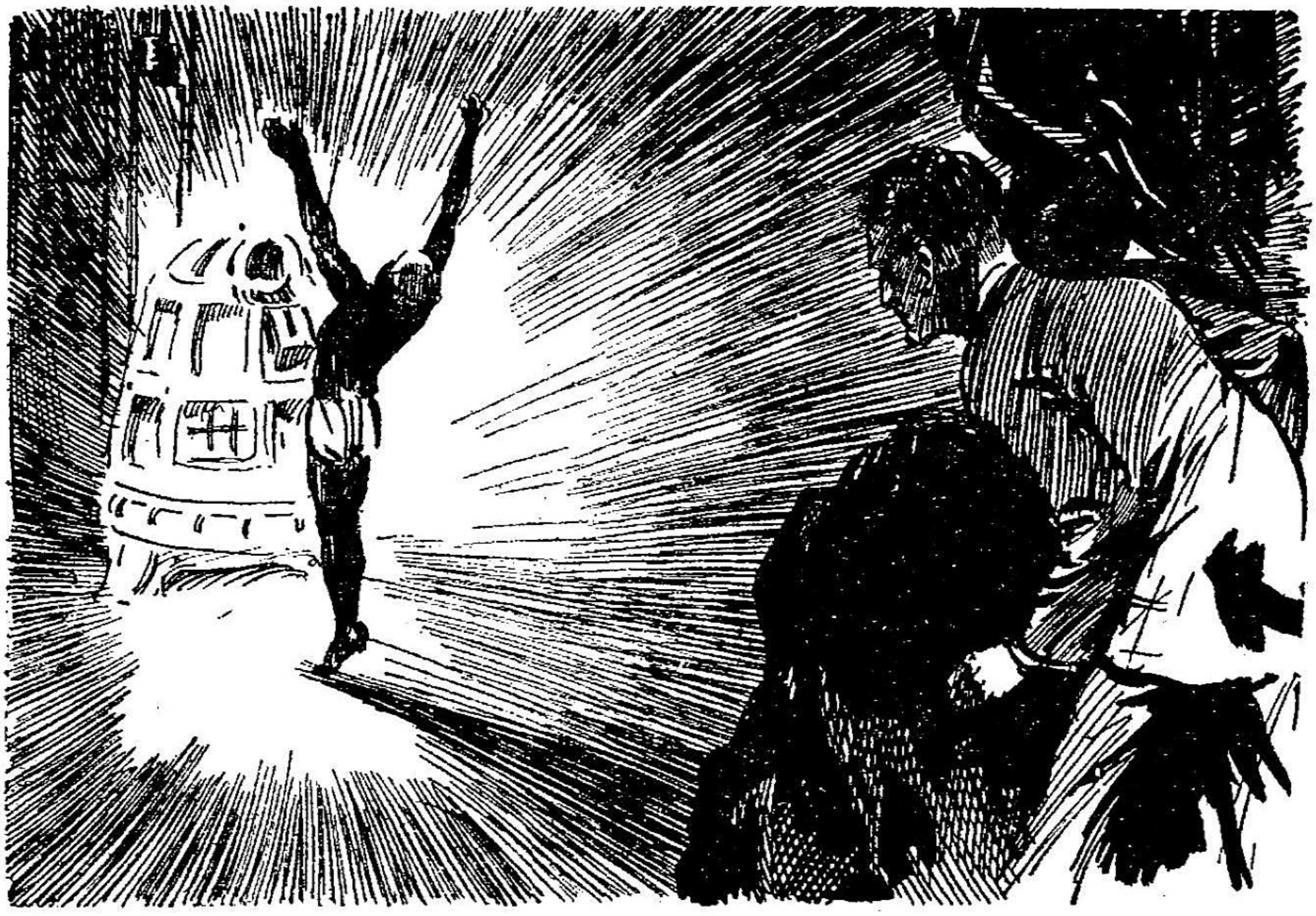
Church and McClure groaned.

"Are we going camping?" asked Church.

"There's never any telling," said Handforth, shaking his head. "We may be delayed, and we don't want to be left without food and drink! You go to the tuckshop, Church, and get the sandwiches and the ginger pop. I'll see about the rope, and McClure can go and borrow Archie's electric torch. If he isn't there, all the better—we don't want any talk about it."

And Handforth hustled his chums off in spite of their protests. His whole idea was to make the investigation without loss of time, while the trail was hot.

As it happened, the chums of Study D played an unconscious game of hide-and-seek



Goolah Kahn was standing there, rocking himself to and fro, and acting in an insane, fanatical manner.

"It's no good—he's got it on his brain!" muttered Church. "We shall have to go through with it, or he won't give us any peace. Besides, we can't let him go alone—he'll get lost!"

"Fall down a crevice, or something," said McClure.

Handforth looked at his chums severely.

"I don't like this muttering!" he exclaimed. "I'll bet you're conspiring to desert me, or something like that. Now, we want some electric torches, plenty of rope, candles, a couple of cricket stumps, a parcel of sandwiches, and a couple of bottles of ginger pop."

with the chums of Study C. For, as Handforth & Co. left on their great errand, Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson came round the Ancient House from the other side. By a mere second or two they missed seeing one another.

If Nipper had seen Handforth & Co. making for the shrubbery, he might have stopped them and asked a few questions. And if Handforth had seen Nipper & Co., it is practically certain that he would have hurried up, and demanded confirmation about the cavern and its mysterious contents.

As it was, the two parties missed one another, and Handforth and Church and

McClure went down the stone steps into the ancient vault—and thus entered upon one of the most terrible episodes of their lives.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT IS THE SECRET?

JUST behind the monastery ruins, in a little sheltered spot where the ground had been well protected from the recent rain, there were two figures. One was prostrate, and the other was watching beside him.

They were Nelson Lee and Goolah Kahn.

To his immense relief, Nelson Lee had succeeded in bringing his unconscious burden to the surface. But it was still fairly daylight, and Lee could imagine the comments that would be made if he were seen in his haggard, dishevelled condition, carrying the rajah indoors.

It would be better to wait.

So he had taken the unconscious young Indian round to the back of the ruins, and was now attending him. This was another queer little circumstance—another little trick of Fate.

For Handforth & Co. went down the stairs into the vault only five minutes after Nelson Lee and Goolah had come up. It seemed that Handforth & Co. were destined to blindly enter danger.

The Rajah of Kurpana was showing signs of recovery now, and Nelson Lee was hoping that he would soon be himself. There were still plenty of visitors about, and the boys were thronging the grounds. It would never do to venture out yet.

So Lee poured some brandy down Goolah's throat, and did everything possible to restore consciousness.

And at last he succeeded.

Goolah Kahn opened his eyes, looked about him with a strange, hunted expression, and he muttered a few strange words. Then, catching sight of Lee, he attempted to sit up.

"It's quite all right, Kahn," said Nelson Lee. "Don't disturb yourself. But as soon as you are strong enough to walk we will go indoors. Do not hurry yourself."

Goolah Kahn passed a hand over his eyes.

"I do not remember!" he muttered. "But yes! I seem to know that we have recently experienced some extraordinary—— Yes, yes! You were there, Mr. Lee! And Chandra Jungh!"

He couldn't quite grasp everything, and Nelson Lee instinctively knew that this

studious young man was no criminal. Whatever associations he had with those Indians of the cavern, they were not nefarious associations. Under some fanatical influence, he had possibly overstepped the mark, but in his true senses he was normal.

Nelson Lee did not press him. It was better, perhaps, to let him rest, and recover fully. By this time Nelson Lee felt that there could be no danger from the cavern. The explosion which Goolah had referred to was possibly nothing more terrible than his own imagination.

At last the rajah was able to rise to his feet, and as it was now growing rather dusky, Lee decided to go in. He badly needed rest, and he had had no food for two or three days. Furthermore, the steel cuff was still fixed to his wrist.

"If you'll take my arm, we will proceed slowly," said Nelson Lee gently.

"Why are we here?" asked Goolah Kahn.

"I will explain everything——"

"What have you done, Mr. Lee?" insisted the other dully. "You were with me somewhere—I can't quite remember. But no matter. If you wish me to go, I will go."

