THE SCHOOLBOY TEST MATCH PLAYER!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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When Jerry Dodd, of the St. Frank's Remove, is chosen to play for England against Australia in a Test match, it causes a sensation in cricket circles. But it is nothing to the sensation Jerry causes by his wonderful play in the game!

(The Narrative Related Throughout by NIPPER.)

CHAPTER 1.

Handforth's Grim Discovery!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH entered Study D in the Ancient House at St. Frank's with a heavy, forbidding frown upon his brow. He wasn't angry—that frown merely denoted that he was in a thoughtful mood.

He failed to observe that the table was set already for tea. The bread-and-butter was cut, the cakes and pastries were arrayed in an appetising way, and Church and McClure were sitting down at the table.

They looked up as Handforth entered.

"About time, too!" said Church. "You told us to have tea ready prompt at five, and you don't turn up till ten past. What's delayed you, Handy?"

Handforth made no reply. He walked straight before him, progressed as far as the window, and then turned round.

"What's the trouble, Handy?" asked McClure.

"Poison!" said Handforth absently.

"Eh?"

"The question is, what does it mean?" went on Handforth. "Poison! There's something sinister about this, and——"

Handforth came to an abrupt halt, his eyes gleaming with a sudden new light. His face flushed, and he clenched one fist. Then he brought the fist down upon the tea-table.

"By George," he shouted, "I've got it!"

Whatever he had got, it was quite certain that Church and McClure had received something, too. Church's cup of tea danced in the saucer, wobbled

about precariously for a moment, and then toppled gracefully over into Church's lap. He sprang to his feet with a yell.

"Yow-ow!" he howled wildly. "I'm scalded! You—you silly ass!"

"My only hat!" gasped McClure. "What the dickens——"

He had saved his own cup of tea by a masterly effort, but half of it was spilt over the tablecloth.

"He's mad!" snorted Church indignantly. "I'm soaked! What's the matter with you, Handy? What's the idea of coming in here and causing all this havoc?"

Handforth saw his chums for the first time.

"What's that?" he snapped impatiently. "Oh, don't bother me now! I'm thinking—I'm in the middle of an intricate problem!"

"You've soaked me with hot tea!" snorted Church fiercely. "Why can't you keep your hands still? A fellow who's got hands like sledge-hammers ought to be more careful!"

Handforth sighed.

"And you two chaps are supposed to be my chums!" he said bitterly. "All you can do when I want to be quiet—when I want to concentrate on a murder case—all you can do is to interrupt with silly remarks about tea! What do I care about tea? What do I care whether you're scalded or not? I'm on the track of a terrible crime!"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned McClure. "He's got the detective fever again! This'll mean the end of all our peace!"

"Detective fever—rot!" said Handforth grimly. "There's no fever about it. I've made a discovery—just that, and nothing more. And it's set my mind into a train of thought."

"Good!" said Church sourly. "Oh, go on—we're listening!"

"This case I'm investigating is connected with Dodd, of the Remove."

"Oh!" said Church. "So Jerry Dodd's in it! Is he the murderer, or merely the victim? You'd better get your handcuffs ready, old man——"

"Will you listen or not?" thundered Handforth. "I'm not going to be treated in this way by my assistants."

"Your what?" asked McClure.

"My assistants!" repeated Handforth firmly. "You're not Remove chaps now. I'm a detective, and you're my assistants. Understand? We're going to do this thing properly. Well, about Jerry Dodd. Ever since he came I've been puzzled about him. There's been something fishy connected with the chap—something that I couldn't fathom."

"Marvellous!" said Church. "Is there anything you can't fathom, Handy?"

Edward Oswald ignored the sneer.

"Just think of Podge and Midge," he continued. "Who are they—what are they?"

"A couple of escaped lunatics!" said McClure promptly.

"A pair of prize idiots!" added Church.

Handforth curled his lip.

"That only shows how you've been spoofed!" he said. "Podge and Midge are detectives—as keen as mustard. You may not think so, but that's where you've been hoodwinked. Podge and Midge have made themselves look ridiculous, but that's only part of their plan. Actually, they are all alive, and waiting for the right moment."

Church and McClure looked at one another rather wearily.

They were used to this sort of thing. At intervals Handforth would have these attacks, and they generally came suddenly. It was something like a man who is subject to fits or seizures. And when Handforth was attacked in this way nothing could stop him.

Church and McClure had no difficulty in recollecting Messrs. Podge and Midge—the two extraordinary gentlemen who styled themselves the Deadliest Sleuths on Earth. They were supposed to be detectives, and

they had been concerned in one or two ludicrous incidents during the last week or so. Most of the fellows knew that Messrs. Podge and Midge were in the neighbourhood for the express purpose of keeping their eyes upon Jerry Dodd.

The new boy in the Remove certainly had a mystery connected with him. And Podge and Midge had apparently received instructions to protect him. They were about as much use in this capacity as a couple of lost sheep.

"Podge and Midge are here because Jerry Dodd is in some danger—or because he's threatened with danger," went on Handforth. "We know that, don't we?"

"But what is the danger?"

Handforth held up a finger.

"Aha! That's just it!" he said mysteriously. "What is the danger? Until a few minutes ago I didn't know, and I was puzzled about it. But now I do know. I placed my finger on the key of the mystery just before I came into this study."

"Bravo!" said Church. "Good old Handy!"

He and McClure were proceeding with their tea. But Handforth needed nothing. The very thought of eating and drinking never entered his head.

"As you chaps know, Dodd's uncle is at present at St. Frank's," he continued. "Mr. William Dodd came here a day or two ago, and he's staying until to-morrow, I believe. Why did he come?"

"To see his nephew, I suppose."

"Ostensibly, yes!" agreed Handforth. "On the face of things, Mr. Dodd came to St. Frank's just to see Jerry. Who is he? We don't know! We are simply aware that he came from Australia."

"Rats!" objected McClure. "Uncle Bill—as Dodd calls him—is a member of the Australian cricket team. He's a well-known batsman——"

"That's what he says," interrupted Handforth. "But we don't know whether that's the truth or not—and we can't take anything for granted. To my mind it's queer that he should come here and stay two or three days. Other chaps' people don't do it!"

"No, because they don't live in Australia."

"A quibble!" said Handforth contemptuously. "Mr. William Dodd has come to St. Frank's for a sinister reason. You may not believe me now, but I'll soon exlain. We all know that Dodd's pater is worth pots of money."

"I fancy he's a millionaire," said McClure.

"Exactly—a millionaire!" hissed Handforth dramatically, as he leaned across the table. "Jerry is his only son. When Dodd's pater dies, Jerry comes into all the money. That's right, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," said Church. "But what on earth——"

"Wait!" snapped Handforth. "Now, this is significant. Where will the money go if Jerry Dodd dies at once? Who will be the next of kin?"

"Blessed if I know," said McClure.

"Why, the uncle, of course—the man who's here at St. Frank's!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Do you see now? Once Jerry Dodd is out of the way, the uncle's path will be clear. He'll only have to murder Dodd's pater, and he'll come into everything! Don't you call that a masterful piece of deduction?"

Church and McClure had stopped eating, and they were staring at their leader in blank amazement. Handforth's face was flushed, his eyes were blazing with excitement.

"Great Scott!" gasped Church. "Do—do you mean that Dodd's uncle has come to St. Frank's to—to kill him?"

"Yes!" rapped out Handforth.

"Oh, you prize lunatic!" groaned McClure. "You better not let anybody hear you say anything of that sort, Handy! Why, you'd be sacked for even less——"

"Sacked!" snapped Handforth. "What do I care about that? I'm going to reveal the truth—I'm going to expose this blackhearted scoundrel in his true colours! Uncle Bill is a wolf in sheep's clothing!"

Church rose to his feet, rather alarmed.

"Look here, Handy, this is a bit too much for you!" he said gently. "You mustn't get so excited—your brain won't stand it! Mr. Dodd is a gentleman—one of the best. Everybody likes him. It's absolutely ridiculous to suggest that he's come to St. Frank's to—to——"

"You're off your rocker, Handy!" declared McClure.

Handforth cooled down in his sudden abrupt way. He became icily calm, and looked at his chums with withering scorn.

"Of course, I expected you to take it like this," he said with contempt. "You don't understand—you haven't got sense enough to see the truth when it stares you in the face. I don't blame you—I didn't expect anything else."

"But—but what's put this idea into your head?" demanded Church.

"Ah, you want to know, don't you?" said Handforth, in a tense whisper. "I'll tell you! Jerry's uncle means to poison him!"

"Poison him!" gasped Church.

"Yes."

"But—but——"

"I'll explain how I made the discovery," said Handforth, leaning forward. "Just before I came into this study, I was walking along the passage. I had passed Dodd in the lobby, so I knew that he wasn't in Study F."

"Obviously," said McClure. "He couldn't be in two places at once."

"But as I was coming past Study F I saw that the door was ajar," said Handforth. "I didn't take particular notice at first. Then I caught sight of the mirror over the mantelpiece. And, reflected in the mirror, I could see the form of Dodd's uncle."

"I suppose he was in the room?" asked Church breathlessly.

"Of course he was, you ass?"

"Ah! A clue!" said McClure.

"If you're going to be funny, I won't say another word!" roared Handforth. "You don't seem to realise that this matter is deadly serious. I saw the reflection of Dodd's uncle. And what was he doing?"

"Standing on his head?" suggested Church.

"No, you babbling lunatic, he wasn't," replied Handforth. "He was standing there, with a little bottle in his hand!"

"Good heavens!" said Church. "You mean he was helping himself to a swig of whisky——"

"The bottle was a tiny one—a phial!" said Handforth significantly. "It was blue, and there was a label on it. And, printed on this label, in red letters, was the word 'poison'! Now do you understand?"

"And how did you see all that as you walked by?"

"I paused, of course," said Handforth. "I knew at once that something was wrong—I smelt a rat. And I could see the word as clear as I can see you. Dodd's uncle was holding up a bottle of poison."

Church and McClure were slightly impressed.

"Is that all?" asked Church.

"Well, isn't it enough?" demanded Handforth. "What should he be doing with poison—alone in that study? It means that he's got designs on Jerry's life. There's no other explanation."

"Oh, rats!" said McClure. "In the first place, you may have been mistaken—the stuff may not have been poison at all. Even supposing it was, there's no necessity to think that Dodd's uncle means to use it on the chap."

Handforth snapped his fingers.

"You don't understand these things," he exclaimed. "You haven't got the faculty of putting two and two together and making four."

Church shook his head.

"That's just where you fail, Handy," he said. "When you put two and two together, you generally make four hundred! The true explanation of what you saw is probably as simple as A B C, and you go and jump at conclusions. What proof have you got that Mr. Dodd has evil designs upon his nephew's life? No proof at all, except that which has come into your own mind."

"Rubbish!" said Handforth. "The whole thing is as clear as daylight. There's no other way to look at it. I'm not going to explain it all again, because you don't seem to understand. But I know what I'm talking about, and I know that Jerry Dodd's life is in danger. We're going to save him."

"Save him?" repeated Church. "How?"

"By exposing his uncle in his true colours."

Handforth's chums were now really alarmed.

"Do—do you mean to say that you're going to accuse Mr. Dodd of making an attempt to—to poison his nephew?" gasped Church.

"Yes."

"Oh, you prize ass!" gasped McClure. "You'll be sacked—the Head'll be in a tearing fury, and he'll expel you on the spot! You can't do it, Handy—you'll absolutely let yourself in the cart if you interfere——"

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth suddenly. "Look!"

He pointed with a quivering finger through the window. And Church and McClure, gazing in that direction, saw Jerry Dodd strolling across the Triangle with his uncle. They were relieved, for, from Handforth's tone, they had half expected to see Jerry's lifeless form lying out there.

"You gave me a scare!" said Church. "What's the matter with you?"

"Can't you see?" hissed Handforth.

"Yes, I can see Jerry Dodd and his Uncle Bill——"

"They're just going out together—it's what Mr. Dodd has been working up to," said Handforth. "He's luring Jerry away from the school, and unless we stop him going, he'll never come back!"

"Oh, do dry up——"

"We've got to go out and rescue him!" said Handforth grimly. "Come on!"

He dashed to the door, and before Church and McClure could interfere, he was hurrying down the passage. The two juniors gazed at one another in alarm. In spite of Handforth's little ways, his chums were very fond of him, and they did not like to see him running his head into a pile of trouble.

"Oh, the hopeless fathead!" groaned Church. "What shall we do?"

"We'd better follow him, and drag him away by force," said McClure desperately. "It's the only thing to do. Come on!"

They dashed out, and they arrived in the lobby just in time to overtake Handforth. The latter was already making his way towards the door, and he did not pause as his chums came up. But they made a dive at him, and grabbed hold of his jacket.

"Come back, you ass!" said Church fiercely.

"Leggo!" snapped Handforth. "I've got to do my duty——"

"But—but——" Church broke off. "They're coming back," he added. "Dodd and his uncle!"

Desperately, Handforth's chums grabbed hold of him, and forced him back against the wall. In no circumstances would they allow him to make his mad accusation against Mr. William Dodd. He was quite capable of confronting Jerry's uncle, and then the fat would be in the fire.

Church and McClure succeeded in

holding him back by sheer force. It was not often they were capable of doing this, but just now they were filled with wild anxiety. It would certainly mean expulsion for Handforth if he had his own way.

Jerry Dodd appeared with his uncle—a fine, handsome, well-built man of about thirty-five, with a bronzed, clean-shaven face.

"Say, I'm awfully sorry, Uncle Bill," Jerry was saying. "I don't reckon I've had toothache, but I've heard it's painful."

"That's all right, Jerry, don't you worry," said Mr. Dodd. "A touch of my special cure will soon make it better. I left the bottle on the study mantelpiece. I've had the toothache rather severely since I came to England—the climate, I suppose."

"Lemme go!" hissed Handforth thickly. "I—I——"

"Hold him tight!" gasped Church.

They did hold him tight.

"Why, yes, uncle, I remember seeing the bottle in the study," said Jerry. "It's marked poison, isn't it?"

Mr. Dodd smiled.

"Strictly speaking, it is poison, but most toothache cures are," he replied. "It's the finest stuff I've ever used. The tiniest drop on a piece of cotton wool is enough to stop the most raging ache within a few minutes."

Jerry's uncle passed through the lobby, and went along towards the junior passage.

Church and McClure were no longer capable of holding their impulsive leader. The strength had completely gone out of their muscles. They fell back against the wall, and apparently went off into hysterics.

"Ha, ha, ha!" they howled uproariously.

Edward Oswald Handforth looked rather dazed.

"Toothache cure!" he muttered feebly. "And—and I thought——"

"Oh, Handy!" sobbed Church. "My sides will ache for a week! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" shrieked McClure.

Jerry Dodd turned in astonishment, and looked at the mirthful ones.

"By Jingo!" he exclaimed. "That joke must be a darned good one!"

But he never knew what it was. Church and McClure were incapable of speech. They howled until they were sore—they couldn't control their laughter. And Handforth seemed to swallow something with difficulty. He walked down the passage towards Study D with a sickly expression upon his face.

The bottom had fallen out of his wonderful theory with a terrible crash, and Handforth felt faint as he realised how narrowly he had escaped making a ghastly blunder. He had Church and McClure to thank for his salvation.

But Edward Oswald wasn't grateful to his long suffering chums. He remembered their hyena-like laughter, and he set his teeth grimly. What happened shortly afterwards need not be set down in full.

But fifteen minutes later Church possessed a beautiful black eye, and McClure rejoiced in a decidedly swollen nose. And the way in which they were sobered was quite wonderful.

Handforth's methods were certainly effective.

CHAPTER 2.

The Adventure on the River!

"FEELING better, Uncle Bill?"

Jerry Dodd asked that question as his uncle came out of the Ancient House doorway. Jerry was waiting on the step, in the evening sunlight. Mr. William Dodd smiled and nodded.

"Much better thanks, Jerry," he replied. "Toothache is a nuisance, but it can't be avoided sometimes. We figured on going to the river, didn't we, to have a row downstream?"

"Sure, uncle," said Jerry. "We'll get right along."

"No, not just yet," said Mr. Dodd, glancing at his watch. "It's not far from six—and I've just remembered I have an appointment with Dr. Stafford at six o'clock. I can't very well miss that, young 'un!"

"An interview with the Head?" repeated Jerry.

"Sure thing—about you."

"Oh!" said Jerry quickly. "I guess you mean—cricket?"

"You can bet you're right," said Mr. Dodd. "Now look here, Jerry, we'll just have another chat, and I'll have my facts clear before I beard the Head in his den. To-day is Thursday, and I must leave quite early in the morning—I'm booked to play in an important match in Kent to-morrow. Strictly speaking, I ought to go to-night, and perhaps I shall."

"I'll be darned sorry to let you go, Uncle Bill," said Jerry regretfully.

"You can't have me here all the time, young fel'," said Uncle Bill, patting Jerry on the shoulder. "Now, let's have the facts. You're not allowed to play cricket here?"

"That's right, uncle."

"Hard lines—but we can't blame the school people," said Mr. Dodd. "Your father arranged with the Head that you were not to play cricket. His idea was for you to stuff your head with knowledge. I won't tell you my personal opinions—I don't like being rude to my own brother. But it's unfair on you, Jerry. Cricket is the breath of your life, and to be barred from it—well, it must be torture. I'm going to make an alteration."

"By Jingo. I hope you can!" said Jerry eagerly.

"We'll see," smiled Uncle Bill. "The day after to-morrow—that is, on Saturday—there's an important fixture here at the school. The juniors of Helmsford College are coming over to play against you. Well, you'd like to be in that match, wouldn't you?"

"I'd give anything!" declared Jerry Dodd.

"Well—you'll play, you can take my word for it," said Uncle Bill. "I'm going to speak to the Head and bring him round to my point of view. You can rely on me making everything all right, Jerry."

His tone was full of confidence, and Jerry was bucked up to a wonderful extent. It was fine to have a big uncle on the spot to help him in his difficulties.

Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

The old school clock was chiming the hour, and Mr. Dodd came to a halt.

"I'll go now," he said briskly. "Wait for me out here, old fel'."

Jerry felt rather anxious as his uncle went off. Within two minutes Mr. Dodd was tapping upon the door of the Head's study. He was invited to enter, and he found the Head ready to welcome him.

"Come in, Mr. Dodd—come in!" said the Head genially. "I've not had much opportunity of chatting with you, since your arrival. We are proud to have such a distinguished guest under our roof."

"Say, it's very kind of you, Dr. Stafford," said Uncle Bill. "It's my way to get straight to the point, and I'm generally rather blunt. I'd like to have a few words with you about my nephew."

"I hope the lad has not been complaining?"

"Oh, no—nothing like that," said Mr. Dodd. "He's quite content at St. Frank's—except for one thing. That's what I mean to speak about. Jerry loves playing cricket—he loves outdoor sports of all kinds. He's been used to it all his life. But here, at this school, he's forbidden to——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the Head. "I feel very sorry for the boy, for I know that he is particularly keen on sports. And I must say that I admire him greatly. Mr. Lee has already told me how well Dodd is getting on with his studies. Although he dislikes the work, he has set himself to it

with a strong will, and has succeeded beyond all expectations. It is a matter of great regret to me that he should be debarred from playing in the regular school games."

Mr. Dodd nodded.

"Now, see here, sir," he said firmly. "Can't we make an alteration?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Oh, that's rather hurried, isn't it?" smiled Uncle Bill. "Jerry is fairly dying to play in the cricket match on Saturday—it's going to be a big affair, I understand. Couldn't you let him play, Dr. Stafford? It won't make any difference—in any case, he won't do any studying on Saturday afternoon ——"

"That is hardly the point, Mr. Dodd," interrupted the Head painfully. "I will agree with you that it is extremely galling to the boy to be forbidden cricket. If it were in my power I would give him permission at once—willingly and freely. Indeed, he would not find it necessary to ask. Unfortunately, however, I am not in a position to alter the present situation."

Mr. Dodd looked astonished.

"But you're the headmaster," he said. "I don't quite understand, Dr. Stafford."

"Then it will only take me a moment to enlighten you," smiled the Head. "You see, Mr. Dodd, when the lad came to St. Frank's his father made a firm stipulation that he should devote his time to studies, and that he should not play football, cricket, or spend any of his time at sports. Naturally, he was to take exercise, but by walking, riding, swimming, and such like. Games, in your brother's opinion, were to be avoided."

"But why?" asked Uncle Bill blankly. "What's the matter with cricket?"

"It is one of the finest games a boy could play," said the Head. "But you must admit, Mr. Dodd, that it occupies a great deal of time. It will generally be found that the members of the school elevens are not particularly brilliant in the class-rooms. Boys, at a big school like this, are divided into two big classes—those who do well at sports, and those who succeed in their studies. It is not often that a first-rate sportsman is also a first-rate scholar. And your brother wanted Jerry to devote all his time to lessons—with a view, I believe, of studying for the Bar."

Uncle Bill snapped his fingers.

"I reckon my brother was daft," he said bluntly. "Jerry—reading for the Bar? What absolute nonsense! He's not suitable for that kind of life. But we are straying from the point, Dr. Stafford. I want you to give Jerry permission to play against Helmford on Saturday!"

"I am very sorry, but I cannot give that permission."

"But, see here, sir——"

"Really, Mr. Dodd, I must be quite firm," said the Head. "Were it a personal matter I would give it at once. But I made a binding agreement with your brother that Jerry should not play in any of the school fixtures. You will surely realise how impossible it is for me to break my own word. I am very sorry, but your nephew cannot play."

"Can't you take it from me that my brother wouldn't be angry?"

"No—that would not be honourable," said the Head quietly.

"I guess you're right—and I'm sorry," said Uncle Bill. "If you gave a definite promise, Dr. Stafford, you can't very well back out of it. Say, this will be a terrible disappointement for the lad."

And it was.

When Uncle Bill returned to Jerry, and gave him the report, the Australian junior was dismayed. He and Mr. Dodd strolled through the playing-fields towards the river, and Jerry heard all about the interview.

"Oh, Uncle Bill, and I thought you'd do the trick;" he said sorrowfully. "What hard luck! I can't play, after all—unless Nipper gets up to some more of his tricks," he added, with a

touch of hope. "I told you how we dished everybody in the Bannington match, didn't I?"

"Yes, that was great!" smiled Mr. Dodd. "But that can't be done again—particularly in a home match. No, Jerry, I'm afraid there's no hope. I've done my best, and I've failed. But don't be miserable, young fel'—let's enjoy ourselves for this evening. There's a whole day clear before Saturday, and something might turn up."

Jerry was not very optimistic, but he cast his gloom aside, and in a short time he and his uncle were seated in a long, speedy rowing boat, gliding down the river. It was a glorious evening for such enjoyment as this.

