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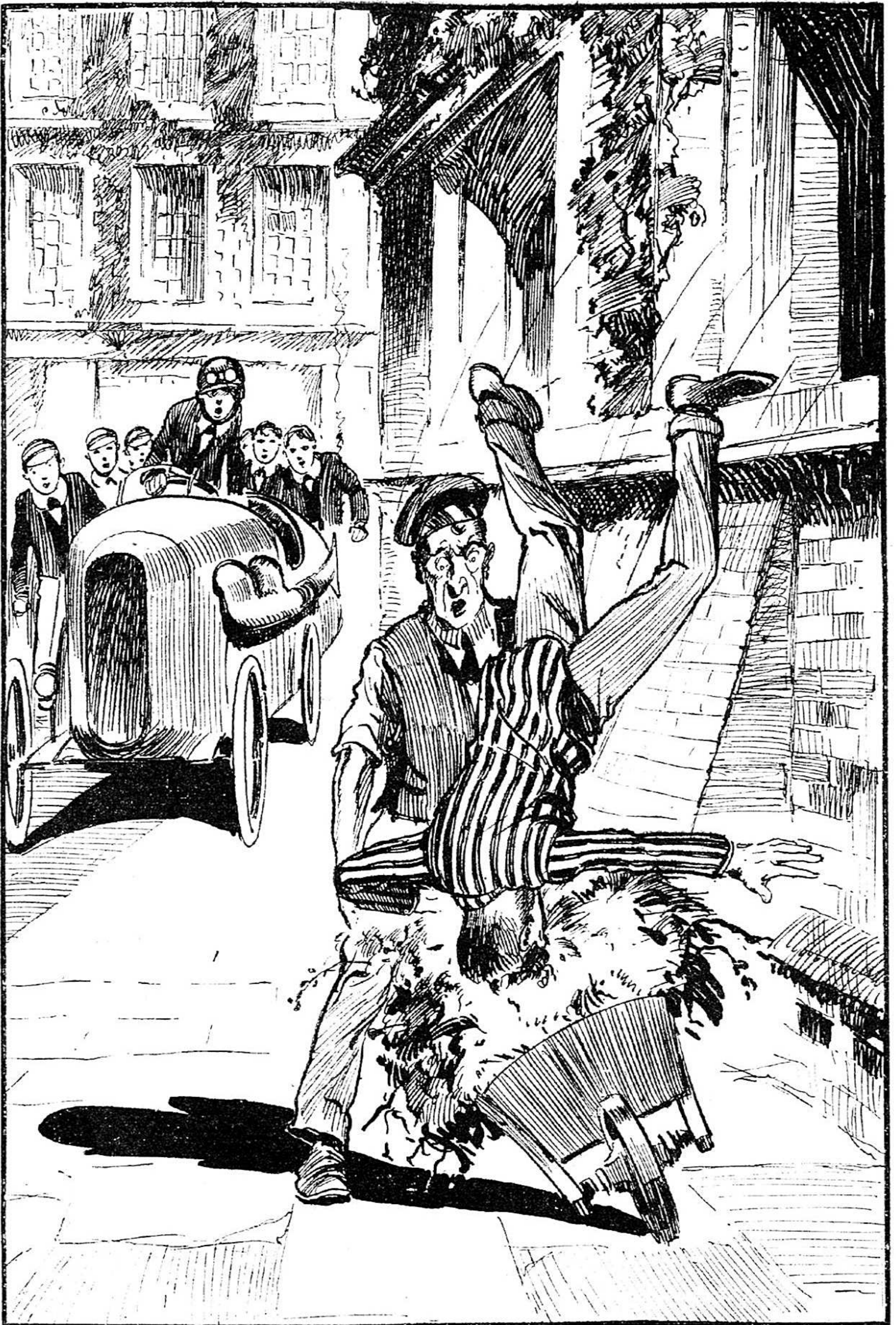
ST FRANK'S AT LORD'S!

A Stunning Long Complete Story of the Fifth Schoolboy Test Match.

New Series No. 11.

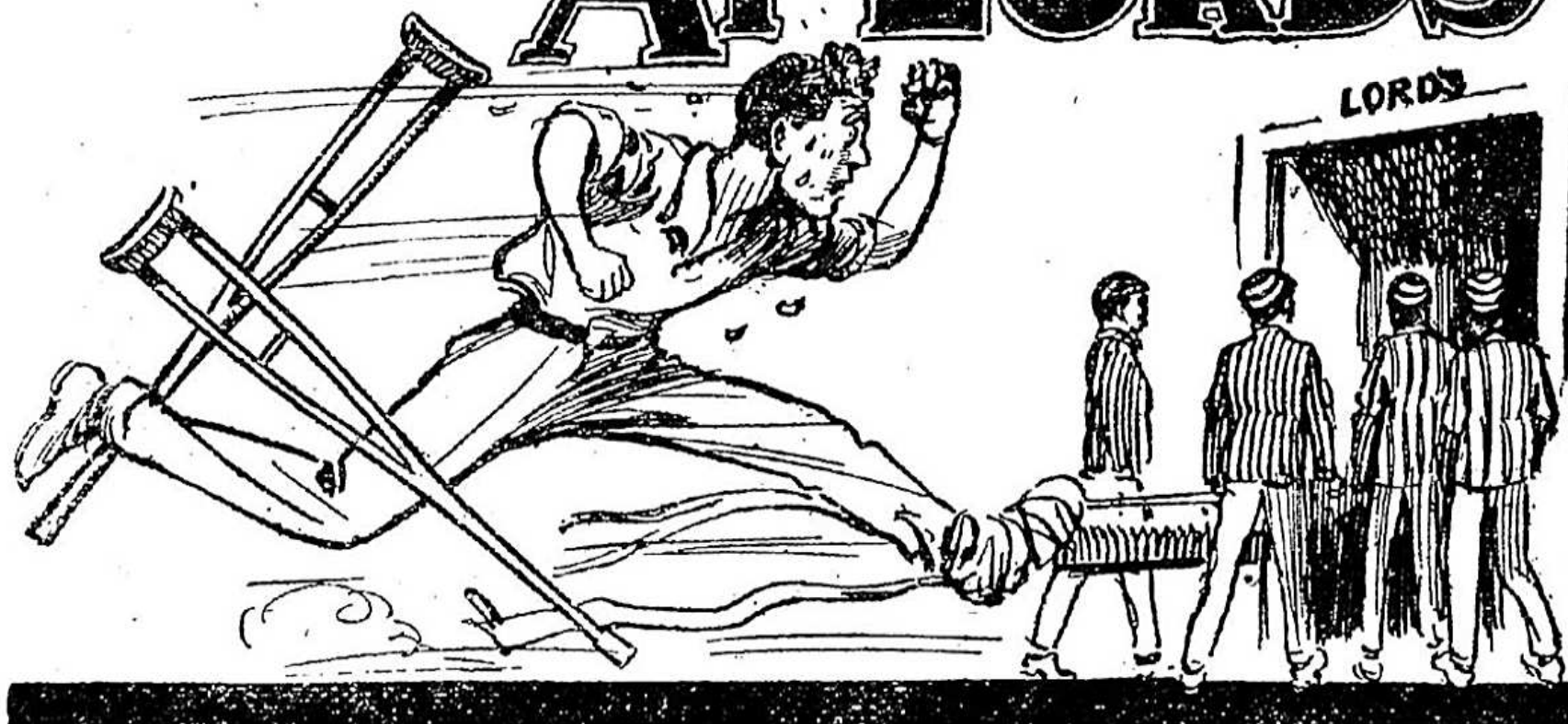
OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 17th, 1926.



Headfirst, Handy plunged from the window into the barrow-load of cut grass and weeds. The handles of the barrow were torn from Mr. Cuttle's grasp and the whole thing tipped over. "O-o-oh!" grunted the school porter. "What's happened?"

ST. FRANK'S AT LORDS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handforth on crutches—and he's due to play in the Fifth Schoolboy Test Match! Read all about it in this stunning yarn of School Life and Sport.

CHAPTER 1.

A CHANCE FOR CHURCH.

CLACK!

The drive was a perfect one, but Church, at cover-point, shot his hand out, and gripped the leather as it winged its way boundarywards. His movement was so quick that scarcely anybody knew that he had made a perfect catch until he calmly skied the ball, and then blew on his fingers.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Oh, good catch!"

Church, of the Remove, thought nothing of that brilliant piece of work. The game was over, and the St. Frank's First Eleven had beaten Helmford College by five wickets, after a good deal of excellent play on both sides.

"Well done, young 'un!" said Edgar Fenton, the captain of St. Frank's, as he patted Church on the back. "Good work!"

"Thanks awfully, Fenton!" said Church gratefully.

"It's your first big game, and you've won your First Eleven cap all right," went on Fenton, with a nod. "I've had my eye on you for some weeks, Church, and you've been getting better and better. To-day you've proved that you can stand the strain of an important match."

"I—I only made thirty-five runs," said Church anxiously.

"You'll do!" smiled Fenton.

Church made off, and was at once claimed by Edward Oswald Handforth and Arnold McClure—his famous chums of Study D. Fenton turned to Browne of the Fifth, and grinned.

"Did you hear that bit?" he asked. "Only thirty-five runs, if you please! Did the young ass expect to make a century in his first big game? In my opinion, he's done extraordinarily well."

William Napoleon Browne nodded.

"It is no exaggeration to say that Brother Church has liberally bespattered himself with glory," he agreed. "I take it, Brother Fenton, that you will no longer have any

hesitation regarding Brother Church as a probable for next Wednesday?"

"After his fielding to-day I can't very well leave him out," said Fenton thoughtfully. "He's a good bat, too—some of his work this afternoon was positively wonderful. Yes, I think I'll put Church on the list when we hold the final meeting of the Selection Committee. He deserves it."

"Church?" said Phillips, of the Fifth, as he paused near by. "Are you playing Church in the Test match at Lord's next Wednesday?"

"His name's going down on the preliminary list, anyhow," replied Fenton. "He's a First Eleven n an now, and——"

"Hang it, the Test team will be nothing but juniors at this rate," interrupted Phillips tartly.

"Take no notice, Brother Fenton," said Browne gently. "Merely the vapourings of a disappointed non-starter. You apparently forget, Brother Phillips, that age counts for nothing in cricket. We are out for the best players, irrespective of their status in the school. And I venture to suggest that Brother Church will add so many laurels to his existing bunch that he will resemble a young forest."

Phillips sniffed.

"Well, you know best, Fenton," he said tartly. "I suppose I'm dropped?"

"As it happens, you're not," replied Fenton. "Your form is still first-class, Phillips, and you'll be on the list for the final Test match. Of course, if you'd prefer to stand down, I've got another man——"

"Sorry, Fenton," grinned Phillips, his good humour restored. "Some ass told me that I was liable to lose my place because I only scored five runs this afternoon. As for Church, good luck to him!"

He went off, and came to the conclusion that Edgar Fenton, after all, was about the best skipper the First had ever had.

It was a Saturday evening, and the match with Helmford College had been a single-innings affair—a one-day game. Under normal conditions, it would have been regarded as an important fixture, but this season St. Frank's looked down upon it as a mere bagatelle.

The Test matches were the great feature of the term—the series of five games between Young England and Young Australia for the honour of securing the Schoolboy Ashes. Four games had been played—four thrilling, breathless fights. And the honours were exactly even—two wins each.

The last game of the series was to be played at the famous London ground, the mecca of all schoolboy cricket—Lord's. The Eton v. Harrow match, and suchlike games, seemed trivialities by comparison—at least, to St. Frank's. For Lord's was to see the final fight for the Ashes—St. Frank's First versus an Australian schoolboy eleven, picked from seven or eight famous public schools.

Wednesday and Thursday of the following week were the days fixed for the great Final,

and all the boys of St. Frank's were hoping for a continuation of the fine weather. An additional feature of interest was the fact that that same week would witness the commencement of the third *real* Test match at Leeds. London, unable to see the actual Test players, would flock to Lord's to see these schoolboy valiants.

"Churchy, old man, you're safe," declared Edward Oswald Handforth, as he paused on the Ancient House steps, and inspected a slight chip in his bat. "You'll play for Young England next week, or I'm a Dutchman. By George, look at this gash! My bat's ruined!"

McClure grinned.

"Gash, do you call it?" he asked. "Why, you ass, you need a microscope to see it properly. I wish I could agree with you about Church," he added thoughtfully. "He's done wonders to-day, and Fenton had his eye on him, but this isn't the age of miracles."

"Of course it isn't," agreed Church carelessly. "I'm lucky enough to get my First Eleven cap this season. Why, I never dreamed of it—I thought I should be pretty marvellous if I got into the Second. So I've got no illusions about next week's Test match, thank goodness."

Handforth glared.

"Look here, my lad, I believe in modesty—I'm a modest chap myself—but I don't want to hear any of that rot!" he said sternly. "If Fenton doesn't select you for next week's Eleven, I'll swallow my Austin Seven!"

"Do you really think——" Church paused, and the light which had jumped into his eyes died down. "Oh, but that's all piffle, Handy! Why, if I'm selected as twelfth man, I shall be dotty with joy."

"What's that?" said Phillips, who was passing. "Talking about next week's Test match? You're a lucky young sweep, Church."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"You've been definitely chosen."

"What!" roared Handforth excitedly.

"Chosen?" repeated Church, his heart thumping like a sledge-hammer.

"Fact!" nodded Phillips. "I've just had it straight from the horse's mouth. Been having a chat with Fenton, you know. Of course, it's not official yet, and you'll have to wait until the list is posted up on Monday morning. But you can look upon it as a cert."

He went in, and Church looked at his chums dazedly.

"He—he was rotting!" he muttered breathlessly.

"No fear!" said McClure. "I saw him talking to Fenton and Browne, and you can look upon this information as A 1 at Lloyd's. Good luck, old man! Congrats! You jolly well deserve your place!"

"Rather!" agreed Handforth enthusiastically. "That'll be two members of Study D in the team! Mac, you lazy slacker, what's

the matter with your cricket? We ought to have been solid——”

“Oh, chuck it!” interrupted McClure. “I’m pretty good at football, and I can play cricket in a House match—but we’re not all built for big things. I don’t mind admitting that Church’s sudden rise has left me breathless. I never thought he had it in him.”

Handforth looked at Church as though he were a zoological specimen.

“Yes, it is a bit rummy, now you come to mention it,” he said. “Like your giddy cheek, Church! Up till now I’ve been the big noise of Study D.”

“Hear, hear!” agreed his chums promptly.

“I don’t mean literally, you chumps,” said Handforth, with suspicion. “I’ve always secured all the honours, but now Church is trying to cut me out! Fenton must be mad to select him for the Test match.”

“But you just said——” began Church.

“All the same, I’m jolly pleased with you,” went on Handforth heartily. “It only shows what training can do. When I took you in hand I meant to make a champion of you, and I’ve done it.”

Church simply stared. Edward Oswald’s cool assumption of credit was startling—actually, he had had nothing to do with Church’s swift rise in the cricket world. By dint of hard practice and persevering grit, Church had won his own laurels. But it was just like Handforth to claim the credit.

“I—I can’t believe it, you know,” muttered Church. “Oh, it’s rot! I never dreamed——”

“Dry up, and don’t look so moony!” interrupted Handforth briskly. “I’m glad that Fenton has come to a wise decision about being prodded into it by me. There’s nothing to worry about now, Church, old man. All you’ve got to do is to keep fit, and put in some stiff practice early next week.”

Church hardly heard him. Although Handforth’s description of his expression was somewhat caustic, Church certainly did look vacant. This thing was too big for him to realise all at once.

For some weeks past he had had his dreams. He had progressed so well at cricket that he had pictured himself as playing for the Second Eleven, and then for the First Eleven—and then in one of the Test matches. But he had always known that they were dreams, too utterly fantastic ever to come true.

And yet two of them *had* come true!

He had played for the Second, and he had played for the First. And now, like a thunderbolt, came the news that he had definitely been selected for the most important game of the whole season! Phillips, of the Fifth, little realised what he had done when he allowed his tongue to wag. For, of course, Church’s selection was not definite at all. His name would merely be put before the Selection Committee as a “probable.”

But Church knew nothing of this—he believed now that his place was a certainty.

For the remainder of that evening he was like a fellow in a daze.



CHAPTER 2.

SOMETHING FOR HANDFORTH TO THINK ABOUT.

“WHAT about tea?” suggested McClure lazily.

“Blow tea!” mumbled Handforth. “I’m just feeling sleepy. Unless you

chaps can keep quiet, you’d better clear off! By George, it’s wonderful out here this afternoon. Bet we shan’t get this weather on Wednesday!”

The leader of Study D was looking very comfortable. He was lying flat on his back in the grass, his arms outstretched, and his straw hat tilted over his eyes. The hot sunshine was warded off by the welcome shade of a neighbouring hedge.

It was Sunday afternoon, and Handforth & Co. were enjoying an idle hour in the grass on Little Side. The private road to the lane was just at the back of them, and nature was in a peaceful mood. A gentle breeze was blowing, and the air was heavy with the humming of countless insects. Butterflies fluttered about, and the whole of St. Frank’s was quiet.

“Well, we must have tea, anyhow,” said Church, as he got up. “Supposing Mac and I go in and get it ready, Handy?”

“Good idea!” murmured Handforth approvingly.

“Will you come in soon, or shall we wake you up in about twenty minutes?”

“As long as you clear off and don’t bother me, I don’t care what you do!” said Handforth indolently. “I don’t want any tea, so you’d better not disturb me. I’m just in the mood for a nap.”

His chums left him, and sauntered off into the Triangle.

“There’ll be an unholy dust-up if we take the ass at his word,” grinned McClure. “Imagine us having tea and leaving Handy out of it! He’d come in and wreck the study!”

“One of us had better pop out and give him the tip as soon as we’re all ready,” said Church. “I say, what a pity it’s Sunday! All this glorious cricket weather wasted!”

“Rats!” said McClure. “Life wouldn’t be worth living if they allowed us to play games on a Sunday. Enthusiastic asses like you wouldn’t get any rest at all. Over-practice leads to staleness.”

“Something in that,” admitted Church, nodding.

“Congrats, Church, old man,” said John Busterfield Boots, of the Fourth, as he paused near the fountain. “I hear you’ve been selected for the Test Eleven. Lucky beggar!”

“Yes, it seems a bit thick,” said Church apologetically.

“Glad you realise it!” retorted Boots gruffly. “Where’s the Fourth? That’s what I want to know! You Remove chaps are getting all the fat!”

McClure waved a lofty hand.

“When the Fourth can produce players like

Church, you'll be in a better position to talk," he observed blandly. "Church hasn't been selected because of any favouritism, Boots, old son. He's hit the top of his form, and Fenton knows it. So no jealousy!"

Buster Boots grinned.

"You're right!" he said, nodding. "Goodness knows, we're not jealous, Church. Good luck to you, and I hope you make a double century!"

Church was growing accustomed to these congratulations. Everybody seemed to know that he was definitely selected—for rumours soon assumed the standing of fact in a big school. It was impossible for Church to have any more doubts. Everybody knew that he was chosen for the big match, and his happiness was complete.

Church wasn't a particularly demonstrative fellow, and he had never even let his own chums know how completely he had set his heart on this honour. They didn't know that he had already written to his mother, telling her the glorious news in extravagantly jubilant language that would have surprised Handforth and McClure very much, could they have seen the letter. Church's mother was the only living person who ever saw his inner self.

All day he had been in a thoughtful, subdued mood, and some of the other juniors imagined that he was worrying over something. He wasn't. He was so happy that everyday matters became unimportant, and he was heartily glad that it was a Sunday, with no lessons to distract him.

McClure understood, and said very little. And while they were preparing tea, Handforth continued to lounge inelegantly in the grass. He had supposed that he could sleep in peace after his chums had gone, but a particularly persistent fly refused to leave him alone.

"Rats!" muttered Handforth, at last. "It's all rot when they talk about the joys of the open air! Whenever I try to get a nap out of doors, I'm always pestered by flies, or bitten by ants, or stung by wasps! I've a dashed good mind to have a nap in the dormitory."

This, of course, was a sensible idea, and one that many other fellows had adopted long since. But it was tea-time, and Handforth, for all his assertions to the contrary, had as healthy an appetite as any other fellow. He sat up and made a fierce lunge at the offending fly.

"Little beast!" he snorted. "You've been buzzing round my giddy head for hours—Good! Got him!"

The fly having been annihilated successfully, Handforth lolled back with his head resting on his clasped hands, and with his knees hunched up. His hat was still half-covering his face, and he idly watched the movements of an ant as it investigated the mysterious region behind the hat-band. The little insect made one or two excursions, but always came out again.

The sound of voices came to Handforth's ears, and he dimly recognised them as belong-

ing to Fenton and Morrow, of the Sixth. The two seniors were strolling along the private road, just on the other side of the hedge.

"Jawing cricket, I'll bet!" Handforth told himself.

He listened idly, and the voices came nearer.

"Simply comes to a toss-up, I suppose," Fenton was saying.

"Between Handforth and Church, you mean?" asked Morrow.

"Yes."

Handforth sat up so abruptly that he jerked his hat off, and the ant nearly fell into his eye. He brushed it off his forehead, and sat rigid. He knew that he wasn't supposed to hear this conversation, but there was nothing private about it, and his position behind the hedge was perfectly legitimate.

"It's rather a pity," remarked Morrow thoughtfully. "Both Handforth and Church are jolly good, particularly Handforth. We can't possibly afford to be without him. Don't forget his performance in the last match."

"My dear chap, Handforth's a cert," said Fenton decidedly. "He may be a young braggart, but he doesn't mean anything by it—in fact, I don't think he realises that he is bragging. And he's a wonderful bat."

"Church has come on pretty marvellously, too—"

"Yes, I know," admitted Fenton, his voice becoming less distinct. "But I've had a talk with the other members of the committee, and the decision's up to me. It might be a bit risky playing Church when we've got so many other good men. As I said before, it's a toss-up between Handforth and Church—and I've already decided."

"Then Church is out?"

"I'm afraid he is."

"Poor kid," said Morrow feelingly. "I believe some of the fellows have been stuffing him up that he's been definitely selected."

"It'll be his own fault if he's disappointed," said Fenton. "He shouldn't believe these rumours. Of course, if anything happens to Handforth between now and Wednesday, I shall play Church instead."

Edward Oswald sat there in the grass with his mouth open, and with an expression of dismay in his eyes. It was evident to him that the two seniors had paused a little distance away, for their words were still audible, and Handforth held his breath so that he could hear everything that was said.

"Then I'm afraid there's not much chance for Church," remarked Morrow.

"Oh, I don't know," said Fenton. "Handforth's a reckless young sweep, and anything might happen to him on that Austin Seven of his! Besides, he might get crocked in practice, or get a cold or something. In any case, we shall take Church with us as a twelfth man, but I don't think he'll actually play."

"Well, it's just as well to be decided about it," said Morrow. "The list goes up in the morning, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Fenton.
 "Then let's go indoors for tea," suggested Morrow. "Your fag ought to have everything ready by this time—unless he's a slacking young beggar, like mine."

Fenton laughed.
 "Young Handforth minor is my fag—and he's worth his weight in gold," he said genially. "We shall find everything ready

They were moving off, and their words failed to reach Handforth's ears—not that he wanted to hear any more!