They passed round the ruins, left the shrubbery, and made their way by the shortest cut to the headmaster's private garden. From here Nelson Lee would be able to get indoors without exciting any comment.

But somebody, at least, saw him with the rajah.

Nipper was walking about restless. He had been anxious ever since he had got back. It worried him to think of his master still chained to that wall—even though the chain was nearly severed. And he had had half a mind to go back again, alone.

So he had given his chums the slip, and was on the point of creeping towards the ruins when he saw the two figures of Nelson Lee and the young rajah. One look was enough for him. He understood perfectly.

His heart gave a leap, and a great relief came over him. Without troubling to approach Nelson Lee—for he knew that everything was all right now—he sped into the Ancient House, and told the news to Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West.

"Now I can do my prep. without a worry!" he said cheerfully. "The guv'nor's back, and it means that everything's all serene."

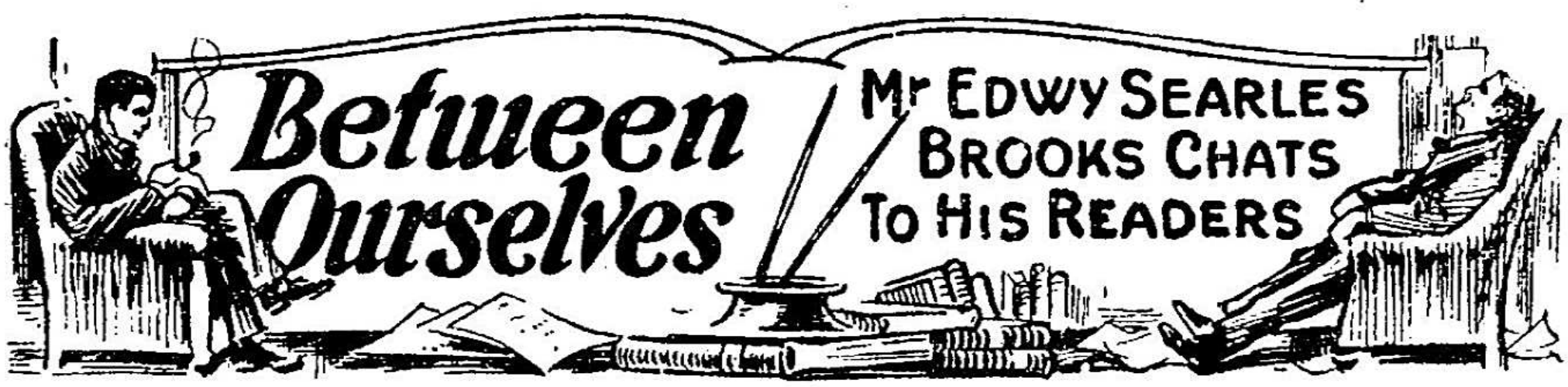
"Thank goodness!" said Tommy fervently.

"Begad, rather!" agreed Sir Montie, with a smiling nod.

And so they settled down without another thought.

Yet the situation was precisely the reverse of "all serene." For not only were Handforth & Co. to be involved in a dreadful predicament, but the whole of St. Frank's was on the verge of the greatest and most stupendous sensation in its whole history.

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: "Disappointed Reader" (Yorks), Renee Turk (E.16), Nipper (Essex), Jock Munro (N.S.W., Australia), Fred Eltoft, (N.S.W., Australia), T. J. Dickens (Birmingham), Frank Hollingworth (Oldham), Charles P. Gilligan (Belfast), R. Wood (Wilts), J. S. Ricketts (Cornwall), A. Redgate (Nottingham), Francis Spratt (Alveston), G. E. Marshall (Stratford), A. N. Doyle (Kew Gardens), S. St. L. (Nottingham), M. Millner (Johannesburg), Arthur Salt (Meliden), Grahame Watson (Basingstoke), W. Bailes (Croydon), Raymond Warren (Portsmouth), Basil Tichbourne (Pimlico).

* * *

Although a good many of you give me your full names, there are still quite a number who try to satisfy me with mere initials. And, to be quite frank, I'm not satisfied at all. I'd like it a lot better if you always gave me your Christian names, at least—the surname isn't so important. You see, it helps me a lot in replying if I know whether my correspondent is masculine or feminine. And it would help me still more if you gave me an indication of your age.

* * *

Sorry I neglected to mention that matter of general interest suggested in your previous letter, Renee Turk. You want more sport, eh? Well, you're getting cricket at present, aren't you? But what you really want is an annual St. Frank's Sports Day, with a special story describing all the events. Perhaps other readers would like to comment upon this suggestion.

* * *

Yes, Nipper, I am certainly interested to hear that you obtained three new readers —and pleased, too. As you very truly remark, every little helps. It isn't a little, either. If every supporter of Our Paper obtained three new readers, it would be something enormous. Yes, you are right in assuming that the St. Frank's boys wear top-hats on Sundays. But I don't often bring Sundays into my stories, because the Sabbath is always a quiet day at St. Frank's—as at any other big Public school.

* * *

I was very pleased to receive your chatty, interesting letter, Jock Munro. Thanks for your nice remarks. I always try to get something new, if possible, but the trouble is lots of readers start jibbing. I don't know what would happen if I really introduced a startling change or two. While most readers approve of the idea of some new Houses at St. Frank's in the autumn, one or two tell me that such drastic changes are a bit too much. But it'll all depend upon the way in which it is done, won't it? Anyhow, I shall do my hardest to please the whole bunch. As for introducing a Scots junior into my stories—brogue and all—I'm frankly frightened. It's high time a real Scot appeared, but as I'm an Englishman, I've got a horror of making a mistake or two in the brogue. Imagine the wrath of all you Scotch readers if I did that! I wonder if I should be forgiven? Regarding your other suggestion, Jock, it might be of general interest, so I'll mention it. You want a girl to come to the Moor View School with all Fullwood's characteristics, so that she can stir up trouble among Irene & Co. What does everybody say about it?

* * *

I wouldn't mind betting you're a pal of Jock's, Fred Eltoft. Anyhow, your letter comes from the same town in Australia,

and you make the same requests. There's one word that you both include in your letters—the word "dinkum." It's a new one to me—but perhaps I'm merely betraying my ignorance by saying this! It must be an Australian word, because I have never heard it in England or America. I suppose it means something particularly good?

* * *

If I haven't given you any space before, Frank Hollingworth, it must have been because there was nothing of general interest in your letters—although they were interesting enough to me, personally. Irene & Co. have appeared once or twice since you wrote, I think, so I hope you are more satisfied. I don't bring the girls forward in every story, because they don't always fit in. I always try to introduce my characters when they're wanted, and when the situation demands.

* * *

There are a few lines I would like to quote from a letter, and the writer will no doubt recognise them: "My parents never stop me from reading your books, but they read them themselves. Parents who do not permit their sons or daughters to read the Old Paper, and have not read it themselves, are, I think, like a jury which returns the verdict without hearing the defence." I am always pegging away at this subject, you'll observe, because so many parents still condemn my stories unread. I want to do all I possibly can to bring about a change.

* * *

The Black Wolf stories, R. Wood, appeared long before the St. Frank's yarns commenced. They were not written by me—although, at that same period, I was busily engaged on the Green Triangle, the Jim the Penman, and the Eileen Dare stories. Needless to say, all the St. Frank's yarns in Our Paper have been—and are—from my pen.

* * *

Why should I refuse to acknowledge any reader who met me in the street and spoke to me, A. Redgate? To tell the truth, I should rather enjoy the experience. The trouble is, nobody recognises me. That's the worst of looking so much like an ordinary chap! If I had long locks and a funny tie, it might make all the difference. I shall have to think about it. So you bet me I can't find out the spelling mistake in page 3 of your letter? To tell you the cruel truth, you made two. You've spelt "why'll" for "while," and you've spelt "assisfan" for "assistant." Is this just a little wheeze on your part to pull my leg?