Uncle Bill was seated near the bows, rowing, whilst Jerry sat in the stern, steering.

He had been looking forward to this hour on the river, but all the enjoyment had gone out of it. He tried to keep smiling, but it was a great effort. Jerry's disappointment was keen. He had looked upon it as certain that he would play in the Helmford match, and now he knew that it was impossible.

But the junior was not allowed much time for brooding, for a rather startling incident took place within the next few minutes.

Jerry and Uncle Bill were going downstream, and, after rounding a bend, they came within sight of a very pretty stretch of water. Willows grew in clumps on either bank. Grassy meadows, gaily filled with wild blossoms, stretched away on either hand, and, just near by, the dense bulk of Bellton Wood loomed up.

"You'll have to duck your head soon, uncle," said Jerry. "Keep a sharp look-out—that bridge is very low."

The river was surprisingly full, for there had been quite a lot of rain recently, and the water, consequently, was higher than usual at this time of the year. A rustic bridge spanned the river just a little farther down.

It was not used much, and could hardly be described as a powerful structure. The bridge was very low, and when boats passed beneath, it was necessary for those within the craft to crouch down. There had been some talk of taking the bridge away, but this had never been done.

It was undoubtedly picturesque, for the parapets of the bridge were high, and composed of rustic trelliswork, with tangled masses of wild creepers growing in profusion. The juniors frequently played japes on this bridge, for they could crouch there without being seen from the river. Many a boatload of fellows had been pelted from those rustic parapets as they passed beneath.

"Get ready now, Uncle Bill," said Jerry. "Swing your oars in."

Mr. Dodd obeyed, and the boat glided slowly under the bridge, both its occupants bending low, in order to avoid being caught on the brambles and creepers which hung down. Uncle Bill, being in the bows, was naturally under first, and he could not very well see what was happening to Jerry—not that he expected anything to happen at all. But something did take place—swiftly and unexpectedly.

Jerry had his gaze upon his uncle's feet, and he certainly did not think of looking upwards. Then a pair of strong, lithe arms reached down. They caught the junior just under the armpits.

He gave a startled gasp as he was lifted clean out of the boat. Just for a moment he dangled in mid-air, wondering dazedly what had occurred. Then he was swung upwards. The old rustic work creaked, and he found himself on the bridge.

A hand was clasped over his mouth, but, in spite of this, he managed to make a slight outcry—a muffled gasp. He could see that he was in the grasp of a powerful man with dark skin—an Indian! And another man of the same race was near by, helping to hold him down.

This incident had been so unexpected, so swift, that Jerry could hardly realise what it could mean.

Uncle Bill, meanwhile, was nearly as startled as the junior. And this was not surprising, for he had just caught a glimpse of Jerry disappearing upwards out of the stern of the boat. Jerry's legs dangled for a second, and then he completely vanished. Mr. Dodd stared in complete amazement.

"Say, Jerry!" he shouted. "What's the idea?"

For a moment he thought that the boy himself had done something. He could scarcely realise that there was anyone else near the spot; but he knew it a moment later.

Jerry fought desperately with his captors, but he knew instinctively that he would never be able to defeat them. They were unseen from the river, and it was only necessary to drag him swiftly across the bridge and they would be swallowed up among the trees. Uncle Bill would never know what had happened. Jerry would have been kidnapped before his eyes!

One of the Indians drew a piece of cotton material from a small metal box. He moved as though to clap this to Jerry's face.

He knew what it meant—a drug!

And for a second Jerry fought like a tiger. He used all his strength, kicking, struggling, and wriggling. He would never have got free, but Providence came to his aid in an unexpected fashion.

Crash!

As Jerry swayed to and fro, his back came into contact with the rotten old rustic work. The wood could not withstand the strain, and it splintered and cracked with a series of minor crashes. The next second Jerry went plunging backwards through the opening he had made, to fall with a tremendous splash into the water.

The Indians disappeared as though by magic. They had failed, and they knew it.

To Uncle Bill, all this seemed very extraordinary. He had not seen the strangers, and he did not know what had happened to Jerry until he saw the boy plunge down into the river.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Mr. Dodd.

He wrenched at his oars, and then a disaster occurred—for him. He used rather too much power, and the oar slipped out of the rowlock and fell into the water. Uncle Bill went crashing over against the side of the boat, catching his right wrist between his hip and the woodwork. For a second his face was screwed up with pain, and his wrist felt as though it were broken.

As it happened, he needn't have worried at all, for with a few strokes Jerry reached the boat and hauled himself on board. He was none the worse, except for a soaking, but his eyes were blazing.

"By jings!" he gasped. "Did you see them, uncle?"

"I didn't see anything—I don't know what happened," replied Mr. Dodd. "All I know is that my wrist is out of action, confound it! That oar slipped out of the rowlock."

"Say, that was a near thing for me," said Jerry breathlessly. "Thank goodness the old bridge busted up! Those Indians had got hold of me and in another minute I should have been unconscious. They've gone now, of course, but they didn't get me!"

Uncle Bill forgot his wrist for a moment.

"Indians?" he repeated, staring. "What are you talking about?"

"Why, didn't you see?"

"I've already told you that I saw nothing——"

"As we were passing under the bridge somebody leaned over and grabbed hold of me," explained Jerry. "I figure they tried to kidnap me, Uncle Bill. And if it hadn't been for that bridge breaking, they would have done the trick. By jings! In open daylight, too."

"My dear Jerry, all this is double Dutch to me," said Mr. Dodd. "Indians? I think you must have been mistaken, Jerry."

"But I wasn't mistaken," declared the Australian junior. "It's a queer business, Uncle Bill. I can't understand what it all means, and why they should trouble themselves over me."

Mr. Dodd winced slightly as he moved his wrist up and down.

"Well, we needn't discuss matters now," he said. "You're soaked through, young man, and I imagine you'll be better off in dry clothing. How can we get back to the school?"

"I suppose it'll be quicker to get ashore, and then go across the meadows at a run," replied Jerry. "But there's no danger of me catching a cold, I figure. I'm hardy enough."

It was not long before they were ashore, and then they set off at a trot across the meadows. By the time they arrived at St. Frank's, Jerry was in a glow, and he left his uncle in Study F while he went upstairs to change. He soon came down, after a complete change of attire.

"That's all right now, Uncle Bill," he said, as he entered Study F. "We can talk, and I can tell you about those Indians. I guess I'd like to have a word with Mr. Lee, too. Say, he's a fine man—Mr. Lee! Why, by jings! What's the matter?"

Mr. Dodd was holding his right arm in a curious position, and then Jerry noticed for the first time that his wrist was swollen and puffy.

"It's nothing much, but I'm afraid I'm done for temporarily," said Uncle Bill ruefully. "A sprained wrist, young fel'—twisted rather badly. That infernal oar, you know. I shall be no good to-morrow."

Jerry looked alarmed.

"But—but what about your match?" he asked.

"They'll have to do without me," replied Mr. Dodd. "Fortunately, we have two or three reserves. I couldn't handle a bat in this condition—or bowl, either."

"What blamed hard lines!" said Jerry. "Oh, but, say! Maybe you can stay?" he added suddenly. "Perhaps you can see the Helmford match on Saturday?"

Uncle Bill nodded.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't remain here a day or two longer," he agreed. "I certainly will, Jerry; and if I can do anything to get you into the St. Frank's team, I'll be only too glad to oblige."

Jerry was sorry that his uncle was hurt, but at the same time he could not help feeling pleased. For that slight sprain, insignificant in itself, would mean that Mr. Dodd would remain at St. Frank's until the end of the week.

"Now, about these Indians?" said Uncle Bill.

"They've been hanging about the district since I came to St. Frank's. Mr. Lee knows all about them," explained Jerry. "Anyway, he's pretty keen on the case, uncle. He's asked me all sorts of questions. I figure it would be a good idea for you to have a chat with Mr. Lee."

Mr. William Dodd nodded.

"No time like the present," he said briskly. "I'll go right along now."

Nelson Lee, as it happened, was just coming along the passage when Uncle Bill turned the corner. The famous schoolmaster-detective guessed at once that Mr. Dodd was going to his study.

"Say, this is great!" said Uncle Bill. "I was figuring to have a few words with you, Mr. Lee—providing you're not too busy. But if I'm butting in, just say the the word, and I'll await your convenience."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"My dear sir, I am only too delighted that you have come," he replied. "To tell you the truth, I am

rather anxious to have a chat with you. I particularly want to do so before you leave."

"Well, that's real good," said Uncle Bill.

He followed Nelson Lee into the study; they sat down and lighted cigarettes. Lee quickly noted the condition of his visitor's wrist, and made a concerned inquiry regarding it.

"A sprain—not much, but more than I care about," said Mr. Dodd. "No cricket for me to-morrow, or for a few days."

"I'm sorry," said Lee. "This will be bad for your eleven."

Uncle Bill smiled deprecatingly.

"I don't reckon I'm so valuable as all that," he said. "I shall remain at St. Frank's until Monday next, I expect. I've a mind to see the match against Helmford College."

"It will be a good game, I fancy," said Nelson Lee.

"But, to get to more important matters," went on Uncle Bill. "I got this sprain on the river, through a very queer incident which occurred to my young nephew, Jerry. To put it short, Mr. Lee, two Indians attempted to get hold of him."

Nelson Lee became suddenly alert.

"Indeed!" he said quietly. "Let me hear of this affair!"

Mr. Dodd lost no time in describing what had happened, and Nelson Lee listened with great interest.

"I didn't actually see the Indians, but Jerry swore that they were Hindoos, or something of that kind," concluded Uncle Bill. "But he's a sharp youngster, and he wriggled away, ending up by falling in the river."

Nelson Lee stroked his chin.

"I am glad you have spoken of this, Mr. Dodd," he said. "It is the very subject I wished to broach. Perhaps you do not know of the curious events which have been taking place at St. Frank's since your nephew's arrival?"

"I reckon I'm feeling in the dark," replied Uncle Bill.

"Then I shall be most pleased to give you the facts," said Lee. "At first there was no indication that anything was different; then one day the boy came to me with a curious story of a dream he had had. In this dream he had met an Indian in native costume; he had been taken to a cavern; he had gazed into a crystal; and he had finally awakened in a dazed condition."

"That was a bit of a nightmare," suggested Mr. Dodd.

"On the contrary, the thing actually took place," said Nelson Lee grimly. "It was no dream, as Jerry imagined, but a real happening. I had positive proof of this at the time. While in this cavern, the boy picked up a little golden idol, and he slipped it into his pocket. Later on, at the school, he found this idol, but it had no significance. He had forgotten his dream completely."

"That was strange," said Uncle Bill.

"Very strange," agreed Lee. "Well, I came to the conclusion that your nephew had been placed under the influence of some Eastern drug. This drug was injected by means of a tiny dart, probably projected through the air from a blowpipe."

"Good gracious!" said Uncle Bill. "I can't quite believe it, Mr. Lee!"

"I will admit that it sounds far-fetched and preposterous, but it just happens to be the truth," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Jerry went through a similar experience shortly afterwards."

"What can their game be?"

"I am quite in the dark," confessed Lee. "But I am doing my utmost to get at the truth, Mr. Dodd. I must also tell you that these Indian gentlemen have broken into the school on two occasions—with the object, no doubt, of recovering the golden image. But I have retained it, for obvious reasons."

"Quite so," said Uncle Bill. "But have you any theory, Mr. Lee? Can you suggest why these Eastern men should wish to get hold of my nephew? The whole thing seems fantastic to me, and I can only conclude that they are madmen, or that they are making some extraordinary mistake."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"It is hardly feasible to suppose that these Burmese, or Indians, should make a mistake over such a matter," he said. "No, Mr. Dodd, I am convinced that there is some grim reason for all this, and I am taking great care to see that Jerry is protected. I have already warned him that he must not venture out alone—and you will see the necessity for this when you remember what occurred this evening."

"By George, yes!" said Mr. Dodd. "Burmese! What does it mean?"

"That is what I am trying to understand," said Nelson Lee. "I hope you won't think me personal, Mr. Dodd, but I should like to ask you one or two questions—family questions."

"Right-ho, Mr. Lee!" said the visitor. "You can fire ahead as soon as you like; I'll answer any questions I can. There are no skeletons in our family cupboard that I know of."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I was afraid there might be one," he remarked. "Now, about your brother—Jerry's father. Do you know whether he has ever had any connection with India or Burma? The presence of these Eastern men here—the fact that they are trying to get hold of Jerry—clearly proves that there must be something behind it all. Can you provide that missing link in the chain?"

"No, I am afraid I can't," said Uncle Bill slowly.

"To your knowledge, your brother has never visited the East?"

"Somehow, I've got an idea that he did," said Mr. Dodd, scratching his ear. "He's much older than I am, Mr. Lee—ten years, at least. When I was about twelve—a mere boy—my brother left Australia on a trip. Our parents were always quiet about that trip, and when my brother came back he was different—quieter and more settled in life. Previously, he had been rather harum-scarum."

"Ah, I see!" said Nelson Lee. "Do you know where he went to?"

"That is the point," said Uncle Bill. "I don't know. I've asked Jerrold himself—of course, he has the same name as his son—but he would never give me any satisfactory answer. Once or twice, however, a reference to Burma crept out, and in the face of all these events, I am now convinced that it was to Burma that my brother went. But that was over twenty years ago."

"Obviously," said Nelson Lee. "I am glad you have told me this, Mr. Dodd. It coincides exactly with my own theory. As you will imagine, I have been looking up this subject most diligently, and have gained some very instructive information regarding Burmese religion—sects, castes, and so forth. It is not my intention to discuss the subject further now, but I fancy I shall soon have the mystery well solved."

"That's good hearing, Mr. Lee," said Uncle Bill heartily. "I reckon I hate a mystery — particularly about a member of my own family. And, say! Now I come to think of it, somebody from the East visited my brother on his ranch, not so very many months ago."

"A merchant from Rangoon?" said Nelson Lee. "Jerry told me."

"Yes. And it was just after that that the boy was sent to England," went on Mr. Dodd. "I was in Sydney at the time. Say, I was surprised a lot! I'd never had any notion that my brother Jerrold would send his son to an English school. It strikes me that he had a reason for doing so—he was afraid of something."

"Precisely," said Nelson Lee.

"Indeed, that can be the only possible explanation. Mr. Dodd sent his son to England to get him safely out of the way; but, contrary to your brother's hopes, these Indians got to know about it. And they are here—they have tracked the lad to this school. It is apparent that your brother feared that this might occur, for he evidently instructed a firm of detectives to watch the place. There are two men in the district now—hopeless duffers, I believe, although I have never seen them."

"Why, in wonder's name, couldn't he take me into his confidence?" asked Uncle Bill impatiently. "That's the worst of Jerrold—he was always secretive and pig-headed. He might have saved himself a lot of trouble if he had asked me for advice. It's a good thing you're here, Mr. Lee—on the spot."

The detective smiled.

"Well, I'm hoping to be of some use," he said. "And now, there is just another question I should like to ask you, Mr. Dodd. I had intended to ask Jerry, but did not do so. Do you know if his fifteenth birthday is near at hand?"

Uncle Bill considered for a moment.

"Why, yes!" he said in surprise. "It'll be his birthday next week—on the fifteenth of the month! How did you guess that it was near?"

"It wasn't actually a piece of guesswork," said Nelson Lee. "I had reasons for suspecting that such would be the case. So Jerry will be fifteen on the fifteenth? I am glad to know that for certain. It will be necessary to protect him very carefully on that day."

Uncle Bill was rather puzzled, but Nelson Lee did not explain precisely what he meant. And very shortly afterwards his visitor departed. Nelson Lee remained very thoughtful.

The schoolmaster-detective was slowly solving the problem of the Indians' strange attentions towards Jerry Dodd, and he felt that he would soon be in a position to act.

CHAPTER 3.

The Missing Cricketers!

MEANWHILE, in the Remove we were all looking forward eagerly to the match with Helmford, but spirits were dampened somewhat by a steady fall of rain on Saturday morning. Many anxious eyes were directed towards the class-room windows, for the sky was leaden and overcast.

The rain was not heavy—just a mere sprinkling, but it was steady, and the leaves were dripping on all sides. Gloomy prophets declared that conditions would get worse, and that there would be no cricket.

But before morning lessons were over a change came about, and spirits rose like rockets—not only junior spirits, but those of the seniors as well. The first eleven was playing Bannington Grammar School that afternoon—away. But this did not interest the junior school. The only cricket at St. Frank's worthy of notice was that provided by the junior eleven. At least, this is what the Remove thought.

The clouds broke in many places before the bell rang for dismissal. The sun even appeared, and the rain ceased. By the time we all trooped out into the Triangle the ground was drying up, and the sunshine was brilliant. It had been close all the morning, and now it was getting swelteringly hot.

After dinner there was a general rush up into the dormitory, particularly by the cricketers—to change into flannels. And then the fellows sallied out on to the playing-fields.

The match against Helmford College was an important fixture—even more important than the Grammar School match. We were fairly confident of being able to defeat Helmford on our own ground. In any case, it would be a close match.

Our visitors arrived in good time, and by then I was feeling somewhat anxious. The match was due to commence as soon as the Helmford eleven had

changed into their flannels. But, for some unaccountable reason, several members of my team were not to be found.

"Anybody seen De Valerie?" I asked, approaching a group of fellows in the Triangle. "The Helmford chaps are changing, and if they go in to bat first I shall want all my men for fielding."

"I've been looking for De Valerie myself," said Somerton. "I can't make out what's happened to the beggar."

"What about Pitt?" asked Watson. "I've looked everywhere, and he's not to be found. Pitt and Grey are both missing."

"There's something queer about this," I said, frowning. "Pitt—Grey—De Valerie! Three of the most important chaps in the eleven! And the match is just about to start, and they're not here!"

"They weren't in to dinner, either," put in Tommy Watson. "And what about Griffiths and Armstrong? They're both away——"

"Never mind them," I interrupted. "But I must have the others. We shan't stand half a chance if I'm compelled to put in three reserves. Why, there's nobody to take their places!"

Jerry Dodd strolled up.

"Anything wrong, chum?" he asked, looking at my anxious face.

I briefly explained, and Jerry became serious.

"By jings! That's bad!" he said. "But there's no need to worry—they must be about somewhere. I reckon they'll turn up before the start."

At that moment I heard a hail from Little Side. The Helmford fellows were ready. We couldn't afford to wait, because if the innings were long drawn out we should only just have time to finish the match.

"If those chaps appear, buzz them on to the field," I said, as I left. "Keep a sharp look-out."

I hurried to the pavilion, and explained the position to the Helmford junior captain—a short, stumpy, genial fellow named Walford. He was very sympathetic.

"It's beastly rough luck!" he said. "Three of your best men, too. You see, this is the first time I've been to St. Frank's, so I don't know any of you chaps. What shall we do? Make a start?"

"I suppose there's nothing else to do," I replied. "But if the missing chaps turn up after the game's begun will you allow me to make some alterations in the eleven?"

Walford grinned.

"My dear chap, you can do just as you like," he replied. "I'm not particular—I'm not one of those fellows who refuse to allow a change. If your men turn up soon, they can take the places of the reserves."

I thanked him, and within a few minutes I had my team ready. It was made up as follows:—Tregellis-West, myself, Watson, Handforth, Church, Christine, Yorke, Nation, Owen major, Hubbard and Talmadge. The latter three were the reserves I had been compelled to put in at short notice. They were not brilliant by any means, but I had no better material to choose from. The loss of Pitt, Grey and De Valerie would be positively disastrous.

I hoped against hope that I would win the toss. I could then elect to bat first. This would give a chance for the missing ones to turn up. But I was not surprised when the spin of the coin favoured Walford, and he, of course, decided to open the batting. It was only natural that he should do so.

"This is a fine state of affairs!" I said to Sir Montie, as we went on to the field. "But we can only hope for the best. And both Pitt and De Valerie are two of my best bowlers."

"It's frightfully unfortunate, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "Somethin' must have happened—an accident, I suppose."

Quite a crowd of fellows had gathered round the ropes to look on, and everybody knew that the position

was looking bad for St. Frank's. With three of our best men absent we couldn't expect to do much—and this had a bad effect on the eleven.

Jerry Dodd was one of the spectators. It was something of an ordeal for him. Here was a wonderful chance for him to play—to fill the breach, so to speak. But it couldn't be done. Cricket for him was forbidden.

"By jings! What a darn shame!" muttered Jerry, clenching his fists.

The game started.

Black and Alton, of Helmford, went in to open the innings. They looked very businesslike as they strolled on to the pitch. It was necessary for me to keep my eyes well open, and to set the field in the best possible way. But until I knew what the batsmen could do, a great deal had to depend on chance. I only knew one or two of these visitors, for the Helmford team had undergone a great change since their previous visit, during the last season.

In the ordinary course of events I should have put on Christine and De Valerie at bowling. De Valerie was a splendid bowler, and what we should do without him I didn't like to imagine.

In the circumstances, I opened the bowling with Christine. There were really no other juniors in the team who were skilful enough at this branch of the game. Handforth claimed to be a bowler, and I had given him a test the previous week. After he had nearly succeeded in braining two batsmen I decided that his claims were not justified.

I could not help feeling rather bitter when I thought of Jerry Dodd—not bitter against him, of course, but against his father. What a tremendous help he would have been to the side! His inclusion in the team would have helped us enormously. His bowling was amazing, and his batting fairly staggering.

But it was no good thinking of the impossible.

Alton broke his duck with a neat hit in the long field, which resulted in two runs. I was bowling this over, and I was putting all I knew into my work. Alton scored another three, and then Black made a somewhat spectacular four—a boundary. The visitors were settling down.

The St. Frank's fielding, upon the whole, was not bad—but it certainly could have been improved.

During the second over, when Christine was bowling, Black sent the leather skyward. The crowd immediately set up a roar.

"Catch!"

"Get it, Hubbard!"

Hubbard—one of the reserve men—was the only fellow who could reach the ball. He did so, and it dropped neatly into his palm. But the roar of cheering was choked as the ball was seen to slip out of Hubbard's hand. Pitt or Grey, in the same position, would never have missed that catch.

Hubbard picked up the ball with a scowl, and tossed it back to Christine. He couldn't quite understand why he had missed that catch, for it had been an easy one.

Black and Alton continued well, batting steadily. And then, after Black had notched seventeen runs, I succeeded in removing his leg stump.

"Oh, good man!"

"Out!"

Out it was, and Black returned to the pavilion. The next man in was Parkes, the Helmford wicket-keeper. He scored a pair of two's from my bowling, and then delivered the ball very neatly into the waiting grasp of Handforth.

"How's that?" yelled the leader of Study D.

"Out!"

"Twenty-eight for two wickets," said Tommy Watson, as he strolled up. "Not so bad, eh? We ought to do fairly well, I think."