"By George!" he breathed sombrely.
 So poor old Church hadn't got his place, after all! Even Handforth had looked upon it as a certainty, and this sudden information knocked him all of a heap. From a purely selfish point of view, the position was satisfactory—for Fenton had said some very nice things about him. He was indispensable to the team!

Handforth had known this all along, and he dismissed the matter at once. But what about Church? Church was doomed to the greatest disappointment of his life! He was left out in the cold—or nearly out. The fact that he would travel up to London with the team meant practically nothing, for there wasn't one chance in a thousand that he would be called upon to play.

"Poor old Churchy!" muttered Handforth miserably. "I'm all right, but he's dished! By George! I'll jolly well go to Fenton, and give him a piece of my mind! I'll make him drop one of those other chaps, and—"

He paused with a start. How could he speak to Fenton? He had heard that conversation by accident, and wouldn't like to admit that he had overheard—even though he was entirely guiltless of eavesdropping. Besides, Fenton had said that the only possible chance of Church playing was in the event of Handforth himself being dropped. And that, of course, was unthinkable.

Handforth's heart was touched, and he sat there with his mind in a state of chaos. In the end, he decided that he had better say nothing at all, and wait until the official list of players was posted up in the morning.

"Two days, you mean," said McClure, grinning. "To-morrow and Tuesday—and then you'll be off up to London. Lucky bounders, both of you! I shall have to stick here in school."

"What's the good of being in the First if we don't enjoy special privileges?" asked Handforth tartly. "But I shouldn't be so jolly excited if I were you, Church. Wait until the list's up to-morrow."

"I don't think I shall get any sleep to-night," said Church dreamily.

McClure was looking at Edward Oswald rather curiously. His mind wasn't so obsessed as Church's, and he had not failed to detect the peculiar note in his leader's voice.

"That's about the tenth time you've said that this evening," he remarked.

"Said what?" asked Handforth.

"Advised Churchy to wait until the list's up."

"Well, it's no good taking things for granted—"

"Oh, rot!" said McClure. "Everybody knows that Church has been chosen. Hasn't he been congratulated by Hamilton and Pitt and Boots and Christine, and all the other chaps? Why have any doubts?"

"Well, I shouldn't be too sure," said Handforth stubbornly. "There's many a slip 'twixt

the cup and the lip! I'm just trying to warn Church not to count his chickens before they're hatched."

"What's this—a lesson in proverbs?" asked McClure. "Don't be a chump, Handy! You couldn't warn Church if you tried to. He hasn't even heard what we've been talking about. The poor old scout's dreaming half the time."

Handforth grunted, and said nothing more. Throughout the evening he had certainly dropped a number of broad hints without the slightest effect. He had thought it a good idea to let Church down lightly—to instil doubt into his mind so that he would be more or less prepared for the shock on the morrow. But his efforts had been useless. Church had taken no notice of him, and McClure had only smiled. Handforth's moods were well known to his chums, and they had long since got into the habit of indulgently letting him run on.

Twice had Handforth gone to Fenton's study, and twice had he turned back before entering. After all, what could he say? It was one thing to talk about swallowing his Austin Seven if Fenton didn't comply with his wishes, and it was quite another thing to beard the cricket skipper in his den. Hand-

ON HOLIDAYS?.....

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CHAPTER 3.

THE BOMBSHELL.



WHY isn't to-morrow Wednesday?" asked Church, as he undressed that night. "My only hat! I don't know how the dickens I shall last out! Three solid days, you know!"

forth had a vague idea that Fenton might settle the whole argument by crossing his own name off. Not Fenton's own name, but Handforth's. Fenton wasn't the kind of captain to play about with.

"Oh, hang!" muttered Handforth, as he lay in bed. "What can a chap do? I'm sorry for old Church, but I can't offer to stand down in place of him. I don't want the chaps to sneer at me. Besides, what's going to happen to the team if I don't play?"

"Eh?" said McClure, looking up from his own bed.

"Might as well give the Ashes to the Australian chaps, and be done with it," said Handforth indignantly.

"Talking to me?" said McClure, staring.

"No, I'm not!" growled Handforth, with a start. "I wasn't talking at all. Can't I think now, without you butting in?"

"Well, be a good chap and think silently," said McClure. "How do you expect us to get to sleep if you keep thinking aloud? If I were you I'd forget cricket, and forget Church, too. He's all right!"

And McClure turned over, and went serenely to sleep. He could easily do so, for he had no worries. Being absolutely out of the running, he could watch events with the impartial nonchalance of an outsider. Church, on the other hand, was finding it difficult to wait until he could proudly read his own name on the Selection Committee's list. And Handforth was simply torn with agony because he knew that Church's name would not be there.

However, in the end they all got to sleep, and Church was the first to awaken in the morning. The rising-bell wouldn't ring for another half-hour, but he hopped out of bed and dressed himself. He had heard that Fenton had prepared the list on the previous evening, and would post it up before breakfast this morning.

He was down before any of the others even thought of getting out of bed, and although he knew it was quite useless to haunt the notice-board yet, he remained in the vicinity of the Ancient House lobby. The lists would be pinned up in every House, and the Ancient House would probably be the first, as Fenton was Head Prefect there.

The weather wasn't quite so good this morning. There were clouds in the sky, and the Triangle was damp. Rain had fallen in the night, and the general conditions were becoming unsettled. Church stood in the doorway, looking at the sky anxiously.

"I bet it'll pour on Wednesday," he told himself. "Just my luck, of course! The first real chance I've had, and— Oh, rats! What's the good of getting pessimistic? It might be gloriously fine!"

He turned and looked at the notice-board again, as though some magician might have pinned the list up during the last twenty seconds. It wasn't anxiety that held him here. He had no doubt whatever. His confidence was absolute and supreme. Not the faintest inkling of the real truth was in his mind. He merely wanted to see his name

there—neatly typewritten with the other names. For Church had a full realisation of the great honour. To be a member of the Test Eleven was about the greatest triumph that any fellow could attain. Why, he had beaten many of the lordly seniors—fellows who had played for the First for season after season!

Some of the other juniors came down, and before long St. Frank's had awakened in earnest. Church was again congratulated by a good many, but he seemed strangely indifferent. As a matter of fact, he was sensitive to all these expressions of good-will, and he didn't like to show everybody that he was brimming over with inward excitement.

When Handforth came down he was looking careless.

"List up yet?" he asked casually.

"Not yet," said Church, trying to keep his voice calm.

"I shouldn't hang about here, if I were you," said Handforth. "I don't suppose they'll post the notice until after breakfast. Let's go and knock a ball about on Little Side."

"There isn't time," said Church. "Besides, I'd rather stay here—"

"Rats! You're coming out with me!"

"I'm not," said Church obstinately. "I mean to stay— By jingo! Here comes Morrow! I'll bet he's got the list—"

But Morrow turned into the cloak-room, and emerged with his cap, and went out. Church's face had become flushed, but he laughed, and pretended to be indifferent. Handforth watched him with silent agony—afraid to disillusion him.

To drag him out was impossible—for Church insisted upon haunting the notice-board. Before long there were others waiting, too—for there was a general eagerness to see the actual list. The Lower School was particularly interested because there would be a heavy proportion of juniors in the Eleven.

"Pretty excited, eh?" said Dick Hamilton, smiling.

"No fear!" denied Church hotly. "I'm not excited, you ass!"

The Captain of the Remove laughed, for Walter Church's excitement was patent to everybody—except himself. He fondly imagined that he was concealing it.

"We don't blame you, old son," chuckled Dick. "The first time my name was on the First Eleven list, I pretty nearly went off my chump."

"Same here," said Reggie Pitt, of the West House. "We've got sort of used to it now, but I suppose we ought to be just as excited as you. This last Test, too, is going to be a regular corker."

"Yep!" nodded Adams, the American boy. "You said it!"

"Why, are you interested in cricket at last?" asked Church.

"I'll tell the universe I am!" said Adams. "I've gotta hand it to you guys that cricket is sure a crackerjack game. You ain't such suckers as I first thought. But—aw, gee! If you want to see a real game—an honest-to-



Handforth stared aghast. Church was sprawled across his bed, his shoulders were heaving and a stifled sob sounded. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Handy. What was the matter with Church?

goodness eye-full—I guess you'd better start in on baseball."

"Rats!" said everybody, in one voice.

"Can you beat that?" said Adams, glaring round. "Say, you boneheads make me tired! The way you knock baseball gives me a pain. But if you could just see Babe Ruth on the plate hitting a sizzler— Oh, boy!"

"If you're running down cricket, you Yankee ass—"

"Not on your life," grinned Adams. "I'll just wise you up to the fact that cricket is the crocodile's elbow. But baseball—"

"Dry up!" snapped Handforth. "Here comes Fenton."

"Good! He's got the list!"

"By jingo, so he has!"

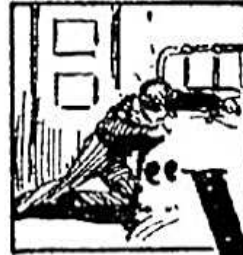
Fenton good-naturedly pushed his way through the crowd, and pinned up a foolscap sheet. Church did his utmost to appear unconcerned, but his heart was in his mouth as he pressed closer. The moment had come! He would see his name on the official list, with Fenton's signature—

Church gave a sort of gulp, and his throat went dry. He could see the list now, for Fenton had gone, carrying duplicate lists with him to pin up in the lobbies of the other Houses. It seemed to Church that the type-written names swayed dizzily before his eyes. He forced his way closer, heedless of Handforth's grip on his shoulder.

"Steady, old man," muttered Edward Oswald. "Take it calmly—"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Church hoarsely. Even now that he was at close quarters

the list swam before him. There was something wrong with it—something idiotically wrong. There were eleven names, but his own was not among them!



CHAPTER 4.

POOR OLD CHURCH!

WELL, there's nothing startling about it," remarked Dick Hamilton, as he scanned the list. "Practically the same team as the last Test match."

The notice was quite short, and merely read as follows: "List of players for Fifth Test Match—Fenton (Captain), Morrow, Wilson, Browne, Stevens, Phillips, Hamilton, Pitt, Handforth, Kahn, Fullwood. Four reserve men will travel with the team, and their names will be posted later—Edgar Fenton."

"Jolly good!" said Pitt enthusiastically. "I'm glad to see that Fullwood's been selected again. Your minor's out of it, Handforth—"

"You can never expect justice in these matters," interrupted Handforth bitterly. "My minor's a cheeky young beggar, but he's a better cricketer than some of those seniors! I've a good mind to—"

"Wait a minute," said Dick Hamilton. "What about Church?"

"Yes, by Jove!" said Pitt, looking at the list. "He isn't down!"

"Hard lines!"

"Poor old Church!"

"And everybody thought he was a cert!"

"Hard luck, Church, old man!"

With these trifling expressions of sympathy, the matter was carelessly dismissed. Those who were in the team had nothing to worry about, and those who had never had any chance were equally nonchalant. The tragedy of Church struck them as being a matter of very minor importance.

For once Handforth had very little to say. He was expecting Church to make an outburst, and to show violent signs of his disappointment. This is what Handforth himself would have done, and he had a habit of judging other fellows by his own standards. If Edward Oswald had been left out of the team, the Ancient House lobby would have resounded with loud animal cries.

But Church merely shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Chuck it," he said carelessly. "No need for you chaps to jaw! I never expected a miracle, anyhow."

"But you must be pretty disappointed, old man?" asked Hamilton.

"Oh, a bit," admitted Church. "Of course, I should have been an ass if I had really expected a place in the Eleven. I don't suppose I shall even go as a reserve," he added lightly. "Well, never mind. Worse troubles at sea!"

He turned aside, smiling with the same indifference. Hardly any of the juniors noticed that his smile was forced, that his face was pale, and his whole expression haggard. And certainly nobody guessed by what supreme efforts Church managed to assume this air of careless unconcern.

Dick Hamilton, perhaps, was the only fellow who vaguely guessed. He gave Church's arm a gentle pressure.

"Rotten hard luck, old man," he murmured. "Keep your pecker up, and——"

"Why, I'm all right," interrupted Church gruffly. "Chuck it, Hamilton! No need to make a song about it!"

He pushed his way out of the crowd, and strolled off upstairs with his hands in his pockets. Not that he saw where he went. He felt dizzy and dazed, and the lump in his throat was bigger than ever. His efforts to swallow it were fruitless.

What a fool he had been even to hope! Any chap with a grain of sense would have known that there was no earthly chance! And yet he had lived since Saturday evening in the dream that he would play in the Test match! He deserved this shock for his idiotic belief in rumours!

Downstairs, in the lobby, Handforth was feeling happy.

He didn't possess Dick Hamilton's keen insight, and he only saw Church's assumed indifference. It surprised Handforth so much that a wave of relief swept over him, and his usual cheerfulness returned in one bound.

"Good old Churchy!" he murmured. "I thought the ass would take it badly, but I've been worrying over nothing. Well I'm jig-

gered! The fathead didn't seem to care a snap! All my concern for nothing!"

He began to feel slightly indignant, and marched McClure off into the Triangle. McClure was looking very serious.

"I say, what a rotten piece of luck for Church," he said soberly. "And we thought he was certain of his place!"

"I didn't!" growled Handforth. "I knew he wouldn't get his place, but I didn't like to tell him so. I thought he would be cut up, and now the chump goes off with his hands in his pockets and doesn't seem to care a toss! Well, I'm glad he's taken it so gamely."

McClure was staring at him.

"You knew?" he said. "How did you know?"

"I heard Fenton talking to Morrow yesterday——"

"You listened?" asked McClure, aghast.

"Don't be a blithering idiot!" roared Handforth. "It was while you and Church went indoors to get tea. Fenton and Morrow passed along the private road, and I couldn't help hearing 'em."

"And what did they say?"

"They were talking about the Eleven, and Fenton decided that Church wouldn't get a place, after all," said Handforth. "I didn't like to mention anything, because I wasn't supposed to have heard it. Besides, I thought Church would go half dotty with disappointment."

"Well I'm blessed!" exclaimed McClure. "Fancy you keeping that to yourself for practically twelve hours!"

"None of your rot, my lad!" growled Handforth.

"And I'm not so sure about Churchy taking it well, either," went on McClure. "He doesn't like to show it, that's all. I'd bet he's frightfully sick, really. Poor old scout! After he'd counted on it, too!"

"Oh, he doesn't care much," said Handforth lightly. "I was expecting him to yell like anything, and kick up a fuss. Instead of that he said he never really expected a place—and doesn't even hope to go as a reserve. He's all right, Mac. No need to worry now."

And Handforth dismissed the affair as settled. In any case, the bell for breakfast went just then, and food was a subject which brooked of no delay. But Handforth was rather surprised when he started his meal. Church hadn't come in to breakfast, and he didn't show up at all.

"I told you he was cut up," murmured McClure.

"It looks a bit like it, but it's jolly rummy," said Handforth, frowning. "But why miss breakfast? A chap's got to feed, whether he's disappointed or not! It's all rot to ignore your giddy nosebag!"

Immediately after breakfast Handforth and McClure instituted a search. McClure went outside to scout in the squares and playing-

fields, and Handforth went upstairs. He was beginning to get worried again, for he had more feeling for his two chums than the rest of the Remove suspected.

"It's no good moping about the place like this," muttered Handforth, as he went along the upper corridor. "Besides, he seemed all right— Perhaps he's sulking in the dormitory, the ass! I've a good mind to go to Fenton, and ask him what he means by messing old Church about!"

He reached the dormitory, and quietly turned the handle. He didn't really expect to find Church there, for he kept assuring himself that his suspicions were groundless. He took a peep into the room, and then started.

It was a small apartment—for the juniors of St. Frank's did not use large dormitories, but slept three in a room at the most. Some fellows had bed-rooms entirely to themselves.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Handforth, aghast.

An expression of scared consternation was on his face. Never in his wildest dreams had he expected this! Church was kneeling on the floor, and sprawling over his bed. And his shoulders were heaving, and he was very obviously sobbing. There was something indescribably pitiful in this little scene.

He had no idea that Handforth had entered. He thought that he was alone, and he had given way to his real feelings in the privacy of the dormitory. In front of the other fellows Church had kept a stiff upper-lip, but when there were no eyes to see, he had given way.

Edward Oswald Handforth was inexpressibly shocked. For an instant—but only for an instant—he felt contemptuous of his chum's weakness. But then, in a flash, he knew what an unjust feeling this was, and his heart was touched.

Church wasn't weak at all—he was strong! In front of the others—even his own chums—he had smiled bravely. Nobody was supposed to see him now—he was merely unbottling his surcharged emotions. And his hopeless misery touched Handforth in his softest spot.

He crept forward, half-intending to soothe his chum, and buck him up. He didn't know how he was going to do it, but he felt that it was distinctly up to him to make a move of some sort. He bent over Church, and then stared again. There was a writing-block near Church's tousled head, and Handforth couldn't help seeing the words upon it:

"Dear Mother,

"Just a line to tell you that I am not playing in the Test match, after all. I was a fool to believe that I should be so lucky, and I'm awfully sorry I wrote you that note on Saturday—"

At this point Church had broken off, and the letter was unfinished. His fingers were still gripping the fountain-pen, and he was so absorbed in his own misery that he knew nothing of Handforth's presence.

He sobbed unrestrainedly.



CHAPTER 5.

HANDY SETTLES IT!

EXACTLY how Handforth got out of the dormitory without Church hearing him, he hardly knew—for he was a clumsy fellow, and could hardly move a step without tripping against something, or causing a creak. But this time he stole out with the silence of a shadow.

Perhaps it was because of his deep concern. His soft heart was overflowing with pity for his chum; he realised that it would be sheer madness to let Church know that his private misery had been seen. Far better to steal out and save Church from that embarrassment.

In the corridor, Handforth felt a huge lump in his throat, and he was mildly surprised. He wasn't far off blubbing on his own account, and he was furious with himself because his eyes felt moist. Of all the rot! What on earth was the good of acting like a silly kid?

But, somehow, he didn't blame Church for giving way. Church was built differently—he made no public demonstration, but he exposed his soul in solitude. Handforth appreciated that he had intruded upon a sacred privacy. Never must he allow Church to know that he had seen him there.

"Poor old chap!" Handy muttered huskily. "I'd no idea he was so hard hit! It's a shame! It's a beastly, rotten shame! By George, I'm not going to stand it, either!" he added fiercely. "Old Church isn't going to be dished out of his place like this! It's simply awful!"

He stood there, breathing hard. He was thinking of Church in that dormitory, sobbing his heart out on the bed. Perhaps it was a sign of weakness in one way; but, after all, it was only human. Church had had the pluck to keep his pecker up in front of the others—and that was real grit. Handforth had seen something which Church had never intended him to see.

"Yes, something's got to be done!" said Handforth grimly.

In spite of Edward Oswald's blustering bombast, in spite of his violent habits, he was about the "softest" fellow in the Remove when it came to a question of this sort. His heart was always ready to melt at the slightest provocation, and just now he was deeply moved. He would think nothing of punching Church in the eye, or giving him an uppercut that would knock him half-silly. Such trifles were of frequent occurrence in Study D. But, at heart, Handforth had a very soft spot for his two chums—and their troubles were his troubles. The slightest unhappiness of either of them was automatically shared by Handforth. When they were miserable, he was miserable.

"I'll see Fenton!" he said hotly. "By George, I'll give Fenton a piece of my mind, too!"

"An exceedingly rash proposal, Brother Handforth," remarked Browne, as he turned the corner. "Without wishing to hurt your finer feelings, I suggest that you can ill-afford such generosity."

"What generosity, you lanky ass?"

"We will let it pass," said Browne gently. "I observe that you have been addressing your remarks to the thin air. I commend this practice, since it is always difficult for the thin air to enter into any argument——"

"I'll bet you're to blame, too!" said Handforth indignantly. "You rotter! You mean bounder! You swindler! You beastly fraud!"

William Napoleon Browne smiled.

"Why these benevolent terms, Brother Handforth?" he inquired mildly. "It cheers me to hear such compliments——"

"You're on the Selection Committee, aren't you?" snorted Handforth. "What's the idea of leaving Church out of the Test Eleven? He thought he was going to be included, and now he's—he's——"

Handforth paused, and Browne shook his head.

"A sad affair, I must confess," he acknowledged. "But do not speak harshly to me, Brother Edward. Do not lay this base charge at my door. If you must give voice to these vituperative outbursts, be good enough to interview Brother Fenton. He is our captain, and to him you must go. Am I to assume that Brother Church has complained?"

"No, Brother Church hasn't!" retorted Handforth darkly. "Brother Church hasn't said a word—he's accepted the thing gamely. But I'm saying a word!" he added forcefully. "I'm saying two or three words!"

"One must admit the truth of that statement," said Browne smoothly. "As Brother Church's champion, you are certainly a great success. I am with you whole-heartedly, for Brother Church deserves his place. However, my small voice has failed to penetrate the defences of our skipper. And where I have failed, what hope is there for you? Our family traditions are world-famous, Brother Handforth, as you doubtless know. Where a Browne fails, none can succeed!"

Handforth laughed mockingly.

"Don't you believe it!" he retorted. "I'm going to Fenton, and I'm going to smash him to smithereens until he agrees to shove Church in the Test Eleven!"

"A laudable project, but foredoomed to failure," said the captain of the Fifth. "And I should certainly suggest that it would be better to defer the smithereen business until Brother Fenton has given his consent. No self-respecting sports skipper can agree to much after he has been reduced to mangled fragments."

Handforth strode off with a further snort, being in no mood for Browne's pleasantries. He went straight to the Sixth Form passage, and charged into Edgar Fenton's study.

"What about Church?" he demanded hotly.

Fenton, who was alone, looked up with a frown.

"Get out of this room!" he snapped. "Unless you can come in like a human being, Handforth, and not like a bull——"

"Sorry!" growled Handforth. "But I'm—I'm wild! What about Church? That's what I want to know! What about Church?"

"What about him?"

"Why isn't his name on the list?"

Fenton might have assisted any other fellow out of the study with the toe of his boot, but Handforth was in a class alone. The school captain took him by the shoulders, and held him firmly.

"Do you happen to be the chairman of the Board of Governors?" he asked grimly. "Have you been elevated to the position of headmaster? Am I supposed to answer your demands without question?"

"I want to know about Church——"

"When you can calm yourself decently, I'll speak to you," interrupted Fenton coldly. "And if Church has any complaint to make, why can't he come to me himself?"

Handforth simmered down.

"Church hasn't complained," he growled. "He wouldn't think of complaining. But the poor old scout was given to understand that he'd be in the team, and now he's had the shock of his life. Why can't you drop Phillips, or Stevens, or Morrow, and give Church the place?"

"If it comes to that, why shouldn't I drop you?" asked Fenton genially.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Handforth. "We want to win, don't we?"

"I believe that is the general idea at the back of our minds," admitted Fenton drily. "Look here, Handforth, old man, I can appreciate Church's disappointment, but you won't do any good by this sort of thing. The team's been selected according to merit, and Church will only go with us as a reserve. I don't mind admitting I've done a lot of hard thinking over this Eleven, and Church deserves a place. Unfortunately, a cricket team only consists of eleven players, so there's no room for him."