* * *

You are quite right, Francis Spratt—I plead guilty. There certainly was a boy introduced in the story entitled "Jack Grey's Temptation" named Burnett. He was the right sort, won a scholarship, and stayed at St. Frank's. But I might as well confess it—I'd forgotten all about him. That's why he didn't appear in the Portrait Gallery. I shall have to bring him to life.

* * *

I say, S. St. L., go easy! How many more portraits do you want every week? The Editor's giving you four, and, according to your letter, you want about twenty! Personally, I think the Editor is beating all records by publishing four a week. Although most of the Third, Fifth, and Sixth will appear, a good many fellows are not being included—for the simple reason that as they are scarcely ever mentioned in the stories, they aren't needed. But all the prominent and well-known seniors will have their places—and this also applies to the Moor View girls, the masters, and local characters. Regarding that terrific argument you had with your friends, somebody is wrong. I am in no way connected with the three gentlemen you mention. I always write under my own name, and have no nom-de-plume—although I had one some years ago.

* * *

Your letter, M. Millner, was posted on March 7th, I see, and it reached me on April 15th. That's what you wanted to know, isn't it? Somehow, I think it must have come on a slow boat.

* * *

I see that you both want a story about a St. Frank's Sports week, Grahame Watson and W. Bailes. Evidently, you won't be satisfied with a day, like Renee Turk. Of course, if the majority of readers want me to introduce a story of this kind, I shall have to do it.

* * *

So you have ONLY written to me to let me know that you have secured six new readers, Raymond Warren? Only, eh? I think it's a very fine reason, and I congratulate you on your enthusiasm and sportsmanship. You are certainly a brick to go about as a "booster" for Our Paper. Thanks very much for your good services—and I hope the six new readers will stick. I'll do all I can to make 'em!

* * *

Another of your nice letters, Basil Tichbourne. I haven't got enough space to give you a long reply, but I hope you'll take the will for the deed. With regard to receiving letters, they always come into my hands almost immediately after arriving at The Fleetway House. But, owing to pressure of space, I am sometimes compelled to keep them a week, or perhaps more, before I can acknowledge them.

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.)

HANDFORTH'S CRITICISER (Hornsey), ISRAEL GREENBAUM (Birmingham), SHINGLED FLAPPER (Glasgow), DORIS (New Tupton): Four weeks ago I sent in jolly fine answers to you and seventy-six other disturbers of my peace. Seventy-two appeared (a week late) in May 2nd issue. But my replies to you —and the next four—got shoved on the shelf for want of room till now. So you can't blame me, can you?

F. SNELL (Sudbury), T. ALLEN (East Grinstead), SKILLY (Uckfield), A CHAP WHO IS NOT AFRAID OF HANDY'S BLUSTER, AND WILL KNOCK HIS FACE OUT OF SHAPE IF HE DESIRES IT (Leyton): You're the other four poor sufferers I meant in the last paragraph, and the first three of you must blame that last chap for doing you out of a proper answer even now. His silly name's taken up the room!

ALEC WILLIAM WIGLEY (Battersea, S.W.11), AN AMERICAN CITIZEN (Brighton), THE PRINCE UNKNOWN (Shoreditch, E.2), A.B.C.D.L. (Shoreditch, E.2.): I answered you lot also—and the next four—for May 9th number. But as there was only space for the other sixty-four replies which appeared then, all my well-thought-out remarks to you were wasted, and you've got to put up with these instead!

LESLIE TENNANT (Croydon), TWO JOLLY JACK TARS (H.M.S. Impregnable, Devonport), C. LAWRENCE (Battersea, S.W.11), TRUE BLUE (Liverpool): It's no good repeating what I said to you for May 9th issue, because what I wrote is out-of-date now. And I'm jiggered if I'm going to think out another fine flow of language just to fill in this last line or two—no room for it if I did!

DOREEN FINLAY (Wandsworth, S.W.17), FRANK McCANN (Wandsworth, S.W.17), K. F. T. GOLDSTON (Port Mackay, Queensland, Aus.), ARCHIE CARN (Wairoa, New Zealand), A. V. SEN (Rangoon, Burma): I've had to squeeze an extra name and address into this paragraph, because those first two are a "Joint Firm." So that lets me off, and if you've any grumbles make them to Finlay & McCann, Ltd!

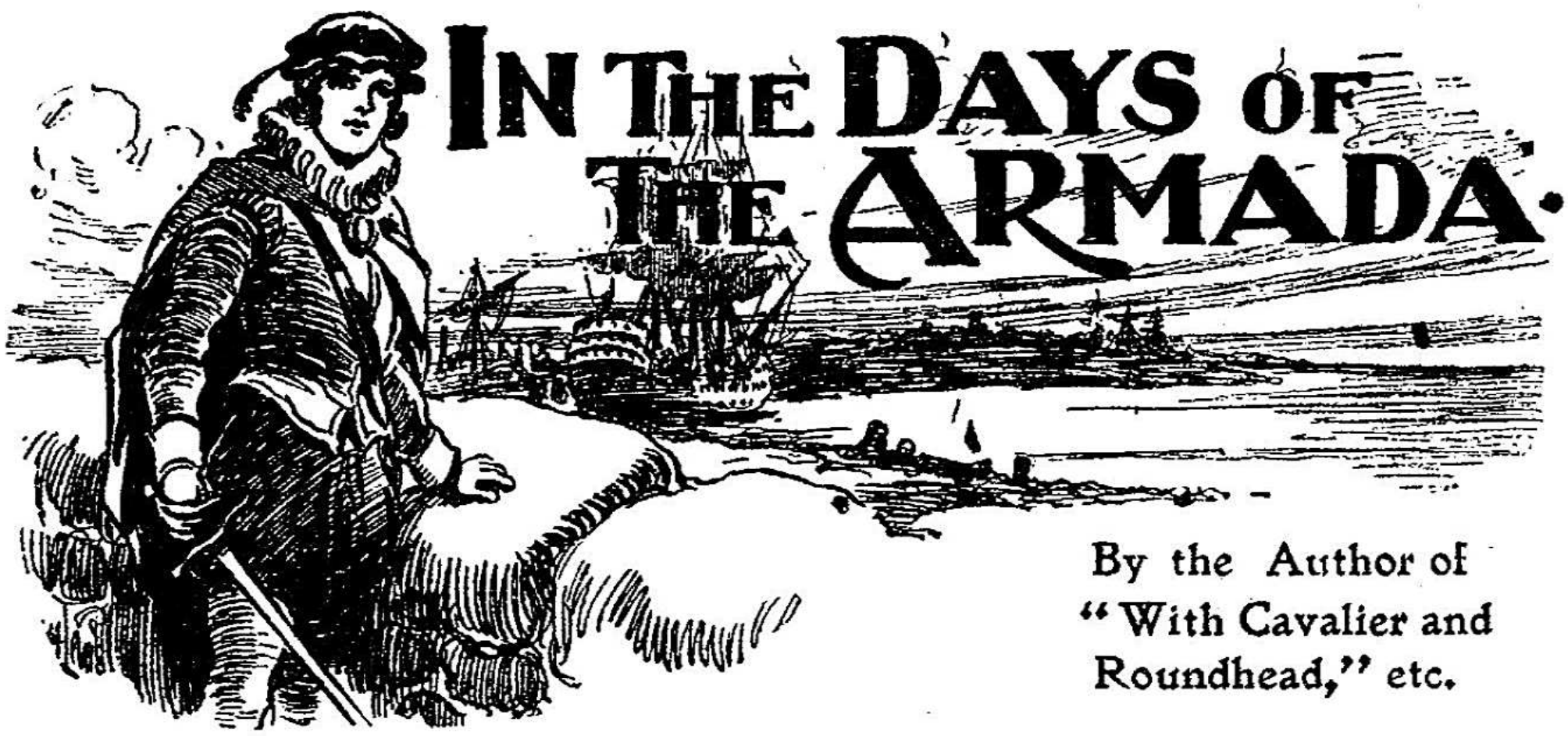
STANLEY ALLEN (Hucknall, Notts.), H.B.L.A.M. (Stockport), AN AUSSIE READER (Freemantle), L.C.G. (Fernie, B.C., Canada): By the time Church and McClure have copied down your names and addresses (one reads and the other writes) there's only room enough left for me to fill in a few words like this. Many thanks, L.C.G., for that fine photograph of those two lovely girl readers.