"Don't you be too sure," I said. "Some of these other men won't be so easy to dismiss. I wish those bounders would turn up!"

I stared across towards the Triangle anxiously, but there was no sign of the

missing trio. And by now we had ceased to hope for their arrival. The next man in was Marler, a long, skinny junior, with knock-knees. There were many grins as he took up his position on the crease.

But these grins soon vanished when Marler commenced operations. He was a regular slogger, and startled the onlookers by scoring two boundaries, one after the other. That made the end of the over, and I had the bowling again.

The first ball I sent down accounted for Alton. He misjudged the ball, and allowed it to slip under his bat. The leather only just grazed the wicket, upsetting the bails. But this was enough to satisfy me.

Alton was out, having made 14 runs for his side. Three wickets were now down, and the total stood at 43. Marler had made 8 of these runs. He was presently joined at the wicket by Maitland, a junior with plenty of confidence, to judge by his attitude, but he didn't do much to begin with.

For a long time we tried hard to get rid of the batsmen, but the bowling of Christine and myself only resulted in a greater accumulation of runs. Somehow, we couldn't touch the wickets.

To make matters worse, an epidemic of catches took place. Marler had quite a habit of sending the ball high—and always in the same direction. I set the field accordingly. Marler ought to have been out three or four times, but Owen major, Church and Yorke, all muffed catches which ought to have been simple.

Then, when Marler's score stood at twenty-six, he was caught out by Tregellis-West. The batsman received a great ovation as he returned to the pavilion. He had done well.

Jerry Dodd stood watching with mixed feelings. As a cricketer, he was full of criticism—but he kept it to himself.

"By jings! I'd like to have been bowling against that fellow who's just been dismissed," he muttered. "Twenty-six runs. I don't reckon he ought to have made six!"

Jerry looked round suddenly as a tall figure approached. The junior's face broke into a smile as he recognised his uncle who had remained at St. Frank's to witness this match. His wrist was still painful.

"What do you think of it, Uncle Bill?" asked Jerry.

"Not so bad—although it might be a lot better," replied Mr. Dodd. "To tell the truth, young fel', I'm rather disappointed."

"This game isn't what it ought to be," declared Jerry, shaking his head. "Those three men being absent make all the difference. Barring Nipper, they're the best cricketers in the eleven. The side hasn't got any fire left in it."

Mr. Dodd understood, and he watched with interest as the game proceeded.

The next man in was Lewis—quite a small junior who looked as though he could be dismissed without the slightest trouble. As events turned out, he provided some of the most spectacular batting of the match.

He swiped away at everything with perfect judgment, and with extraordinary force. In two overs he knocked up twenty-three runs, and then continued his innings with the same brilliance.

Christine knocked Maitland's wicket sideways at last, after the batsman had scored nineteen. Lewis was still in with thirty-seven to his credit.

"I'm afraid St. Frank's will have a pretty stiff task," remarked Uncle Bill, shaking his head. "These youngsters are putting up a good performance, Jerry. One hundred and eighteen for five wickets. That's splendid. And I rather fancy they've got some good batsmen yet."

"Sure thing!"

Kemp joined Lewis, but didn't get much of the batting at first. When he did get it he kept his wicket intact without attempting to score. It wasn't necessary—Lewis was obtaining all the

runs. His personal score now stood at forty-two, and he seemed properly set.

Then the unexpected happened. He met one of Christine's balls with terrific force, and everybody looked for a boundary. The ball was missing for a second—until it was found in my hand. The leather had come like a bullet, and it was more by luck than anything else that I stopped it—and held it. My hand tingled painfully as I tossed the ball into the air.

"Out!"

"Oh, well caught!"

"Good old Nipper!"

Lewis was dismissed, and then Parnell came in. We didn't know what he was like at the time—but we soon found out. He batted like a professional, knocking up runs at great speed. Kemp was soon out—for nine—and Hatch came in as Parnell's partner. Between them, they proceeded to make the field perspire.

I tried two or three fresh bowlers, but with no success. The score mounted higher and higher. After Parnell had knocked up his fifty I felt absolutely gloomy. The Helmford "tail" was providing the best cricket of all.

Hatch was dismissed at last for twenty-four, and then Hall came to the wicket and contributed nineteen. In the meantime, Parnell attempted to get one run too many. Watson fielded the ball like lightning, and took a chance. Parnell's wicket crashed before he could reach the crease with his bat.

"Out!"

Parnell received tumultuous cheers as he retired. He had made the best score of the innings. The last man in was Walford, the captain. He did splendidly, adding forty-five to the score in fine style. He would probably have knocked up double this number, only Hall was a bit too venturesome and hit out at an inviting ball. It went skyward, and dropped into the hands of Bob Christine.

A sigh of relief went up. Helmford were all out, and they had set us a well-nigh impossible task. Their total score was 281, and the thought of obtaining an equal number of runs seemed out of the question.

But we should do our best.

We didn't know that a dramatic event was to happen during our innings.

CHAPTER 4.

The Super Cricketer!

DISASTER overwhelmed St. Frank's at the beginning of our innings.

There had only been a comparatively short interval, during which we partook of tea. Still there was no sign of the absent trio. Their disappearance was a complete mystery. And we were obliged to commence our innings with the same eleven.

I sent in Yorke and Nation to open the battle for the Remove. Yorke was clean bowled with the first ball, which had been delivered by Kemp. This junior had not performed wonders at batting, but he soon proved his value as a bowler.

Yorke looked very glum as he carried his bat out. He was followed by Bob Christine, of whom I was expecting great things. Christine was an excellent batsman, and generally made a good score before being dismissed.

To-day he failed utterly. The second ball of the over resulted in no runs, and the third ball, sent down by Kemp at lightning speed, sent Christine's wicket crashing over. Bob was more surprised than anybody else.

"My only hat!" he gasped in dismay.

A yell went up from the ropes.

"Play up, St. Frank's!"

Christine came in gloomily.

"Awfully sorry, Nipper——" he began.

"My dear chap, don't apologise," I interrupted. "Those things can't be helped. That chap Kemp is a terror."

Church was the next batsman, and a little sigh of relief went up as he sent the leather on its journey for a single

run. The St. Frank's eleven had broken its duck. But Nation now had the bowling, and my heart fairly sank when he launched out and delivered a swipe which sent the ball high.

I knew what was coming. Nation was caught out—for nil.

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Handforth. "Three wickets—one run! We look like whacking Helmford, don't we? We've only got to get another 281 to win!"

"It's too awful for words!" said Watson.

"Well, thank goodness a decent batsman is going in now," said Handforth, as he strapped on his pads. "If I don't knock up a century, I shall be surprised!"

As it happened, Handforth put some life into the game, for he proceeded to knock the bowling into the middle of next week. He scored a boundary, a two, and then a three. Then Church had the bowling for a short while, added three more to his score, and then managed to get his leg in front of the wicket. The umpire promptly declared him out.

"Another disaster!" I grunted. "Oh, this is glorious!"

Tommy Watson took Church's place, and he did not feel very confident. The poor showing of his predecessors did not tend to make Tommy particularly cheerful. He scored exactly two runs.

"For goodness' sake, Montie, put up a decent show," I said seriously. "We can't let this sort of thing go on—it's too ghastly for words. Something must be done to stop the rot."

"Dear old boy, you can rely upon me to do my best," promised Sir Montie.

Further groans went up when Handforth jumped at a ball, missed it, and turned round just in time to see himself stumped. He had scored twelve runs—instead of his promised century.

"By jings! Did you ever see anything like it?" groaned Jerry Dodd, his face keen with anxiety. "Oh, Uncle Bill! Six wickets down—and only eighteen runs. Why, they'll be all out for a couple of dozen at this rate!"

"I'm afraid you're right, Jerry," said Mr. Dodd. "Your friends have made a terribly poor showing. I'm afraid the game is hopelessly lost."

"It's impossible to save it now, uncle," said Jerry gloomily. "I guess I'll take a stroll. I don't fancy looking on any more!"

He was disgusted with the luck, and he thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and lounged away towards the Triangle. Eighteen runs for six wickets. It was too awful for words.

As Jerry strolled away he noticed Nelson Lee hurrying on to Little Side. The detective waved his arm as soon as he caught sight of the Australian junior.

Jerry wondered what the reason could be, and he hurried forward. Nelson Lee held an envelope in his hand, and he was smiling.

"Good news for you, my boy," he said briskly.

"For me, sir?" exclaimed Jerry wonderingly.

"Yes—I have just received this cablegram from your father—read it," replied Nelson Lee. "It is in reply to a cabled message of my own which was dispatched two days ago. I think you will be interested."

Jerry took the cablegram with a fast-beating heart. It was from his father, but he could not imagine what it contained. He opened out the flimsy sheet of paper, and read the following words:

"Permission heartily granted.
"Dodd."

Jerry looked up in astonishment.

"Say, sir, I don't catch on!" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps you will when you read this," replied Nelson Lee. "This is a copy of my message to your father."

Jerry took it in the same puzzled way, and read the words. As he did so, his face flushed. His eyes gleamed with excitement until they were fairly blaz-

ing, and the sheet of paper shook in his grasp. For this is what he saw:

"Jerry studying hard. Excellent results. Feels cricketing ban keenly. Urge you send permission for him play regularly for school. Please cable reply.

"LEE (Housemaster)."

It was almost more than Jerry could believe—and to come at such a time as this, it seemed to him that he must be dreaming. But the bare facts were clear and precise.

Nelson Lee had cabled to Mr. Dodd asking for his sanction for Jerry to play regularly in the school eleven, and Mr. Dodd had complied. It was the most glorious piece of news that Jerry had ever received. He could hardly find his voice for a moment.

"By jings! I—I—does this mean that I can play, sir?" he gasped at last.

"Certainly it does, my boy," smiled Nelson Lee. "You see, I thought something ought to be done, and so I acted in this way—without the Head's knowledge. But Dr. Stafford knows everything now, and he agrees that I did the best thing. From now onwards, Dodd, you'll be able to take your rightful place in the school cricket."

Jerry could find no words to thank Nelson Lee for what he had done. He was so excited that his mind almost refused to operate. Then, as he gazed dazedly across the field, he saw Owen major just leaving the pavilion.

And Jerry's mind became clear in a flash.

He didn't wait to say another word—he only remembered one thing. The junior eleven had met with disaster—six wicket had fallen for eighteen runs—and the position was practically hopeless.

"Perhaps I can help!" thought Jerry feverishly.

He raced across the pitch, charged full tilt into Owen major, and forced him back to the pavilion. Then, in a series of gasping sentences, he blurted out his news. When I fully realised what he meant the gloom seemed to rise from my shoulders, I became alert and eager.

"At the eleventh hour!" I said tensely. "Doddy, old son, you're going in now. Rip off those things, Owen—you won't be needed until later. Hubbard you're out of the eleven—Dodd will take your place."

Owen major and Hubbard were staggered.

"Dodd!" shrieked Hubbard. "You're going to put that fathead in instead of me?"

"He can't tell a cricket bat from a lawn-mower!" roared Owen major.

"You must be mad, Nipper!"

"Clean dotty!"

A wild chorus filled the air. But Handforth was more excited than myself—he knew what Jerry Dodd could do, and he saw the present possibilities.

"Great!" he shouted. "Doddy won't be able to save us, but he can probably knock up a century. That'll save us from being disgraced!"

Within three minutes Jerry was in readiness. He had already been attired in flannels, and now I thrust Bob Christine's bat into his hand, and squeezed his arm.

"It rests with you!" I said grimly. "Play up, old man!"

Jerry didn't say anything. He walked out with a springy stride, and Uncle Bill opened his eyes very wide as he saw his nephew. The crowd simply yelled. They didn't know what Jerry Dodd could do—he was regarded as a rank duffer.

Within five minutes everybody was almost faint with amazement.

For the Australian junior played in the most astounding manner. The sheer joy of handling a bat thrilled him through and through. The fact that he was playing for the school spurred him to tremendous efforts.

Kemp was bowling, and everybody expected to see Jerry dismissed with the first ball. Instead, Jerry Dodd's bat flashed, there was a sharp "clack,"

and the ball simply disappeared. It was found, after the match, in a corner of the Triangle.

The new ball had no rest. Jerry created a record by scoring five boundaries one after the other. The Helmford juniors were sitting up by this time. Walford could say nothing—he could raise no objection—for he had given me permission to alter my eleven if I chose.

The enthusiasm was terrific after Jerry had been batting for ten minutes. He was as cool as ice, and alive to every opportunity. He simply slashed out at everything that came. And his batting was masterly; it was the most amazing performance that had ever been seen at St. Frank's.

The onlookers were now tense with excitement. Tregellis-West hardly got a look in, for Jerry Dodd did exactly as he liked. His judgment was remarkable. The last ball of an over he would send away for three runs, and thus get the bowling again at once.

Jerry's score mounted by leaps and bounds. He obtained his fifty before anybody realised it. During this time Montie had contributed five. Two minutes later the score stood at eighty-two.

"My hat! The chap's a marvel!" I said. "He's batting better than a professional—and the bowling isn't easy, either. If we want to win, we've got to get another two hundred, and with six wickets down that doesn't seem very probable. But if Jerry goes on like this——"

I didn't dare to voice the thought which was in my mind. I watched the play with my heart thumping against my ribs. For twenty-five minutes the Helmford juniors were run off their feet. They didn't have a moment's rest. The leather was sent into every corner of the field. The batsmen, on the other hand, were quite fresh. They didn't do much running, for boundary hits were constant.

Jerry was as fresh as paint. During that twenty-five minutes he gave a display which attracted hundreds. Seniors came over to Little Side by the score, and stood looking on in a dazed kind of way. They could hardly believe their eyes. Such enthusiasm had never before been seen at a junior cricket match.

At last there was a deafening cheer.

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, Dodd!"

"Go it, Doddy—we'll beat 'em yet!"

"Hurrah!"

Jerry had scored his hundred, and it seemed that he would go on for ever. He added another thirty-five to the score before Tregellis-West was dismissed. Montie was caught out by Maitland.

Owen major went in next, with instructions from me to make no attempts to score. All he had to do was to keep his wicket intact. With Jerry in this mood it would be ghastly if the rest of us were caught out or bowled.

Owen major didn't obey my instructions. He had only been in five minutes when he tried to make a hit. His leg stump was whipped out of the ground. Talmadge went in next—the tenth man. The crowd waited tensely, and a sigh of dismay went up when Talmadge's wicket fell.

The score now stood at 164.

And the last man was just going in—myself. If we were to win it would require a herculean effort, for we had a deficit of well over a hundred to make up. We couldn't afford to lose another wicket now, for that would end the game.

At first I was very guarded, and allowed Jerry to continue his brilliant innings. Then I began to feel more certain of myself, and commenced hitting. I knew what the bowling was, and my confidence grew.

Then we treated St. Frank's to a display of the most thrilling description. Without boasting, I can say that I did fairly well, contributing forty-six to the total score. But for every run I secured, Jerry obtained two.

The Helmford bowlers could do

nothing with him—or with me. In despair, Walford changed his bowlers time after time, and, minute by minute, the score increased—230—240—250.

Terrific cheers went up when this figure came on the board. And still Jerry Dodd was knocking boundaries with the regularity of clockwork. When at last his score reached two hundred, I thought the crowd had gone quite mad. Such cheering had never been heard before.

And now the total stood at 268. Immediately afterwards I knocked a pair of twos, and then a three. It was destined to be the last over of the match—a match which was to lead to amazing results in the near future.

Jerry nearly secured a boundary with the next ball, but it was fielded smartly, and only resulted in two runs. But the score was 277. Victory was within sight. Only a stroke of terrible misfortune could rob us of it now.

Kemp sent down the last ball—a stinger. Jerry Dodd caught it at the precise second, and I thought the impact would have broken his bat. The ball went soaring away like a shell. Off it went into the distance, towards the school. A crash sounded—and those fellows with sharp eyes could see a gaping hole in one of the dormitory windows.

"Hurrah!"

"Six!"

"St. Frank's wins!"

"Well played, Dodd!"

What happened after that I can hardly remember. Both Jerry and myself were surrounded. Jerry received the ovation of his life—he was the hero of the hour. He had performed a feat which everybody had thought to be impossible.

And we discovered that the three missing members of the team had turned up, with a woeful story, but quite a simple one. With several others they had gone to the coast to have a sea bathe before dinner. They had taken a boat out to one of the rocky islets, and the boat, left unattended for a moment, had drifted off, marooning the bathers. In spite of all their attempts to attract attention, they had been obliged to wait over three hours before they were taken off. Pitt and Grey and De Valerie had been nearly mad with anxiety, but their relief was unbounded when they learned how Jerry Dodd had filled the breach—how he had won the match off his own bat.

If we had only known what this match was to lead to, our surprise would have been considerable.

CHAPTER 5.
The Midnight Intruder!

NELSON LEE was quite comfortable.

It was just after midnight, and decidedly close. Outside, the stars were winking rather hazily, but there was every prospect of fine weather. The whole countryside was silent and asleep. Behind the school the moon was shining down with a pale, weak light.

Nelson Lee had been at his bed-room window for some little time. It was very comfortable there, sitting in an easy-chair and smoking his pipe. He didn't particularly want to sleep.

At first he had sat down just for a few minutes after undressing. Attired in his pyjamas and dressing-gown, he had switched off the light, and, instead of getting into bed, he had pulled the lounge chair to the window.

At this hour it was quiet; there was no possibility of an interruption. And the famous schoolmaster-detective, free from the scholastic worries of the day, was at liberty to think deeply on other matters.

Just now he was thinking over the problem of Jerry Dodd. He was bringing back all the details to mind. Nelson Lee himself had had some astonishing adventures with the party of mysterious Indians, or Burmese, who had made their headquarters in a rock fissure down in the old quarry on Ban-

nington Moor. For some reason best known to themselves, they were intent upon getting hold of Jerry Dodd.

"Why should these men from the East come to St. Frank's on this mission?" muttered Lee. "It is quite evident that they are in grim earnest. I have received ample proof of that."

More than once Nelson Lee had been in danger of his life at the hands of these men, but he did not think they meant any actual harm to Jerry Dodd. There was no doubt, however, that they had every intention of capturing Jerry, if possible.

Nelson Lee had spent a great deal of time in looking up books of reference, and he had come across one or two very interesting details concerning habits, customs, and religions of the different sects and castes of Burma.

And he was now convinced that this mysterious little party in the district was set upon branding Jerry Dodd on his fifteenth birthday. This would fall on the Wednesday of the present week. Lee was determined that Jerry should be well guarded on that particular day.

As Lee lay back smoking in his chair, he also called to mind the peculiar incident of the golden idol. Jerry had brought this to the school, having taken it from the rock cavern while under the influence of a peculiar drug. Nelson Lee now had that idol in his own possession.

He had thought of taking direct action, but, so far, he had not gone to this length. Until it was absolutely necessary, he did not want to make the matter public, or even to inform the police.

For Nelson Lee had an idea that there was a secret behind all this—a secret which Jerry's father would prefer to remain hidden.

Therefore, although Nelson Lee had plenty of evidence, he had not yet taken official action. And he had an idea that the Indians themselves guessed that this was the case, and so they remained in the neighbourhood, awaiting an opportunity to achieve their purpose.

At last Nelson Lee roused himself. The big school clock had just chimed out the hour of one, and the detective considered it was about time he got between the sheets.

Lee took a last look out in the silent Triangle. Everything seemed ghostly. The fountain was clearly outlined in the pale moonlight, casting a long shadow over the dry gravel.

Nelson Lee's gaze wandered over towards the little plantation near the monastery ruins. Then suddenly he became rigid. He stood perfectly still, staring out at one certain spot.

Was it imagination, or had he actually seen a slight movement?

"Strange!" he murmured. "I could swear I saw a dim shadow—— Ah!"

He stared harder than ever, and now he knew that he was not mistaken. Something was moving among the trees —something stealthy.

The figure went first towards the little wood-shed among the trees. There he paused for quite a little while. And Nelson Lee drew back well away from the window so that there could be no possibility of his being seen.

Then at last, when he had begun to think that the shadow would not reappear, he saw a slight movement quite a long way away. He knew what had happened. The intruder, whoever he was, had passed behind the woodshed, now coming into view again nearer to the school building.

There was a short stretch of open moonlight to cross, and the stranger ran with great speed, but absolutely silent. He was swallowed up in the shadow which lay deep against the face of the Ancient House.

Nelson Lee pursed his lips. He was positive that the intruder was an Indian! The man had moved in a peculiar, snake-like fashion. No ordinary burglar or tramp could have adopted those movements. And a visit by one of the Indians was not alto-

gether unexpected. Lee had been on the look-out for some such contingency.

He knew that he was safe from observation now. He leaned out of the window, just allowing his head to project over the stone sill. He gazed away in the direction the figure had taken. At first there was no sign of it; then Lee could discern a tiny patch of blackness moving amid the other blackness. And then, as he looked, it suddenly disappeared.

"Quite so!" he murmured. "I could not have desired a better move on the enemy's part. The dusky gentleman has entered my study."

This was quite clear to Lee. The man had slipped in through the window, which he had had no difficulty in opening, since the catch was of simple manufacture. But he was not likely to be rewarded for his pains.

Lee, knew of course, why this Indian had come. There could be only one reason. He was looking for the golden image, as he had looked on another occasion. Then, as now, Nelson Lee had surprised him at his work. But this time the detective was far better off, for he had received full warning.

He took out a revolver, and passed out into the corridor. Then, with catlike tread, he made his way to the staircase, and descended.

He did not waste any time in reaching his study, and he arrived outside the door without the intruder having had the slightest warning of his approach. And then Nelson Lee's movements were rapid.

With one combined movement he flung the door open and switched on the electric light. It was done in a flash. And there, facing a mahogany bureau, was the swarthy figure of an Indian. He had been taken utterly by surprise, and he swung round with a sharp hiss of alarm.

"Stand still!" rapped out Lee curtly. "One movement, and I fire!"

The intruder leapt towards the window, which was standing wide open, but Nelson Lee anticipated the move. Quick as thought he flung a light chair across the room—not at the Indian, but in front of him. The man, unable to check himself, stumbled headlong over the obstacle.

Crash!

He was over before he knew it, with Nelson Lee on top of him. The detective obtained a ju-jutsu grip, and he held the Indian helpless. The man, breathing hard, muttered some words in his own language.

"No, my friend, you don't get away this time!" said Nelson Lee calmly. "Can you understand what I am saying?"

The prisoner grunted.

"My knowledge of English is extraordinary!" he muttered.

"Splendid!" said Nelson Lee. "We shall now be able to converse quite freely, and, I have no doubt, with mutual interest. Our present positions, however, are not precisely comfortable."