"But he's a wonderful bat——"

"Church is thundering good," admitted Fenton. "And if anything happens to any of the others—if anybody falls ill, or crocks himself—Church'll get his place. But there's not much chance of that. And don't forget that Church is not the only one, my lad. Heaps of fellows in the Sixth and Fifth are nursing their disappointment at this very minute. The Junior School ought to feel infernally proud or having five representatives in the team."

"Yes, I suppose it ought," said Handforth slowly.

"So just go away, and be thankful that your own place is safe," continued Fenton. "Your study has got a player in the big match, and it ought to be satisfied. I'm sorry for Church, but if you secure the best Harley Street specialists, I dare say he'll survive. Shut the door after you, old son!"

Handforth went out, considerably subdued. There was something so calming about Fenton

that his original indignation had gone. Of course, Fenton was quite right. It was no good kicking up a fuss about Church. But this wasn't much consolation from the stricken junior's point of view.

It was nearly time for morning lessons, and out in the Triangle Handforth found Church and McClure chatting with Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. Church was apparently himself. He was smiling good-humouredly, and his whole manner was care-free and normal. Handforth eyed him very closely.

"Feeling all right?" he asked.

"Of course I am," said Church. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, after that disappointment——"

"I should think I'm old enough and big enough to keep my pecker up," growled Church, annoyed. "Don't be an ass, Handy! I always thought it was too good to be true, anyhow. About time the bell went, isn't it?"

For a moment Handforth was almost deceived—as McClure and the others were deceived. But then he remembered what he had seen in the dormitory, and he knew that this bold front of Church's was a piece of sheer grit. The poor chap was really in anguish, but he was pluckily concealing it.

Handforth's heart was touched even more. By George, the chap was made of the right stuff. For Handforth positively knew his true feelings—he knew the abysmal depths of Church's misery.

"It's a shame!" he muttered miserably, as he turned aside. "It's not fair that the poor old beggar should suffer like this. It wouldn't matter so much if I was in his shoes—I'm tougher! He doesn't show much, but this is going to crack him up completely——"

Handforth paused, and stood there staring unseeingly at the East House. An idea had just come to him. If he or any of the others got crocked, Church would get his place in the team!

"By George!" he breathed. "Why not? I'll stand down, and let Church have my place! That'll settle the whole giddy question!"



CHAPTER 6.

EASIER SAID THAN DONE!

HANDFORTH was startled by his own quixotic idea. What an ass he had been not to think of this before! It was so simple, too. He only had to stand down, and Fenton would put Church in the vacant place, and then everything would be all serene.

"After all, I've played in these Test matches," Handforth told himself. "It won't be any sort of blow to me. And I can go as a reserve, and watch the play, and cheer old Churchy a bit. Yes, by George, it's easy!"

But was it?

During lessons that morning Handforth realised that there was a particularly hefty snag in the way. In the first place, Fenton might refuse to accept his resignation from

the Eleven; then, again, everybody was bound to talk a lot, and make a big fuss. The fellows would want to know why he was standing down, and the reason would be obvious. He would be regarded as a sort of self-sacrificing young hero—giving up his place for the sake of his chum. He shivered at the very thought.

What a ghastly prospect! Handforth had a perfect horror of acting the part of a hero in the eyes of the others. He wanted to give Church his place, but he didn't want anybody to know that it was a deliberate move. How could it be done so that the school would suspect nothing?

Then Handforth remembered those words he had overheard the previous afternoon. Fenton had referred to him as a reckless young ass, and had suggested that he might get crocked before the match. And in that event Church would automatically be selected! Yes, that was the idea! He'd get crocked, and nobody would suspect anything. Church would get his place in the team, and even Church himself wouldn't embarrass his leader by thanking him, or any rot of that sort.

"By George!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "Easy!"

Mr. Crowell looked up from his desk.

"I beg your pardon, Handforth?" he said.

"Eh? I—I—— Sorry, sir!" said Handforth hastily.

"You spoke just now, Handforth."

"I—I didn't mean to, sir."

"You shouldn't make these sudden outbursts, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell, frowning. "I have noticed that you have been pre-occupied all the morning. Church is similarly abstracted, although not to the same extent as yourself. You must not allow your little quarrels to interfere with your lessons."

"We haven't quarrelled, sir," denied Handforth indignantly.

Mr. Crowell waved him into silence, and the incident was over. Handforth was in a far happier frame of mind. He had arrived at a workable solution, and Church would be able to play in the Test match without having the remotest inkling of the truth.

If Edward Oswald's first decision had been quixotic, this was ten times more so. For he had definitely made up his mind to crock himself! Exactly how this was to be accomplished he didn't know yet—but that was a detail to be settled later. The chief point was that the rest of the juniors couldn't call him a hero.

Handforth never gave one thought to his own loss, although he was vaguely aware of a dull pain somewhere. It was disappointment, if he had only known it. He had always dreamed of playing in this match at Lord's—the finest game of the whole series. But he was ready to give it up without a pang for the sake of the unfortunate Church.

In fact, the satisfaction he obtained from the prospect of making Church happy overwhelmingly outweighed any possible regret on his own part. The very knowledge that

he was doing something that would send his chum into transports of joy made him enthusiastic for the actual execution of his purpose.

And when Handforth started on a thing he generally went forward with it. He didn't pause to ask any questions, or to reason matters out. He just made up his mind, and then started business in earnest.

There was not another fellow at St. Frank's who would have considered his proposition for a moment. It would have been dismissed as a piece of sheer lunacy. It was one thing to give up your place in a team for the sake of a chum, but it was another thing deliberately to venture forth with suicidal intentions.

Having finally settled his policy, Edward Oswald Handforth went ahead with it without any other thought. The only way for Church to get the place was for him—Handforth—to crock himself! He couldn't rely upon getting a cold, or going groggy in some other direction, before Wednesday morning. But a genuine accident would put him completely out of the running.

Therefore, an accident must be schemed!

Handforth fairly revelled in his thoughts now. By George, wouldn't Church be overjoyed? Of course, he might be a bit concerned about his leader's condition when the latter was carried in, smashed up, but he would know that his place in the Test Eleven was secure. And he wouldn't even guess that Handforth had deliberately sacrificed his own chances.

Many schemes ran through Handforth's mind—much to the detriment of his morning's work. He dismissed all idea of using his Austin Seven. The little car was insured, but he wouldn't purposely involve himself in a smash. It might be months before the insurance company replaced the car. Besides, it wouldn't be far short of a swindle.

No, he couldn't risk the Austin Seven. His bike? Yes, that was more likely, and it wouldn't matter a toss if he smashed it up—because he had lost all interest in his bike since an eccentric aunt had presented him with the little Austin. His bike would be just the very thing!

Curiously enough, the whole school had expected Handforth to be crocked long before this. Whenever he went out in his Austin Seven, the fellows anticipated his return in an ambulance. Strangely enough, Handforth was an excellent driver, however; although he seemed to take the most appalling risks, he never met with any mishaps. Well, this time the school would have its expectations realised.

Handforth was so busy with his thoughts that when the Remove was dismissed he still sat in his place, his eyes glued to his history book. Mr. Crowell glanced at him approvingly.

"I am glad to see this enthusiasm for your work, Handforth," he said, striding up and glancing at the book—not, perhaps, without a little suspicion. "Splendid! Do you hear me, Handforth?"

"The old quarry!" muttered Handforth

abstractedly. "If I ride full tilt over the edge—Eh? Oh, hallo, sir! Why, what—My hat! Everybody's gone!"

"You said something about a quarry, Handforth."

Edward Oswald started, but mastered the situation.

"You read all sorts of rummy things in history, sir," he said briskly, closing his book. "And it's so interesting that a chap's inclined to get buried in it."

He hurried off, and Mr. Crowell pursed his lips. He wasn't quite so sure that Handforth had been actually studying history. He opened the book, which Handforth had carelessly left behind, and found several crudely executed drawings of a bicycle on the margin spaces of the page that had been lying open.

"There seems to be something the matter with Handforth," murmured Mr. Crowell, frowning. "His reference to a quarry was most peculiar. H'm! Not that I need bother my head about the boy."

And Mr. Crowell dismissed the matter. It was rather fortunate for Handforth that he proceeded no further with his quarry scheme, or the Form-master would have smelt a rat. Edward Oswald came to the conclusion that life was pretty good. There was no need to reduce himself to an absolute pulp. A knock on the head would be enough, or a twisted wrist, or something like that.

Church and McClure were waiting for him in the Triangle.

"Going out to the nets, Handy?" asked Church casually.

"Nets?" repeated Handforth. "No fear!"

"But Fenton will expect you—"

"Then let him expect!" growled Handforth. "You'd better get some practice, Churchy, old man. You'll go up to Lord's on Wednesday for the match."

"But I've been left out," said Church, with pretended indifference.

"Eh?" Handforth started. "I—I mean you'll go up as a reserve," he added hastily. "And you never know your luck. Somebody may fall ill at the last moment, and then you'll get your chance. Buzz off to the nets, and you go with him, Mac. See that he practises hard."

"And what about you?" asked McClure, staring.

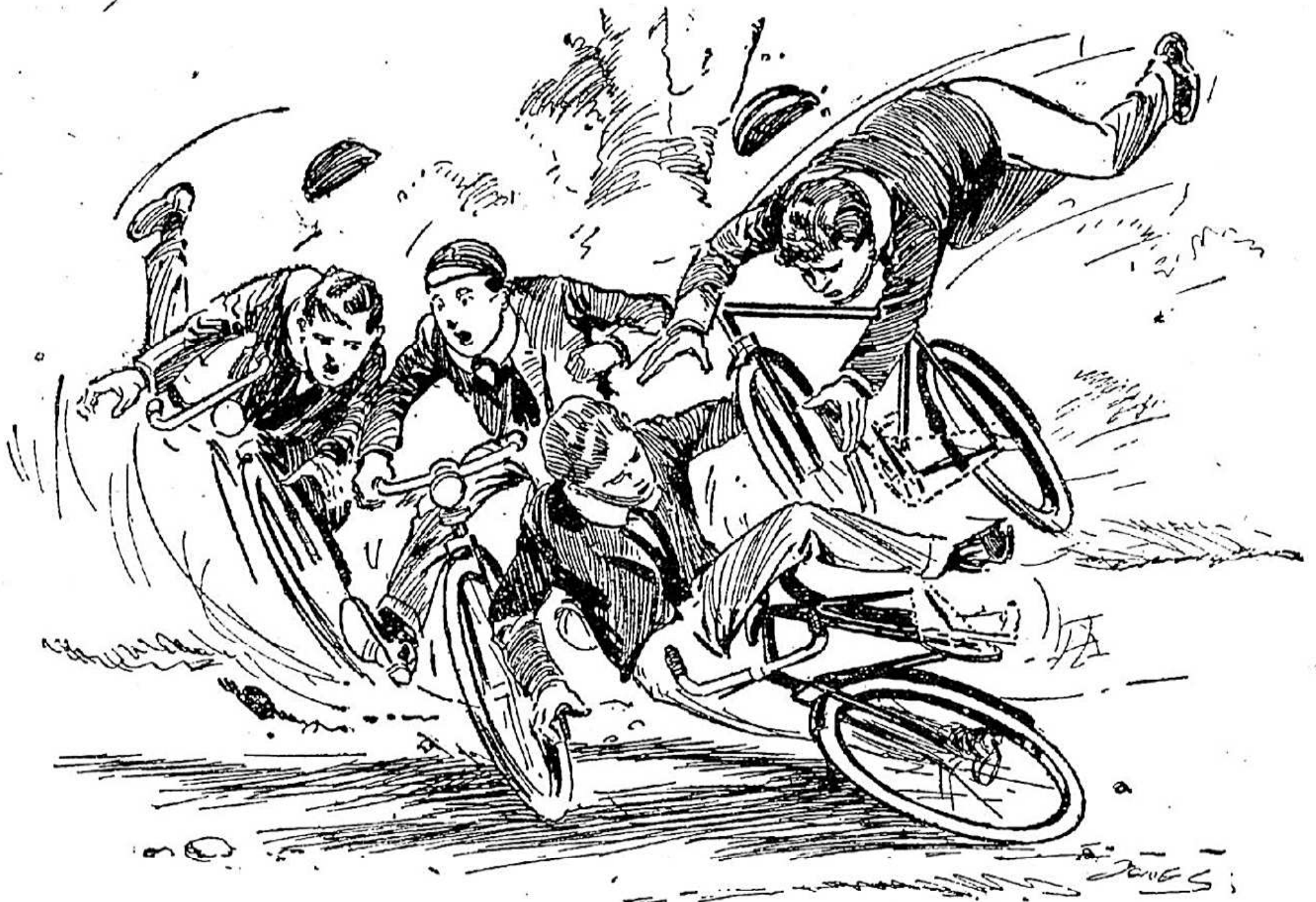
"I'm going out," replied Handforth mysteriously. "Shan't be long—expect me back in half an hour, on—on—"

He was going to add "on a stretcher," but suddenly realised that this might be an incautious remark. He went off with a grim, set expression on his face which his chums knew of old. There was even something in his stride which told of a set purpose.

"He's up to something," said McClure, frowning. "I don't think we ought to go to the nets, Churchy. When Handy's in this mood he's dangerous. We'd better look after him."

"Yes, we'll follow—"

"None of this slacking, my lad," smiled Fenton, as he came past. "You're one of



Handforth sent his bicycle swerving full across the road, heading straight for the three River House cyclists! There was a crashing and rending of metal, a series of alarmed yells, and then everything was hidden in a heaving cloud of dust.

the reserves for Wednesday, and you'd better get to the nets."

Church looked at Fenton with gleaming eyes.

"Is—is that official, Fenton?" he asked eagerly. "Am I really going?"

"Only as a reserve," said Fenton gently. "But you're going."

Church turned to McClure with flushed face.

"Well, that's better than nothing, anyhow," he said joyously.

McClure said nothing. He knew that Church was fooling himself—for the hopes of a reserve player were scarcely, if ever, realised.



CHAPTER 7.

ROUGH ON BREWSTER & CO.

"Hi, Handy!"

The Remove skipper gave the hail as Handforth tore through the main gateway of St.

Frank's with more than his usual recklessness. He was on his bicycle, and he swerved out into the lane with a giddy lurch, shaving the near-side granite post with less than an inch to spare.

"The hopeless ass!" frowned Dick Hamilton. "He can't afford to take risks like that when he's in the First Eleven! He

ought to be at the nets, too! I'll give him a jawing when he gets back, confound him!"

Crash!

Dick, who was about to move off, started. An ominous sound had reached his ears from the lane, and he ran quickly to the gates. Just down the road a mangled heap of humanity was struggling, intermingled with an overturned bicycle.

"My hat!" said Dick breathlessly.

He didn't know it, but the effect had been entirely unrehearsed. Handforth, with the intention of deliberately crocking himself, had met with a real accident in the first twenty seconds! He had swerved to avoid a lanky junior who was suicidally walking in the middle of the road, reading a book. Handforth hadn't contemplated any such early chance as this.

He grazed the lanky junior, lost his balance, and crashed over. He hit the road with a fearful thud, and was so surprised that he sat up in sheer bewilderment. Clarence Fellowe, the lanky junior, had been tipped over, too, and in some extraordinary way he had got mixed up with the frame of the bicycle, which was festooned round his neck like a collar.

"You—you hopeless ass!" gasped Handforth.

"Well, upon my word, it's most absurd!" said Fellowe indignantly. "You reckless clown, you've knocked me down!"

"I didn't see you!" snorted Handforth, as he got up and pulled his bicycle away. "H'm! Not even scratched! Not even a pedal-crank bent! And, by George, I don't think I'm hurt!" he added hotly. "You rhyming fathead! I'm not even bruised!"

Clarence Fellowe arose dizzily.

"My book is torn to smithereens!" he complained dolefully. "I do detest these painful scenes! You ought to learn to ring your bell—we can't detect your bike by smell! In perfect peace I stroll along, and then you come and spoil my song."

"You weren't singing, you silly lamp-post!" snapped Handforth.

"In poetic lines I was immersed, and now my book is all dispersed," said Fellowe complainingly. "I'm in a mess, I must complain; and I am suffering grievous pain!"

Handforth wasn't listening. He regarded the poet of the Remove as a mere cipher in this affair. The distressing feature was that he hadn't even scratched himself, and he couldn't even feel the slightest bruise. What a chance missed!

Dick Hamilton came up, very anxious.

"Anybody hurt?" he asked quickly.

"Of course not!" roared Handforth. "I'm not even grazed!"

"Great Scott! Did you want to be?" asked Dick, with relief.

"Eh? Well, no— I mean—"

"Pardon an interrupting word—I'd like to make my grievance heard," said Clarence feebly. "Although this chump may be unharmed, I'm not exactly feeling charmed. My wrist is grazed, my elbow sore, and other spots are simply raw."

"Oh, chuck it!" said Handforth, glaring. "You shouldn't get in the way!"

"I fear I've got a twisted neck, and on the whole I'm quite a wreck," said Clarence indignantly. "This lunatic should be restrained—I'd like to see him soundly caned!"

"Well, it's a good thing you're not hurt, Handy, that's all," said Hamilton severely. "Clarence is quite right—you ought to be locked up in a padded cell! Haven't you got more sense than to risk your limbs two days before the big match?"

"Rats!" said Handforth curtly.

He jumped on his machine, and tore off down the lane with greater recklessness than ever. The Remove skipper frowned, and stared after him.

"What's come over the idiot?" he asked wonderingly.

"He always was a blundering chump—"

"So now you've got the thundering hump?" grinned Dick. "By Jove, that's a better rhyme than yours, Fellowe."

"The chap is simply off his bean—the biggest ass I've ever seen," grumbled Clarence Fellowe, whose alleged poetry was purely unconscious. "I'm sore and sprained by Handy's charge—he's nothing but a clumsy barge. He'll kill himself before he's done—he's like a bullock on the run."

Dick Hamilton winced slightly.

"Thanks all the same, old man, but that's about enough poetry for one dose," he said. "You'd better get indoors and have a wash—your arm has had an awful kosh— Oh, my hat! I've caught the fever!"

Clarence stood there, scratching his head.

"I'm puzzled, too, I must admit," he said; "I can't quite get the hang of it. He seemed so wild when he looked round, to find himself quite safe and sound. One might believe that he had tried—a rash attempt at suicide!"

"Yes, he did seem a bit disappointed when he found that he was whole," said Dick thoughtfully. "There's something wrong with the old ass to-day. He's been looking rummy ever since this morning."

Clarence went off, shaking his head, and limping slightly. And, in the meantime, Handforth was pedalling aimlessly along the Bannington Road. He hadn't any definite idea of his programme. He only knew that before he got back to St. Frank's he would have to crock himself.

He thought about charging head-on into a hedge, but this would probably result in a few scratches which would disfigure him, but otherwise leave him fully capable of playing cricket. No, it would have to be something more drastic—something which would really hurt him.

Three cyclists were coming towards him, and he brightened up. He recognised them as Hal Brewster & Co., of the River House School. They were coasting down one side of a dip, and Handforth was coasting down the other.

"By George, here's a chance!" said Handforth triumphantly.

A cycle accident! What could be more natural? That little mix-up with Fellowe was responsible for this idea entering Handforth's head. He was bound to crock himself, and nobody would suspect a thing. Nobody could accuse Handforth of being selfish, but in this instance he gave no thought to the possible injuries to Brewster & Co. Besides, there wasn't time for any hard thinking. He was upon them in less than two seconds.

Hal Brewster was just waving a cheery hand when Edward Oswald gave a giddy lurch. He swerved sharply across the road, and charged full-tilt into the unprepared River House boys. The whole thing went beautifully.

There was a crashing and rending of metal, a series of alarmed yells, and where four cyclists had been, there now arose a cloud of dust. On the road lay a battered heap of debris.

The crash had been severe, Brewster colliding with Ascott, and Ascott plunging giddily into Glynn. Handforth arrived last, and landed on the others. Wheels, twisted and otherwise, stuck up in all directions. Here and there a foot protruded, or an arm wagged, or a head showed.

"How many dead?" asked Brewster dazedly, as he sat up with a gasp, and disentangled his left hand from Dave Ascott's

front wheel. "Handforth, you—you mad-man! You deliberately charged us!"

"Never saw anything like it in my life!" moaned Glynn, as he staggered to his feet. "Oh, my goodness! I'm all bruises and gashes! And look at Ascott's bike! Scrap-iron!"

"Yes, look at it!" howled Ascott wildly. "My new jigger!"

He forgot his hurts. His machine was a wreck!

"I—I swerved!" spluttered Handforth, as he reeled away from the wreckage. "I swerved, you know!"

"You did it on purpose!" hooted Ascott. "You—you raving madman! Look what's happened to my jigger! You might have killed us——"

"He's killed me, anyhow!" said Glynn feebly. "Good-bye, you chaps! I've got about another two minutes——"

"Chuck it, Georgie!" interrupted Hal Brewster. "We're not hurt much, thank goodness—but it might have been serious."

"Might have been!" roared Ascott. "Look at my bike!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth, feeling himself all over, and looking at the River House boys with rising anger. "I'm not hurt! I thought I should sprain a wrist, or something—and I'm not even scratched!"

They stared at him.

"Glynn, old man, hurry off and ring up the nearest asylum," said Brewster grimly. "This chap's dangerous! He deliberately smashed into us, and now he's sorry because he's not crocked!"

"It's a fact!" said Handforth indignantly. "I can't feel a bruise or a pain anywhere! And I'm dashed if my bike isn't as whole as ever!"

"Don't worry about that—ours might satisfy you," said Brewster. "At least, Ascott's might. The others aren't much hurt. Dave, old man, there's only one thing for you to do."

"I'm doing it!" said Dave Ascott firmly.

He pulled Handforth's machine out of Edward Oswald's hands, and examined it. It was a first-class bicycle—quite as good as his own. Brewster and Glynn wheeled their own machines free, too. Handforth was left there with the remnants at his feet.

"Hi!" he yelled. "What's the idea——"

"You were just complaining because your bike wasn't smashed up, so you can rejoice in the remains of mine!" said Ascott calmly. "What the dickens made you charge us like that?"

"Gimme that machine!" roared Handforth angrily. "Why, of all the nerve! You River House rotters, I'll smash——"

"You've done enough smashing for once," said Brewster curtly. "Come on, you chaps! You can get your machine back, Handy, after you've had Ascott's repaired. Until then he'll use yours!"

They leapt into the saddles, and rode off, leaving Edward Oswald to ponder over the unsuspected difficulties of getting himself crocked.



CHAPTER 8.

STILL ON THE JOB.

MORROW, of the Sixth, paused as he was about to enter the Ancient House. Handforth had just emerged from the West

Arch, having deposited the wreckage of Dave Ascott's machine in the bicycle-shed. He was looking thoughtful and depressed. Getting himself crocked was easier said than done! He was amazed at his non-success—and he was convinced that under any normal circumstances his smash with Brewster & Co. would have half-killed him. But because he wanted to get hurt, he had escaped unscathed.

"Fenton's been looking for you," said Morrow curtly.

"Eh?" said Handforth, looking up. "Talking to me?"

"Yes, I am," said the Sixth-Former. "Why didn't you show up for practice? All members of the Test Eleven are supposed——"

"I—I've had a bit of a spill," said Handforth.