MILTON CRONENBERG (Toronto, Canada), D.D. (Victoria Docks, E.16), HANDY II (Finsbury Park, N.4), D.B. (Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork): It's a grand afternoon, a half-holiday, and all the other hounds are waiting for me to lead them in a Paper Chase. So how the dickens can I stick indoors answering all you worriers? Besides, there's no room nowadays to print the answers if I did!

J. J. P. E. E. E. R. BROWN (Bournemouth), IRENE MARTIN (Sudbury, Middlesex), JOHN J. BELL (Peckham, S.E.), ADA ROBERTS (Westcliff-on-Sea), JOEY ROBERTS (Westcliff-on-Sea): There! That acknowledges EVERY letter I've received up to date of writing (April 25th), although I warned you, as long ago as March 28th number, not to expect even acknowledgments! So I'm feeling pleased with myself for once!

TED.

A STIRRING TALE OF A BRITISH BOY'S EXPLOITS WHEN SIR FRANCIS DRAKE SAILED THE HIGH SEAS.



By the Author of "With Cavalier and Roundhead," etc.

FOR NEW READERS.

It is in the year 1587 that Giles Montford, the sixteen-year-old master of Templeton, receives a letter from his uncle, Don Ferdinand Gonzales, asking him to go over to Spain, which is about to make war on England. Giles stoutly refuses, and decides to take up arms under Drake to defend his country against the Spaniards. At this the Spanish envoys of Don Gonzales waylay Giles, but are beaten off by the skilful swordsmanship of this Devonshire lad and his devoted Servitor, Stephen Trent.

(Now read on).

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH GILES IS ENLISTED ON A SECRET MISSION.

THE demand was peremptory, and the answer devolved on Giles. The lad, knowing the knight's quick temper, feared to hesitate, nor was he willing to speak out in the presence of the steward and his companion. Happily, he remembered that he had brought Don Ferdinand's letter with him. He drew it from under his cloak and handed it to Sir Richard.

"First read that," he said, "and I will tell you the rest."

Sir Richard took the lantern from the steward, and held it close to the open letter. As he read his brows contracted, and an eager look shone in his eyes.

"Well, what next?" he asked, handing back the letter. "I trust we are all loyal here," he added, observing that Giles hesitated. "You can speak freely, my boy, and that without mentioning a certain name. Do you understand?"

Giles nodded, and then gave a brief but graphic account of what had befallen him from the time he left home. During the narrative Simon Baillie listened keenly, though he made a clever feint of inattention.

"Strange doings, indeed," muttered the knight. "Here are actors and a stage that out-rival the plays of William Shakespeare, which I have lately seen in London. And how came you so timely, my trusty Trent?"

"It is easily told, Sir Richard," Stephen answered modestly. "Having had much knowledge of Spaniards in Holland—as you well know—I made bold to follow this knave when he rode away from Templeton. He gave me a pretty wait outside the inn that stands this side of Stonehouse. Finally, he and a companion appeared, and took boat across the Sound. I found a craft close by, and followed them.

"They led me pretty near to this side of the Sound, and then I lost sight of them in the fog. While beating around on the hunt, and not hearing so much as the creak of an oar, the rascals ran foul of me from behind, and stove my boat in. They were bent on killing me, but I got out of their reach by diving, and then I had to swim or sink. It was sheer luck that brought me to the beach in time to hear Master Giles cry for help."

"As brave and rash as ever," said Sir Richard approvingly. "I hope your injury is not serious; it shall be seen to shortly."

"What could have brought the Spaniards here?" he added in a puzzled tone. "From tidings lately received, I can account for their presence in England, but what evil deed they purposed to do in Edgcumbe Park is a mystery that a clearer head than mine must solve."

"Ay, it was naught but evil," growled Stephen Trent. "I felt my sword hand tingle so soon as I clapped eyes on the knave when he came riding up to Templeton."

"Could De Rica's companion have been your—you know whom I mean?" Sir Richard suddenly questioned, turning to Giles. "What think you, lad? Did you see him clearly?"

"Yes; but he was as young as the other," Giles replied. "I am sure he was not Don Ferdinand."

Sir Richard knitted his brows and pondered for a moment.

"So, so," he muttered; "but unless this letter greatly deceives me——" He stopped abruptly, and looked toward Simon Baillie. "A thousand pities you did not arrive in time to capture the knaves," he said. "How came you at all?"

"I fancied I saw a light in the beech wood," replied the steward, rolling his one eye and digging his wooden leg into the sand, "and, thinking it might be poachers, I set off for the spot. Then I heard a cry from the shore and, by ill luck, I came too late. But for this timber-leg, which kept me back, the Spanish ruffians would never have made off in their boat.

"To think of two scurvy assassins prowling around here!" added the steward. "Why, it quite takes one back to the days of Queen Mary."

"Thank God, those days are over!" Sir Richard burst out fiercely, his eyes flashing with a sudden fire. "Little does Spain realise the temper of our people to-day, or she would take timely warning.

"Now, off with you, Baillie," he went on in a milder tone. "Have the beech wood and the rest of the grounds thoroughly searched, and send a dozen of my men-at-arms to watch the beach for three miles up and down until daybreak. And come to the house in an hour. I will have letters ready for the commanders of the garrison at Plymouth and the fleet in the harbour. Steps must be taken to apprehend these daring knaves."

The steward nodded assent, and trudged off into the fog. He was quickly lost to sight, but the thump of his wooden leg over the pebbles could be heard for a long time.

"Well, my boy," said Sir Richard, "were you coming to tell me that you would be a soldier instead of a dry and musty scholar, like the learned Hereward Tomewell?"

"Yes, Sir Richard, I have chosen as you advised," Giles answered, "but I assure you it was not to Master Tomewell's taste."

"I can believe that," said the knight, smiling under his bushy moustache. "And how about old Hard-Thrust here, as the Hollanders used to call him?"

"I go with Master Giles," promptly replied Stephen Trent, flushing with pleasure at the surprising news he had just heard, "and I'll warrant the Spaniards will find my blade as keen as ever."

"He doesn't trouble to ask permission," said the knight, glancing slyly at Giles. "It was always so in Holland. I could storm and bluster, but none the less he took his own way.

"Well, it is settled, then," he added in a different tone; "and now for graver matters. Do you two walk twenty paces behind me for the present."

With this, Sir Richard joined the muffled stranger, who had been impatiently waiting all this time. They set off together, and Giles and Stephen followed as directed, the lad walking a little stiffly by reason of his bruised back. They passed the ferry landing, and pushed still farther up the beach.

"I'll wager yonder companion of the knight is a seafaring man," said Stephen. "I know the gait."

"Whoever he may be he takes good care that we do not see his face," replied Giles.

"Likely, lad, since I judge that he is a bearer of secret news. But it is not a matter for us to pry into."

A little later the two in front paused by a small boat that rested on the beach, and in which sat a man waiting. Giles and Stephen halted also. For nearly five minutes Sir Richard and the stranger conversed in low and earnest tones. Then the latter stepped into the stern of the boat and sat down, and the man who was at the oars pulled the craft swiftly out on the foggy waters.

Sir Richard was in a sober and silent mood when he rejoined his companions. He led the way toward the house, and scarcely a word was spoken until they had entered the stately mansion by a rear door and were seated in the dining-room—an egg-shaped apartment containing magnificent furniture and tapestries, and a fortune in gold and silver plate. Indeed, even in those days of splendour, there were few larger or more luxurious mansions than Edgcumbe Hall, for the family was one of long lineage and vast wealth.

A servant brought in a pewter tankard and a cold haunch of venison on a silver tray, and as soon as he left the room Sir Richard closed and fastened the door.

"Now fall to," he said to his companions, "and spare neither meat nor drink. Unless you are hungry since last you dined, Nature is surely at discord with you. I have urgent matters to prepare, and will join you shortly."