"I am Rahzin—it is not for thou to molest me!" hissed the Indian. "Woe betide thee if harm befalls me! Thou art warned!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I don't fancy retaining this grip, my friend," he said. "I will allow you to rise—and now it is my turn to give you a warning. You will take your seat in the easy-chair, and if you make the slightest attempt to escape, I shall shoot you down. I wish to have a few words with you."

"If thou art so foolish as to release me, I shall escape," said Rahzin. "Of thy warning I pay no heed. Thou wouldst not fire thy gun, as this would arouse all thy companions in this great building."

Nelson Lee said nothing. He rather admired his prisoner for the spirit he was showing, and he knew that it would be necessary to adopt other tactics.

The famous detective was never at a loss for long. He moved his position, and kept the Indian in his helpless atti-

tude by the application of a knee. Then he rapidly felt in his dressing-gown pocket and produced a handkerchief.

With this he succeeded in binding Rahzin's hands behind his back—not very securely, but sufficiently so for the moment. Then he drew out the long cord from his dressing-gown, and made a thorough job of the binding.

Finally, he lifted the dusky intruder, and set him in the easy-chair. Rahzin sat glowering at his captor. An intense fire of hatred glowed in those fierce, strange eyes.

"I think we shall be able to chat quite freely now," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "In the first place, it is quite apparent to me that you came to this school for the purpose of recovering a small golden image, set with twin rubies——"

"The god of Rhoon," interrupted Rahzin. "It is not thy property, sahib. Why is it that thou hast interfered? Thou and thy young helper have probed into matters which are not of thy knowledge. For this thou shalt pay dearly. Our secrets are not thy secrets."

"As a master at this school it is my duty to protect my scholars," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "You have menaced a boy named Jerrold Dodd ——"

"Thou art mistaken, sahib," said the Indian. "We bear the lad no ill will. It is not our intention to harm him. But our business with him is not thy business. Woe betide thee if thou heedest not this warning. Thou art right in saying that I came here for the golden image. Wilt thou let me take it?"

"Not so fast," said Lee grimly. "Why have you come here? Why are you and your friends in this district?"

"It is not my will to answer, sahib."

"What is the name of your chief?"

"He is called Parteb Ghan by our own people."

"Can he speak English?"

"A little, O white man."

"And he is to be found in the rock fissure of the old quarry," said Nelson Lee. "You see, Rahzin, here is the golden image you seek so urgently."

The detective took the little thing out of his pocket—an idol of solid gold, crudely carved, with two rubies in the eye sockets. Rahzin sat forward, wrenching at his bonds, his eyes glittering.

"Thou art right—it is the image!" he said tensely. "Thou wilt give it to me, O sahib, and let me go hence?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Oh, no!" he replied. "I have another plan, my friend. I am afraid you must remain in captivity for the time being. I cannot possibly consent to make any bargain with you. I have decided upon a course of action, and what that happens to be does not concern you."

Nelson Lee's tone was brisk, and he did not waste any further words. He crossed over to Rahzin, and loosened the cord about his ankles. The man was now able to hobble along, although with difficulty.

"What art thou doing, sahib?" demanded the Hindoo.

"You will stand up, and do precisely as I say," replied Nelson Lee. "You are my prisoner, and I should advise you not to attempt any trickery. Now then—stand up! Walk before me as I direct!"

Rahzin did not like it, but he was not in a position to refuse. Sullenly he rose to his feet, and walked across the study to the door, with Nelson Lee in close attendance. The detective was on the alert for any sign of mischief.

However, the prisoner could do nothing, and at length he found himself far away in the rear part of the Ancient House, slowly descending some stone steps into one of the unused cellars. Nelson Lee had decided to leave Rahzin locked up until the morning, when he would either be released or handed over to the police. It all

depended upon what happened during the night.

If possible, Nelson Lee did not want to bring the police into the matter. His aim was to avoid publicity.

Rahzin found himself in a small stone cellar with only a tiny grating in one wall, and a heavy oaken door, which was provided with bolts on the outer side. For him to escape was impossible.

He knew what the scheme was now, and he maintained a sullen silence, refusing to reply to Nelson Lee when the latter addressed him.

The detective made sure that all was secure, and then he quickly mounted the cellar steps, and was soon striding back to his study. In his hand he held the turban which Rahzin had been wearing. He had a reason for taking this, and it was fairly certain that Lee had no intention of going back to bed. There was important work to be done, and the sooner he set about it the better.

Lee returned to his bed-room, but only for a short time. He was about to slip off his dressing-gown when he suddenly paused, and stood thinking for a moment or two.

"Yes, perhaps it would be as well," he murmured.

Then he nodded to himself, and smiled.

Nelson Lee left the bed-room.

CHAPTER 6.
A Narrow Escape!

"NOT a word, young 'un—wake up!"

The voice came to me in a dreamy kind of way. I knew that it belonged to Nelson Lee, and I sat up in bed, rather heavy with sleep for a second or two. I wondered if I had been dreaming, or if I had actually heard the guv'nor's voice.

All was dark in the Remove dormitory. The only sounds were those of the sleeping juniors around me, and a selection of snores which were suspiciously near Handforth's own particular bed.

The moonlight was shining faintly in through the windows, doing very little to disperse the prevailing gloom. A black shadow hovered over my bed.

"Is—is that you, sir?" I whispered.

"Yes, Nipper."

"Well, I'm blessed!" I said. "I thought I was still asleep, sir! What's the idea? What's the time? It's still pitch dark——"

"The time is between one and two," interrupted Nelson Lee. "We cannot talk here, Nipper. Out of bed with you, and slip on a few things. I want you to come with me at once."

I was all attention.

"Where to, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"Never mind where to—I will explain later," replied Lee. "When you have dressed, go down to my study and wait, but you'll probably find me there. There is work for us both, Nipper."

"Good!" I muttered. "I won't be two shakes, guv'nor!"

He nodded and passed out of the dormitory. It did not take me long to slip into my clothes. I was full of curiosity, and I wondered what Nelson Lee's plans were, and where we were off to at this late hour of the night.

I realised, of course, that the errand was connected with Jerry Dodd and the mysterious Indian. This was to be another move in the guv'nor's campaign against the strange men from the East.

It was not long before I went down to Nelson Lee's study. I found the guv'nor already there, attired in an old tweed suit, with a soft collar. He didn't look particularly smart, but he was prepared for business.

"Good lad!" said Lee briskly. "We'll get off at once."

"Where to, sir?"

"The same place as before—you remember our jaunt the other night," said Nelson Lee. "This time we shall

have a trump card in our hands, Nipper; and I do not fancy there will be very much danger."

"It was rather a near thing last week, sir," I said. "Those murderous Indians threw us down into that well, and it was only by a piece of luck that we escaped with our lives."

Before another five minutes had elapsed, we were striding along the moonlit road towards Bannington Moor. And Nelson Lee proceeded to tell me of his plans.

I was very surprised when I heard that one of the Indians was safely cooped up in the Ancient House cellars. And now I understood the position a little better, and I became keen.

"Oh, so you've collared this chap, and you're going along now to tell his pals?" I inquired. "If anything happens to us, the prisoner will suffer?"

"You have hit the idea, Nipper," agreed Lee. "Rahzin is being held as a kind of hostage—you understand? It is my intention to interview the chief of these men. If I am made a prisoner I shall explain that Rahzin is safely under lock and key, and will find himself in the hands of the police to-morrow. I fancy that will make my own position fairly secure."

I felt doubtful.

"But supposing they ignore what you say?" I asked. "Supposing they won't believe that Rahzin is a prisoner?"

"I fancy they will believe my story," said Lee grimly. "I have the fellow's turban on me, to exhibit as a proof of my statement. It is not my intention to bargain with these dark-skinned rascals; but, as I have already told you, Nipper, I wish to deal with them privately, if possible. It is my plan to find out what their game is, and to send them about their business. Of course, if this fails, I shall have no alternative but to call in the aid of the law."

"Well, I don't mind admitting that I'm a bit anxious, sir," I said. "We nearly got done in last time, and—and —— Well, it's a risky proposition. I'm not scared, or anything like that, but these Indians might show no mercy if they get hold of us."

"Quite so, Nipper—that is why I have brought you."

"I don't catch on, sir," I said. "Aren't we both going to this cavern?"

"We are both going to it, but we shall not both enter——"

"What!" I exclaimed, grasping the guv'nor's arm. "Do—do you mean to face those rotters alone, sir?"

"Yes."

"Oh, but—but that's madness, guv'nor," I protested. "I—I——"

"My dear Nipper, please remain calm," interrupted Lee. "It would be madness for us both to enter at once. Prisoners both, we could do nothing. After you have heard my plan, I think you will agree that it is the best that could be adopted. I shall enter, and seek my interview with Parteb Ghan."

"And what then?"

"You will have a time limit of fifteen minutes, Nipper," pursued the guv'nor. "If I do not return within that time, it will be your duty to investigate, and to drag me out of any hole I may have tumbled into. A great responsibility will rest on your shoulders, my boy. On the other hand, it is quite possible that these Indians will realise the wisdom of treating me with respect. In that case, I shall reappear before there is any necessity for you to act. I am bringing you along merely as a kind of safeguard."

"That's all very well, sir," I grumbled. "But how long will it take those rotters to stick a knife in your back? A few seconds, and then what will be the good of me coming in? I don't like the idea at all!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I'm afraid you are unduly pessimistic, young 'un," he said lightly. "It is necessary that we should take certain risks in a case of this kind. I

shall be well on my guard, and I do not fancy——"

"There's another thing," I interrupted. "They might drop you down that water-pit again, sir."

"That thought does not worry me," smiled Nelson Lee. "Having escaped from the place once, I could easily escape again. I am determined to get at the truth, and the only method of doing so is to act boldly. The opportunity has come to-night, and I am seizing it."

We arrived at the quarry, and found the old place enshrouded in gloom. That portion of the quarry which we were making for was completely in the shadow—pitchy black. And we picked out our way foot by foot, taking great care to avoid making any noise.

At last we arrived at the entrance to the rock fissure. It was only a mere slit in the face of the rock, invisible even in broad daylight. One would never imagine that an entrance existed, owing to the peculiar formation of the rocks.

Nelson Lee hardly said a word. He simply whispered that I was to keep on guard, and he warned me to keep my revolver close handy. Then he plunged into the dark fissure, realising at the same time that he was embarking on a risky adventure.

Nelson Lee used his electric torch. He proceeded cautiously, taking his time. The distance to the central cavern was only short, and he arrived within sight of it within two or three minutes.

He now switched his torch off, and progressed in the dark. Just ahead he could see a yellowish glow, and as he came within view of the cavern, he saw that several curious Oriental lamps were burning. There was a brazier, too, and the air was heavy with incense.

Unseen himself, Nelson Lee looked on at the scene for a few seconds. There were three Indians present, one quite an elderly man, with grey hair and brown, wrinkled, leathery skin. He was evidently the chief of the party—Parteb Ghan.

Nelson Lee did not hesitate.

He walked boldly forward, without any attempt at making a dramatic entry, and without any display of arms. The Indians started up, staring at him with their intense, fierce eyes.

Two of them drew long daggers, but Nelson Lee raised his hand.

"This is a peaceful visit," he said quietly. "Do not be alarmed, my friend. It is not my intention to——"

He could get no further. Parteb Ghan rapped out an order, and Nelson Lee was seized. Unable to resist against these odds, he was quickly searched, and his revolver was taken from him. At the same time the little golden image came to light. It was seized upon eagerly by his captors.

The old chief took it with a shaking hand.

"You see, I was prepared for something of this kind," said Nelson Lee calmly. "I have walked deliberately into your hands, but I do not think you will harm me. You can speak English, Parteb Ghan?"

The old man looked up.

"I speak—a little," he said brokenly. "You foolish. Come here and die. No escape from here."

"I thought well before coming," said Nelson Lee. "I anticipated you would seize me as you have done, but I shall soon be released. I have brought back the image you have been seeking. Are you not grateful? Does it appear that I have come here for the purpose of quarrelling?"

"Thou art wise," said Parteb Ghan solemnly. "Come here—good! Bring wondrous image of Rhoon—good! What we seek we now have. But thou wilt not go. Impossible. No return for thee!"

"Perhaps we had better talk seriously," said Nelson Lee. "You have got the idol, and you must know that I intended it to be returned to

you. But what of Rahzin? Do you know where he is?"

The old man wrinkled his eyes up.

"Razhin?" he repeated. "Has he not returned?"

"Rahzin is a prisoner in my hands," said Nelson Lee. "Know you that, Parteb Ghan. If ill befalls me, Rahzin will suffer!"

"Thinkest thou I care?" demanded the old Indian mockingly. "Rahzin may go—it matters not. We have thee, and thou shalt suffer the penalty for interference. There can be no escape."

"Think well before you harm me," said Nelson Lee, still perfectly cool. "Remember, you are in a different country from your own, and the penalty for killing a man here is—death. You have no enmity against me, my friend. I would only know the truth. What connection have you with the boy, Jerrold Dodd?"

Parteb Ghan wrinkled up his eyes.

"Fool!" he exclaimed. "I tell nothing. Our secrets are not for thy ears. So, enough talk!"

Nelson Lee had been afraid of something of this kind, although he had certainly hoped that the Indians would be willing to listen to reason, especially as they had recovered the golden idol. The detective was convinced, in fact, that his precautionary measures had been wise.

He thought rapidly.

By making a supreme effort he might be able to get free from these men, who, apparently, little cared what fate befell the faithful Rahzin. They had Lee in their clutches, and Rahzin could be forsaken.

Lee was almost certain that he would be able to obtain his liberty, but there would be a great amount of risk attached to an open fight. He was unarmed, whilst these rascals possessed knives. Moreover, they were looking out for a sudden dash on Nelson Lee's part, and their blades were already bared.

The detective's calculations had gone wrong. He was aware of this, and it rather unsettled him. He had not reckoned that Parteb Ghan would harm him after bringing the image back, and after stating that Rahzin was a prisoner. Lee's visit, in fact, had been quite futile.

But there was one thought that gave him comfort.

"Over ten minutes have already elapsed," he murmured. "Nipper will soon be entering the fissure. I do not fancy these men will act drastically—yet. Quite possibly Nipper will be in time."

In any case, there was nothing that Nelson Lee could do. While he was thinking, a loop of rope was slung over his shoulders and drawn tight, pinioning his arms to his sides.

The rope was passed round and round, so that it was quite impossible for him to move. Not only his hands were bound, but his feet also. He was placed in a kneeling position, with his hands behind his back, and with his feet secured to his wrists. It was thus quite impossible for him to work the ropes loose, even if he had had the chance.

What could be the meaning of this? Why had he been bound in this way? If the Indians were to kill him out of hand, surely this trouble was unnecessary. Then, with a little chill, Nelson Lee remembered that well-like pit of water. To be cast into that, bound as he was, would certainly mean death. The detective's thoughts were rather bitter now. He realised that he had been rash—even foolhardy—in entering this place and allowing himself to be captured.

His fears did not materialise, for, after being carried for some distance through the rock fissure, he was deposited in the bottom of a curious hollow basin, quite dry, and of peculiar formation. It was quite a natural dip in the rocks, very similar in appear-

ance to a gigantic fool's cap in an inverted position.

Nelson Lee found himself in the bottom of this natural cup, with steep, smooth sides all round. Had he been unbound, he could easily have reached the lip, and scrambled to safety without trouble.

As it was, he could only squat there, helpless.

What were the Indians about to do?

It was not long before Nelson Lee knew the dreadful truth.

Only one flickering lamp had been brought into this part of the fissure, and it cast a feeble, ruddy glow into the rock basin. Nelson Lee's shadow, behind him, was grotesque and strange, moving about as the flame flickered.

He felt more helpless than he had ever felt before. He knew instinctively that his captors were about to resort to some diabolical expedient to finish him off. They had done this in preference to the more simple method of using their knives.

Something dark—something which looked like a coiled piece of thick rope—was thrust into the rock basin. It slid down with a soft noise, finally coming to rest in the basin, within four feet of Nelson Lee.

The detective's gaze was fixed upon it. Although he looked outwardly calm and impassive, his head was beating rapidly, and suddenly he was seized by a feeling of nauseating horror.

The thick piece of rope was moving —slowly uncoiling itself!

"Great heaven above!" muttered Lee. "A cobra!"

Lee had had one or two experiences with cobras during visits to India. He thought rapidly, and realised that his chances of escape were negligible. The hamadryad, otherwise the king cobra, is amongst the most dangerous snakes on earth.

This particular specimen was small, being not longer than five feet, but the bite of the cobra is deadly. Nelson Lee knew well enough that if this reptile struck, he would be dead within a very few minutes. Helpless as he was, he could do nothing to defend himself.

But it seemed to Lee that the cobra was half asleep, for it uncoiled slowly, moving its head about in an aimless fashion. Apparently it had not caught sight of the detective yet.

Lee believed that it had been drugged; no doubt it had been kept in a box or a basket, and had only just been aroused. Even as Nelson Lee was thinking this, the snake raised its deadly head, and Lee became aware of two baleful, glittering orbs. At the same time a strange, hissing noise emanated from the creature. Nelson Lee well knew what this hiss meant.

Fear was practically unknown to him, but just at this moment his skin tingled, and he was aware of a curious sensation at the roots of his hair. Unbound, he would have felt confident. Even unarmed, with only his bare hands to defend himself, he would have put up a fight for his life.

But here he was, absolutely helpless, unable to lift a finger. And this awful thing in front of him was deadly; its first bite would mean death. And Nelson Lee could do nothing.

A more horrible predicament could not be imagined.

He watched the snake in a fascinated kind of way, and dimly wondered if he would be able to keep it at bay by the sheer power of his will. It was his only weapon, and he was determined to use it. The cobra was now alert, and its head was raised higher. As Nelson Lee gazed upon it, the neck portion of the snake distended, forming a kind of hood. This is a peculiarity of the cobra.

And there it sat, with its hooded head swaying slightly to and fro, and with that hissing sound escaping from its vile mouth. Nelson Lee could see the strange black and white marks on the back of the hood—the marks which resemble a pair of spectacles.

It was liable to strike at any moment.

Nelson Lee stared into those awful eyes with all the concentration of which he was capable. He was tempted to lower his lids, to shut out the hateful sight. But if he did this, the end would be swift and sudden—the cobra would realise that it was the master.

There was a steady, deadly glitter in the snake's horrible eyes—a glitter which seemed to possess power. In spite of himself, Nelson Lee felt almost sick and giddy. Yet he concentrated all his efforts, and, so far, he was the master. Never for a second did his gaze falter; not once did his eyelids blink. He transfixed the cobra with a steady, all-powerful stare.

It was a kind of hypnotic battle.

For the moment, Nelson Lee had the upper hand; but how long would it last? He could not keep this up for ever, and the instant the spell was broken, the cobra would strike. And when it did strike, Lee would be unable to lift a finger to protect himself from the reptile's wicked fangs.

The perspiration poured from Nelson Lee's face and body. The mental effort was enormous. His energy was being used up in this one tremendous battle of will-power.

And even now he realised that it was all in vain; he knew that sooner or later he would be compelled to give in. The snake would be the winner in the finish.

The cobra lay there, its tail lashing furiously, its hood fully expanded, its head thrown back, and its venomous eyes glowing like live coals.

The end was near at hand. Nelson Lee felt his muscles growing limp; he felt that this terrible battle could only last a few seconds longer. The slightest movement on his part would be the end. The least flicker of his eyelids would cause the snake to strike.

Meanwhile, all unconscious of the guv'nor's peril, I was making my way into the rock fissure. I had kept a strict watch on the time, and my anxiety grew apace. After fifteen minutes had elapsed, I knew that something had happened which had altered all of Nelson Lee's plans.

He had reckoned to be out before now. He had not come. It was time for me to enter the fissure, and make investigations. As I plunged into the darkness, I felt strangely perturbed.

I knew what these men of the East were; I knew that they were grim and deadly, and that they would stick at nothing. My anxiety for the guv'nor was overwhelming, and a terrible fear took possession of me that Nelson Lee had met with foul play.

As I stumbled along through the pitchy darkness, all sorts of terrible thoughts flashed through my mind.

And then suddenly I became aware of a faint glow just ahead. I crept on cautiously now, walking with a cat-like tread, and holding my revolver in my fist, fully cocked, and ready for instant action.

The glow came from a spot right ahead from between two narrow walls of rock. I was making for this when I saw another gleam to my left. Turning my head I found an opening through the blackness, and there was the central cavern, with the glowing brazier in the centre. But there were no little lamps. I paused, my heart beating rapidly. I could see a man's figure near the brazier. It was kneeling down, and, fortunately, the man's back was towards me.

I had made no sound; he knew nothing of my presence.

I realised that he was the chief of this band—Parteb Ghan, or whatever his heathen name was. And he appeared to be prostrating himself in religious prayer. Where were the other Indians?

And, above all, where was Nelson Lee?

I thought of that glow ahead, and decided not to wait. I slipped across the opening without revealing the fact that I was there, and then moved

noiselessly forward towards that glow between the rock walls.

I heard no sound, but I knew that the Indians must be there. Why had they left the central cavern? I hurried on, and then in a moment I came upon the scene.

I gazed over a kind of rock ledge, which rose up in front of me, forming a barrier. On the other side of this ledge the rock sloped down into another cavern, and the floor of this cavern was like a large, dry pit, with smooth sides.

On the opposite side to me were the figures of two or three Indians, crouching down behind boulders, and watching the pit with intent interest. They knew nothing of my presence. I had moved with the noiselessness of a Redskin, and, so far, I had not exposed myself. I was in a dense, black shadow.

But the whole scene lay before me.

There, at the bottom of the dry pit, lay Nelson Lee, with his hands bound behind him, in an utterly helpless position. The light from the flickering little lamps revealed the guv'nor's features to me. I could see that they were gleaming with perspiration, and his face had a drawn, set expression which rather terrified me.

Not two yards from him, also in that pit, I could see a snake—a cobra, with its hooded head raised, and with its tail lashing. I didn't realise that it was being held in subjection by Nelson Lee's force of will. It seemed to me that the reptile was on the point of striking.

An involuntary gasp of horror left my lips.

"Guv'nor!" I shouted hoarsely.

It was the most fatal thing I could have done; but it was an unconscious effort on my part.

But the spell was broken.

Nelson Lee was startled by my voice breaking in upon him. He glanced up—and this action on his part was involuntary, too. And even as he allowed his gaze to wander from those glittering orbs of the snake, the terrible thing happened.

With a fierce hiss, the cobra struck.

It shot out, and Nelson Lee uttered a sharp cry of horror. At the same second he threw himself sideways. Bound as he was, this was the only action he could take. The cobra struck him fully in the chest. Then the dreadful thing withdrew, still hissing, prepared to strike again—this time with deadly effect. Perhaps it was deadly even now—I did not know. I was sick with fear.