"Yes, I know that—I've heard it from Hamilton," replied Morrow. "You mustn't go dashing about on your bike at such speeds. You might have hurt Fellowe seriously, too."

"Oh, that!" said Edward Oswald. "I don't mean that. I've just had a horrible smash-up with three of the River House chaps. I thought I was half-dead at first, but I'm not even scratched. Just my luck!"

The prefect failed to appreciate the hidden meaning of the last observation.

"You're about right!" he snapped. "Your luck's phenomenal, my lad. But one of these times it'll let you down with a nasty jar. Do you mean to say you've had two bike smashes in one morning?"

"Oh, the first one was nothing."

"Opinions differ," said Morrow drily. "Fellowe seems to think it was quite a nasty affair. You're sure you're not hurt? We don't want any groggy men for Lord's, you know. Sure you're whole?"

Handforth nodded gloomily.

"Yes, I'm as right as ninepence," he said, with a sniff. "By the way, any further news about Church? Is he down as a reserve?"

"Yes, but there's not much chance that he'll be called upon," replied Morrow. "Take my advice, and report to Fenton at once. He badly wants to know why you missed practice this morning. Unless you've got a good excuse, my lad, you'll be in hot water."

Morrow went his way, and Handforth betook himself to Study D. He wanted to be alone, to think. This thing was worrying him. The sooner it was over, the better—but it wasn't proving very easy. Never for

an instant did he falter in his purpose. Poor old Church had to be made happy, and the only way to make him happy was to secure him a place in the Test Eleven.

"Oh, here you are, Handy!" said McClure, as Handforth entered Study D. "Nearly time for luncheon. Where the dickens have you been? Hamilton's been asking for you everywhere. Fenton's on your track, too. And what's the idea of looking like a boiled owl?"

Handforth pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said firmly. "I want to think!"

"You silly ass——"

"Outside!" roared Handforth. "You, too, Church! Unless I think the thing out, I shall never be able to crock—— I—I mean—— Don't I keep telling you I want to be alone?" he added fiercely.

"What's that you were saying about crockery?" asked Church.

"Crockery? I didn't say a word—— Oh, yes!" said Handforth, with a start. "Crockery, eh? Unless you clear out at once, I'll start smashing up the crockery! I'm in no mood for any rot!"

"But Fenton wants you——"

"Blow Fenton!"

"It's nearly time for lunch——"

"Blow lunch!"

"Hamilton was asking——"

"Blow Hamilton!"

Church and McClure gave it up, and went out. Handforth closed the door and locked it. He was startled by his own rashness—he had nearly blurted out that he was planning to crock himself. The misunderstanding about crockery had come to his rescue in the nick of time. If Church had the slightest suspicion that his leader was deliberately——

Handforth went haggard at the thought, and sat down heavily.

"It's no good—I shall have to get it over quickly!" he muttered feverishly. "If this thing goes on all the afternoon I shall give myself away! But how the dickens—— Hallo! I wonder—— By George! Why not?"

He rose to his feet, and went to the mantel-piece. Two somewhat over-ripe bananas were reposing there; he picked one of them up, and his eyes gleamed. People were always having accidents with orange-peel and banana-skins! Why, there was nothing easier than this!

"It's as simple as A B C!" he told himself eagerly. "I'll go upstairs eating the banana, and if anybody sees me they won't suspect a thing. Then I'll drop the skin on the top stair, walk forward a few paces, and then come back. That's it. I'll pretend that I've forgotten something. One touch on that banana-skin, and I'll shoot downstairs like a giddy avalanche! And if *that* doesn't crock me, I must be made of jelly!"

He dropped the banana into his pocket, and made for the door. He flung it open, and found Church and McClure hanging about in the passage. He paused, and frowned. This

wouldn't do at all. They were suspicious already, by their expressions—and perhaps they'd follow him, too.

"Go away!" he said fiercely. "Can't you chaps clear off? What's the idea of hanging round me like a pair of shadows? Haven't I told you that I want to be alone?"

"Well, we didn't disturb you," said Church. "Do you want the whole House to yourself? I'll go and tell everybody to clear out, if you like."

"I don't want any sarcasm," said Handforth curtly. "I've made up my mind to—— Anyhow, I've made up my mind!"

His chums closed upon him anxiously.

"I say, Handy, old man, cheese it!" said McClure. "What's up? Why on earth are you so worried? Why can't you choke it up? Poor old Church needs your sympathy this morning."

"Poor old Church doesn't," said Church gruffly.

"Yes, you do!" insisted McClure. "You pretend to be indifferent about that disappointment, but you're horribly cut-up. So don't deny it. And here's Handy going about like a loony! It's a bit thick, Handy," he added complainingly. "Be a sport, you know!"

Handforth gulped. Considering that all his thoughts were for the stricken Church, this condemnation hit him rather hard. But it was impossible for him to explain matters.

"At any other time, Mac, I'd slaughter you on the spot!" he said huskily. "But just now I'm feeling miserable. About Church, too—so don't accuse me of being indifferent. Cheer up, Church, old son—I'm proud of you! You're keeping a stiff upper-lip, and you're upholding the best traditions of Study D! Never say die—that's our motto!"

Church tried to smile.

"Oh, I shall get over it," he muttered. "After all, I was a silly fool to believe those rumours. The less we say about it, the better. I'm feeling practically O.K. already."

This was a slight perversion of the truth, and Handforth knew it. He remembered how Church had flopped upon the bed, with the floodgates of his misery wide open. He had thought himself to be alone then—and he had exhibited his true feelings. His attitude now was merely a proof of his will-power and grit. He seemed all right, but Handforth knew that he was inwardly stricken.

"Well, it's no use standing here, jawing," said Handforth, at length. "I've got some business to attend to. I'm going upstairs," he added carelessly. "I don't want you chaps to follow, either——"

"There goes the luncheon bell," interrupted McClure. "Better leave it till afterwards, Handy."

Handforth nodded.

"Yes, I suppose I had," he said reflectively. "There'll be nobody about now, and it'll look better if I shoot down with a crowd of chaps watching——"

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"Shoot down where?" asked McClure, staring.

"Eh? Oh, nothing," said Edward Oswald hastily. "I wish you fatheads wouldn't keep bothering me! Let's go in for grub. Feeling hungry, Churchy?"

"Not particularly," said Church listlessly.

"You had no breakfast, you fathead!" said McClure. "Hang it all, there's no need to starve yourself just because——"

"Oh, all right," interrupted Church. "I expect I shall feel hungry as soon as I start eating. Let's go in."

When the meal was over, Handforth was just as determined as ever. He managed to escape from Church and McClure, and hurried to the staircase. It would be as well to get the business over promptly. He pulled the banana out of his pocket, peeled it, and went upstairs eating. A number of fellows in the lobby watched him in surprise.

For Handforth, when engaged upon a task of this sort, performed every action with exaggerated emphasis. This was why, when he appeared in amateur theatricals, he made a great hit as a comedian—although he fondly imagined himself to be a dramatic actor.

Arriving at the top of the stairs, he paused, and dropped the banana skin at his feet. He did this so ostentatiously that his object was unmistakable. But he was quite pleased with himself for having accomplished the task unnoticeably.

"I say, Handy!" sang out De Valerie. "You can't leave that banana skin there, you know! Are you trying to commit murder, or what?"

"Somebody'll break their necks!" shouted Tommy Watson.

"Eh? I—I——" Handforth paused, and looked downstairs. "Banana skin?" he said. "Where?"

"Didn't you just drop one—— Hi, look out, sir!"

"My goodness!"

Mr. Pagett, the master of the Fifth, brushed past Handforth with a frown. Edward Oswald gave a wild gasp, and tried to issue a word of warning. About three Removites rushed upstairs at the same moment.

Simultaneously, Mr. Pagett stepped upon the banana skin fairly and squarely—as though he had just come along for this special purpose. The next second the master of the Fifth sailed into mid-air.

His foot shot from under him, and the void of the staircase yawned below him. He uttered a wild, despairing shriek, and went hurtling downwards on his back.



CHAPTER 9.

HANDFORTH'S LUCK!

CRASH!

Mr. William Pagett was an exceedingly lucky man—although he was by no means prepared to admit

this at the moment. If the staircase had been empty, he might have met with grievous bodily harm.

As it was, he went headlong into the three juniors who had rushed upstairs to warn him. There was a sort of sickening thud, a series of gurgles and gasps, and an assorted mass of arms and legs rolled slowly and drunkenly to the bottom of the stairs.

"What—what happened?" panted Watson, who was one of the three.

He looked round dizzily. He was sitting on something which moved, and with a horrible start he realised that it was Mr. Pagett's head. Tommy Watson leapt up with such speed that he knocked somebody else over. The Fifth Form master again vanished beneath the pile.

"My only hat!" breathed Handforth hoarsely.

He stood at the top of the stairs, gazing down with blank dismay. It had all happened so suddenly that he hardly realised what it meant. Fellows were rushing to the assistance of the wounded, and were sorting them out.

"I—I didn't mean——" began Handforth breathlessly. "My goodness, I can't do a giddy thing without——"

At this point he broke off, having carelessly trodden upon a portion of banana skin which Mr. Pagett had left behind. With a startled gasp he lost his balance, sat down with dreadful violence, and pitched forward. He took about one fifth of a second to reach the bottom, and turned three somersaults en route.

Crash!

Handforth landed in the midst of the crush below—although, happily, Mr. Pagett had just been pulled clear in the nick of time. Tom Burton and Dodd and Duncan bore the brunt of this fresh disaster, and they were strewn all over the place like ninepins. Handforth found himself sitting on the mat at the bottom of the stairs, serenely unharmed.

His efforts to crock himself were undoubtedly causing widespread damage, but none of this damage was where he wanted it to be. Others were being sadly battered, but he remained immune.

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

"Water!" moaned Mr. Pagett, in a feeble voice. "Fetch me some water! Will somebody call the doctor, and ring up the hospital? I am mortally injured! My spine—my spine is broken!"

"It's not so bad as that, sir," said Dick Hamilton soothingly. "I think you'll be all right soon. You tripped on the top stair——"

"Tripped?" roared Mr. Pagett. "Nothing of the sort! This is a deliberate assault! Good heavens! I wonder that I am still alive!"

By this time he was on his feet, mildly astonished to discover that his hurts were superficial. But Mr. Pagett was not a school-boy—composed entirely of indiarubber, as he had frequently asserted—and he knew that he would ultimately develop muscular pains and bodily twinges. No self-respecting schoolmaster of middle-age can fall downstairs from top to bottom without feeling any after-effects.

"This—this will incapacitate me for a whole week!" he panted, torn between pain and anger. "Where—where is the boy who perpetrated this criminal trick? I shall have him expelled——"

"It was an accident, sir," interrupted De Valerie. "I think somebody dropped a banana skin, and you trod on it——"

"It was placed there purposely!" thundered Mr. Pagett.

"It wasn't!" snorted Handforth warmly. "At least, I'd no idea you were going to

tread on it, sir. I was just eating a banana, and I dropped the skin——"

"Oh, so you are the culprit!" snapped Mr. Pagett, glaring. "I might have known it! Your recklessness is proverbial, Handforth, but when you endanger life and limb I feel that the matter calls for special treatment. I shall report you to your Housemaster, and advise him to flog you."

"Leave it to us, sir!" said Watson grimly. "By the time we've done with him, he'll be too weak for a flogging!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Grab him!"

Handforth leapt upstairs, and escaped the many clutching hands.

"Stop this at once!" commanded Mr. Pagett angrily. "I will not allow any summary reprisal at the hands of you boys. Handforth shall be dealt with by his Housemaster."

Mr. Pagett strode off, and for a man with a broken spine he managed very creditably. Handforth wandered away to his bed-room, and locked the door. He wasn't feeling in the mood for scrapping just now. Watson's threat had not alarmed him in the least, and at any other time he would have sailed in enthusiastically.

But his repeated failures worried him. This thing was getting depressing. He had precipitated a road accident which should, by all the laws of chance, have crocked him up badly. He had come out without a bruise! He had fallen headlong downstairs, and he was still untouched. What on earth *could* he do to achieve his object?

He was getting into a sort of panic by this time, for he had an idea that some of the fellows were beginning to suspect. And the whole secret of this scheme was to crock himself "accidentally." Nobody would take it for an accident if he aroused suspicion in advance. So far he was safe—the fellows only assumed that he was in one of his funny moods. Therefore, the job had to be finished—now.

But how could it be done?

If Edward Oswald had sat down, and had given himself ten minutes to think, he could easily have evolved a workable scheme. But in his usual ramheaded fashion, he attempted the first wild ideas that came into his head, without even considering their possibilities.

He walked to the window, and leaned out. The West Square lay below him. It wouldn't be a bad idea to lean out a bit further, and fall out. That paved pathway didn't look particularly soft. The distance wasn't far—quite a comfortable jump, in fact—but if he went out head first he would probably do himself a bit of damage. Anyhow, it was worth trying.

But he hesitated. There were quite a number of fellows down in the square, and they might think a few things if he deliberately tipped himself over the sill, and fell to the ground. The only way was to do it

cunningly, as though he couldn't help himself.

And fortune favoured him just then by the arrival of his minor. Willy Handforth came round the angle of the West House in his "Silent Two." This was Willy's motor-car—a sort of answer to Handforth's Austin Seven. True, the engine only consisted of Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, hidden beneath the bonnet. But the Silent Two could run to the village and back with surprising alacrity, and it was only in the very hottest weather that the engine struck work. Besides, this car of Willy's went an unlimited number of miles to the gallon. He generally reckoned that it cost him two half-pints—of ginger-pop—to run the car for an hour. The engine would occasionally require a bun or two, too—and if he was in a particular hurry, a couple of ice-cream wafers acted as a wonderful spur.

Handforth's eyes gleamed as he caught sight of his minor. Here was the very chance! While he was talking to Willy, he could lean out, and "accidentally" lose his balance. Nothing easier!

"Hi, Willy!" shouted Handforth. "You going to the village?"

The Silent Two came to a noiseless stop on the other side of the square.

"No—only giving the old bus a trial," said Willy. "I'm testing a new engine this afternoon—Gates and Blythe. The young asses haven't developed much speed yet, but— Look out, you chump! You'll be out of that window unless you're careful!"

"If you'll go to the village for me, I'll give you five bob," said Handforth generously, as he leaned further and further out. "I want some—some solution for my bike—"

"Why, you ass, Mrs. Hake sells solution," said Willy, staring.

"I want it from the village!" roared Handforth. "Don't argue! Buzz off—"

"Look out, you idiot!" yelled a dozen voices. "You'll be over—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Willy.

For his major, while shaking his fist at him, tipped precariously over the sill, made a wild grab, and then came hurtling head foremost downwards.

But at the exact second of his fall, Mr. Cuttle was immediately below. Or, to be more exact, the wheelbarrow was. And this latter vehicle was piled up high with cut grass and weeds.

Thud!

As though it had been rehearsed a hundred times, Handforth plunged head first into the spongy mass. Mr. Cuttle gave a gasp as the handles of the barrow were torn from his grip; the next second the whole contrivance tipped over, and Handforth vanished.

"O-o-oh!" grunted the school porter. "What's happened?"

"Quick, pull this barrow up!" shouted Pitt, as he ran over. "The chap's half-killed, I should think! Just like Handforth to lean out until he fell over!"

"He did it on purpose!" said Somerton breathlessly.

"Rot! Handy's a careless ass, but he doesn't go about trying to crack his skull!" said Pitt, as he seized the barrow. "Come on—all together!"

Handforth had certainly vanished. The barrow and its contents had toppled over, burying him under the whole concern. Even when the barrow was removed, the leader of Study D was still invisible. A mingled mass of weeds and grass lay revealed. But there was movement in it, and Handforth's head and shoulders protruded from the heap.

In spite of themselves, the juniors yelled with laughter. Weeds were trailing down from Handforth's head, and he looked something like the Old Man of the Sea in pantomime.

"Where—where am I?" he asked dazedly.

Obviously, he wasn't hurt much. The soft barrow load had saved him. Again he had failed! Instinctively, he knew that he was unhurt, for he could feel no pain anywhere. The whole thing was getting a nightmare. The more he tried to injure himself, the less he succeeded.

And then, in a flash, Handforth obtained a real idea. He was startled that such a thing hadn't occurred to him before. He was amazed with himself for making so many attempts to get crocked. Why, there was a much simpler method!

Why crock himself at all?

Why not merely pretend? It was so much easier, and certainly far less painful. This obvious solution to his difficulty struck Handforth all of a heap for a moment, and he was staggered when he realised how narrowly he had escaped real injury. He could effect his purpose with perfect success by merely pretending to be hurt. And here was his chance!

"Ooooh!" he moaned frantically. "I'm killed! My foot! My ankle! I—I believe— Steady, there! Look out, you asses! I'm all broken into pieces! I'm crocked!"

"Crocked?" yelled Dick Hamilton, aghast. "But—but you're in the Test Eleven, Handy! Didn't I warn you this morning—"

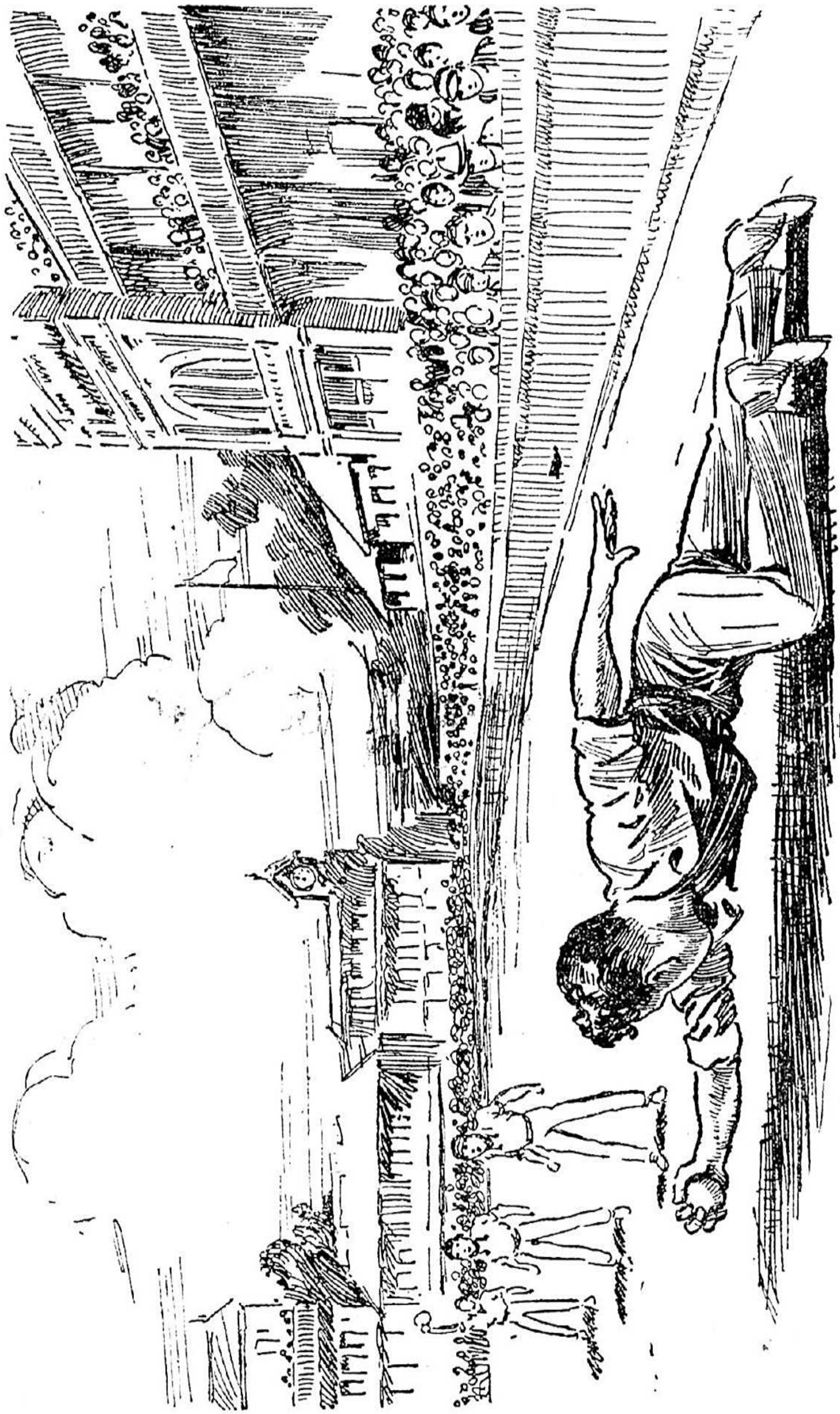
"I can't help it!" roared Handforth. "I tipped over!"



CHAPTER 10.

THE PROBLEM SOLVED.

HANDFORTH'S star of fortune clung to him like a shadow. He had completely failed to observe the approach of Mr. Josh Cuttle, the school porter, who was trundling a huge barrow. Handforth had been carelessly leaning further and further out of the window, with his gaze fixed upon Willy. He had not taken the trouble to look immediately below him.



Handforth

Full length, Handforth slid across the grass; he just got his hand to the ball and held it—only a few feet from the boundary! England still had a chance to win the Schoolboy Ashes!

"He was talking to me, and then over-balanced!" said Willy concernedly. "If old Cuttle hadn't come along with that barrow he might have killed himself! He's got the luck of the dickens!"

"Boys was always boys," said Mr. Cuttle indignantly. "A man wasn't able to do his work without being upset. Look at all this litter! Who was going to clear it up? I was! And for why? Ask me! Because there wasn't anybody else to do it!"

"We can't worry about your troubles, Josh," said Hamilton. "This chap's hurt, and you ought to be only too thankful that you came along when you did. You probably saved his life."

Handforth was gently disentangled from the grass and weeds, and his moans were loud and long. Several juniors thought that he was half dead. But Dick soon discovered that his injuries were few. In fact, Dick couldn't find any.

"Are you sure you're hurt?" he asked, puzzled.

"Oughtn't I to know?" groaned Edward Oswald. "It's my ankle! Perhaps it's twisted, or something— Oooh! Steady, you ass! My only hat! Is it sprained, or broken?"

Dick Hamilton gently fingered Handforth's left ankle.

"It's not broken," he said. "In fact, it's not even swelling, but if you say it hurts, I suppose you're in the best position to know. Try and walk on it, old man. You'll be no good for cricket if you've got a twisted ankle."

"Try and walk!" repeated Reggie Pitt. "I say, what rotten rough luck if you're out of the game at Lord's! Have a shot, Handy!"

Handforth was now feeling serene, and he was master of the situation. His ankle was perfectly all right, but this little comedy was easy to maintain. He held on to Church and McClure—who were deeply concerned and anxious—and he attempted to walk. He put his right foot on the ground, and howled.

"It's—it's impossible!" he gasped, with agony.

"But it's your left ankle!" said Dick Hamilton, staring.

"Eh? Well, aren't I testing my left ankle?" panted Handforth hastily. "By George, I can't—I can't— It's no good, you chaps. You'll have to carry me in. My goodness, I wouldn't have believed it!"