With this the knight vanished into an adjoining apartment, whence was presently heard the rustling of paper and the rapid scratch of a pen.

Giles and Stephen Trent were not unwilling to partake of the hospitality spread before them. Indeed, they were ravenously hungry, and in very little time had made deep inroads on the venison. When they had eaten their fill they drew their seats back and waited. The knight was still writing busily.

"You look depressed, my good Stephen," said Giles. "Does aught ail you? There is still meat on yonder bone."

Stephen smiled at the jest, and then put his mouth close to the lad's ear.

"I have a suspicion," he whispered, "and it lies heavy on my mind. This Simon Baillie was ever a crafty and greedy rogue, and would sell his very soul for gold. It were like him to play the traitor, and I believe he is at that very trade now."

"You wrong him, surely!" muttered Giles, in a tone of horror.

"Softly, lad, or the knight will hear us. Ponder a moment, and put two and two together. The Spaniards crossed the Sound to meet someone—that much is plain. Well, did not Baillie reach the shore at about the same time. It is frippery to talk of poachers, nor was Baillie ever zealous about the game."

There was reason in this, and Giles looked troubled. Though the matter still seemed too incredulous for belief, he began to feel a suspicion himself.

Giles had barely time to give a warning cry when both horses staggered under the shock of the collision, which was so terrific that the rope parted with a sharp snap.

"You should speak to Sir Richard," he whispered. "He gives the steward his full confidence in all matters."

"Not I!" muttered Stephen. "You may, if you think best. It is true enough that Baillie saved the life of Sir Richard's father, and for that the old knight swore he should be provided for at Edgcumbe Hall as long as he lived. Sir Richard feels himself bound to this in duty and honour, and a word against Baillie would fire him off like a spark in a loaded culverin. That word shan't come from me."

Giles knew this to be true, but before he could speak or think farther, Sir Richard

entered the room with a sealed parchment in his hand.

"Are you ready for a ride to London?" he asked abruptly.

Giles and Stephen looked at each other in surprise, and then at the knight. Recovering a little, they gave a hearty assent.

"It is urgent business," added Sir Richard, "and I may tell you this much in secret. The stranger whom you saw with me to-night brought word that a disguised Spanish vessel is lying in the Tower pool at London, with intent to spy on the Government, and to carry off what fugitives have escaped arrest. The information was given him at Plymouth, and is true beyond doubt.

"But there is not a moment to lose, since the vessel may be ready to leave. Here is a letter for Admiral Lord Howard—who is now in London—acquainting him with the matter, and also craving permission for two trusty friends of mine to fight under Drake. And you know what that means. Drake is even now preparing to fall on the Spanish seaports with his fleet."

Giles' eyes glistened as he took the letter and put it safely away.

"I will go as fast as horse can travel, Sir Richard," he exclaimed. "But I pray you tell me one thing. Is Don Ferdinand with the crew of this vessel?"

"My informant declares not, lad, else I should not send you on such an errand. Though your uncle is a bitter enemy of the English, he has no military or naval rank, and is doubtless at home in Spain. De Rica, however, likely came over with this party, and was therefore entrusted with the letter. As to the Don's real purpose, why, I think you are right in supposing that he wants your fortune."

"I am sure of it," Giles answered. "But you misunderstand my question. I would gladly assist in the seizure of Don Ferdinand, were he in England, because of his persecution of my mother, if for no other reason."

"Then I fear you must be disappointed," replied Sir Richard. "In the future you may see more of him than you wish."

"I hope it will be on Spanish soil," said Giles, rising. "So enough of my esteemed relative for the present. When do we start?"

"At once, my boy. Here is a purse of gold, sufficient for your needs, and a little chart that I have drawn up. It will show you when to travel, and rest, and where to stop."

"But I can get a supply of money at home," protested Giles, storing the paper away, and attempting to return the purse.

Sir Richard smiled, and shook his head.

"I don't intend that you shall go home," he replied. "I have it all planned out, and I think wisely. You will take my best horse, and ride from here clear round the head of the Sound. At the same time I will have Stephen Trent ferried over to Stonehouse by one of my men. He will ride here your horse to Templeton, inform Master Tomewell that you will be absent for a few days, and then press on up the other side of the Sound to join you."

"And where shall we meet?" asked Giles.

"At the point where the Exeter road forks off to Tavistock," replied the knight. "From there you will have a fairly straight course to London, and though the distance is close upon one hundred and fifty miles, you can cover it in two or three days. And it is an unfrequented route for the first part of the way, and therefore to be chosen."

"You seem to apprehend some danger," Giles ventured to remark. "At least, I take it your precautions mean that."

"A wise soldier never leaves a loophole open to the enemy," replied Sir Richard. "It is just possible that more Spanish spies are in the neighbourhood, and that they are keeping a watch for your return. Thus I ensure your safety and the safety of the letter by sending you to the head of the Sound. Trent will cross on purpose to draw any spies that may be lurking about after him, and if such a thing should happen, he will be sharp enough to give his foes the slip, and join you without observation. What think you of the plan, my trusty fellow?"

"It is a fine one," replied Stephen. "I could not have thought it out better myself."

Sir Richard laughed.

"Come now," he said. "I will put you in charge of one of my men, and he will escort you noisily and with torches to the water, and row you across. If any spies are about they will be at your heels, and about the time you are embarking I will slip Master Giles away, in silence and darkness, in the opposite direction. Stay, I forgot your wounded arm, and your wet clothes."

"I forgot them myself!" muttered Stephen. "I shall have time for a change of clothes and a bandage at Templeton. And by your leave, sir, I would suggest that you let Baillie pull me across the Sound. If we stumble into any danger he is a good man to have at one's elbow."

"That will do nicely," said the knight. "By the time Baillie returns I can have the letters ready for him."

A smile lurked round the corners of Stephen's mouth, and as he followed the knight from the room he turned to give Giles a meaning look, which said as plainly as words could have done:

"Simon Baillie won't play the spy on you to-night."

In ten minutes Sir Richard returned.

"Now is your time," he said. "Baillie and Trent are half-way to the water, and you have nothing to fear."

He quickly led Giles to the stables, mounted him on a splendid black horse, and gave him a loaded pistol. Then he took the bridle, and led steed and rider a short distance across the park.

"You are on the road now, my boy," he whispered. "Speed you well for your country's service, and keep safe and secret the letter."

"No one but Admiral Lord Howard shall put eyes or hands on it," Giles solemnly declared, as he pricked up his horse, and rode down the dusky avenue of yew-trees that led to the lonely moors of Cornwall.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH A HAYRICK CONCEALS AN AMBUSCADE.

AN hour's ride up and down hill brought Giles to the head of the Sound, where he struck a road that led to the north-west. Pursuing his way along this for half a mile, he reached the cross-road designated by Sir Richard. Southward it sloped by way of Templeton to Plymouth, and northward it wound over the moors to Tavistock.

The locality was a weird and lonely one, and Giles did not enjoy his wait of possibly half an hour. At last a dull pounding of hoofs rose from the south, and presently Stephen Trent loomed out of the fog. He was mounted on a ponderous grey mare, and a brace of pistols peeped from his belt. By his side dangled a box of powder and ball.

An exclamation of relief escaped his lips when he saw the lad.

"Hast heard any sound of pursuit?" he asked. "Did you leave the Hall by stealth?"

"Surely," replied Giles. "Sir Richard saw to that. But what do you mean by talking of pursuit, my good fellow?"

"Come, prick up your horse," Trent answered. "We must lose no time, and while we ride along we can talk."

Giles obeyed, no little mystified and alarmed by his companion's words, and the two urged their steeds to a trot over the dimly visible stretch of damp road.

For a time Trent was silent. Now and then he turned partly round in the saddle and he put a hand to his ear, as though he expected to hear some noise behind.

"I may be mistaken, Master Giles," he said finally, "but there is reason to fear that Sir Richard's precautions were all in vain."

"How so?" asked Giles, in a tone of uneasiness.