Then I remembered my revolver. It had a magical effect upon me. In my hand I had the power to blow this foul thing to atoms. My fear left me, my confidence returned.

Even now the cobra was in the act of striking. Its head, with that grim hood, was held ready, poised for a second in order to take aim.

I could not have been in a more favourable position. Nelson Lee was not in the line of fire. I held my revolver as steady as a rock. How I did so, I can't imagine, for a second before I had been shivering with emotion. I pulled the trigger.

Crack!

The report was loud, and it echoed again and again. With my heart in my mouth, I stared into the rock basin. I hardly knew what I expected, but I half believed that I had missed, and that Nelson Lee would be there, writhing in his last moments of life.

Exactly the opposite was the case.

The cobra lay a quivering mass, his dreadful head half blown away. And Nelson Lee was safe—at least, he was still quite conscious.

"Quick, Nipper!" he shouted. "Fire again; fire at these demons! They'll have no mercy on you if you are caught!"

The three Indians were on their feet. I levelled my revolver, and fired. I did not want to hurt them; somehow it needs a tremendous nerve to fire a

revolver point-blank at a human being. I aimed for the rock.

But I was shaky now, and immediately, following the sharp crack came a wild, agonised howl—a shriek of pain.

One of the Indians clasped his arm to his side, and staggered away. My bullet had pierced the fleshy part of his forearm. The other Indians did not wait. They disappeared into the darkness.

I quickly slipped down into the pit and released Nelson Lee.

"Good lad!" he muttered. "We must go—this place is too warm for us!"

I don't exactly remember how we got into the open. I know that we dashed through the fissure regardless of bruises, of any traps or pitfalls. The Indians did not pursue us, and the reason for this was fairly obvious.

They, themselves, had scooted back into the deep recesses of the fissure, probably believing that I was out to pump lead into the whole bunch of them. They had taken fright, and this gave us an opportunity to get clear.

At last we stood in the old quarry, under the sky, and with perspiration streaming from us. We didn't utter a word until we were up on the moor, safe from all possibility of pursuit.

"Oh, guv'nor!" I gasped. "Why did you risk it?"

Nelson Lee breathed hard.

"Chastise me, Nipper; I shan't mind!" he exclaimed huskily. "I deserve it. Yes, it was foolish—needlessly so. I ought never to have entered that fissure. It is not often that my calculations go wrong, but I must admit failure on this occasion. The Indians proved too tricky for me."

"That—that cobra!" I muttered. "I—I thought——"

"Don't think of it at all, Nipper; thrust it out of your mind," interrupted Lee. "But if you had not fired when you did, death would have been inevitable."

"Oh, my goodness!" I said. "What a terrible adventure, sir. It's a wonder your hair hasn't turned grey. How did it happen? Why did you allow yourself to be bound up?"

Nelson Lee explained the circumstances, and together we walked across the moor towards St. Frank's. The cool air did us good, and when we finally arrived at the school, we were both feeling very much better.

"Oh, by the way, guv'nor," I exclaimed. "What about Rahzin?"

"We will have a look at him now and in the morning he will be handed over to the police," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "And, what is more, after tonight's experience, I shall thrust aside my scruples. Publicity or no, I must take drastic action. And, if possible, I intend to get the whole crowd. I shall interview Inspector Jameson of the Bannington police, at the earliest opportunity."

We were soon within the Ancient House. Then we passed along the passages until, at length, we arrived at the cellar door. It was just as we had left it. Lee switched on the electric light, and we descended the stone steps. We found ourselves in a passage, with many cellar doors on either side of us. Some were used as store rooms, some were empty, and one was tightly closed and the bolt shot home. Nelson Lee made for this one. It was astonishing to me that the guv'nor showed practically no effects of his nerve-trying ordeal.

"Let me have your revolver, Nipper," said Lee quietly.

I handed it over, realising that Lee himself had lost his own weapon. He shot back the bolts, and then flashed the electric torch into the interior of the dark cellar. The next moment he strode in. He flashed the torchlight from side to side.

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated the guv'nor.

I quickly went into the cellar with him. One glance was sufficient to show me that it was empty. I looked

at Nelson Lee queerly, and then took a deep breath. There was something uncanny about this.

"He—he's gone, sir," I exclaimed.

"Undoubtedly, Nipper."

"But you locked him in——"

"I put him in the cellar, and securely bolted the door—just exactly as we found it," said the guv'nor. "As you see, there is no possible method of escape, except by the door. Those Indians or Burmese are slippery customers."

"But—but it's impossible, sir!" I protested. "If the door was bolted, he couldn't have got out! It—it's something like magic, guv'nor!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"My dear Nipper, there is a very commonplace explanation of this little surprise," he said. "There can be no doubt that Rahzin had a companion with him, who was waiting outside. No doubt he saw us go out, and he at once guessed that Rahzin had met with disaster. So he simply came in and investigated. He might have been watching at one of the windows; perhaps he saw us going towards the cellar. In any case, he succeeded in releasing Mr. Rahzin, and the pair made themselves scarce."

"And what are we going to do now, sir?"

"Well, I've an idea that you are going straight up to bed," replied Nelson Lee.

"And you, sir?"

"Well, I'm not sleepy, and I have a mind to potter about a bit outside," replied the guv'nor. "No, you needn't be alarmed, young 'un. I shan't run my head into any danger. You have saved me once to-day, and for that I commend you warmly. I do not intend to take any more chances."

And, less than five minutes later, I was up in the Remove dormitory. And I fell to sleep wondering what Nelson Lee's activities would end in. And very soon I was dreaming about cobras a mile long and as large as drain pipes. I dreamed of hordes of Indians and caverns thousands of feet in the earth.

But when the rising-bell rang I was feeling quite refreshed, and myself.

CHAPTER 7.

Jerry Dodd's Big Chance!

"WELL, sir?"

I was rather relieved to run across Nelson Lee almost as soon as I came down. He was in the lobby, looking quite bright and fresh.

"Oh, Nipper. I suppose you want to hear the result of my pottering?" he said with a smile. "As a matter of fact, the result was precisely nil. I could find no traces of Rahzin and his companions, and I am fairly certain that the Indians have left the old quarry."

"Then everything's all right?" I asked.

"On the contrary, everything is all wrong," said Nelson Lee. "It will be Dodd's birthday to-morrow, and I'm fairly certain that these Indians will attempt to make some move," said Lee. "We shall have to be strictly on the alert. But we cannot talk any further on the subject now."

This was quite true, for a crowd of juniors were coming along. Of course, I said nothing to them regarding my adventure of the night.

But Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were soon in possession of all the facts. It was very seldom I kept anything from them.

They were rather startled when they heard, and Tommy was decidedly indignant because he had not been awakened, too. I patiently explained that his presence wouuld not have improved matters.

There was a good deal of talk this day regarding the Bannington fete and flower show, an annual holiday for all the good people of the local town. The Bannington fete was considered to be

the most important occasion of the year.

"Looks like being fine for the fair," remarked Conroy minor, as he strolled with Jerry Dodd in the Triangle. "The barometer is high, and there's every prospect of this fine weather continuing. I suppose you'll come?"

"Well, I wasn't figuring on anything like that, but maybe I'll have a look in," said Jerry. "I'm not great on flower shows, chum. They don't interest me a heap."

Conroy minor grinned.

"My dear chap, you don't understand," he said. "The flower show is only for the old folks. We shan't need to look at it. But there'll be a fair there—roundabouts, swings, scenic railways, coconut-shies, and all the rest of it. There's tons to interest a chap—particularly if he's got a lot of tin in his pocket."

"I reckon we shan't need to worry about that," said Jerry. "I've got plenty."

"Good!" said Conroy heartily. "The Bo'sun and I will stick to you like glue, my son. In the afternoon there'll be a cricket match; and that ought to interest a marvellous champion like you ——"

"Say, cut it out!" smiled Jerry. "A cricket match, by jings! That sounds rather good; but will it be a real match, or only——"

"A real match!" interrupted Conroy minor. "Of course, it'll be real, and a topping one, too. Bannington rather fancies itself at cricket. The town club is the best for miles round, and there are some pretty decent clubs in the neighbourhood, too. The best men of all the local teams will form an eleven to play against Eastshire."

Jerry's interest was thoroughly aroused.

"Eastshire County!" he exclaimed.

"You bet!" said the other junior. "Of course, it's only a charity match, and it's played every year; the local clubs against one of the counties. This year it'll be Eastshire. They haven't been doing very well in the championship games, and the local clubs are hoping to whack them. The professionals usually regard it as a kind of joke; that's because they nearly always wipe the amateurs to bits. The professionals have only been beaten once in these Bannington charity matches since the fixture was first inaugurated."

"Then it's time they were beaten again," said Jerry.

Very shortly afterwards he was talking with his uncle, Mr. William Dodd. The Australian cricketer was rather interested. Uncle Bill was still unable to appear in the Australian team owing to his sprained wrist.

"We'll have to go, Uncle Bill," said Jerry.

"Yes, certainly," said Mr. Dodd absently. "It'll be rather good. Tomorrow, eh? By George! I wonder—I wonder—it's only a charity affair, and it's possible that—well, anyhow, I'll see what I can do!"

Jerry stared.

"What do you mean, Uncle Bill?" he asked. "I don't get you."

Uncle Bill chuckled.

"No, of course you don't," he replied. "We'll have another talk about this later on, my lad. While you're at lessons, I'll run over to Bannington, and—and see about some seats in the pavilion. We can't miss that match."

Jerry was still rather puzzled by his uncle's animated tone. Evidently an idea had come to Uncle Bill, but he didn't explain what this was. And when morning lessons were well under way, Mr. William Dodd went off to Bannington.

He strolled down the road with the intention of catching the mid-morning train to the local town. It was a fine, hot summer's day, with the sun shining from a cloudless sky. The dust in the lane was thick.

He was half-way to the village when he observed two very curious individuals in front of him. One was huge; an enormous man attired in a check suit which seemed too small for his

gigantic frame, and a soft felt hat which perched on the top of his bald head like a fly on an egg.

His companion was as tiny as the other was large. He was an insignificant man, with a bird-like expression, and a nose which resembled a beak.

These remarkable gentlemen were the famous firm of Podge and Midge, the celebrated detectives. At least, they considered themselves to be detectives, and they had been in the neighbourhood for some little time. In fact, they were greatly interested in Jerry Dodd and all his movements.

So far, they had only succeeded in getting on to wrong trails, and getting themselves into ridiculous scrapes. As detectives they were a wash-out. But they didn't know this; Mr. Podge's opinion of Mr. Podge was an exalted one. Mr. Midge was too weak to have an opinion; he was merely Mr. Podge's echo.

Uncle Bill was interested in these strange gentlemen. They were curious-looking beings, and could not fail to excite interest. Mr. William Dodd wondered if there was a lunatic asylum in the district. He also wondered if the inmates were allowed to wander abroad at will.

Politeness forbade him to gaze at the firm of Podge and Midge as he was passing. He looked straight down the lane. And then Mr. Podge spoke.

"One moment, my dear sir—one moment, please!" he puffed.

Uncle Bill paused.

"I beg your pardon?" he said politely.

"Allow me to introduce myself, and my colleague," exclaimed Mr. Podge, presenting a big card with an elegant flourish. "I may mention that we are fully aware of the fact that you are Mr. William Dodd."

"Good!" said Uncle Bill. "I seem to be well known—— Why, what? 'Podge and Midge, the Deadliest Sleuths on Earth! Cash or Deferred Payments! Cases Investigated While You Wait ——' Ha, ha! Ahem! Pardon me, sir!"

With great difficulty Mr. Dodd kept back his laughter. That business-card was a scream. He placed it in his pocket-book, mentally deciding to preserve it carefully. It was unique.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," said Uncle Bill gravely. "May I inquire how you knew my name?"

Mr. Podge smiled largely, and Mr. Midge tittered.

"It is our business to know things, sir," said Mr. Podge grandly. "We are aware of all things. We discover secrets which have never been disclosed. We make a business of unravelling facts. We are Podge and Midge—is not that enough?"

"Ahem! Of course—of course," said Uncle Bill hastily. "Do I understand that you wish to speak to me?"

"I perceive that your own powers of deduction are acute," observed Mr. Podge. "Yes, my dear sir, we wish to speak to you. The boy, Jerrold Dodd, is your nephew?"

"Sure he is."

"You have come from Australia?"

"I have."

"For what purpose?"

"Well, I thought about starting a rabbit farm," said Uncle Bill gravely.

"Oh, indeed!" puffed Mr. Podge. "An excellent idea, my dear sir, a magnificent idea, indeed. What do you think, Mr. Midge?"

"Oh, undoubtedly, Mr. Podge—undoubtedly," said Mr. Midge.

"Rabbits can be bred easily," went on Uncle Bill solemnly. "Think of the possibilities. A canning factory for canned rabbit pies. A fur factory for making coney-seal coats for the ladies. The whole animal can be used!"

"Inside and out!" said Mr. Podge. "You will become a millionaire, sir!"

Uncle Bill nearly exploded. Never for a moment had he believed that these marvellous detectives would be deceived by his humorous piece of banter; but

they had swallowed his statement whole.

"We wish to speak of your nephew," went on Mr. Podge. "Is he in danger?"

"I really cannot explain much on that point," replied Uncle Bill. "In any case, gentlemen, my train is due to start within seven minutes, and I am afraid I must bid you 'Good-morning!' Please excuse me!"

"But, my dear sir, we wish to question you——"

"I'm sorry—no time!" said Mr. Dodd.

He walked on, leaving Podge and Midge staring after him. He was nearly bursting with laughter. So these were the wonderful 'tecs who were watching over Jerry. They would have made their fortunes on the music-hall stage.

Uncle Bill was soon in Bannington, and then he sought out the captain of the cricket eleven, which was due to play on the morrow.

When he returned to St. Frank's he was in a good humour, and morning lessons were just over. The juniors were streaming out into the sunny Triangle to spend the leisure hour before dinner.

Jerry came out with Conroy minor and Tom Burton.

"By jings! There's Uncle Bill!" said Jerry, hurrying forward. "Say, he's beckoning to us, too. Come on, chums!"

Dodd was popular in the Remove. He was regarded as a fine sport, and one of the very best.

"Did you book the pavilion seats, Uncle Bill?" asked Jerry.

"The—the seats?"

"Yes; for to-morrow's cricket match ——"

"Ah, yes, of course!" said Mr. Dodd. "As a matter of fact, Jerry, another idea has come to me. This match, I understand, is to be played for charity?"

"That's it, sir," put in Handforth. "Of course, it'll be a bit of a rag-time affair. These Bannington clubs think they're smart, but they'll be smashed to a pulp by the giddy professionals. It'll be a one-sided business all the time. I think the Bannington people look upon the game as a joke."

"Well, that doesn't matter much," said Mr. Dodd. "I don't think it will be a joke, and it would be rather rich if the local champions beat the county."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody roared at the thought.

"And, in my opinion, there will be a distinct possibility of a win for the amateurs—if you play, Jerry," said Uncle Bill calmly. "What do you think of the idea?"

Jerry stared.

"If—if I play!" he echoed. "Play in a match against professionals. Against a county team. By jings! That would be terrific——"

He broke off, shaking his head.

"Wouldn't you like it?" asked Uncle Bill.

"Like it!" echoed Jerry, his eyes glittering. "Say, it would be fine. But it can't be done, uncle. They wouldn't think of accepting me in the team. They're men—all of them. How could I play—a junior schoolboy? I reckon this is a sort of joke, eh?"

"Of course it's a joke—it couldn't be anything else!" said Handforth.

Mr. Dodd chuckled.

"As it happens, I'm serious," he said smoothly. "What I want to know, Jerry, is this: Would you like to play against Eastshire County in the match to-morrow afternoon?"

"Sure, I'd like it!" said Jerry eagerly. "I'd give anything, Uncle Bill. Against professionals. By jings, what a chance. But it can't be done—so what's the good of talking about it?"

"I thought you'd like the scheme," said Uncle Bill calmly. "Well, Jerry, it's all fixed up."

"What?" gasped Jerry.

"Fixed up?" yelled Handforth.

"Arranged and settled," said Mr. Dodd. "This morning I have interviewed the captain of the eleven. By a piece of luck, one of his men was

called away to London to-day, and he was in a bit of a fix about a substitute. I suggested you, Jerry, and he agreed. Of course, it needed a bit of persuasion on my part."

Jerry fairly danced with excitement.

"But—but, Uncle Bill!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "It's too good to be true. A place in a team that's playing against Eastshire County. Oh, by glory, what a chance! What an opportunity to see what I can do!"

Conroy minor, Handforth, and all the others could hardly believe their own ears. Jerry Dodd to play in the big Bannington match against Eastshire County. Quite suddenly that match had assumed a tremendous importance, which it had previously lacked. A St. Frank's fellow was booked to appear in the match.

The news spread like wildfire. Most of the fellows flatly refused to believe it, and said that it was nothing but a yarn. Such a thing couldn't be true. It was altogether too ridiculous.

But, after a while, the sceptics were convinced. There was a great deal of excitement, and quite a lot of enthusiasm. Scores of juniors—and seniors—suddenly made up their minds to be present at the charity match. Hitherto they had evinced no particular interest in the event.

When Nelson Lee got to hear of it, he was somewhat sceptical.

He saw Uncle Bill during the afternoon.

"I'm not quite sure whether it will be wise, Mr. Dodd," he said frankly. "I had planned to keep Dodd within the school during the whole day."

"But why?" asked Uncle Bill.

"You seem to forget that to-morrow is the fifteenth—and Jerry's birthday——"

"No; I was remembering that," interrupted Mr. Dodd. "I thought it would be very fine for Jerry to have this treat on his birthday—— Ah, but I see what you're driving at. You are thinking about the Indians?"

"Precisely," said Lee. "The fifteenth of the month is the very day that must be watched. Jerry's movements must give the Indians no opportunity of getting hold of him."

"Well, surely he will be safe enough on a cricket field?" smiled Uncle Bill. "Daring as they are, these mysterious gentry cannot interrupt a cricket game and kidnap one of the players. He will probably be safer at this Bannington affair than anywhere else."

"Well, that is one way of looking at it, I must admit," said Nelson Lee. "And perhaps you are right. In any case, I have no intention of disappointing Jerry by forbidding him to play. By the way, Mr. Dodd, how did you manage it?"

Uncle Bill chuckled.

"At first the idea was pooh-poohed," he said. "The captain of the Bannington men declared that he would make himself a laughing-stock by playing a St. Frank's junior. But he had heard of Jerry's fine performances, and was impressed. And I rather think my recommendation had some effect."

"Naturally," smiled Lee. "You are quite a famous man, Mr. Dodd. I can quite understand the Bannington captain accepting your advice as excellent. Personally, I believe that the boy will do well."

"Good!" said Uncle Bill. "It's his big chance. In ordinary circumstances he could never get an opportunity of playing against professional cricketers. But this is a charity match, and of no great importance in the sporting world, so the Bannington skipper has taken a chance—a chance which, I am convinced, will turn out excellently. But to-morrow we shall see."

I was very enthusiastic when I knew all the details, and I sought Jerry out at once, and wished him luck. And practically every fellow in the Remove came to a decision. There would be no waiting for dinner on the morrow. As soon as morning lessons were over we should get our bicycles and buzz straight off to Bannington. We could

get plenty to eat on the fair-ground, and we should have a chance of seeing the sideshows before the match commenced.

Just before bed-time, Nelson Lee buttonholed me in the lobby.

"There's one thing I want to say to you, Nipper," said the guv'nor. "You are going to Bannington to-morrow, I believe—to the fete and the cricket match?"

"Rather, sir!"

"Well, I want you to keep your eye on Dodd, if you can," said Nelson Lee. "As long as he is with a crowd of juniors he will be safe, but if he happens to wander off alone—well, keep him within sight."

"It may be difficult, guv'nor, but I'll do my best," I said. "I quite realise that it wouldn't do for Jerry to be left on his own—to-morrow, of all days. It's his birthday—the fateful fifteenth!"

Nelson Lee nodded, and passed along. But neither he nor I had the slightest inkling of the extraordinary events which were destined to occur on the morrow.

CHAPTER 8.
The Egyptian Wizard!

"COME on, you chaps!"

"Begad! What rippin' weather for the fete!"

"Rather! Couldn't be better!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson and I strolled on to the fair-ground at Bannington. The great afternoon had arrived, and the weather was gloriously fine. It was, in fact, a blazing hot summer's day.

So far, the fete had been a tremendous success. It was now quite early, for we had rushed off immediately after being released from morning lessons, without thinking about dinner. There were all kinds of stalls on the fair-ground where we could purchase eatables. Over half the Remove had come.

Jerry Dodd was with Conroy minor, Tom Burton, and several others. He had been over to Bannington with Uncle Bill during the morning, having been excused from lessons, and he had been introduced to Mr. Newman, the captain of the Bannington team. He was now feeling light-hearted and serenely happy, and he was filled with a strong determination to play the game of his life during the afternoon.

But an hour or two would elapse before the game commenced, and so he was taking the opportunity to have a walk round the fair. This was quite an interesting place, and there were scores of attractions.

On this particular day Bannington gave itself over to pleasure. It was the one day of the year for the town. Of course, only the more sedate folk went to the actual flower show. The younger people were content with the other attractions.

Girls in silks and voiles and muslins were to be seen everywhere, laughing and thoroughly enjoying themselves. Flannels and straw hats among the men were general; and, naturally, there were scores of children.

They all made a wonderfully colourful picture against the background of green.

On all sides there were the white canvas tents of the side-shows, the refreshment-rooms, and so forth. There were two well-known bands playing in different parts of the ground, and there were coconut-shies, roundabouts, swings, and scores of entertainments of a similar character.

The fair itself had been planted, as was customary, quite near to the old Bannington Abbey ruins. These were ivy covered, and in a state of complete decay, only a broken wall projecting up here and there. The abbey had been built in the fourteenth century, and had stood the test of time well.

It was one of the chief attractions of the fair to explore the ruins, and there were any amount of guides for this purpose.

The cricket ground was some little way off, and, at the moment, this was deserted. It would be safe to say, however, that during the afternoon the enclosures would be packed. This cricket match was a great draw.

At no other time of the year was such a famous team as Eastshire to be seen at Bannington, and the townspeople took the opportunity to watch a first-class game. And on this afternoon there would be more than usual interest displayed, owing to the fact that Jerry Dodd was included in the home eleven.

There had been some scathing comments on the captain's decision, for it was generally considered by the sporting people of the town that he had made a blunder. What good would a boy be in the team? No matter what he had done in school cricket, how could he hope to put up a show against the county men?

However, this would remain to be seen.