Mr. Stokes came along just then, and after he had heard the details he suggested that Handforth should be carried up to the sanatorium, and put to bed. Mr. Stokes promised to have the doctor called in at once.

Much to Handforth's dismay, he was whisked off. Tender hands carried him, and he was now beginning to realise the possible consequences. He wanted to be crooked, but he didn't want to spend all his time in bed! This was a contingency he hadn't reckoned upon.



Full length, Handforth slid across the grass; he jumped from the boundary! England's

To his relief, he wasn't compelled to undress, but was placed on a bed, and left there. And Dr. Brett soon came and made a close examination. Dr. Brett was the school medico in sole charge of the sanatorium. Until quite recently he had practised in the village, but he was so well known at St. Frank's that the Governors had appointed him to the sanatorium. Dr. Brett still lived in the village, and still conducted his practice there, but he had certain fixed hours for duty at the school.

"H'm!" he said at length. "Sure it's the ankle?"

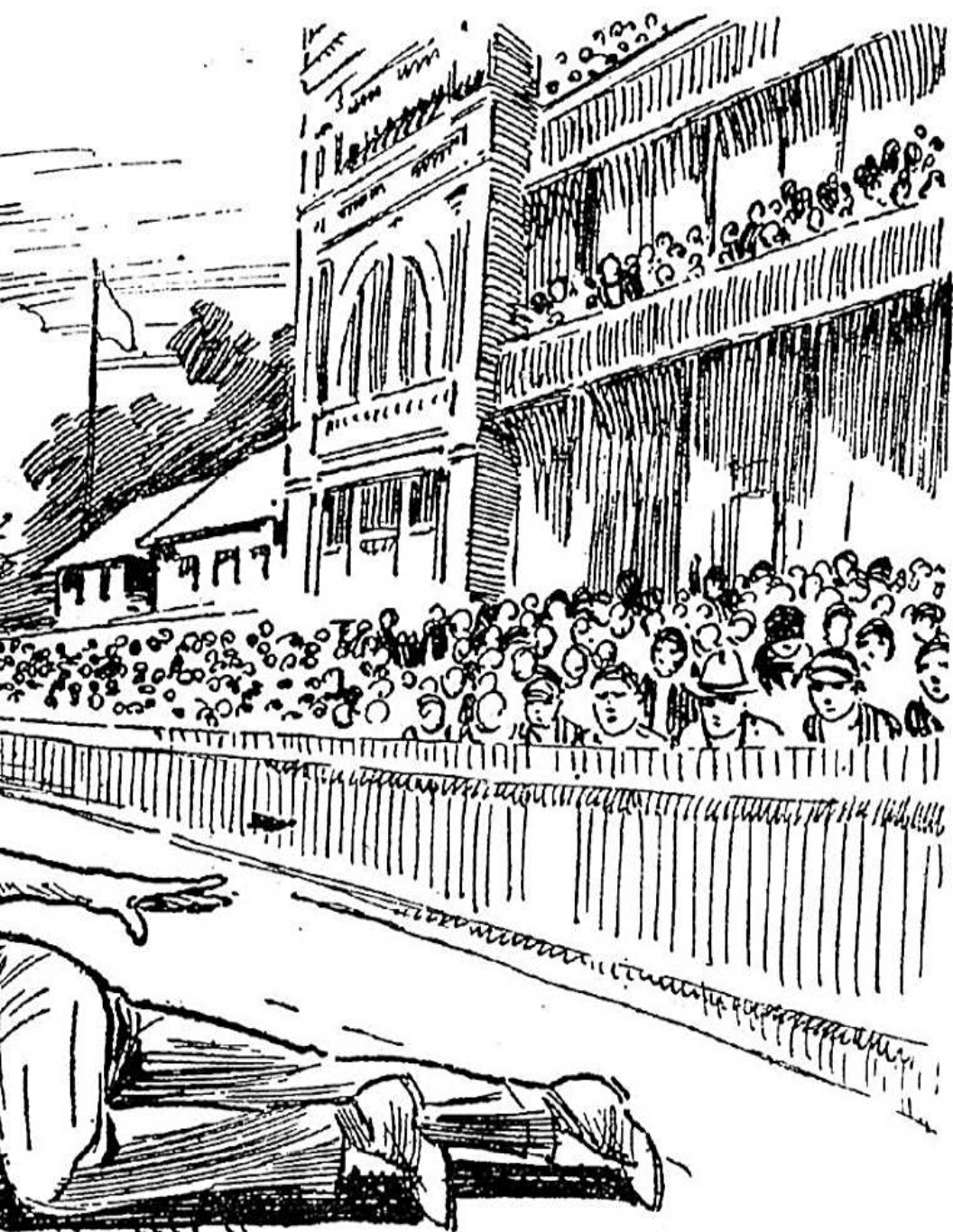
"Of course I am," groaned Handforth.

They were quite alone in one of the little wards, and Dr. Brett sat on the edge of the cot, and examined the ankle again. There was no sign of swelling, and the medical man had a shrewd idea that there was nothing wrong with the member at all.

"Look here, young man, you'd better get off that bed and try to walk," he suggested. "If your ankle was really sprained or twisted it would have been double its normal size by now. You might be able to fool your schoolfellows, but you can't fool me! What's the idea, Handforth?"

Edward Oswald was startled.

"Fool you?" he repeated blankly. "I—I— It's no good! I can't walk, and I'm



s hand to the ball and held it—only a few feet chance to win the Schoolboy Ashes!

not going to try!" he added, in his most stubborn manner. "And I don't want to stick in the sanny, either, doctor. Can't I have some crutches, or something, and go about as usual? And can't you bind my ankle up in yards of stuff? It would look a lot better——"

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Dr. Brett, staring. "Are you suggesting to me that I should be a party to a trick?"

"It's not a trick!" growled Handforth. "At least—— I mean—— Anyhow, I can't walk!" he said obstinately. "It's no good you saying the ankle isn't swollen, either. I ought to know if it pains or not, oughtn't I?"

"Yes, I think you ought—and I think you know that it doesn't," said the doctor grimly. "And aren't you in the Test Eleven?"

"I was," said Handforth sombrely.

"And this crooked ankle will mean that somebody gets your place, eh?"

"Yes, Church."

"Oh, Church!" said Dr. Brett slowly. "Church, eh? He's the man who fills the breach, I take it? If you can't play, he will? H'm! Let's have another look at that ankle."

The doctor was no fool, and he was well acquainted with Handforth's quixotic nature.

And that reference to Church had explained everything. Dr. Brett could not be absolutely sure, but he strongly suspected the truth. And, like a sportsman, he decided to say nothing further.

"Ankles are funny things," he remarked, as he prepared an enormous length of bandage. "No sign of swelling, and yet you say you can't walk? Well, perhaps you know best, young man. Hold your foot out, and I'll bind it. I'll swathe the whole foot, too, and give you a big slipper."

"By George, that'll look fine!" said Handforth eagerly.

"You don't want to stay in the sanny, either, eh?"

"I'd rather be out and about, sir."

"All right—I'll finish this binding, and then let you have some crutches," said Dr. Brett. "Then you can hobble about to your heart's content—and attend lessons, if you like. It's not serious, and I should venture that you'll be able to discard the crutches by Friday—directly the match is over," he added drily. "How will that do?"

Handforth lay back, and closed his eyes.

"Marvellously!" he murmured dreamily.



CHAPTER 11.

CHURCH'S OPPORTUNITY.

McCLURE'S eyes gleamed with eagerness.

"You're name's up, old man," he said, as he clutched at Church's arm.

"Look! How do you like it?"

Church said nothing. He could only stare at the alteration which had been made to the list of players. Handforth's name had been crossed off, and Church's was substituted—in Fenton's own handwriting. It was official—it was absolutely definite. For the moment, Church was too thrilled to give voice to mere words.

It was Tuesday morning now—and the Junior School had grown accustomed to seeing Edward Oswald Handforth hobbling about on crutches, with a bandaged foot. Nobody guessed the real truth. Nobody had the slightest inkling that Handforth could walk as soundly as ever if he liked. Dr. Brett himself had attended him, and surely this was conclusive evidence of genuine injury?

"You're in the match, old man," went on McClure. "Rough on Handy, but you've got your chance now. And Handy's played in three or four of these Test matches, anyhow. Aren't you dotty with joy?"

Church found voice.

"Rather!" he said huskily. "But—but I can't help thinking about poor old Handy, you know. I've got my place, but it's at his expense. Only he don't seem to mind, for some funny reason."

"That's because he knows you've got your opportunity," said McClure gently. "Handy's

a sport, you know—he's a brick right through. I honestly believe he's as happy as a lark because he's out of it. At least, he's happy in one sense, but miserable in another. And his happiness is so much greater than his misery that he's keeping cheerful."

There was a good deal of common sense in McClure's remark—and any amount of truth, too. Handforth was certainly cheerful, and he seemed to revel in the fact that he was incapacitated. But deep down in his heart he was grievously disappointed. He had given up everything for the sake of his chum, for he wouldn't even be able to go to London as a reserve man. He would have to stay at St. Frank's, with the rest of the school, and hear about the great match afterwards. There had been an agitation for a whole holiday, so that St. Frank's could do justice to the important occasion, but the headmaster was of a totally different opinion.

"Hallo! Is your name on the list yet, Churchy?" asked Handforth, as he stumped up with his crutches. "Good man! Fenton told me it was official, but there's no getting away from this list. You ought to be out practising, my lad!"

"I—I don't feel quite comfortable, Handy," said Church awkwardly. "It's not fair that you should be left out—"

"If you say another word about me, I'll biff you," interrupted Handforth, with a glare. "I'm fed up with sympathy! I appreciate a certain amount of it, but a chap can have too much of a good thing! I'm crooked, and you're going with the team. And that's all that matters."

"Yes, but—"

"But nothing!" broke in Handforth gruffly.

"How's the old hoof this morning?" asked Pitt, as he came in. "My word! Those bandages look serious? Has the swelling gone down?"

"No—the ankle's just the same as ever," replied Handforth truthfully.

"Rough luck, old scout—"

"Dry up!" said Handforth, glaring.

All the previous evening he had been the centre of sympathetic crowds, and the whole position was getting on his nerves. More than once he had been on the point of throwing his crutches down, and sailing into the crowd with all his usual vim. But he had always pulled himself up in time, knowing that a revelation of the truth would send Church into greater agony than ever before.

And Church's flushed face and eager eyes provided Handforth with all the consolation he needed. It was good to look at the chap!

Before mid-day the school had realised that Handforth was sensitive on the subject of his "injury," and scarcely anybody referred to

it. He attended lessons as usual, and carried on normally.

But just after luncheon, Irene Manners & Co., of the Moor View School, came round in force. Fully eight of the girls entered the Triangle while Handforth was near the fountain, and he was caught at a disadvantage. Before he could hobble away he was surrounded.

"We didn't hear about it till this morning, Ted," said Irene concernedly. "Is it very serious?"

"It *must* be," said Doris Berkeley. "He's on crutches!"

"And look at the bandages!" exclaimed Mary Summers, in horror.

"Poor Ted!" said Marjorie Temple. "How you must suffer!"

"And what awful luck, too!" said Irene. "Just after you had been chosen for to-morrow's big match! Aren't you simply dying with disappointment, Ted?"

Handforth looked round like a trapped rabbit.

"I say, chuck it!" he protested feebly. "I—I'm all right! I mean, except for this ankle— It's nothing to make a song about, you girls! Any chap's liable to be out of commission for a day or two."

"But you've lost your place in the team!" said Tessa Love.

"That's nothing," retorted Handforth carelessly. "Church has been chosen. Pretty good, eh? Old Church, you know! Who'd have thought that he would blossom out as a giddy Test player? He's got his chance because of my—my accident, so why should I care?"

"That's just like you, Ted," said Irene softly.

Handforth started violently.

"Eh?" he gasped. "I—I didn't mean— Oh, cheese it, you girls! Don't make such a fuss! The fellows have been sympathising with me until I'm nearly dotty, and it'll be ten times as bad if you start?"

But the girls were not to be denied. They saw Handforth in apparent disablement, and it was quite impossible for them to affect indifference. Handforth's misery was acute. For about the first time in his life he longed for Irene and her chums to go. Their presence embarrassed him beyond all measure.

"I'll come again to-morrow, Ted," said Irene brightly. "I'll make an excuse and get here during your mid-morning interval—just to see how you're getting on. I'd like to bring some fruit, too."

"Fruit?" gasped Handforth, horrified.

"Grapes," said Irene firmly. "Invalids always love grapes—"

"But I'm not an invalid!" howled Handforth. "Look here, I—I—"

Words failed him, and he wasn't happy until the girls had gone—after repeating their tender expressions of sympathy. Poor old Handy felt weak and dizzy as he stumped away to Study D, and locked himself in.

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"My only sainted aunt," he groaned. "This—this is sheer torture!"

He sat there, haggard and pale. Then he leapt to his feet, and strode round Study D without the aid of the crutches—just to assure himself that he was really normal. He had been pretending so long that he almost felt that his ankle was injured.

"What a beastly fraud I am!" he muttered miserably. "Everybody's sympathising with me, and I'm only a swindle. My hat, what a rotten business, when you come to think of it! I ought to be jolly well kicked!"

Then he thought of Church, and the recollection of his chum's supreme happiness was full compensation. It was only by a super-human effort that he maintained the deception.

Twenty times during that day he was on the verge of exposure, for he was constantly tempted to put his "groggy" foot to the ground. It was always difficult for Handforth to keep a secret, and this present one would inevitably have been disclosed but for the fact that Church's happiness depended on it. And for his chums, Handforth was ready to go to any length.

While he would punch their heads with impunity, he would also make any sacrifice for them. Behind his rugged and ramheaded nature there was a strain of pure gold.

That evening the Test Eleven was at final practice—and there was much jubilation because the weather was fine, and the glass high. Over half the school had listened in to the morning weather forecast from Daventry, and it was officially announced by the Air Ministry that "the further outlook was favourable."

Church was like another fellow. He pleased Fenton enormously by his masterly batting at the nets, and Fenton felt that he had made a wise choice.

"Hard lines on you, Handforth, old man," said the school captain, as he came across Edward Oswald on the playing-fields. "I'll tell you what. I'll see your Housemaster, and get a special permit for you, so that you can come up to town and see the match. That'll be a bit of consolation, eh?"

"By George, that's awfully decent of you, Fenton!" said Handforth eagerly.

"That's all right," smiled Fenton. "I'll fix it."

But Edward Oswald suddenly lost his enthusiasm.

"Wait a minute," he said, shaking his head. "Now I come to think of it, Fenton, I'd rather not."

"You'd rather not?" said Fenton, in astonishment.

"Well, I don't want to be specially favoured," said Handforth awkwardly. "Only the team and the reserves are going, and the rest of the school has got to stick here. Hang it, I don't want to have any special favours. It wouldn't be fair to the others. They've got to moon about here, so I'll keep 'em company. Thanks all the same."

Fenton looked at him curiously.

"You're right, of course," he said. "But, by Jove, you've got some pluck to refuse, old man! I admire you for it, and——"

"Rats!" muttered Handforth. "Chuck it, Fenton!"

He went off, calling himself an ass. What a chance he had thrown away! Still, he didn't want everybody to point him out as a special favourite. Besides, he was only a fraud!



CHAPTER 12.

AT LORD'S!

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE beamed with benevolent happiness.

"Fame has its joys, Brother Fenton," he said kindly. "Observe the populace pouring in through every gate. Listen to the clicking of the turnstiles! Such is the reward of the celebrated!"

They were standing on the turf at Lord's famous ground, just off St. John's Wood Road, London. It wasn't eleven o'clock yet, and the match was due to start at eleven-thirty. But the crowds were already pouring in, and there was every indication of a huge attendance.

The gloriously fine weather had a great deal to do with this, for there are always thousands of people in London who will go to Lord's for cricket if the weather is favourable. The very fact that the match was to be played at such a famous ground gave it the hall-mark of quality.

"I didn't expect such a crowd as this," remarked Fenton, as he glanced round. "Why, we shall be almost full by the luncheon interval."

"There is a possibility, of course, that many are under the impression that they have come here to see the Australians," remarked Browne drily. "They will not be disappointed—but I venture to suggest that we shall give the throng a game which will please them greatly. I should like to impress upon you, Brother Fenton, the necessity of winning the toss. I trust you will not fail in this all-important matter."

"I'll do my best," smiled Fenton.

"No man can do more than his best," acknowledged Browne. "At the same time, I would remark that you have ignored my advice on previous occasions, and have lost the toss. A disastrous exhibition of obstinacy, Brother Fenton. Do not fail to-day."

"Dry up, you old ass!" grinned Fenton. "What's wrong with Morrow? He's looking pretty excited, isn't he?" he added, as Morrow came hurrying out from the pavilion. "I hope there's nothing wrong."

Browne and Fenton waited for Morrow to come up. They had been inspecting the wicket, and had found it satisfactory—although Browne made one or two disparaging remarks when comparing it to the St. Frank's turf.

The St. Frank's Eleven had travelled up from the school early that morning, leaving by the first train—before breakfast. They were now on the spot, fit and ready for the fray. And the rest of the school was at lessons, fuming and fretting, and bitterly condemning the headmaster for his stony-heartedness.

Morrow was indeed looking flushed as he came up.

"You'd better come in, Fenton," he said hurriedly. "There's something wrong with Phillips."

"Something wrong with him?"

"Yes, he's ill——"

"Nonsense!" said Fenton sharply. "He was perfectly all right five minutes ago——"

"I know that, but he's complaining of horrible pains inside," interrupted Morrow. "The poor man's writhing on the floor—at least, he was when we found him, but we shoved him in a chair and held him down. You'd better come in and have a look at him."

Fenton and Browne went without delay, and they could not fail to agree that Phillips of the Fifth was ill. He was not only in agony, but his face was pale, and he was shaking from head to foot.

"Looks like poison," said Fenton anxiously. "I say, Phillips, old man, this is rotten bad luck! What's wrong? Have you been taken like this before? Have you eaten anything——"

"I—I think it was that pork-pie!" muttered Phillips, in acute pain.

"What pork-pie?"

"I bought one at a shop near——" Phillips broke off with a groan. "Oh, my hat! I—I'm poisoned! I was hungry, you know, and Wilson and I went off and bought something to eat——"

"Did Wilson——"

"No, he only had a ham sandwich," interrupted Phillips weakly. "I thought there was something squiffy about that pork-pie while I was eating it, but I was so hungry—— Ooooh! I keep getting horrid twinges, and I'm all shaky. I believe it's ptomaine!"

"Somebody get a doctor—quick!" said Fenton briskly.

Ten minutes later a doctor arrived, and his examination was brief. Phillips was suffering from a touch of ptomaine poisoning. He was deathly sick, and he was removed to hospital at once. The very fact that he was taken to a hospital indicated that the doctor's reference to a "touch" was more serious than it intimated. There was, however, no danger, although it was clear that Phillips was a non-starter for the match.

"He'll be far better in the hospital," said the doctor. "By Friday he'll be out, I dare say—but he'll feel the effects for at least a week. I'm always warning people to be careful about buying cooked meats during this hot weather. And pork-pies are always under suspicion unless they're fresh. The

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man who sold that pie to the boy will be prosecuted, if I can get the necessary evidence," he added grimly.

"That's not much consolation to us," said Fenton. "I'm glad to hear he's in no danger, but we've lost one of our men—two, in fact. By Jove, we're having some luck this week, Browne," he added ruefully. "Handforth and Phillips both crocked!"

"I am hopeful that Brother Church will worthily uphold the traditions of Study D," said Browne. "I presume you will now play Frinton of the Sixth, in place of Phillips?"

"Yes, Frinton's the best man, I suppose," replied Fenton, frowning. "But it's an infernal pity, all the same. Frinton hasn't got Phillips' doggedness at the wicket. He's a bit erratic— Still, it's no good crying over spilt milk. I shan't make a definite choice, though, until later, unless we happen to lose the toss," he added thoughtfully. "If Young England bats first, I'll wait a bit before deciding on Frinton."

So Frinton wasn't informed that he might be required. He and the other reserve players were left in a state of uncertainty. And Fenton rang up St. Frank's, and imparted the news to Biggleswade—another prefect of the Ancient House.

In response to many pressing requests, Fenton had promised to issue bulletins by telephone during the day, so that St. Frank's could know the exact state of the game at different fixed times.

Acting upon Browne's implicit instructions, Fenton very obediently won the toss, and this was a relief to him. Young England would bat first, and, as Phillips' substitute would not be required until later, Fenton would have time to make a considered decision. While he and Morrow went out to open the St. Frank's innings, Browne rang up St. Frank's again, and imparted the news of the toss.

The game opened steadily.

The crowd was even larger than Browne had anticipated, for by eleven-thirty the big stands were more than half-full. According to all the laws of a first-class cricket match, this would mean a packed audience by the afternoon.

London was flocking to see this match between Young England and Young Australia. The people had heard a great deal of the previous Test matches at St. Frank's, and the idea had caught the public fancy. There were hosts of distinguished people among the onlookers, too.

Relatives and friends of the players were there in force, and the occasion was every bit as distinguished as the more famous Eton v. Harrow match. The pavilion enclosure was like a fashion parade, gay with colour, and bubbling with mild excitement.

The Australian schoolboys were given a tremendous reception as they took the field, and Fenton and Morrow, going out to the wicket, were heartily clapped and cheered. They started well, too.

For the first half-hour there was very little ginger in the play. The St. Frank's pair were settling down, and treating the Australian bowling with the respect it deserved. But soon they began to get the measure of it, and opened out well.

Fenton was at the top of his form, batting steadily and skilfully.

So far he hadn't made a bad stroke, and he took advantage of every loose ball, placing it well out of reach of the alert fieldsmen for twos or threes. There were very few boundaries in this early stage of the game.

There was a feeling of tension in the air, for this match was the most important of the series. With two victories each to their credit, Young Australia and Young England were out to win the Schoolboy Ashes. The Australian bowling was deadly, and both Fenton and Morrow knew it. They took no chances, and were determined to give the St. Frank's innings a steady, substantial start.

And, meanwhile, the old school was waiting anxiously for news—and something else was happening, too. Something which was not only unexpected, but which took most of the fellows completely by surprise.



CHAPTER 13.

HANDFORTH GETS WELL!

MR. CROWELL regarded the Remove rather severely.

"There is a great deal of restlessness this morning," he said, with a

frown. "Merely because five of your companions are playing in a cricket match at Lord's, there is no reason for this pronounced inattention."

"It's not an ordinary day, sir," said De Valerie.

"On the contrary, De Valerie, this Wednesday morning is no different from any other Wednesday morning—so far, as we are concerned in this room," retorted Mr. Crowell tartly. "In any case, why should you be so restless now? The game hasn't started yet—"

"It's nearly time, sir," interrupted Jack Grey, "and we're wondering who'll win the toss."

"By jingo, rather!"

"Fenton will, I'll bet!"

"He's simply got to!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Crowell angrily. "Cricket—cricket—cricket! You can think of nothing else but cricket! Upon my word, you are getting just as bad as you were at the beginning of the term! You had better dismiss now for morning interval—and I trust you will be in a more settled frame of mind when you return."