"You shall judge for yourself," replied Trent. "When Simon Baillie took me down to the boat, he did it with a bad grace that was evident. That was one queer thing, and another was the sound of oars that I heard plainly when the steward had pulled me a quarter-way across the Sound. And what's more, the strange craft was moving toward Mount Edgcumbe. Baillie heard it, too, from the way his ugly eye rolled, but we both kept our mouths shut."

"These things are suspicious," said Giles. "You surely don't think that our errand is known?"

"Ay, I do indeed," declared Trent. "To my mind it's pretty clear that Baillie was outside the dining-room window—which was partly raised, you recollect—and that he heard every word Sir Richard spoke. So if he is in communication with Spanish spies, and I don't doubt it, we shall be hotly pursued. You may believe that I was glad to find you safe, which shows, at least, that we have a good start."

"But there can't be many of the knaves in the neighbourhood," Giles replied, "and we have little to fear from two or three. How De Rica and his companion managed to travel down here from London without detection is more than I can understand."

"I doubt if they did," muttered Trent. "More likely there are two disguised Spanish vessels off our coast, one lying in the Thames, and the other in Plymouth Sound."

"I trust not," said Giles; "but if you are right, the Spaniards will spare no effort to get this letter that I am bearing."

"And at the same time they will start a messenger with warning for the vessel in the Thames," added Trent, "so you see we must ride in hot haste."

"We will do that," said Giles, urging his horse faster. "Do you think there were spies on your track after you landed?"

"I saw none," Trent replied, "nor did I waste any time. I stopped at Templeton only long enough to put a bandage on this swordprick, and to give your message to Master Tomewell, whom I found asleep in bed with a burning lamp on one side of him, and three empty bottles on the other. Then I pushed up the Tavistock road to join you."

Trent now fell into a thoughtful mood, and showed a stubborn disinclination to be roused from it. He replied in monosyllables to the occasional questions Giles put to him. The travellers were now in the lonely forest of Dartmoor, and for mile after mile they rode on at a rapid and steady pace. A breeze sprung up, and the fog began to scatter, showing a heavily clouded sky overhead.

After passing a sort of bridle-path that came into the main road from the south, Trent suddenly became cheerful and talkative. A little farther on the dense forest melted partly away, and the road began to wind down from the high uplands of Dartmoor. A break in the clouds gave the moon a chance to peep out, and a silvery flood of light fell across a landscape of broken wood and moor, splashing brooks, and scattered farmhouses and hedgerows.

"Saw you the bridle-path we came by a mile back?" Trent asked abruptly, as he checked his horse on the verge of the far-stretching hill.

"No," replied Giles. "The one that comes in from Plymouth?"

"Ay, that's it," replied Trent. "Well, I feared a surprise there. I doubt not that Baillie learned our plans, and had there been Spaniards in close reach after he put me ashore he would certainly have started them after us by this road, which is shorter by half a dozen miles than the one we have taken.

"But if the Spanish knaves were lurking about Mount Edgcumbe, this trick could have availed them naught, and it looks that way now, I confess. We are safe by the cross-road, and no sound of pursuit behind. Exeter is no more than ten miles away, and once we reach it the danger is over. Come, Master Giles, daylight must see us at breakfast in the tap-room of the Pig and Whistle, which inn a relative of mine keeps."

They put spurs to their horses, and rode at a trot down the hill. The moon was hidden again by heavy clouds, and the night seemed to be growing darker. As they were riding side by side through the murky gloom a hayrick loomed upon the left side of the road, and about twenty yards distant. Giles was looking at it carelessly, and when he saw a flash of light suddenly appear and vanish, he uttered a hasty exclamation.

"You saw it, too," whispered Trent. "So my eyes did not deceive me. And the shimmer of steel, at that! It may mean nothing, but we take no risk. Dig spurs, lad, and ride for your life and the Queen. So—off we go!"

At the last word Trent drew his pistol, and pricked his horse to a furious gallop. Giles rode as swiftly on the right side, and they went clattering down the rugged hill, with the breeze singing in their ears.

When they were nearly opposite the point of suspected danger, the whinny of a strange horse rang on the night air. Trent was a half-neck ahead of his companion, and at the same instant both caught sight of a faint black line stretched across the roadway from a tree on the upper corner of the hayrick to another tree on the opposite side. It was about three feet above the ground, and was plainly a rope.

There was no possibility of avoiding the obstruction, either by leaping over it, or sheering to the right of the road. Indeed, Giles had barely time to give a warning cry when both horses staggered under the shock of the collision, which was so terrific that the rope parted with a sharp snap.

Trent's steed lurched on a few paces, its right fore-leg hanging limp and broken; then it crashed heavily down with a snort of pain and terror. Giles saw nothing of this, for at the instant the shock came he flew out of the saddle, landed on head and shoulders in a patch of soft ground, and rolled several yards down the hill.

The knowledge of his peril gave the lad no time to discover if he was hurt. He sprang quickly to his feet, and, glancing back, he saw half a dozen men rise up from behind the hayrick and rush forward at Trent, who was standing at bay with the fallen horse.

Though the situation looked very black, no thought of flight entered Giles' head. He whipped out his pistol, and as he started to advance his steed, which had scrambled to its feet, darted in front of him. He mechanically caught the bridle with one hand, holding the pistol ready in the other, and as he urged the horse to one side so as to command a view of what was going on in front, two of the foemen made tardily at him.

"Yield!" they cried fiercely in Spanish. "Deliver yourself up!"

Giles knew the language, but he had no intention of obeying the command. He dexterously evaded a sword-thrust from the foremost of the ruffians, then levelled his pistol, and fired point-blank.

With the loud report, the man fell back against his companion and rolled limply to the ground. Giles threw away the empty pistol, and drew his sword in time to meet the attack of the second ruffian, who was mad to avenge the death of his comrade. They thrust and parried for a moment, while from a little farther up the hill two pistol-shots and the ringing clash of steel told how Stephen Trent was holding his own.

At last Giles drove his antagonist back a few paces, and the latter tripped over the body of his companion. Giles made at him as he scrambled to his feet, with empty hands. The ruffian had lost his sword in the fall, and dared not pause to look for it.

He dodged the lad's blade, and retreated sullenly up the hill, bawling loudly to his companions. Giles pushed after him, still leading his horse by one hand. He shouted cheerily to Trent, who had slain one of his foes, and was engaged in a desperate struggle with the other three.

"Off with you, Master Giles!" he cried hoarsely. "Never mind me! Save the letter!"

At this two of his assailants fell away from him, and ran toward Giles. Until now they had evidently been under a false impression that the letter was in Trent's possession.

Trent was busy with his remaining foe, and Giles found himself in a critical position. Two armed Spaniards were almost upon him, and a third, who was unarmed, was dodging his sword's point.

There was not an instant to lose, and as the lad remembered what depended on the letter reaching its destination, he acted on the impulse of the moment, and swung himself on the back of his steed.

He was barely in the saddle when the unarmed Spaniard leaped up behind him and clutched him by the throat with both hands, evidently hoping to drag him to the ground. Giles tried in vain to shake off his enemy, and he only saved himself from falling by

a blind grab at the bridle. Luckily he got it firmly in his grasp, and that instant the panic-stricken horse plunged furiously down the hill with its double burden.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH GILES IS THROWN UNEXPECTEDLY INTO THE PRESENCE OF A NOBLE EARL.

WITH a pair of bony hands gripping his throat, and a determined foe clinging to his back pretty much as the Old Man of the Sea clung to Sinbad, Master Giles had all he could do to keep his seat. He knew that a fall from the madly galloping horse would seal his fate, and he held tight to the bridle with both hands, at the same time leaning forward as much as possible in hopes of breaking his enemy's grip.

But the Spaniard was firmly seated behind the saddle, and was bending all his energies to suffocating the lad. He bade fair to succeed, and when Giles could no longer endure the painful gasping for breath, he turned partly round in the saddle, let go of the bridle with one hand, and took a tight grip of the Spaniard's throat.

Giles had great strength in his fingers, and he soon compelled his foe to make use of his hands in self-defence. Now began a desperate struggle, each striving to tear the other's throat, snarling and gasping, twisting and swaying in the saddle, while the frightened steed plunged furiously on through the night, with clatter of hoofs and steaming breath.