And, in the meantime, the much discussed junior was enjoying himself. With his own two study chums, and with Handforth & Co., he went on the roundabouts, and viewed one or two interesting side-shows. And then the knot of juniors went gaily on their way.

"My hat!" exclaimed Handforth. "What have we here? Something good by the look of it. Let's have a squint!"

The juniors were pushing their way through the crowds, and noticed that quite a number of people had gathered round a kind of roped enclosure. Just behind these ropes a tent could be seen.

But it was not the usual kind of tent, for it only had three sides. The side facing the public was missing, thus it was possible to look right into the tent. The juniors crowded up to the ropes with interest.

It was not long before they found out the nature of the entertainment. Over the top of the tent there was a big sign, and this announced to all and sundry that the owner of it was "Pharoah, the Wonder-worker of Egypt."

The gentleman in question was now making ready to give his entertainment. The juniors had arrived at the right moment. They helped to swell the crowd, and the magician decided it was an opportune time to begin his show.

"Oh, it's all spoof, I expect," said McClure.

"That doesn't matter," put in Church. "We might as well look on. There's no entrance fee, either."

"Yes, but he'll send the hat round, you can bet your boots!"

The juniors were not deterred by this possibility. Jerry Dodd was still with Conroy minor and Tom Burton, and they, too, stopped near the ropes. Pharoah, the Egyptian wizard, was within his open tent.

He looked a very impressive individual—dark-skinned, with a black, square-cut beard. He was attired in rich, flowing robes. It was quite obvious that his beard was false.

"I'll bet his name's Joe Smith, or something like that," grinned Conroy. "Look at his beard! And I expect that brown stuff comes off!"

"I shouldn't be surprised!" chuckled Jerry. "But he may be clever."

They continued watching. Pharoah stood in the centre of a large red carpet. Near him here was a big basket—an ordinary wickerwork affair something like an extra large laundry basket, quite plain and unornamental.

Pharoah stepped forward, holding up a hand impressively.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me pleasure to see you," he exclaimed, in deep tones. "I like to entertain you. Yes? Much mystery—I puzzle you a big lot. If you are pleased, you pay. If you not pleased, give nothing. Yes—no?"

The crowd listened, and waited.

"I'll bet he won't get much out of me if the show isn't worth seeing," muttered Handforth. "I thought he

was going to do some conjuring—juggling with billiard balls, or something of that sort."

"Well, so he is, I suppose," said Church. "I dare say that basket contains all his paraphernalia."

Pharoah held up his hand again.

"Pardon, ladies and gentlemen, but I like quiet," he said loudly. "You help me? You not talk? Yes—no? It is good—for my show. I must have quiet," he said loudly. "You help me? You not talk? Yes—no? It is good—for my show. I must have quiet. I please you a lot—I give you good entertainment. Much magic."

"All right, old false beard—get on with it!"

"Not so much chin-wagging!"

"We want to see what you can do!"

"It is well," said Pharoah gravely. "My show not very grand, but clever. Yes—no? I say it plain—very clever and mysterious. You will agree soon—I know. Much mystery and strangeness. My assistant—he come. I show you."

With a flourish the magician opened the basket, and, from within, appeared another figure attired in rich robes. This figure was smaller, and also brown-skinned and adorned with a false beard.

"Marvellous!" said Handforth blankly.

"How did he get there?" gasped Church.

"Isn't it wonderful!" grinned McClure.

They were being facetious, of course, and many people in the crowd chuckled. But Pharoah was quite unperturbed, and he indicated his assistant with a wave of his hand.

"I introduce Mahmed, my assistant," he said gravely.

"Three cheers for Mahmed!" said Handforth. "Now let's see what you can do."

The wizard beckoned to his assistant, and they lifted up the basket; in fact, they went through a whole performance. They opened the lid, and exhibited the basket clearly, showing that it was quite empty and that it had no false bottom.

"You see?" exclaimed Pharoah. "No trick—real empty basket. You wish to examine? I willing to allow it. The carpet—quite plain—solid ground underneath. You believe it so?"

"That's all right, whiskers!" shouted somebody. "You ain't acting on a bloomin' stage, with trap-doors. It's solid ground all right!"

Everybody was quite prepared to believe this statement, for, of course, there was grass and stone beneath the carpet, Pharoah's tent having been pitched on the solid earth.

"You satisfied?" said the wizard. "Watch!"

He and Mahmed put the basket back, and the assistant fetched a long piece of gaily coloured material. Pharoah waved this about mysteriously, and then placed it over the basket. Finally, he covered the basket completely.

"Oozi-boko—slap bang!" muttered Handforth. "The basket vanishes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the basket didn't vanish, since this was quite impossible. The cloth was removed, the basket lid opened, and there, within, reposed quite a solid-looking table. It was brought out, and placed on the carpet. The spectators were completely mystified, and certainly impressed. Where had the table come from?

"Dash it all, that was pretty smart, anyway," said Conroy. "How did that table get into the basket?"

"Goodness knows!" said Jerry.

"Oh, there's some spoof about it, you can bet," remarked Handforth. "It's a folding table, I suppose, and it must have been concealed in the lid. That's the way they do these things, you know."

"So!" exclaimed Pharoah. "Now I do something more. Yes—no? You watch—you will be surprised. I great magician."

Mahmed climbed into the basket, and sat down. The lid was closed, the same mystic passes were made with the gay cloth, and then Pharoah muttered some mystic words, waving his hands. He whipped off the cloth, and lifted the lid.

The basket was empty!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Pitt. "How the dickens is it done?"

Everybody was startled.

"There can't be any trap-door—that's impossible," said Church. "There must be some other way out. My goodness! The chap's clever!"

"Rather!"

"You see?" aked Pharoah. "Empty! No trick—Mahmed no longer here. By my magic I make him vanish. No other man can do this—I great wonder worker. I mystify you a lot—yes, no?"

He turned the basket over, and the very fact that he could lift it proved that it was quite empty. He walked all round it, proving that there was no secret and invisible cavity behind.

Pharoah closed the basket, placed the cloth on the top, and again made the mystic passes. A minute later it was opened, and Mahmed walked out as solid as ever, none the worse for his magical disappearance act. All the juniors looked on in silence now for they were greatly impressed.

"Wait, I not finished!" said Pharoah, as one or two of the spectators started drifting away; probably in anticipation of the hat. "I want you believe this genuine—no trickery. No other man in world can perform basket trick. I the only man. I make all this myself."

Pharoah came nearer to the ropes, and looked up and down the crowd.

"You believe?" he asked. "I want you help me. Will somebody come? Will somebody enter basket?"

Complete silence.

"I promise no harm," went on Pharoah. "Just come in basket for minute. I give you nice present if you come. A boy—yes? I promise not hurt. Only for just little time. Come—you will do it?"

Still nobody responded. Pharoah pointed to Handforth.

"Nothing doing, old son!" said Edward Oswald.

"I sorry—no wish to offend," said the magician. "Just a trick. Cause no harm, and gives you present. You, young master?"

He pointed to Reginald Pitt.

"Thanks, I'd rather be excused," replied Pitt smilingly.

"You oblige me?" said Pharoah, facing Jerry Dodd. "Please, young sir—no hurt you."

"By jings, I'd rather not, if you don't mind," said Jerry.

"You afraid?" asked Pharoah.

"No, I'm not afraid, but——"

"I disappointed," said Pharoah sadly. "I not think British boys show fear—what you call white feather. You coward?"

Jerry Dodd turned red.

"No, I'm not a coward," he replied. "Dash it all, I'll do it, if you like."

"You ass!" muttered Conroy.

But, in the circumstances, Jerry Dodd could hardly have refused. And a moment later he crossed over the ropes and placed himself in the big basket. The lid was quickly put down, and again Pharoah went through his performance.

When the basket was reopened, Jerry Dodd had gone. The basket was empty, The crowd had been expecting this, and waited with interest. Pharoah lifted up his hand.

"I must be careful," he exclaimed gravely. "I send Mahmed to fetch white boy back. Can do nothing else. Watch—great trick!"

The assistant got in the basket, and closed the lid down. Two minutes later Mahmed had vanished, too. How on earth the pair had disappeared was a mystery which the audience could not attempt to explain. And, while this was going on, the rest of the fair was in full swing on all sides.

Pharoah frowned, and stroked his beard.

"It difficult!" he exclaimed. "They both gone! I must fetch!"

Without another word, he turned, climbed into the basket, and closed the lid down. The spectators waited, wondering what would happen next. Everybody was of the opinion that this basket trick was an exceptionally fine thing.

"He's a jolly long time!" said Handforth, after a while.

"I expect they'll all appear from some other place," said Pitt. "That's about the truth of it. We can't see from here, but there must be a way out, probably through the back of the tent. It looks empty to us, but that may be illusion. These chaps use mirrors, and all sorts of things."

Several more minutes passed, and still there was no sign of any return. And now the juniors were getting fed up. The other people were impatient.

"Oh, rats!" said Conroy, at last. "I'm sick of this!"

"So am I!" snorted Handforth. "We'll have a look!"

"You ass! You mustn't——"

But Handforth took no notice. He leapt over the ropes, went to the basket, and threw the lid back. The thing was quite empty. Handforth bent down and felt about, as though searching for something hidden within. But the basket was certainly full of nothing more solid than air.

Then Handforth, to the interest of all the spectators, pushed the basket aside. He walked round it. There was nothing whatever to account for the amazing disappearances.

The carpet was intact, as it had always been. Handforth stamped heavily, but there was not the slightest doubt that he was on solid ground.

And the tent itself was simple—it contained no trick curtains at the rear, by which this thing could have been worked. And, gradually, Handforth and all the others were beginning to look scared. They weren't worried about the disappearance of Pharoah and Mahmed. It was the fact that Jerry Dodd had vanished which caused the fellows to be alarmed. The crowd of townspeople was quite excited.

"My only hat!" said Handforth. "I don't like this at all! It's—it's uncanny! Where the dickens can Dodd have got to? Look here, Church, you'd better buzz off as hard as you can and find Nipper, and Mr. Lee, too!"

"But—but——"

"There's something fishy about this," went on Handforth grimly. "It's Dodd, too, and there have been some queer things happening to him lately! I shouldn't be surprised if this was done deliberately! Rush off and find Mr. Lee!"

"Right you are!" said Church breathlessly.

He hurried away at once.

"And you'd better fetch the police," went on Handforth, turning to McClure. "I don't like the look of the business at all. What does it mean? They've gone—and this basket is empty. How did they get away without us seeing them?"

. . . . .

Jerry Dodd had vanished.

It was the fifteenth—his birthday—the very day on which Parteb Ghan and his associates had planned to brand the Australian junior.

And, although the other fellows didn't know it, there was not the slightest doubt that the Burmese had got hold of Jerry Dodd, by means of this trick. In the open daylight, in the very heart of Bannington Fair, Jerry's enemies had succeeded in getting hold of him!

CHAPTER 9.

The Disappearance of Jerry Dodd!

NELSON LEE nodded approvingly. "We couldn't hope for better weather, Nipper," he remarked. "What is more, there will be a record

attendance for this cricket match. As it is to be a charity affair, the more people who pay for admittance to the ground, the better."

"Rather, sir," I agreed. "You can bet a tremendous crowd of St. Frank's fellows will be in the pavilion, and round the ropes. They're all anxious to see what Jerry Dodd will be able to do against the professionals."

"I hope the boy will fulfil our expectations," said Nelson Lee.

"But talking about Jerry," I remarked. "Surely he can't be in any danger?"

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"No, I fancy he is quite safe here," he replied slowly. "At the same time, Nipper, we cannot be too careful. If any drastic step is to be taken by Dodd's enemies, that step will be taken to-day."

"But what can they do to-day?" I asked, smiling. "Look at this scene, guv'nor! Thousands of people everywhere! The whole place is crowded! In a throng like this, Jerry will be as safe as houses."

"Sometimes a crowd is helpful to people who wish to kidnap a person," said Nelson Lee. "I certainly think that Dodd is quite safe at present. I believe you left him with Handforth and a number of other juniors?"

"Yes, sir; they were waltzing round on one of the roundabouts, and they're probably on the scenic railway by this time. Nothing could happen to Dodd while he's with Handforth and that crowd."

"Perhaps I am somewhat too careful, Nipper," smiled Lee. "But these Indians have shown such audacity on two or three occasions that I must be prepared for any sudden move."

"Well, there's a limit to what they can do, sir," I said. "Hallo! Church seems to be in a bit of a hurry! I wonwonder what he wants?"

Church, of the Remove, was rushing up at great speed, and as he approached us it was obvious that he was in a state of considerable excitement. He came to a halt in front of us, red of face, perspiring freely, and breathing hard.

"Well, Church, what is it?" asked Lee sharply.

"Dodd, sir—he's—he's——" gasped Church inarticulately. "Dodd's——"

"Well?" interrupted Lee, grasping the junior's arm.

"What's wrong, you ass?" I demanded.

"Dodd's gone!" blurted out Church.

"Gone?"

"Yes, sir; we can't find him! He—he went!" exclaimed Church, breathing hard, and still looking scared. "He vanished, sir—disappeared right in front of our eyes! Handy told me to come and find you."

"But you promised to look after him!" I shouted, glaring at Church, and feeling inwardly alarmed. "What was the good of me trusting——"

"Steady on, Nipper—steady on!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "Now, Church, let me have the truth of this in as few words as possible. Please explain lucidly, if you can. You say that Dodd has disappeared?"

"Yes, sir," replied Church. "It sounds impossible, but it happened right in front of our eyes. We never thought for a moment that anything serious could occur! It was an Egyptian!"

"Yes, you duffer; but what did occur?" I demanded.

"Don't fluster him, Nipper—that will not help matters in the slightest degree," said the guv'nor. "Now, Church, keep yourself calm, and tell me the facts. You mentioned something about an Egyptian?"

"That's right, sir—one of these sideshows, you know," said Church. "Near the ruins of the old abbey there are all kinds of shows—the living skeleton, rifle ranges, fortune-tellers, and all that kind of rot. They're all frauds, I expect. This Egyptian chap was a kind of magician. Didn't you see his pitch, Nipper?"

"Blow his pitch!" I said. "We want to know what's happened to Jerry

Dodd. Out with it, for goodness' sake!"

"Well, we were standing round this Egyptian's place, looking on while he did some tricks," said Church. "He had a big basket in the middle of a carpet. He shoved his assistant into this basket, closed the lid down, and made some mystic passes over the top. Then, when he opened the lid again, the assistant had vanished."

"Rats!" I said gruffly. "You were spoofed!"

Church stared.

"I know that, you ass!" he grunted. "It was all spoof; but it was jolly clever. I suppose it was an illusion. Anyway, Pharoah's assistant wasn't in the basket. Yet, after it had been closed again and then opened, he walked out as large as life. It's about the cleverest trick I have ever seen."

"But what has happened to Dodd?" asked Nelson Lee patiently.

"I'm coming to that, sir," replied Church. "Pharoah asked somebody in the crowd to come forward and get into the basket. But, of course, nobody offered. The whole crowd was laughing. Then Pharoah pointed to us, and asked Handy to oblige."

"Of course, he refused?" I asked.

"Yes, naturally," said Church. "Then the Egyptian asked Jerry Dodd to get in the basket. He refused, too—at first, anyway; but he agreed at last, and he sat down in the basket and the lid was closed. Pharoah made a few passes, and Jerry vanished!"

"And have you come to me on account of this?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Why, you ass, it's only a giddy trick!" I said, with relief. "There's no need to worry——"

"Hold on—I haven't finished!" broke in Church. "That's not all. Pharoah said that he'd have to take special measures to bring Dodd back. He put his assistant in the basket, and closed the lid down; then, when he opened it again, the assistant had vanished, too. We didn't think anything of it at the time, and the audience was quite interested by now."

"And what was the finish of the affair?" asked Lee.

"Why, sir, Pharoah got into the basket himself, saying that he would have to go and fetch the other two. So he got in, and closed the lid down. Then we waited—until everybody got impatient."

"Well?"

"That's all, sir—at least, nearly," said Church. "Handy got impatient at last, and jumped over the rope, and opened the basket himself. And it was empty! All three of them had vanished! It's a mystery, sir, because there's no place where they could have got to."

"That basket was a spoof one," I put in. "What was it standing on?"

"Simply on a carpet—on the solid ground," said Church. "I've never seen anything so queer in all my life. Where could they have gone? Handy was properly scared, and he sent me rushing after you. And the crowd is excited, too. Anyway, sir, Dodd hasn't been seen since he went into the basket, and Pharoah and his assistant have faded into thin air as well!"

Nelson Lee's eyes were gleaming.

"Well, there's no sense in remaining here," he said briskly. "We must go to this spot at once and investigate. Amazing as it may seem, I have a strong suspicion that these so-called Egyptians are really our old friends, the men from Burma."

I started.

"My only hat!" I exclaimed. "Do—do you think——"

"I think nothing at the moment," interrupted Lee. "It is impossible to form any definite theory. We will go along at once, and have a look at this most remarkable basket, and probably we shall arrive at some explanation."

We strode away, jostling through the gay, laughing crowds. For the moment we had forgotten all about the fair, the flower show, and the coming cricket match.

"It's a pity I didn't stay with Dodd all the time, sir," I said.

"Perhaps so," agreed Lee. "But you

might have been taken in, too, Nipper. It is obvious that these Egyptians worked a very clever piece of trickery—in short, they succeeded in taking Dodd away under the eyes of a large crowd of people. If blame can be attached to anybody, I must confess to be the culprit. I brought you away, Nipper, fully believing that Dodd would be safe so long as he remained with a number of junior schoolboys. It was quite impossible to anticipate that anything of this nature would take place. By the way, why was Dodd so rash as to offer himself for the purpose of this experiment?"

"He was dotty!" I growled.

"Oh, I don't know about that," replied Church. "Dodd couldn't very well help himself. It was all so simple and easy, sir," he went on. "This Pharoah chap couldn't get anybody to come, so he asked Handforth direct. Of course, Handy refused. Then the Egyptian asked Dodd, who was standing with us. Dodd refused, too. Then the conjurer started taunting him—said that Doddy was afraid, and it wasn't like British boys to show the white feather."

"And, of course, Dodd fell into the trap at once," said Lee.

"Yes, sir; he couldn't very well help it."

"I can't blame him," observed the guv'nor; "neither can I blame the other boys. It was impossible for them to guess that there was any sinister motive in this innocent conjuring trick. It only proves, Nipper, how necessary it is for us to remain constantly on the alert."

Before we arrived at the fair ground, we could see that something unusual was afoot. A large crowd of people had gathered in one particular spot, and other holiday-makers were hastening to the place from all sides.

It was only with great difficulty that we pushed our way through the big crowd. And then we discovered that the police had arrived, too, including Inspector Jameson himself. They had been wondering what all the excitement was about, and had come to investigate.

Nelson Lee was pleased to find that the rope guarding the tent was intact, and that the crowd had not encroached upon the ground. Handforth and McClure and one or two other juniors were within the three-sided tent, standing round the empty basket. The crowd looked on.

Handforth was having an argument with the police officer when we approached him, but he turned at once upon catching side of Nelson Lee.

"By George!" he shouted. "I'm jolly pleased to see you, sir! Dodd has disappeared, and I'll tell you exactly ——"

"You need not trouble, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Church has already told me the story in full detail."

Lee looked down at the big basket, and then he allowed his gaze to rove about over the tent and to the surrounding grassland. While he was doing this, Inspector Jameson came up, and he was evidently somewhat impatient.

"Have you heard this cock-and-bull story, Mr. Lee?" he asked. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it's a joke of some kind; but I'll make the culprits sit up, if I can lay hands on them! It's no laughing matter to collect a crowd like this."

Nelson Lee completed his survey.

"Well, it is quite obvious that there is only one possible way in which these disappearances could have been managed," he said. "The basket must have a false bottom, and it stands to reason that there must be an exit through what appears to be the solid ground itself."

"But how can you make that out, sir?" I asked blankly. "This isn't a stage—there can't be any trap-doors ——"

"Two and two always make four,

Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee grimly. "I have eliminated every other possibility, and this is the only one that remains. It seems ridiculous, I know, but I have no doubt that we shall find quite a simple explanation. By Jove! Those Indians are astute beggars!"

Lee bent down, and, seizing the basket, gave it a good heave. It fell over on its side, revealing the bottom to be thoroughly strong, and there was no indication that it was provided with a trapdoor arrangement. And what could be the use of such a device on solid ground?

Nelson Lee hardly gave a glance at the basket. He was staring at the carpet intently, and I allowed my gaze to wander there, too.

The carpet was quite whole—at least, so it seemed to be. The pattern was rather a severe one, being all squares. The colouring was gaudy—brilliant reds and greens and blues; and suddenly Nelson Lee went down on his knees and pulled at a portion of the carpet.

It came up at once, and I uttered an exclamation. The other fellows were just as surprised as I was.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Handforth. "I've been here all this time, and didn't know that there was a cut in the carpet."

"I knew it must be there, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "There was no other possibility to fit in with the facts. As you will see, it has been cunningly contrived. These squares of the pattern concealed the cut edges perfectly, making it well-nigh impossible to distinguish——"

"But—but what's the good of a hole in the carpet, sir?" put in Tommy Watson. "The ground is all solid underneath!"

Tommy stamped up and down, and there was no question of the ground's solidity. I was quite as puzzled as my own chums. The whole business seemed uncanny, and it was certainly extraordinary.

"Have a look at this!" said Nelson Lee grimly.

He swung back the cut portion of the carpet, and then we stared in amazement. For below, in the ground. a wooden trap-door was revealed!

CHAPTER 10.
In the Nick of Time!

"GREAT Scott!"

I uttered the ejaculation as I stared down at the wooden trap-door in the ground. The earth here seemed to be absolutely solid, and for a trap-door to exist was astounding.

Nelson Lee was quite calm and grim. He was not in the least surprised to see this trap-door, for the simple reason that he knew it must be there. There was no other explanation of Jerry Dodd's startling disappearance.

The crowd, fortunately, was being held back by the police, so there was no rush. Handforth scratched his head and opened his eyes wide.

"A giddy trap-door!" he exclaimed. "What an ass I was not to think of this before! It stands to reason that Doddy must have vanished through a hole in the ground. But where can it lead to?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church. "Everything is solid here; we're standing on firm earth——"

"By Jove!" I interrupted. "Are we, though? Now I come to think of it, I'm not so sure. Just behind us are the ruins of Bannington Abbey, and, underneath, there are all kinds of dungeons and vaults. I wonder if one of these dungeons comes out to here? This trap-door may lead down into a vault, or a cellar!"

"You have hit the nail on the head, Nipper," said Nelson Lee briskly. "The ground beneath us is by no means solid. It is, in fact, honeycombed with the ancient dungeons of

the abbey. There is nothing secret about these dungeons and stone passages; their existence has been known for centuries, and the public is quite at liberty to explore them. Our Indian friends have performed a very clever piece of work—we must give them credit for that."