The Remove poured out of the School House for the welcome and all-too-brief interval. The Third was already out, for Mr. Suncliffe had rushed off to Biggleswade to

ask if any news had come in. Biggleswade was the official bulletin-scribbler, and Mr. Suncliffe was just as excited as any member of his Form to hear the latest.

Handforth and McClure were about the last fellows out, for McClure insisted upon accommodating his pace to Edward Oswald's crutches. Handforth was very silent this morning—indeed, he had never been known to be like this before. He had hardly said a word ever since the rising-bell had rung.

He pretended to be cheerful, but his heart was as heavy as lead.

Now that the actual match was due to start, he was feeling unutterably miserable. Church had got his chance, and that was something to be pleased about, but Handforth felt that he was a terrible swindler. The fellows were showing him all sorts of consideration because of his "crooked" ankle—and he knew that he deserved none of this sympathy. He was a fraud.

And he was just beginning to realise, too, how dearly he had longed to play in this match. He had been chosen—he was actually a member of the team—and here he was, stuck at St. Frank's with a faked injury. But for the fact that Church was the gainer, Handforth wouldn't have had the will-power to keep up the deception; but for his chum's sake he stuck it.

He couldn't admit that he was feigning an injury, either, for that would be a confession to everybody that he had done the thing deliberately. He was feeling too upset for any conversation.

"Buck up, Handy, old man," said McClure gently, as they emerged into the Triangle. "There might be some news by now. How's the ankle? I thought I saw you use your left foot a minute ago—"

"Blow my ankle!" interrupted Handforth fiercely.

"Heard the latest?" exclaimed Boots, of the Fourth, as he ran by. "Phillips is out of the Eleven!"

"By jingo!" said McClure. "Honest Injun?"

"Just heard it from Biggleswade," replied Buster Boots. "We don't know what's happened to him, or who has got his place, but he's out of the Eleven all right."

Handforth hadn't heard. He was looking at the gateway. Irene Manners and Mary Summers had just come in, and Handforth was rooted to the spot. He looked round rather wildly, seeking a way of escape.

"Quick!" he panted. "Go and steer those girls away somewhere! I can't stand any sort of sympathy this morning—"

"But they've seen you!" said McClure.

"I can't help that," interrupted Handforth thickly. "I tell you I can't stand—Oh, my goodness!"

Irene and Mary had come up while he was still arguing, and Handforth hardly knew what to say. Escape was now impossible. And he was further horrified by the fact that Irene had brought him a basket of grapes! This was getting beyond ordinary torture.

However, a diversion came, and Handforth's whole attitude was on the point of changing—although he didn't know it yet. Willy came up, and Willy was looking very flushed.

"Fenton's won the toss!" he announced joyously.

"By George!" said his major. "How do you know—"

"Biggleswade just issued a bulletin," went on Willy briskly. "Fenton and Morrow have opened the St. Frank's innings, and Phillips has gone to hospital. The ass poisoned himself, or something! Although it isn't serious, he's done in so far as the match is concerned."

Handforth stared at him in a dazed, incredulous fashion.

"Phillips!" he breathed. "Phillips out of it?"

"Yes."

"Then—then—"

"Absolutely," said Willy, nodding. "You can chuck those crutches away, old man. Church will still have his place, and you can play, too."

"How can he play?" asked Irene. "Don't be silly, Willy! It's not fair to tease Ted—"

"You can't kid me!" exclaimed Willy. "I haven't said anything until now, but Ted's reason for being crooked is over. He might as well play in the match himself now. He can easily get up to Lord's in time—"

"You're dotty!" snorted McClure. "Clear off, you young bounder!"

Handforth hadn't been listening. He was standing there, and his face was deeply flushed. His eyes were simply blazing with excitement, and it was some moments before he could sort out his thoughts. One thought in particular was hammering in his head.

Phillips was crooked! Phillips was crooked!

This could only mean that a substitute would have to be played—and old Church would naturally remain in the team! Why, there was no reason why Handforth himself shouldn't get his old place in the Eleven! Fenton would rather have him than one of the reserves—

At this point Handforth's bewilderment cleared itself. If he could only get to London in time he could play in the match! He gave one wild whoop of triumph, and hurled his crutches aside.

"When's the next train?" he roared violently. "Quick! I've got to get to London— Hurrah! I can play, after all! When's the next train?"

He was so excited that he rushed about madly, his padded and slippers foot looking incongruous now that he was using his leg in its normal way. He leapt up and down like a Dervish.

"Ted!" cried Irene, amazed.

"What did I tell you?" grinned Willy. "I knew I'd cure Ted's ankle in about one second when I gave him that piece of information! What price me for a magician? Sprained ankles cured while you wait!"



The Moor View girls swarmed round Handforth, with tender expressions of sympathy for his bad foot and his crutches. "I'll bring you some grapes," said Irene firmly. "Oh, cheese it!" Handy gasped. "Don't make a fuss!" There was nothing wrong with his foot!

McClure was fairly trembling with amazement.

"Then—then your ankle wasn't crocked at all?" he gasped.

"Crocked!" roared Handforth. "Of course not!"

"But—but——"

"When's the next train?" hooted Edward Oswald. "What's the time? How the dickens can I get up to London——"

"You spoofing bounder!" ejaculated McClure. "Why, you must have got Dr. Brett to keep the secret, too! But what on earth for? I'm blessed if I can see—Steady, old man! Don't go absolutely dotty!"

"Oh, Ted!" exclaimed Mary, clutching at his arm. "This means that you can play, doesn't it? And Church, too? But why didn't you go to London with the team, instead of pretending to be hurt——"

"Don't you see, Mary?" asked Irene gently.

"I'm blessed if I do!" said Mary.

"I'll explain later," smiled Irene, looking at Handforth with a certain tenderness which he quite failed to appreciate. "It's just like him, too! I don't wonder that he's nearly off his head now."

Handforth ceased his antics abruptly.

"Sorry, girls!" he panted. "But—but I've

got to go! You don't understand, but I'll explain later. I must get a train——"

"Why bother about trains?" asked Willy. "What's the matter with your Austin Seven?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "You mean——"

"I'd offer to take you up in my Silent Two, but I'm afraid of the engine," went on Willy calmly. "It's got a habit of petering out after the first two or three miles. She's only good for short runs."

"My Austin Seven!" breathed Handforth. "Why, of course!"

"You'd better go by train, Ted!" advised Irene anxiously. "You're so excited that you'll only crock yourself in earnest if——"

"I shall be all right," promised Handforth eagerly. "There's something else, too. I'll be back in two minutes! Rats to this beastly foot of mine! Mac, old man, dash to the study and get my other shoe; there's a good chap! You'll find me with old Biggy!"

Handforth fairly tore into the Ancient House, much to the amazement of crowds of fellows who were discussing the news from Lord's. Many of them were discovering Handforth's secret for the first time—for they had been too engrossed to see his antics in the Triangle. He flew indoors, leaving a trail of bewildered juniors in his wake—for

he charged in, scattering everybody like ninepins.

"Handy's gone dotty!" gasped Jack Grey. "His foot seems to be all right, too!"

"The snivelling cad was only fooling!" sneered Forrest. "Just tried to get our sympathy, and——"

"He got a fat lot of sympathy from you!" interrupted Singleton tartly. "He pretended to be crocked so that Church could get his place, and now he's well again because of Phillips' illness. It's as clear as daylight. Just like Handy, too! Why, the man's a brick!"

"By jingo, so he is!"

Handforth rushed into the prefects' room, and found Biggleswade at the typewriter. The prefect was a good-natured senior, and he was always ready to oblige anybody. But he was certainly astonished at Handforth's tornado-like entry and his subsequent actions.

He dashed to the telephone, yanked off the receiver, and fumed.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "Hallo! What the dickens—— Oh, good! I want—— Eh? Number? I don't know the giddy number! I want Lord's Cricket Ground—— What's that? Trunk call? I tell you I want Lord's Cricket Ground——"

Biggleswade came over, and took the instrument out of Handforth's grasp.

"What's the exact idea, my lad?" he asked smoothly. "If you want Lord's Cricket Ground, I'll get it for you, but——"

"Quick!" gasped Handforth. "It's urgent!"

Biggleswade gave him one look, then he spoke to the Exchange. He hung up the receiver, took Handforth by the shoulder, and pushed him forcibly into a chair.

"Simmer down, young 'un," he said kindly. "Simmer down!"

your foot. You've got well pretty quickly, haven't you?"

Handforth gave a happy sigh.

"I was only spoofing," he explained. "For goodness' sake, don't make a fuss, Biggy, but I—I—— Well, I wanted old Church to get his chance," he added awkwardly. "I was the only chap who stood in his way, so I pretended to be crocked. But, if Phillips is ill, I might as well play, after all. See?"

Biggleswade grinned.

"Not being absolutely blind, I do see," he replied. "Well, of all the young asses—— I don't know, though," he added, looking at Handforth quizzically. "It was a decent thing to do, young 'un. I don't think I should have had the generosity to tackle it. Hallo, there goes the bell!"

Handforth leapt to the telephone, and snatched off the receiver.

"Hallo!" he panted. "Who's that?"

"This is Lord's Cricket Ground——"

"I want Browne!" interrupted Handforth. "Browne, or Fenton, or Morrow! Any of the St. Frank's chaps! And I'm in a hurry—— Eh? By George! Is that you, Browne?"

"Ah, either the line has been accidentally put through to the Zoo, or I am speaking to our own Brother Handforth," came Browne's calm tones. "I am inclined to think the latter. Do I detect a certain anxiety in your tone, Brother Handforth? Confide in me——"

"I'm coming up to London!" roared Handforth.

"Splendid! I will instruct the population to unfurl their flags——"

"I'm coming to Lord's!"

"Better still!" came Browne's voice. "The massed bands of the Guards will be waiting——"

"Can't you chuck that rotting?" snorted Handforth. "I say, is it true that Phillips is ill and can't play?"

"Alas, too true!" replied Browne. "The unfortunate Brother Phillips is now languishing in hospital with severe pains in the belt region. The tragic result of eating wonky pork-pie——"

"Good!" said Handforth happily.

"I delight to hear such heartfelt expressions of sympathy!"

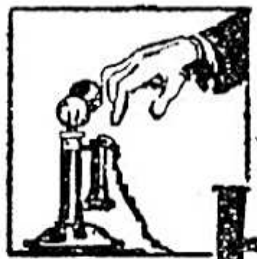
"Sorry! I didn't mean that!" said Handforth. "But as Phillips is out of the running, I'm coming up to town to take my original place in the team. Fenton hasn't selected another man, has he? Tell him I'll be there——"

"One moment, Brother Handforth——one moment," interrupted Browne. "While appreciating your thoughtful regard for the welfare of the team, I have a slight inkling that crutches are strictly forbidden by all the rules. And I venture to suggest that it would scarcely look well for you to hop from wicket to wicket on one foot——"

"You ass, I'm well!" shouted Handforth. "That's what I've rung you up about! I

CHAPTER 14.

THE DASH FOR LONDON.



HANDFORTH was nearly frantic.

"Biggy, you rotter, lemme go!" he panted.

"I tell you I must speak

to Lord's——"

"Don't be so excited," interrupted Biggleswade. "It's a trunk call, and I've given the number. They'll ring through as soon as they've got it. Now, what's the trouble? I thought you were crocked?"

"Oh, so they're getting the number, eh?" said Handforth, with relief. "I must speak to Fenton! It's vital!"

Biggleswade smiled.

"In that case, they'll probably go out to the wicket, stop the game, and bring Fenton to the telephone," he said drily. "At the same time, I wouldn't give much for your chances of speaking to the skipper just now. You're far more likely to get hold of Browne. But you haven't answered my question about

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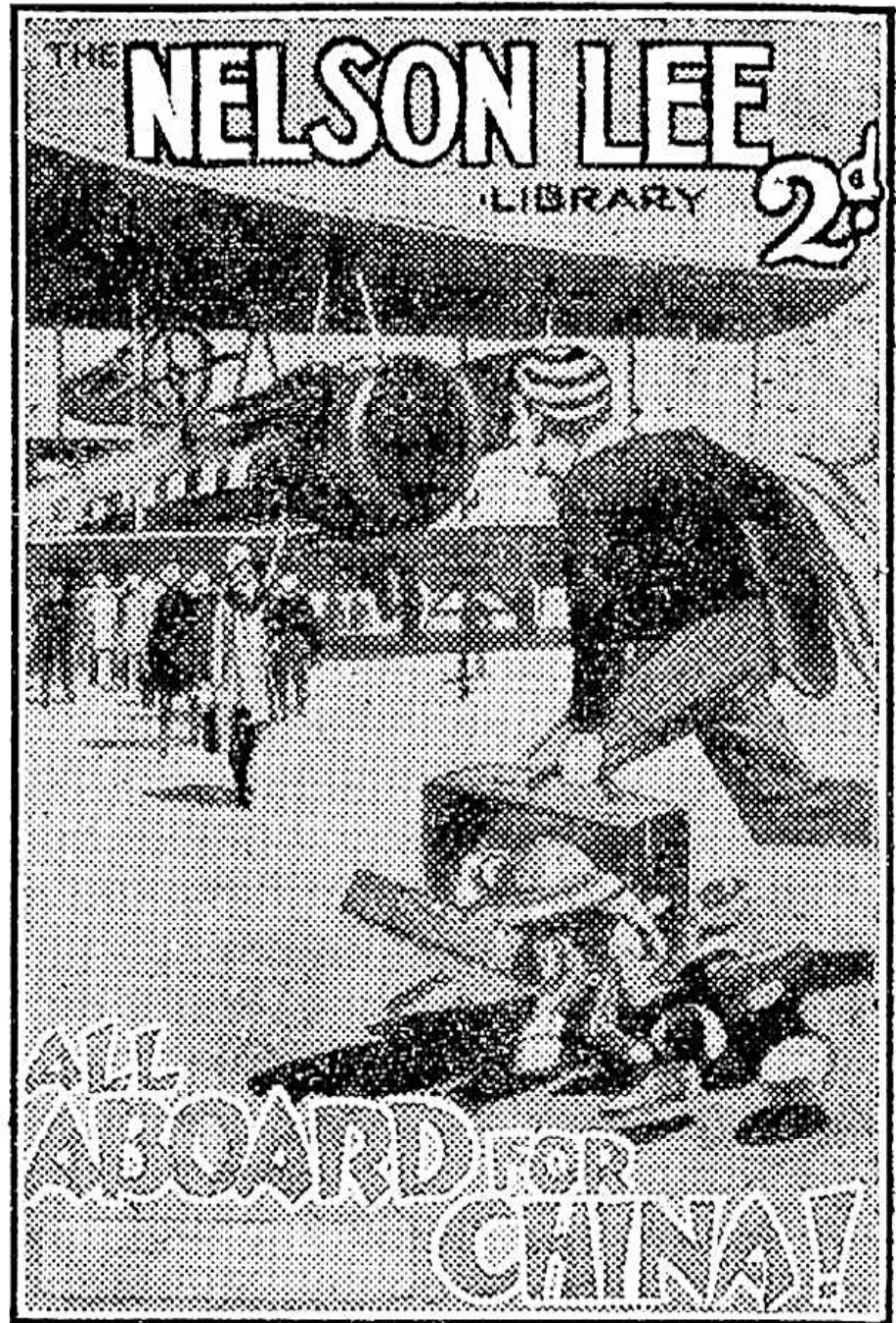
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*There they go—and Handy's last as usual!
But never mind, he's just in time for
the trip to China! Look out for this cover
next Wednesday.*

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

only pretended to be crooked, so that Church could get my place. But now that Phillips is ill, I can play!”

“Alas and alack!” came Browne's pained voice. “This is a sad, sad blow to my faith in human nature, Brother Handforth! Such duplicity appals me. So you are actually whole? I confess that I had vague suspicions. We will rejoice until you arrive—for I can assure you that Brother Fenton will be overjoyed to hear these glad tidings.”

“Do you think I can do it in time?” asked Handforth excitedly. “I'm coming up in my Austin Seven—starting in five minutes.”

“History has clearly indicated that you were never born to be dispatched in an accident,” replied Browne evenly. “I assume, therefore, that you will arrive safely in the Austin—after leaving a trail of dead and dying in your wake. Owing to the luncheon interval, you will probably arrive in excellent time to be of service. Brothers Fenton and Morrow are batting nobly, and no wickets have fallen. So, with your usual luck, you will undoubtedly join us—”

“Good!” interrupted Handforth. “Thanks, Browne! You think Fenton will let me have the vacant place?”

“He will be guided by me,” replied Browne calmly. “And always remember, Brother Handforth, that I am your friend and champion. Hasten!”

Handforth rung off a moment later, and dashed out. He found an animated throng in the Triangle—for by this time everybody had heard the news. It was nearly time for lessons again—the interval being a mere fifteen minutes—but Handforth had never thought of getting the necessary permit from his Housemaster to join the Eleven.

His Austin Seven was waiting, having been brought round by Willy & Co. McClure was holding his leader's left shoe, and his bag and other essentials were already in the car.

“Is it all right?” asked McClure eagerly.

“Yes. Browne's asked me to go up—”

“Good man!” ejaculated McClure. “Here's your shoe. You can't drive your car with a bandaged foot, Handy! Don't forget

your petrol, and try and ring us up in the afternoon—”

They all crowded round him, and the next few minutes were packed with action. His bandage was torn off, and his shoe substituted, and his hand was shaken by many.

“Good luck to you, Ted!” said Irene, her eyes shining. “I think it was splendid of you to give up your place for Church.”

“He’s a hopeless chump, but he can’t help it,” said Jack Grey, grinning. “Let’s hope you make a century, Handy, old man.”

Not only the girls, but everybody else understood the position precisely. Nobody could help admiring Handforth, although they also regarded him as an impulsive jackass. He was about the only fellow in the whole school who would have adopted such a big-hearted stunt. But now he was being rewarded, for it seemed that he would be able to play, after all.

Amid a chorus of good wishes, he started up the engine of his car, and sped off, and it wasn’t until he had gone that the others realised that he hadn’t bothered about the formality of asking for permission.

“Just like Handy!” chuckled Doyle. “Imagine him spoofing about that giddy ankle of his! I say, it must have been a fearful wrench for him to give up his place like that! You can’t help liking the chap.”

“Allee same good fliend,” said Yung Ching, the Chinese boy, nodding. “I lember how he savee me last week. Plenty fine chapee.”

“Yes, he’s always surprising the natives,” agreed Scott. “The way he rescued you, after you’d been kidnapped, Chingy, was pretty marvellous—for him. You never know what Handy’s going to do next!”

“Him one piecee fine fella!” declared Yung Ching.

“Oh, by the way, talking about that kidnapping affair last week,” said Boots, of the Modern House. “Has anything come of that charge at the Bannington Police Court? Were those two half-castes sentenced?”

“Have you been asleep for the last three days?” asked Doyle. “You mean those rotters who tried to smuggle Yung Ching off on a boat? There was no defence, and they were shoved in chokey for six months with hard labour.”

“Well, that’s that!” said Boots, nodding. “Ever had any idea why they tried to collar you, Chingy?”

“All samee big mystely,” replied the Chinese boy. “Plentee lummy!”

“Plenty what?”

“He means it was rummy,” grinned Doyle. “Scott and I understand his lingo, but it sounds a bit queer unless you’re used to it. No, we’ve never been able to discover why he was carted off. Mr. Stokes thinks there might be another attempt, but that’s all rot. In any case, what’s the idea of bringing up the subject now? We’re full of cricket to-day.”

“I’m glad to see Handy off to London,” remarked Boots. “He gave everybody the

pip, hobbling about on those giddy crutches. And he was only spoofing, too! It only shows that you can’t believe your own eyes!”

At this point the juniors were obliged to go back into the class-rooms. Indeed, the interval had already been increased to double its usual duration, and even this didn’t satisfy the school. They thought it was sheer tyranny to expect them to attend lessons at all.

And while the Remove pretended to settle down to work again, Edward Oswald Handforth hummed serenely on towards London. There wasn’t a fellow at St. Frank’s who didn’t wish him the best of luck.



CHAPTER 15.

STUDY D MAKES HISTORY.

EDGAR FENTON shook his head.

“Sorry, old man, but Handforth’s got the prior claim,” he said. “He’s the regular player, and if he’s fit he’ll have the place. I don’t see that you’ve got anything to grumble at.”

“But, hang it all, Handforth’s crocked!” protested Finton, of the Sixth. “With Phillips ill, it’s only right that I should—”

“We don’t want to have any unpleasantness,” interrupted the skipper quietly. “Handforth isn’t crocked—Browne made that quite clear. Are you out for personal glory, or do you want St. Frank’s to win?”

“Well, naturally, I want St. Frank’s to win.”

“Then don’t make such a fuss,” growled Fenton. “Handforth’s only a junior, but he’s a better player than you are, and you know it. Man alive, we shall have to work like demons to win this game, and I’m only too glad that Handforth is available. He ought to be here soon, too.”

Finton said nothing more, although he was sadly disappointed. The St. Frank’s innings was well on the way, and the game had been going on for nearly an hour after the luncheon interval. The score stood at 133 for four wickets. Browne and Dick Hamilton were now batting, and the great audience was watching with keen appreciation. Browne was a spectacular bat, and some of his hitting was a sheer delight to see. Dick was splendid, too, and they were both giving the Australians some hard leather-hunting.

With the score at 149, Browne succumbed to a particularly tricky ball, and carried his bat in to the accompaniment of much applause.

“Alas, Brother Fenton, I have failed to make that century,” he said dolefully, as the skipper met him. “What news? Has Brother Handforth arrived? Have the massed bands heralded—”

“No, he hasn’t turned up yet,” said Fenton. “But there’s plenty of time— Yes, Church, you’re the next man,” he added,

as Church prepared to go out. "Good luck, young 'un—I hope you do well."

"I'll try my best," said Church steadily.

"The bowling," said Browne, "is one hundred degrees centigrade. In other words, Brother Church, hot—with a capital H. So be wary. Attempt no sixes until you have secured the measure of the enemy."

"I'll be lucky if I break my duck!" said Church.

"If you cannot return to the pavilion with a score which runs into at least two figures, Brother Church, you may as well regard this as your last hour," said Browne solemnly. "However, I strongly suspect that you are about to make that century of which I so lamentably lost track. So go, and do your stuff!"

Church went out coolly and confidently. All the morning he had been dreading this moment, assuring himself that he would be rocky and nervous. He was astonished to find that he had looked upon the Australians with perfect sangfroid.

"Good luck, Churchy!" said Dick Hamilton, as he passed.

"Thanks," said Church.

A minute later he nearly caused Browne to faint by hitting up a beautiful four—a clean, delightful stroke which sent the leather hissing to the boundary.

"By Jove, that was a lovely drive!" said Fenton appreciatively.

"You will remember that it was I who originally detected Brother Church's wonderful form," said Browne, with a modest cough. "Without making any rash predictions, I now— But what is this raucous noise? Surely it is the voice of our one and only Brother Handforth?"

Browne was right. Edward Oswald Handforth came hurrying in, ushered by one of the officials. He was dusty and hot, but filled with triumph.

"I've seen the score!" he announced. "Five wickets down, and Hamilton and Church batting! Good egg! I'll go in next, Fenton!"

"That's very obliging of you, Handforth," said Fenton, smiling. "We're not doing so famously to-day, and we need somebody who'll put up a strong stand. Are you quite fit?"