A minute seemed an hour to the lad. He saw hedges and trees skim by him in a dusky blur. He felt a cold spattering of water as the horse tore across a wayside stream, and he fancied he heard a shout from some point ahead.

Then, with a fearful curse, the Spaniard had him tighter than ever by the throat, and was trying hard to drag him from the saddle. Giles could no longer breathe. In desperation he let go of the bridle, and turned on his foe with both hands. In vain he struggled. He could not loosen the tightening grip, and the agonies of suffocation seized him. Lights flashed before his eyes.

Next there was a sudden shouting and clamour round about, a sharp jerk, and out of the saddle shot the lad and his antagonist. Giles lay still for an instant, his face pressed against damp grass. Then he recovered from the stunning shock, and pulled himself dizzily to his feet.

The first thing he saw was the Spaniard, clearly unhurt, running fleetly after the galloping steed. Giles started in pursuit with a shout, but quickly fell over from weakness. When he rose again, horse and man had vanished in the gloom.

A commotion to the left now caused Giles to turn in that direction, and he saw that he was standing at a point where two roads crossed. Twenty yards ahead was a lonely little inn—as its swinging signboard showed—and from here three or four loudly talking men were advancing with lanterns. In the doorway behind them a maidservant was screaming shrilly.

The party quickly came up to Giles. Foremost was a tall man wrapped in a long cloak, and with a drawn sword in his hand. What could be seen of his face showed that he was young and handsome, and of high estate. He was attended by a soldierly man, who was evidently his servant, and with these two were the red-faced innkeeper and a loutish stable-lad.

"Odds fish! 'Tis a mere youth!" cried the gentleman with the sword. "Methinks I have seen his face somewhere. What do you mean, young sir, by waking the peaceful quiet of the night in this fashion? And at just the time when I was about to retire! Who was your friend? Odds zooks! I had hoped for a brush with a fleeing Spaniard."

"You would not have been disappointed had you come a little sooner," replied Giles. "The knave was a Spaniard, and I have luckily escaped from him with my life."

At this the stranger's face blazed with anger and chagrin.

"You have had an adventure then!" he cried. "Let us hear it quickly, Master Montford, and we will pursue this rogue."

"You know my name!" exclaimed Giles, in astonishment. "Ah, and I know yours as well——"

The stranger made a gesture of silence, and led Giles a few feet to one side.

"I thought I was fairly well disguised," he muttered. "Now, who am I?"

"Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex," Giles whispered.

"Right, lad. I see you have not forgotten our meeting in London three years ago. Truly we have strangely renewed our acquaintance. But do not speak my name openly, for I have just finished a secret errand in this part of the country, and am speeding back to town. And now for your adventure."

From what Giles knew of his companion, he did not hesitate to tell the whole story, and even to hint at the purport of the message he was bearing.

"And so you see I am in sore straits," he concluded. "Without the delay of a moment I should press on to London, and yet it wrings my heart to leave Stephen Trent to his fate. He is likely dead, but I am by no means sure of it."

"You still have the letter?"

"Yes, my lord." Giles answered, feeling in his bosom for the precious parchment.

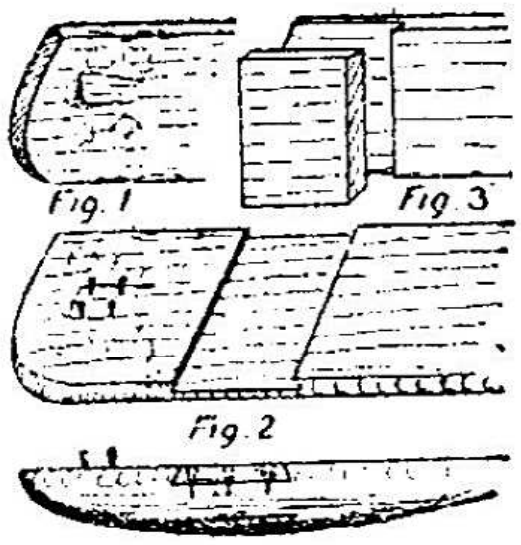
"Good!" cried the earl. "It is useless to pursue the Spaniard, for by this time he has overtaken the horse. But we will go back for your trusty man, and I shall answer for the consequences of the delay.

(Another grand long instalment next week.)

THE CARE AND REPAIR OF CRICKET BATS

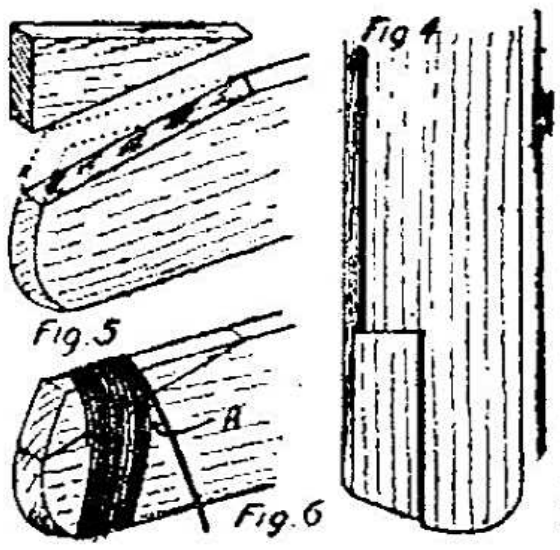
By DICK GOODWIN

AFTER a time the best of bats shows signs of wear and tear, and unless the damaged portions are attended to at once, the bat may be rendered useless. It frequently happens that thin layers on the hitting surface open up as at Fig. 1, and if not pegged down when first evident, will break off and leave a hollow space. Small pegs are made from willow or pine, holes are made with a gimlet or drill, the raised portion is covered underneath with hot glue, pressed down and the pegs dipped in glue and driven in as at Fig. 2. If the damaged portion has broken away, it may be necessary to fit in a new piece, either as at Figs. 2 or 3. For this purpose, well-seasoned willow must be used, pieces cut from an old bat are useful. The edges should be dovetailed, but the surfaces must be carefully levelled because glue will not hold on uneven surfaces. The glue must be strong, very hot, and not thick, and pressed thoroughly out of the joint which should be pegged down afterwards with glued pegs.



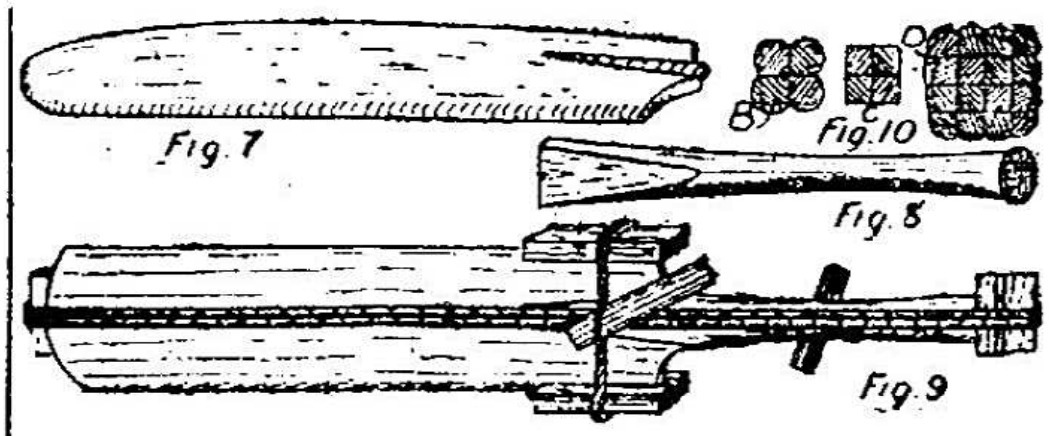
SPLICING NEW PIECES.

Broken corners can be fitted with new piece as at Fig. 4, glued, pegged down, and bound with twine, but if the damage is serious, the usual method is to splice on a new piece, as at Fig. 5. The main point to remember in all repairs of this kind is to make the surfaces to be joined perfectly true. When gluing rub the surfaces together to exclude as much of the glue as possible; if this is not attended to, small air bubbles will be left in the joint which will expand and probably open the joint.