"And what shall we do now, sir?" I asked.

"Well, we shall certainly waste no time here," replied Lee promptly. "It would obviously be absurd to smash this trap-door down, since we can reach the vaults quite easily by the ordinary means. In any case, it would be a difficult task to smash this trap-door, for it is heavily made, and strongly bolted."

"But why haven't people seen it before, sir?" asked Church.

"My dear boy, the thing was not in existence until last night!" replied the guv'nor. "You can surely see what has been done? A small flagstone has been completely removed, and this wooden trap-door substituted. Those responsible must have been working throughout the night, and probably into the forenoon of to-day. Within this tent they were private, for they probably fixed up a fourth side to the tent."

Never for a moment had Nelson Lee been at a loss. From the very first he had divined the truth, and now he was active. He knew, better than anybody else, how necessary it was to rescue Jerry Dodd at the earliest possible moment.

After a word with Inspector Jameson, Nelson Lee set off briskly through the crowds. I went with him, and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West came, too. Naturally, Handforth & Co. were equally anxious to be on the scene, but Nelson Lee pointed out that it was impossible for everybody to accompany him.

It was not long before we arrived at the abbey ruins. They were nearly deserted, for the crowds would not be on the fair-ground until the afternoon; and, in any case, not many people were keen upon exploring the vaults on such a lovely afternoon as this.

Several eager youths offered to act as our guides, but we did not avail ourselves of their assistance. The ruins were open to one and all, and it was not necessary to obtain permission to descend the vaults.

Both Nelson Lee and I had our electric torches, and after we had descended the long, circular stone staircase—a staircase with many steps broken and crumbled away—we found ourselves within a wide, low-arched passage. It was somewhat damp and chill, but not at all unwelcome after the heat of the day on the surface.

"This is all very well, guv'nor, but what can we do now?" I asked. "How do we know which direction to take? There are all sorts of passages and dungeons here, and we might waste a lot of time——"

"I don't think we shall do that, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I came down these vaults about a year or two ago with my friend, Dr. Brett. There was only one very high-roofed vault, and that, I remember, admitted one or two tiny streaks of daylight, which entered between minute cracks from above, where the flagstones forming the roof failed to meet. That is the only spot possible. There is no other vault or dungeon down here where similar conditions exist."

I looked at the guv'nor admiringly.

"By Jingo, sir, you've got a ripping memory!" I said. "And it doesn't take you long to put two and two together. I reckon you must be right. But how do we get to this vault with the high roof?"

"It is some little way down this passage, I believe," said Nelson Lee, indicating a dark opening on his left. "Yes, this is the one—and we must hurry, boys."

We did hurry, but before very long our progress was brought to a full-stop.

For our electric torches revealed the fact that the tunnel was completely blocked up, making further progress impossible.

"My hat!" I said. "What's all this?"

"It looks like an avalanche, begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "How frightfully awkward, dear old fellows! I'm afraid we're dished!"

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"H'm! It's not altogether unexpected," he said. "I half anticipated something of the sort. Our coloured friends thought it wise, no doubt, to block up this tunnel, so that any curious members of the general public could not interrupt their little game. Some such precaution was necessary."

"Of all the nerve!" said Tommy Watson. "This is about the limit!"

Nelson Lee went closer, examining the rock passage closely with his torch. The obstruction consisted of a large number of stone slabs, uneven boulders, and so forth. Examined casually, it would seem that the roof had fallen in. Any exploring party coming in this direction would at once turn back.

But Nelson Lee could see that this was no collapse of the roof, but a carefully built barricade. There was only one thing to be done—the obstruction had to be removed. It would not be such a hard task as it appeared to be.

"Come, boys, we must set to," he said crisply. "Only a few of these boulders need be removed in order to make a space sufficiently large for the passage of our bodies, and the sooner we are through, the better."

We set to energetically, and before long the topmost stones and rocks had been removed. We were then able to scramble over the rest, and to alight in the other part of the tunnel. It stretched darkly before us.

We had not progressed for more than a hundred yards when we suddenly emerged into a big vault, with an enormously high roof—a roof which went up to a point. At this point one or two streaks of daylight came through—just a spot here and there. The top was covered by two stone slabs, and something else—a newly constructed trap-door of wood. Upon the floor, immediately underneath, lay a great, heaped-up pile of straw. Nelson Lee nodded comprehendingly.

"Yes, just as I thought!" he murmured. "This is really the only way in which the trick could have been performed. After Dodd got into that basket, the trap-door was opened, and he was precipitated down on to this pile of straw, where, of course, he alighted without injury.

"What a cute dodge!" said Tommy Watson.

Lee flashed his light upwards.

"As you see, that was the only slab that could have been removed," he said. "It was taken completely away, and a wooden door fitted in its place—rather a formidable task, but these men were determined, and they had the whole night at their disposal."

"But how did they know that they would be able to get hold of Jerry Dodd?" I asked.

"They didn't know," replied Lee. "They probably learned that Jerry would be coming to the fair, and they faked up this whole arrangement on the off-chance—as a last desperate expedient to gain their ends. As we know, it came off, and Jerry is now in the hands of the Indians."

"But he's not here, sir!" said Watson, looking round.

"No, obviously not," replied Lee. "He has been taken off by his captors—and there is only one way in which they could have gone. In any case, the trail is quite clearly marked upon the floor."

Out of this cavern there were several passages, but only one showed distinct traces of footmarks, and along this Nelson Lee led the way. It was a fairly wide stone passage, with a low, circular

roof, and with a floor so uneven that it was impossible to progress at any speed.

After a while the walls became damp and even wet. Moisture dripped down from the roof, big drops of water splashing into puddles in great numbers.

And then we came upon a board which was fixed to the wall in such a way that it could not escape the attention of all who came up. It bore the following words:

"Danger! Visitors will proceed beyond this spot at their own risk. By order, B.U.D.C."

"Oh! This looks rather lively," I said. "So the Bannington Urban District Council advise all visitors to retreat at this spot. What can the danger consist of?"

"The roof is probably weak and liable to fall in," replied Nelson Lee. "Yes, I fancy this tunnel leads out into a tiny, ivy-grown ruin near the river, and the passage was probably used in the old days as an aid to smuggling. Having its exit so near the river it was useful for such a purpose."

"Well, let's get on, sir," I said.

"I don't know whether I ought to allow you to come——"

"Begad! You don't mean that, sir," put in Sir Monty. "If these Indian rotters could come this way in safety, why can't we go, too?"

Nelson Lee agreed after a moment, and we all went forward. The reason for the warning notice was soon obvious. The floor of the tunnel was full of potholes—deep treacherous clefts filled with mud and water. But for out electric torches we should have floundered in them helplessly. As it was, we could pick our way with comparative ease.

And the walls were in a terrible condition. Many stones were missing, and great jagged cracks extended in all directions. In many parts, it seemed that a dangerous fall might occur at any moment. It was impossible to prevent a slight feeling of apprehension creeping over us as we passed along.

At length, after two or three hundred yards of this sort of thing, the tunnel became dry again, and here another board, facing the opposite direction, bore the same legend. We had passed the danger zone. And it was not long before we arrived at the exit.

We found ourselves within a tiny stone ruin. The passage, indeed, came out on the very ground level—we had no steps to climb.

And we were now close to the river bank, with many shady willows and other trees obscuring most of the view. The ground level here was much lower, since a hillside stretched up towards the old abbey.

We were quite beyond sight of the fair and flower show, for all this was hidden by the thick trees.

But now and again we detected a glimpse of the river through the thick foliage—it was only twenty yards or so away.

"And now, I suppose, we're done?" muttered Tommy Watson.

"Leave it to the guv'nor," I said confidently.

Nelson Lee was already walking out of the ruins, with his gaze fixed intently upon the ground. It was not easy to follow any trail, for everything was dry and hard. I certainly couldn't see much, but Nelson Lee walked onwards, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction.

"Very faint, Nipper—very faint!" he exclaimed. "But I think we can manage to get on the track—— One moment."

He broke off, looking up, and then took quite a different direction. Instead of going through the trees, he went straight towards the river bank, and now he paid no attention to the ground. Arriving at the bank he looked up and down intently.

I was by his side, and the view which we obtained was a charming one. The river wound round in a picturesque style, and just over the tree-tops in the distance the outskirts of Bannington

could be seen. And in the other direction lay the open country, with an old water mill chugging and grinding away.

Somewhat nearer were some locks, and moored close to these lay an old river barge. A coil of smoke was lazily ascending from a small stove pipe, and a gentleman in blue trousers and a jersey was seated on deck, enjoying his pipe.

Nelson Lee looked in this direction keenly.

"You observe, Nipper, that these trees along the bank continue without interruption to the spot where the barge is moored," he said. "A number of men could easily leave the old tunnel, pass through the trees, and board the barge without attracting any notice—and perhaps without being observed."

I stared.

"Yes, sir, but what——"

"Jerry Dodd is at present on the barge," interrupted Nelson Lee coolly.

"What?"

"Begad!"

"My goodness!"

We all stared at the guv'nor in astonishment.

"But—but how can you know, sir?" I asked blankly.

"My dear Nipper, it is absolutely impossible for Dodd to be elsewhere," said Lee. "It is simply a matter of logic—of putting two and two together. We know for a fact that Jerry was brought through the tunnel, and we further know, from the tracks outside the old ruins, that the Indians took the direction of the barge. It would be a mere waste of time to search for tracks any longer."

"But Jerry may have been taken down the river on a boat, sir——"

"I hardly think so, Nipper," put in Lee. "He was either rendered unconscious by means of drugs, bound and gagged, or—and this is most probable—he was placed inside some receptacle, such as a basket or a box. I found distinct traces of a large square object several times in the passage. These Indians would not risk being seen on the open river in broad daylight with their prisoner. It stands to reason, therefore, that there is only one place where Jerry can be concealed. It is in this immediate vicinity, and the barge presents the most likely possibility. We will investigate that at once."

After a moment's thought I could see that Nelson Lee's assumption was probably correct. If not on the barge, where could Jerry Dodd be? It was about the only spot where he could have been taken to in broad daylight without exciting interest and inquiry.

Nelson Lee scribbled something on one of his cards, and turned to Tommy Watson.

"By running up the hill you can arrive on the fair ground within a few minutes, Watson," he said briskly. "Take this card to Inspector Jameson and tell him to lose no time."

"Right, sir!" said Watson eagerly.

He was only too glad to make himself useful, and he rushed straight off. I turned to Nelson Lee with a look of inquiry.

"I have requested Jameson to come along with half a dozen men at once," said the guv'nor, before I could speak. "I further told him to be on the spot within twelve or fifteen minutes."

"And shall we wait until they come, sir?"

"Not necessarily, Nipper, we want to be as quick as possible," said Nelson Lee.

We went back to the little ruin, and from there made our way through the trees paralliel with the river bank. At frequent intervals, Nelson Lee would pause and examine the ground.

"Yes, we are following the right trail, Nipper," he murmured.

It was not long before we nearly overshot our mark. Happening to glance to the left, I could just catch a glimpse of the barge lying close to the river bank. I touched Nelson Lee's arm.

"Hold on, sir," I said. "We're going right past."

But Nelson Lee knew what he was doing. His plan was to see whether the Indians had gone straight on. They had not, and when some clear footprints were seen on a damp spot of ground leading towards the barge, all further doubts were set at rest.

We emerged upon the river bank. And there, lying peacefully at rest, was the barge. The gentlemen in the blue jersey was still seated upon the hatchway, and he looked up casually as we appeared.

He was an old bargee of the usual type, with a clay pipe sticking out of the corner of his mouth. He nodded and touched his forelock.

"Mornin', gents," he said amiably. "Nice day!"

Nelson Lee stepped on board, and we followed.

"Yes, quite so," said the guv'nor. "I wish to ask you a few questions, and it is my way to be direct. Do you know anything of a party of Indians—Hindoos? I have every reason to believe that they are on board this barge at the present moment."

The man stared, removed his pipe, and shook his head.

"Injuns?" he repeated slowly. "By hokey! What should I know about Injuns? I ain't set eyes on one."

"I asked you for the truth, my friend," said Nelson Lee grimly.

The bargee spat overside.

"Oh, so you'd call me a liar, would you?" he demanded. "Me—Bill Adams, wot's known on this 'ere river from Caistowe to——"

"You can't bluff me, Adams, so it's no good attempting to do so," interrupted Lee curtly. "I want certain information—you can give it. Perhaps you do not know that these Indians are being searched for by the police, and that they have deliberately kidnapped a schoolboy. I don't suspect you of any wrongdoing, Adams, and if you know nothing at all, I advise you to be truthful. I suspect that the Indians gave you money for the use of the barge. Is that so?"

Bill Adams removed his peak cap and scratched his grey hair.

"Well, I'm durned if you don't know more than I do!" he exclaimed. "Wanted by the police, are they? If I'd ha' known this, they wouldn't have had my barge—no, not for no money! I'm a respectable man, I am!"

"In that case, Mr. Adams, I am sure you will fall in with my suggestions," said Nelson Lee. "These Indians brought the boy on to your barge——"

"They never did no such thing!" protested the owner. "I've been here the whole time, and there wasn't no schoolboy brought on board. I reckon you must have made a mistake."

"In all probability the boy was enclosed in a basket, or a box," said Lee.

"By hokey! A box!" said the bargee. "They did take a box down the for'ard hold, but I never thought there was anybody inside. And who may you be, sir, anyway?"

Nelson Lee soon introduced himself, and Mr. Adams was certainly impressed. He was still more impressed when a small party was seen rapidly approaching from the direction of the fair ground.

It was headed by Inspector Jameson, and consisted of the inspector, three constables, and Tommy Watson—to say nothing of a crowd of other juniors who followed at a respectable distance.

"Well, darn my skin!" ejaculated Mr. Adams. "This 'ere's a fine go, and no bloomin' mistake! The fust time I've 'ad any trouble with the police—me, with as clean a record as any man on the river! By hokey! It makes a man think twice afore obliging strangers! No more heathen Injuns for me!"

He was indignant and somewhat alarmed, and he went on to explain that the Indians had paid him the sum of ten pounds for the use of his barge for two or three hours. He had thought it a very excellent deal, and had

believed the Indians when they told him that they only required the barge for the purpose of holding a harmless religious service—something peculiar to their own sect.

Mr. Adams was certainly a harmless old fellow with no suspicions of the real truth. And Nelson Lee promised him that he would not suffer.

"Are we going to wait for the police to come, sir?" I asked, looking at the approaching crowd.

"No Nipper—we shall waste no time," replied Nelson Lee briskly. "Come, my lad, you and I will investigate now. Take no risks, for reinforcements will be at hand almost as soon as we enter. But I do not wish to be too late—enough time has been wasted already."

Without delay we passed along the deck of the barge until we came to the companion. The hatchway of this was tightly closed and locked on the inside. Nelson Lee had tried it very cautiously, and now he looked at me.

"No, we won't risk knocking," he said. "Such a move might only precipitate matters for Jerry. The forward hold, Adams said, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we will make an entry by that means."

The hatch was tightly closed over the forward hold, but it did not take the guv'nor long to make an alteration. Then he drew out his revolver and got ready.

"Now, Nipper!" muttered the guv'nor grimly.

Together we heaved over the hatch, letting a flood of daylight into the dim interior. We found ourselves staring into a deep well—quite a large apartment, in fact. And at the moment it was filled with various figures.

The surprise had been swift and dramatic. It had happened so abruptly that Parteb Ghan and his associates were taken off their guard.

But I did not pay much attention to the dark skinned men from the East. I stared straight at another figure—the figure of Jerry Dodd.

He was bound to a chair, and his mouth was completely gagged by means of a huge scarf. The Australian junior's breast was bared, and he was streaming with perspiration.

And I had caught one brief glimpse of something which made me feel rather bad for the moment. At the very second of our throwing the hatch covering back I had seen one of the Indians with a red-hot branding iron in his hand. This vile thing he had been about to press on the bare skin of Jerry Dodd's chest!

In fact, we had interrupted the proceedings at the crucial moment.

Exactly what happened next was rather confused. I know that I marvelled a bit about the accuracy of Nelson Lee's deductions. He had tracked Jerry Dodd to his prison with surprising skill and speed. But it was impossible to think clearly on these matters just then.

For the Indians were attempting to escape—and failing. Inspector Jameson and his men arrived, and Parteb Ghan, Rahzin, and the others were seized and handcuffed and rendered harmless. Nelson Lee and I dropped down into the hold, and in a twinkling we had cut through Jerry Dodd's bonds, and he was free.

Only in the nick of time had he been saved from a ghastly ordeal!

CHAPTER 11.

The Bowling Marvel!

JERRY DODD lay back with a sigh of comfort.

"I figure I'm feeling really good now, chums," he said easily. "By jings! Those Indians got me good and proper that time!"

"That's all right, my son—don't you think about them," I said. "It's all over now, and you won't be troubled by the blighters any more. There's no possibility of further danger."

"Begad! It was wonderful the way Mr. Lee tracked you down, old fellow—it was, really!" observed Sir Montie, adjusting his pince nez, and eyeing Jerry Dodd with great interest. "But I am frightfully doubtful about your playing in the match this afternoon."

"Yes, you'll be off colour," said Tommy Watson.

"Say, chums, you make me smile!" grinned Jerry. "Off colour! Not on your life! I reckon I'll put up a good show, an' I'll be in tip-top form."

"Well, you ought to know best," said Church.

Quite a crowd of us had collected round the Australian junior, who was seated in a deck-chair just within one of the big refreshment marquees on the fair-ground. Only half an hour had passed since Jerry's dramatic rescue from the barge, and much had occurred in that small space of time.

Nelson Lee, of course, went straight off into the town with Inspector Jameson and his prisoners, for the guv'nor would be required to make the formal charge against the Indians.

In the meantime we had seized Jerry Dodd, and had carted him off to the fair-ground. And now he was looking practically himself again. His old colour had returned, and he was full of confidence. The trying ordeal had left no ill effects, and it was comforting to him to know that no further danger could assail him.

For Parteb Ghan and his fellow conspirators were now in the hands of the police, and we had been conjecturing as to their ultimate fate. Handforth declared that they would receive a sentence of not less than twenty years' penal servitude; but this, of course, was quite wrong.

"They deserve punishment, of course," I remarked. "But in a case of this sort the police have got to be jolly careful, and it's quite likely that the whole thing will be hushed up. Jerry's pater won't want this story published in the newspapers."

As a matter of fact, I was right in my surmise, for when Nelson Lee returned shortly afterwards, he requested that we should keep the facts to ourselves. He told the other boys that they would be doing Jerry a good turn by keeping their mouths closed. There was no reason why this story should be spread.

"I rather fancy those Indians will never be brought before a magistrate," went on the guv'nor; "or, if they are, it will be a very quiet affair, and no newspaper reports will be allowed."

"But what's going to happen to the rotters?" demanded Handforth.

"They will probably be held in custody for a few days, and then sent back to India," replied Nelson Lee. "That is, they will be deported; and there is no further possibility of Dodd being endangered. My advice to you, boys, is to forget the whole episode."

"Right you are, sir!"

"We'll do just what you want, sir!"

"That's very good of you, my lads," smiled Lee. "And now, how are you feeling, Jerry? In the circumstances, I think I had better have a chat with Mr. Newman, and get him to release you from the match——"

"Jumping kangaroos!" gasped Jerry, leaping out of his chair. "Don't do that, sir! By jings! This is the chance of a lifetime. I can't miss it, Mr. Lee!"

The guv'nor smiled.

"At least, there is no doubt about your enthusiasm, Dodd," he said. "But do you think you will be fit? Your nerves must be rather shaky——"

"I guess they're as steady as a rock, sir," interrupted Jerry eagerly. "I've forgotten all about those Indians. And my plan for this afternoon is to show these professionals that it's not always a wise thing to grin too soon!"

"Oh, so you know that they have been grinning?" smiled Nelson Lee. "As a matter of fact, Dodd, these Eastshire players are highly amused; they

regard your presence in the Bannington team as a first-class joke."

"The conceited rotters!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Not at all," put in Nelson Lee. "These professionals have never met Dodd, and they do not know his capabilities. It is only natural that they should be highly amused at the thought of a schoolboy playing against them."

"That's right enough, guv'nor," I agreed, "and I don't suppose Jerry is offended. What he's got to do is to show these Eastshire men that he's not a joke, and I believe he'll give them a big shock."

"We'll hope so, at all events," said Nelson Lee. "You must remember, Dodd, that these county men are first-class cricketers. They are not schoolboys, and you will need all your skill to maintain your excellent reputation. The chief thing is to keep cool and calm. That, I realise, will be difficult, for you will be out of your element—every other member of the two elevens will be much older than you. So it is only natural that you should be somewhat nervous to start with."

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"I guess it'll take more than that crowd to scare me, sir!" he observed.

"By the way, guv'nor, what do you reckon would be a good performance on Jerry's part?" I asked curiously.

Nelson Lee considered.

"Well, if Dodd takes one wicket for his side, and if he knocks up between twenty and thirty runs, he will do famously," he replied. "A score of twenty-five against these professionals would be highly creditable."

Handforth sniffed.

"Why, if Jerry doesn't make fifty off his own giddy bat, I'll eat my boots!" he declared. "He may be a kid, but size doesn't count in cricket. Those professionals will have some of the swank knocked out of them this afternoon!"

We were reminded that it would soon be time for the match to commence. The enclosures were already filling up. The public was greatly attracted by the star cricket match of the year. Before the time fixed for commencement, the cricket ground would be packed.

Jerry soon went off with Nelson Lee, and the majority of the juniors hurried off to obtain some lunch before going to their own places. They had come for the special purpose of seeing Jerry Dodd do some wonderful things against Eastshire. Perhaps the fellows were expecting rather too much from their cricketing hero; a good performance on his part would be set down as poor. So Jerry Dodd was determined to play the game of his life.

He didn't feel at all nervous, as Nelson Lee had feared. On the contrary, when he was introduced to the Bannington eleven by Mr. Newman, the captain, he was perfectly cool and at his ease.

But he did not fail to observe the curious glances which were bestowed upon him by the local champions. Many of these cricketers entirely disapproved of their captain's decision, and they looked upon Jerry's inclusion in the team as a silly experiment which could only result in ridicule and disaster.

But Jerry had expected this, and he did not mind particularly the somewhat scornful glances which were cast in his direction. He mentally resolved to turn those scornful glances into ones of approval. He wanted to make good—and if pluck and determination could help him, he would certainly do so.