"Fiddles aren't in it!" retorted Handforth promptly.

"But your ankle——"

"That was only a little dodge of mine," explained Handforth coolly. "You're such an obstinate bounder, Fenton, that I wanted you to see Church in a big match—and it was the only way of making you play him. I'm as right as ninepence."

"In that case——" Fenton paused, and glanced round. "What's that?"

"Unfortunately, I fear that Brother Hamilton is out," said Browne sadly. "I may be wrong, but his wicket is minus the middle stump, and that is surely an indication of disaster?"

"Real disaster, too," said Fenton seriously.

"Ye gods! We've only got 162 for six. If the tail collapses, we shall be fairly in the soup."

"I can already feel it creeping round our ankles," said Browne. "We are splashing about very noticeably, Fenton. It is left for Study D to come to the rescue."

Handforth was quite ready to go in. He had already changed into flannels, and he had his pads on in a few seconds. Pitt, who had expected to be next man in, readily stood aside.

"Yes, you go in, old man," he said promptly. "Church is out there, and you'll probably give him a lot of encouragement. As old Browne says, it's a chance for Study D to distinguish itself."

"Thanks!" said Handforth gratefully. "We'll show you something!"

He was rather astonished to receive a loud and prolonged cheer when he went out, for he hadn't realised the number of spectators. He was recognised, too—for any amount of people had heard of this hard-hitting junior and his reckless batting. He was the kind of cricketer that the crowd enjoyed watching. And nothing could have suited Edward Oswald better. He was never more brilliant than when he had a big audience.

"Good old Churchy!" he grinned, as he went to the wicket.

Church was looking anxious.

"But are you really all right?" he asked. "I mean that ankle——"

"Watch me run!" interrupted Handforth briskly.

Church watched him twenty seconds later, when he sent the leather away to the far end of the ground. They ran three for that effort, and Handforth's ankle was evidently perfectly sound.

He delighted the crowd still further by settling down to the most brilliant innings of the day. In fact, he and Church were an entertainment in themselves. For Church caught some of his leader's dashing spirit, and they both hit out powerfully and vigorously. During half an hour's play they sent the score soaring well over the two-hundred mark. Church was the first to succumb, and he carried his bat out at last, with a splendid 32 to his credit.

"First-class!" said Fenton enthusiastically. "Handforth was right—I ought to have put you in the team at first, Church. You've done toppingly. Good man!"

"Oh, I say, thanks!" said Church, flushing happily.

Reggie Pitt was next man in, but this was not one of his lucky days. He only scored 5 when he misjudged a ball, and was easily caught out. The other members of the eleven were dismissed quickly, Handforth being 57 not out at the close of the innings. And Young England's total was the very creditable one of 266.

Without any question, Handforth and Church had changed the complexion of the game. Study D alone had contributed no less than 89 runs. At St. Frank's this news

created a kind of miniature riot in the Remove, and McClure was rendered temporarily insane for at least an hour.

The Australians, however, gave a vigorous answer.

They went in immediately, and by some very rapid work they knocked up the runs at an uncomfortable speed for the St. Frank's bowlers. Browne took most wickets, but by the time the day's play was over, Young Australia had not only equalled Young England's total, but had beaten it.

With nine wickets down they had scored 272. Upon the whole, the teams were very evenly matched, and it was impossible to make any forecasts for the morrow. The Australians were bound to be out with only the addition of a few runs, and Young England would not be in a difficult position.

The game was in a most interesting state, and at least two members of the St. Frank's Eleven were supremely happy. Handforth and Church went off to the former's home, after receiving many congratulations—for they had both done well in the field, in addition to their fine batting display.

"Wait until to-morrow!" said Handforth dreamily. "By George, we're going to show 'em something, aren't we, Church?"

"We'll try!" said Church cautiously.



CHAPTER 16.

THE WINNERS OF THE ASHES.

TWO events of momentous importance happened the next morning.

In the first place, the headmaster of St. Frank's unexpectedly granted the school a whole holiday, and every fellow who could beg or borrow or otherwise raise the money took the early train to London, so they could see the second day of the match. Quite a number of impecunious stalwarts decided to make the journey by bicycle, but these were firmly restrained from such a rash purpose. About one-third of the seniors and juniors were able to get away, and they went off in a cheerful crowd.

The other event of momentous importance was the startling dismissal of Young England, in the second innings, for a total of 192.

The Australian schoolboys had been polished off within the first ten minutes that morning, their total amounting to 284—for only one wicket had remained from the previous day. This simply meant that they only needed to make 175 in their second innings to beat St. Frank's and win the Schoolboy Ashes.

Nobody quite knew why Young England had done so poorly. The weather was still fine, and the wicket was excellent, but somehow the innings went badly from the very first. Fenton and Morrow were dismissed before the total had reached 25, and even Browne failed to stop the rot. Handforth

and Church were in together, as in the first innings, and they put on between thirty and forty runs between them. But the Australians were in fine fettle, the bowling being accurate, and the fielding brisk. Anyhow, St. Frank's were all out for 192, and the fact had to be faced.

"I wouldn't have believed it!" said Fenton gruffly. "Still, we're not beaten yet. Browne, you've got to bowl now as you've never bowled before! We've got to get those Australians out before they get that 175!"

"A mere matter of determination, Brother Fenton," replied Browne smoothly. "Let us go into the field with sufficient will-power to win, and we shall undoubtedly win. Determination is the keynote of all success. The Ashes are ours, so do not concern yourself. I, Brother Browne, have spoken. Or should it be, has spoken? One cannot afford to be too particular in these times of national stress."

Browne's optimism was certainly catching, but the task which faced the St. Frank's Eleven was a formidable one indeed.

The Australians were naturally confident, for it seemed that they could easily knock up the necessary runs.

They started well, too, and neither Fenton nor Browne could make any impression upon the opening pair. The hopes of the St. Frank's spectators—who had now arrived in strong force—were growing smaller and smaller. A blanket of gloom settled down upon them.

"Ninety-four for no wickets!" groaned McClure, who had come up with the others. "Oh, my hat! It's a walk-over! These Australian chaps are going to win the giddy match by about eight wickets!"

"Looks like it!" agreed Jack Grey moodily.

Kahn, the Indian junior, was bowling now, and the first wicket to fall was to his credit. There were loud cheers, for the break was a welcome one. It is always a relief when a long and persistent partnership is dissolved. The Australian batsman was given a rousing reception as he came to the pavilion.

The next man soon settled down, however, and it seemed that another stand would take place. But this time Browne found his wickedest form, and sent down some balls which were utterly deadly. In one over he dismissed two men, and even now the total was only 113.

Although hope of victory was forlorn indeed, the gloom began to lift from the St. Frank's supporters. The game was getting more even, and there were a few hopes that the thrashing would not be an appalling one, after all.

One hundred and thirteen for three looked bad enough, for Young Australia only needed another 62 to win the game, and they still had seven wickets in hand.

And then, at this period, one of those tense overs took place which every cricket lover longs to see. Browne was bowling, and he was at the height of his dangerous period.

Most bowlers have these off-and-on spells, and when Browne was in earnest he could be fatal. He had told Fenton that he was determined, and he had evidently meant what he said.

The over started quietly enough, but with the second delivery Browne sent down a swerving ball which had the batsman guessing all the way. He misjudged it entirely, imagining it to be well to the off, but at the last second it swung inwards, and gently removed the bails by touching the off stump.

"Out!"

"Good old Browne!"

The next man came in, and Browne sent down the third ball of the over. It seemed such an easy ball that the batsman could not resist it. He made a perfect stroke, and the leather hummed away. Like a flash, Church leapt upwards and sideways, and there was a loud slap. The next second a roar went up when it was seen that Church had held the leather.

"Hurrah!"

"How's that?"

"Out, by jingo!"

"Well done, Church!"

A buzz went round on all sides. Already the game had altered its complexion—113 for five. Was there any chance that Browne would perform the hat-trick again this season?

"Browne's a demon," muttered Fenton anxiously. "By Jove, I've seen him do some hot bowling, but he's pepper this afternoon! One never knows, Arthur. There's just a chance—"

"Don't!" muttered Morrow. "Let's wait and see."

Two minutes later, William Napoleon Browne sent down the fourth ball of the over. A complete silence had fallen over the entire ground, and everybody waited with breathless intensity.

Clack!

It was a hit, and everybody thought that the batsman was safe—until the wicket-keeper—Wilson—tossed the leather skywards. The new man had only snicked the ball, and he had been caught at the wicket!

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Browne!"

"The hat-trick, by Jove!"

"There's a chance yet!" breathed Handforth. "By George, there's a chance yet! They've only got another four wickets, and— Oh, but these miracles can't go on for ever," he added, shaking his head.

He was right. The next man in proved to be a stayer. For half an hour he stone-walled everything, and allowed his partner to get the runs. The latter, however, succumbed to Browne's bowling at length, but by this time the score had mounted to 135.

It continued to go steadily up. The new man was a slogger, and he easily made up for his companion's non-spectacular methods. In one over he added 16 runs to the total, and by the time he was caught out there seemed no hope left.

One hundred and sixty-one for eight!

Still, there was just a faint chance—a forlorn kind of possibility. The Australians had two wickets left, and they only needed 14 runs to win. It seemed easy. But another wicket fell when the score had reached 170.

Last man in! And only 5 runs for victory! By this time the tension was indeed near to breaking-point. Browne was bowling, and every St. Frank's fellow was silently praying that he would perform this giant's task.

Snick!

It was a beautiful cut, and away went the leather to the boundary. A groan went up—a groan of sheer anguish, for this would mean the end. Four runs, and the Australians would have equalised, and—

"Oh, well stopped, Handy!"

A shriek went up when it was seen that Handforth flung himself full length and had stopped the ball just before it got to the boundary. Like lightning, he twisted to his feet, returning the ball brilliantly, and the hit resulted in only 3 runs. Still hope!

Another ball was delivered, and there was another respite when no runs were scored. Then the field changed for the next over, and Fenton was bowling. He sent down a ball which broke short, and the batsman went out to meet it. He missed, and there was a click behind him.

"How's that?"

A roar went up as the wicket-keeper swept the bails off—with the batsman's foot outside the crease. It seemed an age before the umpire's verdict came.

Out!

"Out!" howled Handforth wildly, running up and grabbing Wilson in a fond embrace. "By George, you deserve knighting for that! We've beaten them! We've won the Ashes by one giddy run!"

The match was over, and Young England had won the Schoolboy Ashes. But they were the first to admit that they had only done so by the skin of their teeth. It was really a kind of toss-up, and the actual honours were even.

But, so far as St. Frank's was concerned, the series of schoolboy Test matches had ended in the only way possible. The Australians had given them a long and vigorous fight, and there was scarcely a pin to choose between the two Elevens.

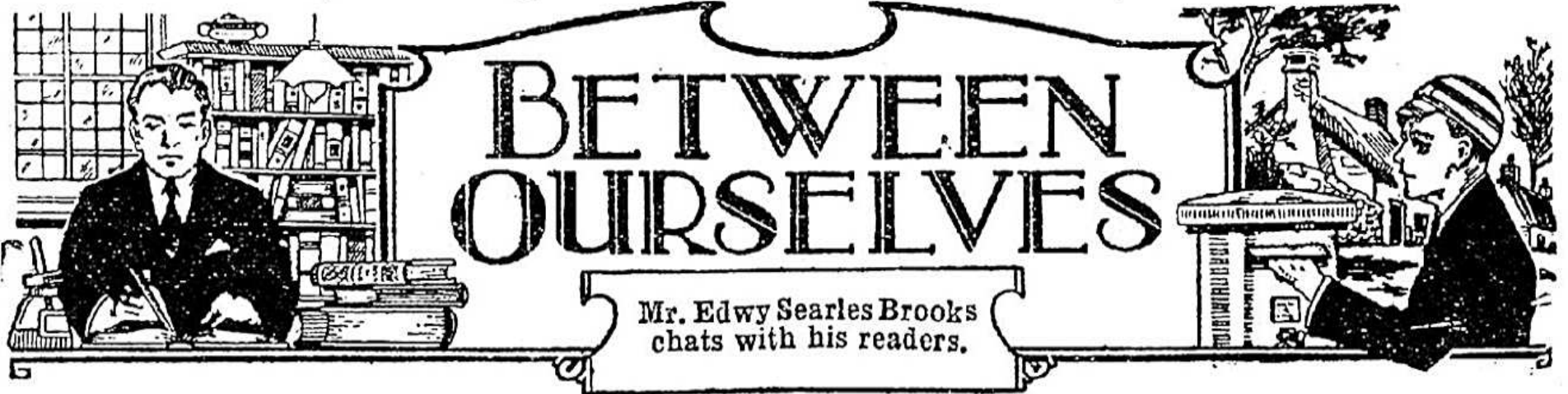
And at St. Frank's this last game was universally voted to be a triumph for Study D.

THE END.

..... DON'T FORGET!

..... "ALL ABOARD FOR CHINA!"

..... NEXT WEEK!



Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. 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. Every letter will be acknowledged in these columns, and if of very special merit will be starred.

E. S. B.

THAT was a nice little chatty letter from you, S. E. Bate. One of your usual cheery efforts. Now, about that suggestion of yours. Will it be possible to have a special Christmas Number in addition to the usual one? Well, I'm not sure that this can be managed—But what on earth am I talking about? Here am I, back at Christmas time, instead of dealing with the Summer yarns! Still, there's nothing to worry about. I'll have a word with the Editor about your suggestion some time between now and *next* Christmas. But, mind you, I don't suppose for a moment that he will adopt the notion. You ask me what has happened to that football coach from Aston Villa. Yes, I know the chap you mean. Now, I wonder what's become of him? He's probably knocking about somewhere, but why should we bother about him? We're right in the middle of cricket now! It's quite likely that he'll turn up in time for the next footer season.

As I have a distinct and rooted objection to poison in my porridge, W. Lister, I think I'd better give you a line or two. Not that I need worry much, since I seldom eat porridge. But, unless I give you a reply, you might just as easily insert morphine into my milk. So I'll give you an answer to your post-script. Yes, old man, I freely excuse all blots, and place all the blame upon the pen and paper.

All right, S. J. Ward. With regard to Detective-Inspector Lennard and Smiling Bill Gordon—yes.

Perhaps you don't realise, E. L. F., that if there were a lot of illustrations in "The Monster Library," it would be necessary to cut out some of the story. And I really think the majority of readers prefer to have these yarns intact. With regard to the larger type in the Old Paper—well, there's no need for me to answer your question, because that welcome change has already been made, and I think the type will now suit everybody.

Allan J. Thorpe (Sydney), Male Incognito (Huddersfield), Mary O'Donohue* (Dubbo,

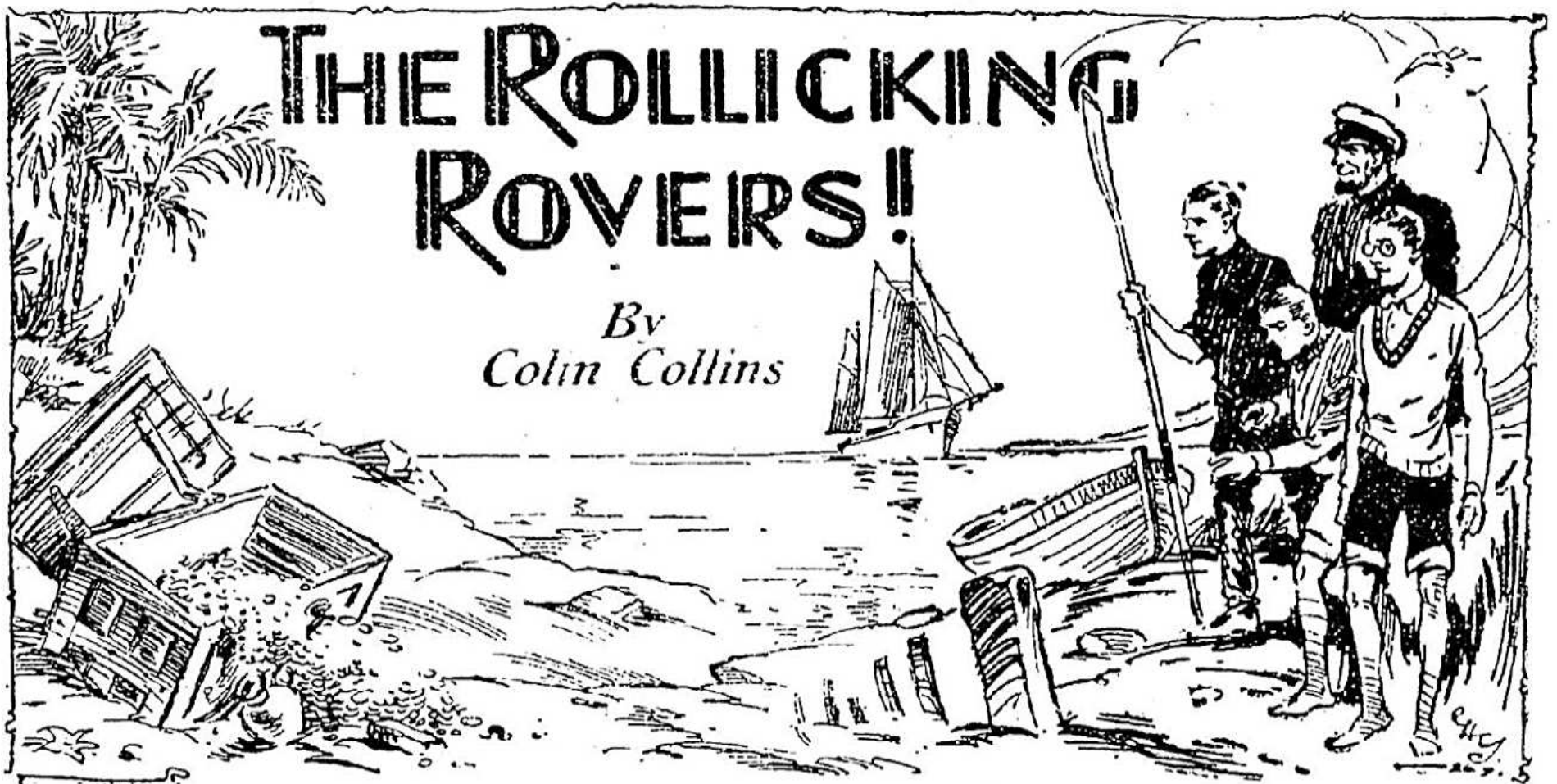
N.S.W.), Harold Dow (South Melbourne), William Maver (Sydney), J. Stanley (Perth), K. Barry (Morwell, Vic.), Norman Atherton (Warwick), Wilfred Hartley (Mansfield), No. 1,698 (Sheffield), John Brittan* (Notting Hill), New Leagueite (Limerick), A Reader For Ever (Kentish Town), Leonard Ernest Thorell (Regent's Park), George Buist (Arbroath), Sidney Cohen (Leeds), Member 782 (Glasgow), E. J. M. (Forest Gate), Satisfied (Peckham), Jack Ricketts (Hayle), Ted (Walworth), T. Lealman (Richmond, Yorks), Arthur Bernard Clive (S.E.1), Logic (Bagshot), Nemo** (Ashton-under-Lyne), E. Vanderheyde (Bexhill), Finished (Bradford).

It seems to me that your request has been answered long ago, Allan J. Thorpe. At all events, you've been getting lots of Handforth recently, haven't you? But I don't think you'll say you've been having too much. I often try to keep old Handy in the background, but it's simply no good. He's such an aggressive bounder that he gets the better of me—and the more I try to keep him back, the more he barges into the forefront. By the way, thanks for that page of the "Sydney Sunday News" you sent me. I was very interested, as I always like to see newspapers from our big cities of the Commonwealth and the Dominions.

I felt very, very guilty, when I re-read your letter, Mary O'Donohue. Your opening remarks, indeed, were so peculiarly apropos that they went right through me, and buttoned up at the back: "I am afraid my effort will go unnoticed," and "I suppose I will be an old woman by the time I see an answer." Well, it's hardly as bad as that, but I certainly did feel a little twinge of remorse. You tell me that you wrote a couple of letters before this one, and never had the courage to post them. I hope you've still got them—and, if so, put them in the nearest pillar-box as soon as you can. And if you write to me again, after this belated acknowledgment of mine, I can promise you a much speedier answer.

Fun and adventure !

Begin this yarn Now !



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

BOB DIGBY, HAROLD DWYER and FATTY VOSS are left a large fortune, to be divided equally between them. The fortune is left them by their uncle, Silas Digby, and the wealth is hidden in a chest which he has buried somewhere during his travels round the world. They have no clue to the whereabouts of this fortune, but enlist the aid of BEN TOPPET, the skipper of the Saucy Ann, who tells them of a chest concealed beneath a tree in their uncle's garden. They dig up the chest and find that it contains documents, a mummified head and hands! The papers are examined, and it is

The Mysterious Apparition!

FOUR pairs of eyes, four gaping mouths, and four heads bent over the empty deed box, marvelling at the disappearance of the Spaniard's head and hands; for they had certainly been there when the chest was originally conveyed to its hiding-place. The papers within appeared to be undisturbed.

The box had been put in its hiding-place by Ben himself.

The boys had seen him wrap it up in an old oilskin coat, and deposit it in his own special hiding-place—a hollow between two beams, only revealed by lifting a concealed trap.

The box seemed to be as they had left it when Ben, by the light of his lantern, took it from its hiding-place. Yet now, as they gazed, the box lay on its spread oilskin, the lid open, and the gruesome contents gone!

"Nobody knowed that hole 'cept me," cried Ben hoarsely, getting up from his knees and backing away in fear. "This ship is harnted, I tell yer."

He looked to where Dumb Dummy stood at the wheel, hearing nothing and apparently

decided to accompany Ben on the Saucy Ann in a world quest for the lost treasure. But there is a member of the crew named FOXEY, whom they do not trust, and it is arranged to leave him behind. With this week's instalment, the Saucy Ann has just set sail with our adventurers on board, including also a mysterious stowaway. Strange manifestations occur, and the ship is believed to be haunted owing to the presence on board of the chest and its sinister contents.

(Now read on.)

uninterested in their investigation, just a dim figure, the upper half of him lighted by the lamp in the binnacle that sent a faint glow upwards.

"No, it ain't him," growled Ben. "He's been at his post. This ship's harnted, I tell yer."

"But head and hands don't wander about without a body," urged Goggles, trying to feel normal, yet distinctly shivery.

The lid was closed with a bang; but Ben's lantern was too near, and got a knock. Out it went, and they were left in utter darkness, except for the stars overhead, the dimly lighted figure of the man at the wheel, and the regulation lights on the mast and hull.

Bob, however, groped his way to the hole, and with Fatty's assistance, replaced the box. A cry came from Martha, who wanted Ben, and came along stumbling.

"Ben, Ben, turn on the lights!"

As if in answer to her cry, the lights in the captain's state-room—the cabin on deck—shone out through the cosy red curtains that screened the windows; they had been suddenly switched on.

"Who did that?" cried Ben, seeing the

lights in his own cabin turned on as if by an invisible hand. "Lights don't turn themselves on, and there's nobody aboard this ship but us."

In denial of that a shadow passed across the curtains, moving within.