BINDING WITH TWINE.

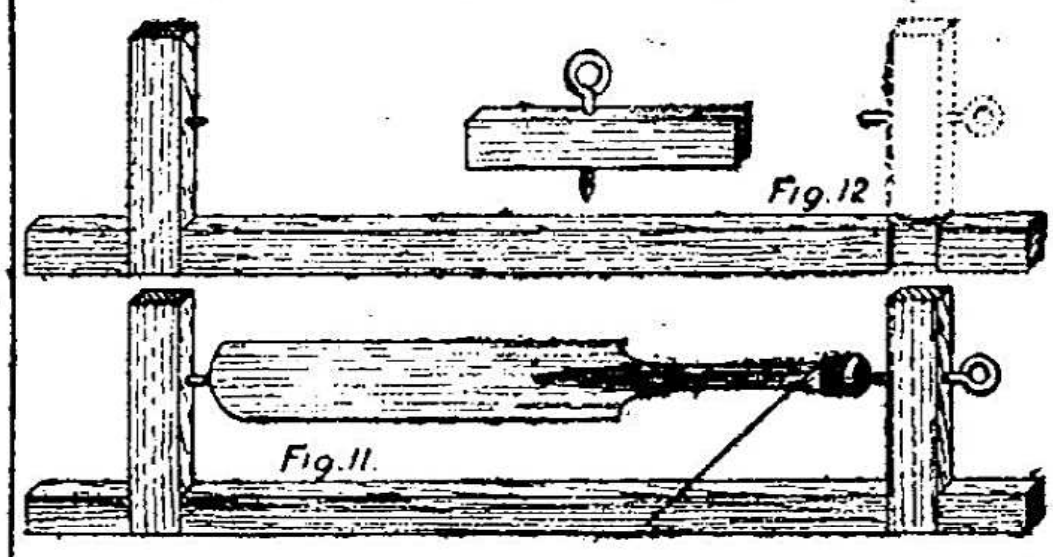
The method of binding the splice is shown at Fig. 6, the commencing end of the twine is covered over by the binding, as at A, and the end is pulled under the last two or three strands. Shoemaker's twine, rubbed with wax, is an easily procured material for binding.



It is sometimes necessary to refix the spliced handle, and to do this the whole of the old glue should be cleaned off. It is not sufficient to scrape the surfaces level, but the wood must be exposed and left quite true and clean.

REFIXING THE HANDLE.

The two portions of the bat ready for gluing are shown at Figs. 7 and 8, the old glue can be dissolved away with hot water (this is sometimes more convenient than scraping), but the surfaces should be carefully tested to see that they are quite true. The next thing is to provide small wooden blocks to fit on the sides of the blade, at the bottom, and also at the top of the handle. Lengths of whipcord or other strong string is now wrapped from side to side and from top to bottom, and thin pieces of wood



provided for twisting the string. When these necessary adjuncts have been provided, the splice is glued, the strings placed in position over the blocks, and then they should be twisted each in turn to tighten them. The bat should be left until the glue has thoroughly hardened, and then the handle can be covered with new twine.

BINDING THE HANDLE.

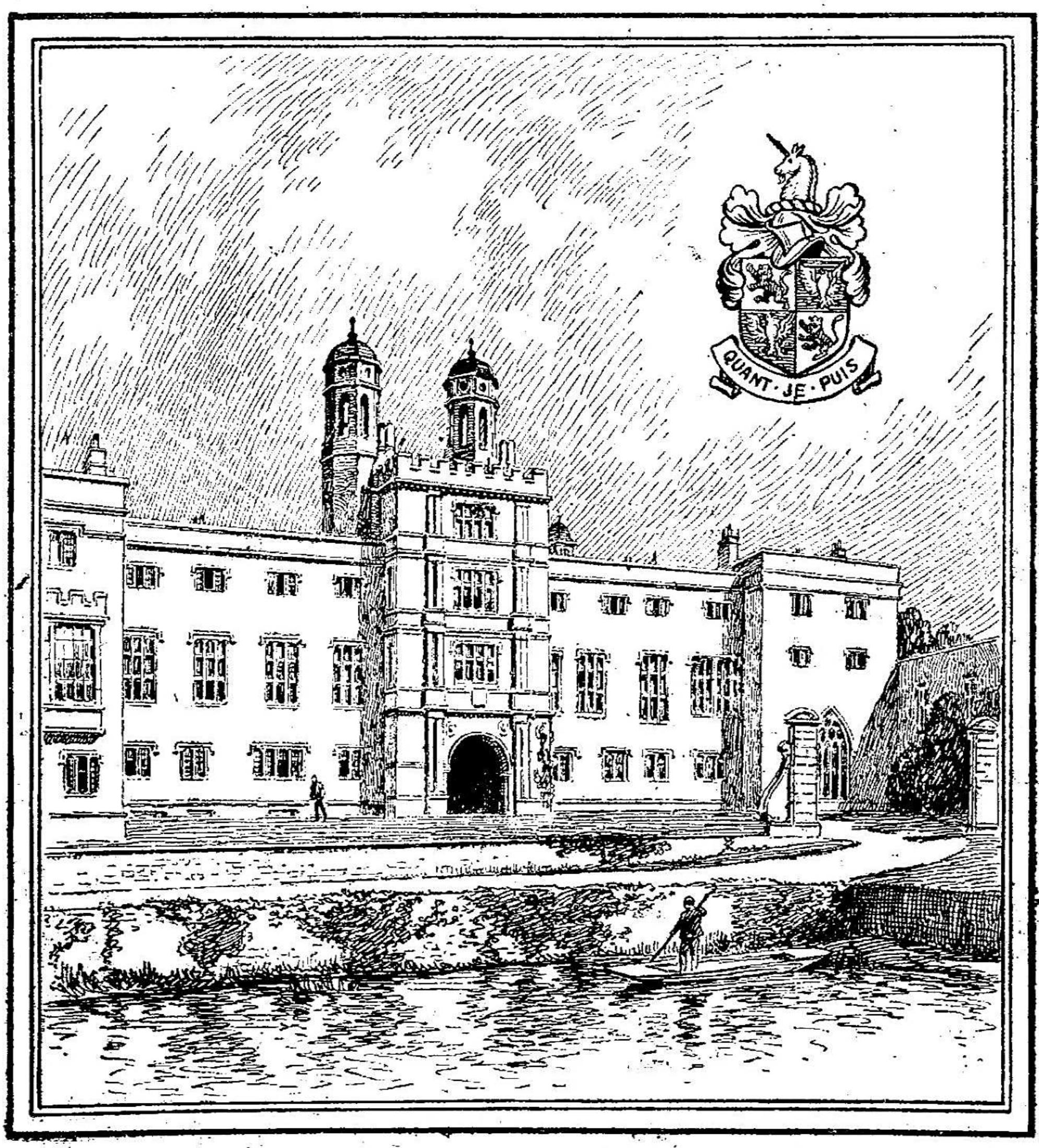
All bats are fitted with cane handles, the method of forming the handle is illustrated at Fig 10. Four selected lengths of rattan cane are planed and glued as at B; when ready, the sides are planed to form a square, at at C, and other pieces of cane are glued to the outside of the square, as at D. The shape of the handle is formed in a lathe after being glued to the blade of the bat.

The easiest method of binding the handle with new twine is shown at Fig. 11, the necessary frame is quite easily made from short lengths of planed batten, somewhere about 2 in. by 1 in. The uprights are fitted to the bottom length, with the bridle joint as at Fig. 12, but there is no reason why the mortise and tenon joint should not be used.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special Sketch by Mr. Briscoe, for "The Nelson Lee Library," of

STONYHURST COLLEGE.



A famous Catholic Public school, Stonyhurst College was originally founded abroad for the education of Catholics. Founded in 1592 by Father Robert Persons at St. Omer's, it was compelled to seek sanctuary from political strife at Bruges in 1762, and from there driven to Liege in 1773, and from thence it came to England, settling in 1794 at Stonyhurst. Situated in the valley of the Ribble, Stonyhurst is about four miles from Whalley.

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