"There's someone there, Ben!" screamed Martha, clinging to her man and helping on his fright.

"Look!" gasped Fatty. "Look!"

The red curtains parted and a head came to the glass, as if peering out—a black head, a head with long hair falling on each side, a head bobbing to and fro as if on the watch.

Ben gave a great roar of fright; Martha screamed, and even the lads got the shivers now. Though lighted from behind, there was no doubt about the identity of that head—the head from the box! And the eyes that looked were just sockets, the skin was wrinkled and withered. A claw-like hand scratched at the curtains and drew it close to the head.

Then the light snapped out. All was dark again.

"Harnted!" groaned Ben. "Harnted! We'll never reach port! There's sperrits aboard!"

"Quick!" cried Bob, who was the first to recover himself. "Quick, into the cabin, and see who it is!"

But the others felt no quickness in them, and he himself was going anything but fast. The door of the cabin was open, and, in groping blindly for it, Bob's face was brushed by something that felt like hair. Something fled silently into the black, dark around—a distinctly moving shadow.

He drew back with cold shivers all over him, and that sense of danger and terror of the unseen that fills all of us—even when there are no ghosts about—groping in the dark, not knowing from which direction a blow may come, or where an obstacle may rise up for us to bump into.

"Don't be a coward," said his heart; and he groped for the electric light switch inside the doorway, finding it with fingers that trembled. Seeing the window and the red curtains flash out again, Martha gave another shriek. But they could see Bob now standing in the open, lighted doorway and beckoning them to come on.

"There's nobody here—nobody!" he shouted.

Slowly the others came. Bob had gone in and looked round. All was normal, except for the bundle of bedclothes on the floor that Ben had found sliding about the deck.

"There's somebody aboard this boat besides us, Ben," said Bob.

"Sperrits!" groaned Ben, seizing a coat from a chair and jerking into it. "I ain't sleepin' another wink this blessed night. Turn on the lights all over the ship."

Wherever there was a switch Ben turned it on, going about as warily as if panthers were in the dark corners waiting to spring.

The boys returned to their cabins, but only to dress. Ben stamped about as if to assure himself that he was in full command of his own boat, sperrits or no sperrits; and Martha set the disordered cabin to rights, and remade the bed—after looking under it and behind it and in every nook and corner.

"I know I never ought to have come," she wailed to Ben, when he came in to see if all was well. "A ship is no place for a woman, Ben. You never told me it was haunted."

"Well, it never was till we brought them remains aboard," he growled, "never—'cept once."

"When was that, Ben?"

"Down South among the islands, where the guv'nor was allus a-ferrettin' and scratchin' and searchin'. It was a dark night, dark as pitch, and something swept across the deck and brushed our caps off our heads—touched every man's face and sent shivers all over the ship. The very sails rattled, and the riggin' moaned same as in a gale—and there weren't no gale!"

"What was it brushed their faces?" asked Martha in a horrified whisper.

"Hair, they said it was, like a woman's hair sweepin' across their eyes. And I'll bet my bottom dollar that were the night the guv'nor brought that box aboard. It *was* the night. I remember now, it was! And ever after that day he were never the same."

"How never the same?" asked Martha.

"Well, he was money mad, treasure mad; allus scratchin' and clawin' in holes and caves and under tree-roots, and never explaining to nobody what he was really after."

"That's what you're doing, Ben, you and the boys. You've got the mania, too."

"Ah, well, we've got to find out where the old guv'nor's hid the treasure we found at last. In the mornin' we shall be in harbour, and there won't be no sperrits there."

"I wish it was light! Hark! What was that?" exclaimed Martha, clutching at Ben's arm.

There came to their straining ears a sudden whining of the wind, first a puff, then a real moaning squeal that shrieked through the rigging, bellying the sails with big slaps.

"Oh, that's nothing!" cried Ben, none too easy, all the same. "Just the wind getting up. Hold tight, we shall start rolling in a minute."

True enough, the boat lurched, and Martha went staggering to the nearest bedpost.

"Oh, Ben, I was never meant for the sea!"

"You'll get used to it; you gets used to anything afloat—even sperrits," said Ben, squaring his chest and striding to the door. He called lustily to the lads to get to work.

"Now then, you lads, lend a hand. You, Mr. Bob, and you others."

Then followed a great shouting of instructions in nautical language. Of course, they

floundered about, and Ben rushed from one to the other, helping to haul at ropes and trim sail quickly.

Dummy was busy, too; and soon they were going merrily before the wind, with the waves splashing and plopping, and the mast creaking, and with all signs of that pleasant progress which had been absent during the hot, still hours of the windless night. England was far behind now, and they were heading for the French coast. Ghosts were forgotten.

The sensation of really moving, of a strong breeze and motion at speed, and the gradual lightening of the sky as dawn approached, dissipated all shivery horror, and the blood began to tingle in their veins. All were happy again—except Martha, who was very sick, and loudly declared that never, never again would she leave dry land.

The House!

THE Saucy Ann slid gently alongside the Boulogne harbour wall, right under the windows of a house that rose flush with the breakwater. Ben leapt about and arranged with the lads to berth her neatly to within a yard of the lower windows of the house.

He winked knowingly at them as he jerked his thumb up at the window.

"That's the house, and that's the window," he whispered. "At high tide the gun'l' is almost level, and that's how he got the box in."

By repeatedly dwelling upon the idea that old Digby had hidden his treasure here, Ben had settled exactly how and when the business was worked, and how it could be worked again. He was as certain that they would find the treasure chest in the watery cellars of this house, and get it out of the window by the way it went in, as he was about the reality of "sperrits."

The boys were not so sure. There was nothing to prove the chest was there, except surmise; and it might just as likely be in a dozen other places mentioned in the diary as this. But hope ran high.

After breakfast on board the Saucy Ann, Ben led the way and knocked at the door of the house, preparing a pleasant grin, and ready to give a jovial greeting to his old friend, the fisherman's wife and landlady of the lodgings.

The door was opened by a sour-looking, sallow-faced woman of fifty in short skirt and fisherwoman's cap, but a stranger. Inquiry revealed the fact that the place had changed owners. This was the first check. But, yes, the new tenants carried on the old traditions and let rooms to respectable skippers and yachtsmen.

Ben slipped in, followed by the lads, and introduced them to the sitting-room, whose windows looked out on to the deck of the Saucy Ann.

"Young gents own ship, maydarm," cried Ben, with a wave of the hand, shouting very loudly at the landlady because she was a foreigner. "Me skipper—them boss."

"Ah, oui, varry good ship!" said the woman, who spoke enough English to get along very comfortably with her sailor lodgers.

"Very bong room," roared Ben, as if she were stone deaf.

"A very good room. How many to sleep?" asked the Frenchwoman.

"Four!" shouted Ben, holding up four fingers.

"Ah, but I have only one bed. What for you want beds when you have good ship?"

Said young Bob politely:

"One bed-room will do, madame. We can have this sitting-room, of course?"

"Ah, oui, oui!"

"That's all, missus," cried old Ben, flinging his cap on the table and taking out some money.

"Non, non!" cried the landlady with a shrug, intimating that she required no money in advance.

The moment she was gone Ben turned the key in the lock, and the others eagerly examined the plain board floor, on which were spread two rush mats. There was one table in the centre, and another, a smaller one, by the window, a shabby sofa and three wooden chairs ranged against the wall.

"Is this the room where the water is underneath, Ben?" asked Bob in a whisper.

"It is. Run your eye along the boards. Lift up this mat—and that one. No, no sign of a trap; and yet there's cellars below."

Fatty, who was on his hands and knees, crawling about, came to rest in a corner of the floor, and then cried out excitedly:

"Look! Screws in this corner!"

All came and bent down and looked.

"Yes, screws!" gurgled Ben. "Good old English screws! This board is screwed down, and the next, and the next! All the rest is nailed. Now I come to think of it, it was here as the gov'nor sent me off one day for his tool-kit, and I never thought why, for he was allus a-tinkering with tools and things. The sort o' man who starts mendin' other people's 'lectric bells if he found 'em out of order. And he couldn't bear a loose doer-knob anywhere."

"A handy sort of man," said Bob thoughtfully. "But he wouldn't screw down other people's floor-boards without a reason. We must have those screws out."

"Not now, not now!" cried Ben in alarm, going to the door and listening. "We'll tackle 'em later—at night—when everybody's asleep."

They all agreed that this was wise; but Goggles intimated that there would be no harm in bringing in a bag, to look like luggage, and filling it with tools and a length of rope, and anything else likely to be useful in hauling up the chest—if they got it.

"We're hot on the scent," Ben declared,

whispering every word he uttered about the hidden chest, but talking very loudly when he spoke of other things. "We'll bring that bag o' tools along, and then you lads can go around the town and see the sights, and pass the time till it's dark. I'll go back to Martha—I left her packing up to go home."

"I think that very wise of her," said Bob gravely.

"So do I," cried Goggles.

"And I say ditto," added Fatty.

The boys had talked it over and come to the conclusion that a woman aboard was a nuisance. The fewer people who took part in the quest the better.

"It was mostly her own idea," sighed Ben. "She wouldn't trust you lads to me—she's got the habit o' feelin' a sort o' mother to you all. But we weren't reckonin' on sperrits and apparitions, and it's terrible easy to scuttle a female's courage."

"I think you'd better let her go back by the next steamer—if we find nothing," said Bob.

"But we're going to find something," cried Ben, pointing to the mysterious screws, and full of hope.

Ben returned to the ship to fill the tool-bag, and the boys went off to the town. In the excitement and novelty of their first walk on foreign soil they forgot all about their avowed intention to search the Saucy Ann by daylight, to see if that queer fellow, Dummy, hadn't been playing some diabolical joke on his skipper.

"It's my belief it was done to scare Martha off the ship," Bob had told them; and they were disposed to agree.

When Ben got back on board he found Martha's bag packed. Not another hour would she spend on board a haunted ship, even in broad daylight.

And an hour later Martha was gone—gone home to make an astonishing discovery!

But of that more later.

The Water Under the Floor.

THE mysterious four, Ben Toppit, Bob Digby, Harold Dwyer and Joseph Voss, adventurers, treasure-seekers, plotters and schemers, met at the fisherman's cottage and took possession of the sitting-room at dusk.

The bed-room upstairs was supposed to be engaged for Ben, the skipper; but the sitting-room was for the use of all the party. They assembled with newspapers and books, a lamp in the centre of the table was lighted, and Ben put on a long pipe.

"These fisher folk goes to bed early if they ain't out trawling, 'cos they has to be up at daybreak for market to sell their fish," Ben explained in a whisper.

"When can we begin?" asked Fatty, with a glance into the corner.

"When the folks is well abed, not afore," Ben decided.

They were wise to have waited. At ten the landlady popped in for final orders. No, they wanted no supper; so she bade them good-night and begged the captain to lock and bolt the front door. Then they heard heavy, lumbering feet clumping upstairs.

All listened as guiltily as thieves, pretending to read their books and papers, but squinting furtively at one another, waiting for the sign to begin.

"Ush!" whispered Ben, with a voice like escaping steam.

"Not so loud," urged Bob softly.

"I was whisperin'," protested Ben, aggrieved.

"You nearly blew the tablecloth off with your 'Ush!' We must be very quiet in all we do. Lock the door, Harold."

Fatty had already dived into the tool-bag, and was first with the screwdriver. Crawling like a stealthy animal, he attacked the screws at the end of the room, close to the skirting; and the boards began to creak.

The others could only look on, but all felt their hearts beating very loud, and every sound outside the house made them jump. One screw—two screws—now two more! Fatty got close to his work with his head against the wall. Two more screws, and three of the thick old boards were free at the wall end.

He slid back on his knees to find the fastenings at the other end. There was a crack, a crash, and the three short boards tipped up with his weight. The loose ends sprang into the air; there was a cry—a gaping hole—and the boards, tipping up, hit him in the face; while the ends his knees pressed down gave way.

Down!

Fatty, with a cry, vanished below as if caught in a tipping trap, and they heard a mighty splash.

"He's gone right down!" Bob shouted; but Ben clapped a hand over the offending mouth.

"Quiet! He only fell into water, and it can't be deep."

"Ow—ow—ow! Help! Oh, I'm—down here!" gurgled the helpless one in the water-logged cellar below.

"Yes, we know you are! Don't 'owl the 'ouse down," cried Ben, hanging over the hole. "Is it deep?"

"I'm—I'm standing up. Ow, I'm—in water! It's wet! I'm soaked! My nose is bleeding, I think! Help me out!"

"Look here, my lad," said Ben, talking down. "While you're wet, and while you're there, you may as well make a search. Wait till I light my lantern."

From his big bag he produced a candle lantern. It was presently lowered to Fatty, whose head was not more than four feet below. They could touch hands with him as he reached up to take the light.

The object that the light fell upon would have scared Martha worse than a ghost. Fatty's face was black, his hair dripping



Bob leaped to his feet—a hand was coming through the window! A bony, shrivelled hand with nerveless fingers that scratched gently at the papers on the table.

slime, and only a few white patches under the eyes revealed that the face had ever been white, or was a face at all!

Bob brutally laughed. No matter, Fatty was first on the trail. To him the glory of the first search—the first grope, so to speak. Wading with difficulty, he held the lantern high, and they could see the confines of the cellar and the inky flat of the water, which was almost to his armpits. It presented a clear expanse, except in one corner, where something rose above the level—a dark mass!

“What’s that in yon corner?” asked Ben, who was lying on his stomach, his body half over the hole, and his arms hanging down, completely blocking the view of the other two.

Fatty waded across to the heap, which was slimy and soft to touch. He gripped and answered:

“Baskets; a pile of baskets, all rotted.”

“Try all round with yer feet, you may happen on something,” urged Ben.

They waited while Fatty waded and kicked, going the round of the cellar, and at last reported:

“Nothing; just floor—and slime.”

Bob and Goggles, above, gave a great sigh of disappointment, and were getting ready to assure each other that they never really expected to find anything, when Ben whispered:

“Move the baskets and see what’s under.”

Fatty had only one free hand, so he came back, calling up:

“Hold the light, and then I can use both hands.”

Ben’s long arm swung down, and his finger hooked the lantern. Fatty waded back—swish—swish—swish!

They heard his grunts, and saw him draw away the top layer of baskets, just a mass of pulpy sticks that had probably been there for fifty years. Some floated, some dipped under. The boy was obliged to go deeper to pull at the lower ones, and the water rose to his chin. Then he uttered a gurgling cry.

“Yes—yes!” they heard him gasp.

“What?” roared Ben into the hollow, forgetful of caution.

“What?” Bob and Goggles echoed.

“A box!” exclaimed Fatty, feeling below the water, with only his nose and chin sticking out.

“Can you move it?” asked Ben.

“Yes—it’s coming!” groaned Fatty.

“Pull!” shouted Ben. “Pull hard!”

“It’s coming! I can drag it—easy!” gurgled Fatty excitedly.

The thing slid and slipped, it was so covered with slime, but by using hands and feet and shins, he got it across the cellar and below them, panting and puffing like a grampus.

“Where’s the rope?” demanded the slime-covered hero of the moment, lifting up two black paws.

They all dashed to the bag for the rope; but one sweep of Ben’s great arms and the

others went sprawling. He had it looped and noosed and lowered, giving instructions how to work the noose and find the middle of the load, and so forth. He forgot to whisper now, and the cellar was like a sounding box.

Fatty, by several actual dives of his head into the water, got the noose down and announced that it was around the box. They tugged, and the load rose easily in the water—then slipped—and it all had to be done over again.

"I must rest," groaned Fatty. "The reek of this place is awful, and I'll be poisoned!"

"Never mind," said Ben encouragingly. "It'll be cheap at the price. Now you've got it."

"Ugh! This smell gets worse and worse!" gasped Fatty, when he again got to work. "It seems to come from the box."

"No, it's the stuff you're stirring up," said Bob soothingly. "Stick it, old man, we'll soon have it out, once you tie it tight."

"Now—haul away!" cried Fatty, once more triumphant.

"It don't feel particular heavy," growled Ben. "Keep it level, my lad. Now then; a hand there, Mr. Bob. Got it? Heave!"

A few inches at a time, and up it came, everybody very careful, and Fatty, with arms up, keeping the thing from slipping out of the noose.

"Oh, what a holy mess there'll be on the floor," cried Bob, as the bundle of black slime came nearer and nearer the floor level.

"Never mind that," gasped Ben. "Heave! Once we've got it up we'll shove it through the window and on to the deck of the Saucy Ann, and away! I've got planks there that we can haul in by reaching out. One more heave!"

Now the long, flat object was within reach. Four hands grasped it and it was drawn on to the floor.

"Surprisin' light," muttered Ben as he helped to place it on one of the rush mats.

All promptly forgot poor Fatty, who remained below, protesting and appealing.

"I say, help me up! What about me? Where's the rope?"

"Here, my lad," cried Ben, dropping his great arms down, "catch hold."

Fatty gripped, and Ben, on his knees, hauled him up like a child, grunting: "There y'are! You've won the right to get a first squint at what's inside. You shall open it. Where's them tools? Sling over a screwdriver or summat!"

"It feels very soft," said Bob, who was digging his fingers into the coating of slime.

Ben seized the big chisel Goggles held out and began scratching away till he struck wood.

"You're right, Mr. Bob; it's mighty soft—feels like deal. I doubt if this is the box I told you about, but like as not he packed it different."

"Oh, my, the effluvium!" gasped Goggles, holding his nose.

"The what?" demanded Ben.

"He means that it stinks," Bob translated. "And, my hat, I should think it does; you could cut it with a knife."

"Well, what d'ye expect—violets? This 'ere has been in dead water for years and years."

"Hundreds of years, I should think, by the stuff on it!" remarked Goggles, holding his nose tight and peering close.

The stabbing chisel went through soft wood, went in deep.

"Terrible soft," growled Ben, beginning to look a little anxious. This did not seem the sort of box a miser would pack Spanish doubloons in. And it was certainly curiously light.

"I've got under the lid," whispered Ben at last; and with a grunt he heaved off a section of wood, and all the black stuff on it, into the air.

They all bent down eagerly, and as quickly fell back, nearly choked by an odour, the like of which had rarely before assailed human nostrils.

"Why—it's—a cran full of rotten fish!" roared Ben in savage disgust.

"Open the window!" gasped Goggles.

The Ghostly Hand!

ALL the high hopes of the treasure-seekers were dashed by their failure, or, rather, asphyxiated by the odour of the rotten fish.

Here was a pretty how-d'ye-do! And such a mess of slime and water; a hole in the floor; and the house slowly filling with the appalling smell.

"What are we to do with it?" Bob demanded in dismay, and talking into his handkerchief.

"Out o' the window with it into the sea," replied Ben. "Open that window! Pitch it out!"

Goggles had already put his head out to get a little fresh ozone from the none-too-sweet-scented harbour, and Ben thrust him aside, and, lifting the box, bore it to the opening. There was barely room for the box to fall between the wall of the house and the side of the Saucy Ann, for the tide had risen and the ship with it, so that the floor of the house and the vessel's deck were about level.

Plop! went the load into the silent harbour with a sound like a man overboard; but as there was only Dumb Dummy on the ship, he heard nothing. On the shore, however, a gendarme on night duty on the sea wall heard something and began nosing about in the dark.

"What's to happen to me?" asked the shivering and dripping Fatty.

"Back to ship and get them duds off, and give yourself a swab down," replied Ben.

"But I can't go through the streets like this!"

"No need. I left a couple o' planks on deck, nigh the window, in case we wanted to slide anything out and across. You can go that way."

Ben leaned out of the window, grabbed the plank and bridged the space between the gunwale and the window sill; and Fatty—not at all liking the black gap below—was helped and pushed across.

The others, after drawing the curtains, but leaving the window open, in case Fatty should decide to return, applied themselves to cleaning up the mess. They whispered across to Fatty to sling over mops and swabs, and soon made a very fair job of the floor.

Then there were the boards to screw back. This, however, was impossible, for an old joist was broken and had fallen into the water below. The mops were flung back on the deck, and by that time Fatty, in fresh clothes, but only half washed and very smeary, was ready to rejoin them.

All this took some time, and everything had to be done stealthily.

"We'll have to skip in the morning, we can't mend that floor," Ben observed, as he stood scratching his head with his hat tilted over one eye.

"But where to, Ben?" Bob asked. "Where next? There's nothing here."

"Ah, where?" sighed Goggles. "We shall have to push on to the last place before this where uncle stayed, and might have hidden his box. Where was that, Ben?"

"I forget without the diaries and papers, and they're all in the harnted box."

"Let's call to Fatty and have them brought over," suggested Bob, who cherished no terror of the box—as a box.

"If he dares," observed Ben nervously.

"Of course he dares."

They appealed to Fatty out of the window, and very soon he came across the plank scrambling along on his knees and pushing the box before him. He was helped in, and the window curtains were snugly drawn. The box was set on the floor, and the diaries flung out on to the centre table. The charts and

maps and old-time stuff of the Spaniard's were put on the little table near the window to get them out of the way.

Three of the party drew up chairs, and Fatty stood behind Ben, looking over his shoulder. Soon all were as eager as if there had been no failure, no dashed hopes, no setback. Every page held a possible clue.

"Now let's see what he says here," cried Ben, turning to the magic page. "Ah, yes, it was Isle of Koba, off the African coast, a dreadful spot for any white man to want to stop at. He——"

Fatty's hand gripped Ben's shoulder like a vice; and Ben, looking up to see why, beheld the smeary one staring in the direction of the window with eyes that threatened to jump out of their sockets.

Ben gave a great gasp, for when his own eyes followed the direction of Fatty's frozen stare, he saw a sight that seemed to turn his bones to jelly.

No apparition in half-light, this; but there, in the full, clear glow of the lamp, the curtains of the window were parted by a bony, shrivelled hand, protruding from a green sleeve with a red cuff, and clawing softly at the papers on the small table—nerveless fingers; a fixed, dead claw, scratching gently to draw the papers to the window.

Ben's hair stood on end; he gasped and leapt to his feet, overturning table, lamp, books and charts, and sending the lads sprawling in the sudden dark.

Bob, who had only just caught sight of the ghostly hand, and was summoning all his courage to make a grab, was helpless, and grabbed at nothing.

Plunged into inky gloom, everything vanished from sight—the hand, the window, the room. Only Ben's gurgles and scuffles, and his feet trampling over theirs, and his hands grabbing reminded them that they were still on solid earth, and not suddenly wafted to the land of spirits, plunged into nether darkness!

(To be continued.)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE.

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The League Application Form appeared in last week's issue, and will appear again next Wednesday.

I should like to take this opportunity again to remind members of the correspondence facilities which will shortly be opened in connection with the League.

Members who desire to get into touch with other members living in the British Isles or abroad, should send their requirements to me as soon as possible. Full instructions in regard to this were given in last week's issue.

In response to numerous enquiries, the question of a League Badge is being given every consideration, and I hope to make an announcement of great importance at a very early date.

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

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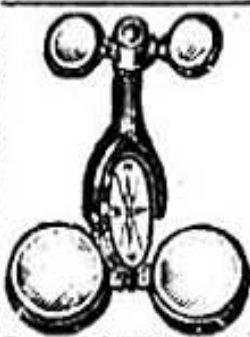
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