But the reception he received from his own side was nothing compared to the open scorn which was heaped upon him by the professionals. The Eastshire County eleven was a famous one, and this match was regarded as a leisurely holiday. The thought of Bannington winning never even entered into the heads of the professionals; and the knowledge that a schoolboy was included in the opposing team fairly made them roar.

When Jerry was first introduced by Mr. Newman, he was greeted with eleven broad grins and several hearty laughs. The Eastshire men were good fellows, every one of them, but they couldn't possibly accept Jerry seriously. The knowledge that he was the nephew of "Bill" Dodd, the well-known Australian player, had very little effect. He was a schoolboy, and a junior at that. It was amazing that the Bannington captain should have chosen him.

The Eastshire captain was J. H. Keen, a very well-known cricketer—and, incidentally, a member of the selection committee, that unique body whose duty it was to choose the players for the Test matches.

Keen was a big, bluff individual with a bronzed, clean-shaven face. He seized Jerry Dodd's hand quite frankly, and was pleased to be somewhat facetious.

"So you're the dark horse, eh?" he said pleasantly. "You're the terrible demon who means to score a century, and wipe us to bits?"

"I'm not saying what I'm going to do," replied Jerry. "I don't figure it's my habit to take things for granted, Mr. Keen; but it's a darned sure thing that I'll do my best to alter the shape of that smile of yours!"

The Eastshire captain roared.

"Good!" he said. "I dare say you will alter the shape—it'll grow wider. But I admire your pluck, youngster—and your cheek, too! And if you make more than five runs, I'll buy you a new cricket bat."

"Thanks awfully!" said Jerry. "But I've got a beauty of my own."

All the other members of the Eastshire team joked loudly about Jerry. He took no offence. He knew this would happen, and, after all, nothing else could have been expected. But after he had proved what he could do—well, perhaps he wouldn't be taken as a joke.

At the time for the start the two captains tossed, and Keen won. This was rather unfortunate, for the amateurs had been hoping for the privilege of batting first, while they were fresh. Naturally, the Eastshire skipper decided to bat at once.

Accordingly, Mr. Newman and his men went out into the field. Jerry Dodd was placed at cover point, and he was well satisfied with his position. A cheer went up as the first two professionals came out to the wickets—Johnson and Haycraft. Haycraft was a famous batsman, and it was evidently Keen's intention to show the Bannington people some rapid run-getting at the very beginning.

The match started.

The Bannington bowlers were Martin and Longwood, and I didn't know much about them. I watched the play with great interest and keen attention. The weather was glorious, and the crowd was huge and appreciative. Better conditions for a big cricket match could not be desired.

The first ball was sent down by Martin, and Haycraft swung his bat round and dispatched the leather to the boundary for four. This was a good opening, at all events.

There followed some pretty work by the two batsmen, and runs were made fairly rapidly. After fifteen minutes' play the score stood at thirty-three, and Haycraft was responsible for twenty-two of the runs. The bowlers could do nothing to dismiss the professionals. And then came a little bit of excitement—when it was least expected.

Longwood was bowling, and he sent down a ball which broke rather awkwardly. But Haycraft was not put out; he swung his bat, and the leather went soaring away at express speed.

Jerry Dodd leapt upwards, just as he stood—a clean, agile jump. His left hand was outstretched, and there was a sharp smack. The next moment he calmly tossed the ball into the air.

A tremendous roar went up.

"Well held, youngster!"

"Oh, well played, Dodd!" yelled the St. Frank's juniors.

"Good old Doddy!"

It had indeed been a smart catch, and one that nobody had believed possible. Haycraft himself looked stupidly at Dodd for a moment or two, and then shook his head. He walked towards the pavilion with a very serious expression on his face. That catch of Jerry's had made him think.

But the other professionals were not much impressed. They regarded it as a fluke. This idea, however, did not last long.

Cutcliffe, the next man, had not been in for more than five minutes before his wicket went to pieces. It happened rather dramatically—and Jerry Dodd was again responsible.

Cutcliffe had sent the ball away almost to the boundary, and it was rather smartly returned by the fieldsman. It came straight to Jerry, and he hurled it at the wicket without a second's pause.

The leather struck the stumps squarely, scattering them, while Cutcliffe's bat was still a clear six inches away from the crease.

"Out!"

"Oh, well fielded!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!"

The St. Frank's fellows were simply yelling themselves hoarse. The two noteworthy incidents of the match so far had been performed by Jerry Dodd, and with the net result that two of the professionals were dismissed. Nobody could deny that Jerry was hot stuff.

"Two wickets for thirty-nine!" said Handforth. "Good business! If things keep on at this rate we shall see these Eastshire bounders whacked yet."

But things did not keep on at that rate. Kettle was the next batsman, and he proceeded to make the fur fly. The Bannington bowlers were changed occasionally, and nothing seemed to result. The score stood at fifty-eight before Johnson's off stump was found by Martin. He had played well, but not brilliantly.

Bateman now joined Kettle, and these two formed a partnership which led to excellent results. They batted confidently, and in one over alone three boundaries were secured, to say nothing of a pair of threes. Newman changed his bowlers again, but this made no difference.

By twos, threes, and fours the score mounted up, and the enormous crowd was delighted by the excellent display of batting.

The amateurs were feeling their handicap. Against these Eastshire men they were almost powerless. And Bateman and Kettle had settled down so comfortably that they seemed to be firmly "set" for the afternoon.

While the field was changing at the end of an over, Longwood tapped Newman on the sleeve. The Bannington captain looked round.

"No, Longwood, it's no good," he said. "Your bowling isn't any good against these men——"

"I don't want to bowl," interrupted Longwood. "Just a suggestion, old man. Why not try that youngster?"

"Dodd?"

"Yes," said Longwood. "I was rather opposed to it at first, but I've been watching him. He's fairly on his toes, and as keen as mustard. I've heard he's pretty good at bowling. Why not try him?"

Newman nodded.

"I hadn't thought of it," he replied. "By George, I will!"

A moment later he tossed the ball to Jerry, whose face flushed with delight. He had been hoping for this all along. He gripped the leather with a fierce sense of exultation. The flush in his cheeks increased slightly as he heard a murmur of laughter from certain sections of the crowd, and he did not fail to notice the smiles on the faces of Bateman and Kettle.

"Good for you, kid!" chuckled Bate-

man, as Jerry passed him. "Now your pals are going to perspire!"

This meant, of course, that Bateman expected to knock Jerry's bowling all over the field. Kettle was of the same opinion.

Jerry took a short, leisurely run, and it seemed that the ball would be sent down quite slowly. But the last moment his wrist gave a peculiar movement, with a twist in it. The ball left his hand and fairly hissed down the pitch. Bateman was unprepared—as a matter of fact, he was over-confident. Before he knew what actually happened, the leather slipped under his bat and lifted the middle stump clean out of the ground.

"Bowled!"

"Oh, good old Jerry!"

Bateman stared at his wicket blankly.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he gasped. "How—how on earth——"

This was certainly the most surprising event of all, and it was gradually becoming apparent to the onlookers that Jerry Dodd was something out of the common.

"We owe that kid an apology!" said Keen, as Bateman strode into the pavilion. "By gad, that was no fluke, old man, the way he got your middle stump! When our innings is over, I shall apologise to Dodd."

"Oh, don't make a fool of yourself!" snapped Bateman. "I'll admit the youngster's a bit of a surprise, but he can't keep it up for long!"

J. H. Keen, however, was looking very serious now. He had watched the play very closely, and he continued to watch it in the same way. Coles was the next batsman, and he was the Eastshire wicketkeeper. If he knocked up fifteen runs in a county match he did well. To-day he expected to double his usual average.

He was dismissed for nil.

Jerry sent down the second ball of that over. It was a tricky one. Coles was obliged to hit it, or his middle stump would have gone. He did hit it, and his worst fears were realised. It went sky high, and descended into the waiting hands of Newman.

"Out!"

"The young demon!" muttered Keen. "What that boy doesn't know about bowling isn't worth learning! Thank heaven he wasn't put on earlier! I certainly do owe him an apology!"

At last the crowd knew the truth, and the Bannington eleven knew it, too! With exultant joy they watched Jerry's every movement, and they realised that Newman had had a brainwave in including this schoolboy in the eleven. The Australian junior was playing an astounding game.

Five wickets were already down, the score stood at one hundred and five. Heath was the next man to join Kettle. The St. Frank's fellows were half hoping that Jerry would do the hat-trick—at least, that he would dismiss Heath for a duck's egg. But this was too much to expect.

The professionals were cautious now. They realised, rather too late, that this schoolboy cricketer was more than their match; they knew that he was something of a wizard at the game.

The runs were now obtained slowly, and only fifteen more were added to the score during the next twenty minutes. Then Kettle's leg stump went flying. This time it was Martin who found it.

Murray came in, and exactly three minutes afterwards, when the score stood at one hundred and twenty-one, he fell into one of Jerry's traps and was caught out. The position was not looking very good for Eastshire now. Seven wickets down for one hundred and twenty-one runs could not be called a brilliant performance, considering that the professionals were up against an amateur eleven.

Further disasters followed.

Heath was soon out, and now Muggleton and Keen were at the wickets.

They put up a bit of a show. Keen himself was determined to pull the game out of the fire.

He had added twenty-five to the score when Jerry took up the bowling once more; the junior had been having a short rest. He sent down a ball which Keen completely misjudged. It broke awkwardly, seemed to be going wide, and the Eastshire captain attempted to play it into the slips. Instead, he sent the leather into his own wicket.

There were nine wickets down now, and less than ten minutes later the tenth went; Muggleton being tempted to hit out at a ball which he should really have blocked. It soared high, and it was Jerry Dodd himself who caught it.

He was aware of the fact that the outburst of cheering was intended for him, and he flushed with pleasure. The professionals were all out, and their score was by no means formidable—one hundred and seventy-two.

It was a most surprising result. Keen himself had expected to declare at about tea-time, after making between two and three hundred runs. And now, at about four o'clock, they were all out for quite a moderate score! And J. H. Keen did not lose sight of the fact that he had Jerry Dodd to thank for this state of affairs.

He looked forward to the Bannington innings with secret misgivings. If Jerry Dodd could bat as well as he could bowl—but Keen did not like to think too much about that!

As for Jerry Dodd, he was already the hero of the afternoon.

CHAPTER 12.
Proving His Worth!

BATEMAN shook his head as he filled his pipe.

"Hanged if I can understand it," he said bluntly. "That boy doesn't look anything much, after all. And I made a proper ass of myself when he was first put on to bowl, confound him! He took me fairly by surprise!"

Keen nodded.

"There's no doubt about that," he agreed. "It shows that we mustn't be so confident. These people are only local amateurs, and I wouldn't give a fig for the ordinary team. But that boy raises it out of the common ruck completely. I tell you, he's as smart as they make 'em, and we shall have to look out for ourselves when he goes in to bat."

The tea interval was nearly over, and it would soon be time for Eastshire to take the field. The professionals were a very different set of men now. That feeling of supreme confidence had deserted them, and they were in a very thoughtful mood. There were, however, one or two optimists.

"Oh, I don't know," said Coles, the wicketkeeper. "This boy is certainly a good bowler, but that's all the more reason to suppose that he's not very good at batting. If we can only dismiss him with only a few runs to his credit, the others will soon be polished off. In fact, I'll bet you ten to one, Keen, that these Bannington men are all out for less than a hundred."

"I wish I could believe you," said J. H. Keen. "In any case, I'm not going to bet. I only wish we'd realised Dodd's value at the beginning, instead of setting him down as a rabbit. That's where we made our big mistake."

Keen had already seized his opportunity to speak with Jerry. And the Eastshire captain had apologised freely and generously for his banter at the commencement of the game. Keen was a sportsman, and his heart was in cricket. He was full of enthusiasm for Jerry Dodd's astounding prowess.

There was a big cheer when the county men streamed out of the pavilion into the field. Then came the first two Bannington batsmen—Alder-

ton and Lockson. These men, of coure, were all known in the district, and much was expected of them.

Unfortunately, they did little.

Eastshire proved that they had some excellent bowlers. At present, Muggleton and Kettle were doing the bowling, and Muggleton was particularly deadly. He was nothing to look at—a short, stumpy individual. But he sent the leather down with a speed which had staggering effects.

The fourth ball of the over proved to be Alderton's downfall. His leg stump was just touched, and the bails went toppling off. The first man out, and the score stood at nil.

This was by no means a promising opening. But, as somebody pointed out, it was better to start badly and finish well, than to start with a bang and go all to pieces later.

Dale came and filled Alderton's place, and the tremendous round of applause which went up told me that Dale was something of a local champion. As a matter of fact, he was the best batsman that Bannington could provide, and he had been doing great things in the local games.

He did not disappoint the crowd.

Right from the start, he exhibited great confidence, and hit out at everything that came, scoring twos and threes with unfailing regularity, with an occasional boundary thrown in.

He had scored thirty-one, and Lockson seven when the next wicket fell. Dale seemed to be set, and he was batting brilliantly. Then he fell a victim to the smartness of Coles, the wicket-keeper.

Leaping forward to meet the ball, apparently with the intention of sending it well over the boundary, he completely missed the leather. Before he knew it there was a crash. Coles had knocked off the bails with the ball while Dale was still out of the crease.

"That's out, I think!" said Coles pleasantly.

"Hard luck!"

"Well played, Dale!"

Dale did not look very happy as he carried his bat out. He had expected to put up a much better performance. Newman, himself, went in next, and covered himself with somewhat doubtful glory by knocking up nine runs and fizzling out.

He was neatly caught by Bateman, and the swift downfall of the local captain had its due effect upon the crowd. Everybody was now watching anxiously.

"Why don't they send Doddy in?" demanded Handforth. "He'd show them the way to bat!"

"Rather!"

"Oh, Doddy will be in soon, don't you worry!"

The next man in, however, was Thornton, a long, lean young fellow who had been rather smart at fielding. Misfortune dogged him, for he managed to get his leg before the wicket before he had been batting four minutes, and the umpire pronounced him to be out. He had added nothing to the score, which now stood at fifty-two for four.

Then Longwood came out, and proceeded to wake things up somewhat. The first ball he sent to the boundary, and then followed this up by scoring a three. This brought the bowling to Lockson.

It was rather unfortunate, because Lockson tried to lunge out. He actually did so, but the leather went sky high, and there was no mistake about the catch. The fieldsmen were now looking rather more easy.

Five wickets down, and only fifty-nine runs scored. This was very different from what Eastshire had done. With five wickets down, their score had been over double this amount.

"This won't do—this won't do!" said Newman anxiously. "Unless we improve, we shall fail to get a century between us! Who's the next man? Oh, Barrow! For goodness'

sake, man, do your best. Longwood's in good form to-day, and the pair of you ought to make up for lost time."

"Leave it to me," said Barrow confidently.

Three minutes later he came back, his wicket having been knocked to pieces by the first ball. There was no doubt that Muggleton was a dangerous bowler. He was causing the wickets to fall in a deadly way.

"Oh, corks!" groaned Handforth. "These Bannington chaps look like beating the county, don't they? The match is a giddy frost! Six wickets—fifty-nine runs! Help!"

"It's a bit rotten," admitted Church.

"They'll never do it now—it's impossible!" put in Reginald Pitt. "Why, they need a hundred and fourteen to win, and they've only got four more men. They'll have to do wonders!"

The roar which went up immediately afterwards was heard half over Bannington. For Jerry Dodd, smiling and cheerful, came out of the pavilion with a bat under his arm. Newman had decided to put him in next. I was very pleased to see this, for now there was a chance that the game might be pulled out of the fire. I had great confidence in Jerry, and I expected him to remain at the wicket until the end of the innings. He would outlast the others, in my opinion.

But there was a lot of leeway to be made up, and it was only natural that the county players should consider themselves to be in a fairly safe position. But they were just a bit doubtful about Jerry.

Muggleton smiled rather grimly while Jerry was busy with the umpire. Then he prepared to bowl, and he steeled himself to make an extra effort—to send down one of his most destructive spinners. It was this spin which had deceived many a first-class batsman.

That ball was certainly a terror, and Jerry Dodd knew it. Consequently, it did not prove his undoing. On the contrary, he played it neatly into the slips, and, owing to the spin, it fairly shot over the ground towards the boundary. Jerry and Longwood crossed the pitch three times.

Longwood received the next ball, and tapped a single. Again the bowling came to Jerry. He opened out his shoulders and delivered a mighty swipe which sent the ball hurtling over the pavilion.

"Hurrah!"

"That's the way, Jerry!"

"Just the same as usual!"

Jerry Dodd was already famous as a powerful hitter. At St. Frank's he had sent the leather to amazing distances. And now he was proving that he could do exactly the same thing when playing against professionals.

And then Jerry treated the onlookers to a wonderful display.

No matter who bowled, he did exactly as he liked with the ball. In one over alone he scored four boundaries. He was calm, confident, and he seemed to exert that uncanny power over the bowler which others had noticed.

The bowler, indeed, had his confidence robbed from him by Jerry's very attitude. The county men were not at their best when facing Jerry. They couldn't account for it themselves.

"And we laughed at this youngster!" said J. H. Keen gloomily. "By gad! We laughed at him!"

There was something rather bitter in his tone. He and his colleagues fully realised the fact that this schoolboy was the best cricketer they had played against during the season. A boy, certainly, but a man so far as cricket was concerned.

The score was mounting up rapidly, for Longwood, too, was doing fairly well. Already the board registered the total of ninety-five, and Jerry was responsible for twenty-seven of these.

There was a round of clapping when the hundred mark was reached. And

still the batsmen were playing confidently. No matter what Keen did, it made no difference. The county skipper altered the field again and again. He set it expressly for Muggleton's bowling and Jerry's batting.

But every time the alteration was made, Jerry calmly changed his tactics. Where he had sent the ball earlier, now closely guarded by hawk-eyed fieldsmen, the ball never came. It went shooting away elsewhere, to be chased by perspiring professionals.

J. H. Keen's experience was of no avail. He simply didn't know what to do. And Jerry went on batting like a machine, to the great joy and delight of the crowd—and the almost hysterical pleasure of the Removites.

While Longwood was obtaining five runs, Jerry scored twenty. And when Jerry's fifty went up there was a big roar. But, after all, it couldn't last for ever, and Longwood's off-stump was found.

"Seven wickets for one hundred and twenty-two!" I exclaimed. "That's all serene, my sons. If these other men will only keep their wickets intact the county will be walloped. Jerry will do all the batting that's necessary. We only need fifty-one to win."

Martin was the next batsman. He rather resented Jerry's performance, for he considered that he and his colleagues were being shown up. And Martin decided to teach Jerry a thing or two. This was a most unwise proceeding, and he quickly paid for his egotism.

He fell into the simplest of simple tricks, and was caught out before he had scored a single run.

Abbott was next man in. He was more careful than his predecessor. There was only one other man after him, so it was necessary to be cautious. The Bannington players were beginning to realise now that their only chance of winning lay in leaving the run-getting to Jerry Dodd.

In a way, this was rather humiliating. But it all depended upon the way in which one looked at it. The real sportsmen in the team were not jealous—they were genuinely delighted at the great piece of luck which had placed Jerry in their team.

The interest was now at fever-heat, and Abbott was watched with much anxiety. Very wisely, he never once tried to launch out. He successfully blocked four balls in succession, and then the batting came to Jerry.

During that one over, eighteen runs were added to the score—every one from Jerry's bat; and so the game proceeded. Whenever possible, Jerry so arranged things that he should have the batting all the time. And he kept up his whirlwind innings, scoring twos and fours with hardly a break.

The crowd had never seen such cricket before, and the stories about Jerry's amazing form—discredited until now—were at last believed. He was so good, in fact, that J. H. Keen little cared whether his side won or lost. He was filled with intense admiration for this master cricketer.

"Man alive, the boy's wonderful—positively wonderful!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, as the field was crossing over. "I've never seen anything like it in my life. In five years' time this boy will be the talk of the world!"

"Well, we're in for a licking, anyway," growled Bateman.

He was probably right, for the scoreboard already announced that the total was one hundred and sixty-five. Unless a miracle happened, Bannington would win.

And then, at that crucial moment, Abbott was unfortunate enough to be run out. The last man in was Woodstock, and if his wicket happened to fall, which was quite possible, victory would be torn from the amateurs' grasp.

Woodstock came to the wicket looking nervous. He felt nervous, too, for he knew how much depended upon him. But there was only one other ball in

that over, and he succeeded in stopping it.

The next over was the last of the match. Jerry was at the very top of his form, and only eight more runs were required. The Australian junior made no mistake. He sent the first ball to the boundary.

"Four more to win!" breathed Newman from the pavilion. "We shall do it—thanks to this schoolboy!"

Muggleton was bowling, and he was filled by an intense desire to lower Jerry's wicket at this critical juncture. But the ball he sent down, although a stinger, had no terrors for Jerry.

The junior raised his bat, swung it round, and the leather went shooting away like a four-point-seven shell. It soared away over the pavilion and into the distance. The ball was never recovered.

It wasn't needed, for the match was over.

Pandemonium reigned immediately afterwards. The crowd swarmed over the ground, and Jerry Dodd only just succeeded in getting into the pavilion in time, otherwise he would have been severely mobbed by his excited admirers.

"Splendid!" said Nelson Lee to me. "I hardly dared to hope for this result. Dodd is already famous. After to-day's match his name will be known wherever cricket is played—the boy who beat Eastshire!"

"By jingo!" I said. "He's a marvel!"

Uncle Bill thought so, too. He fairly hugged Jerry in the pavilion. In fact, Jerry hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. The county men were generous. They freely admitted their guilt in ridiculing Jerry before the match; and J. H. Keen could hardly contain himself.

"I'd like to shout about this for a week!" he declared. "Why, hang it all, the Australians ought to play you in the next Test match, my lad! If they did that England wouldn't have much chance!"

"By jingo!" grinned Jerry. "I figure you're joking, sir!"

"Joking be hanged; it's the truth!" said the Eastshire skipper. "I've seen some clever cricketers in my time, but I'd give all I possess to have you in my eleven. Players of your kind only appear about once in every hundred years!"

"You're right, sir—darn me if you're not!" said Uncle Bill. "I've always reckoned that Jerry was a prodigy at cricket—a genius. He is, too! Before he's a man he'll beat the best performances of Jack Hobbs!"

Poor Jerry hardly knew what to say, or to think. And little did he realise what amazing results this match was to have.

J. H. Keen was positively enthralled by Jerry's playing—and J. H. Keen was a member of the Selection Committee. The next Test match between England and Australia was due to take place on Earl's ground, in London, the next week. And Jerry Dodd——

Enough said—for the moment, anyway!

CHAPTER 13.

The Truth About Jerry!

MR. STAFFORD was hardly to be blamed for coming to the conclusion that half the boys of St. Frank's had suddenly taken leave of their senses.

He became aware of sundry peculiar noises, which rapidly swelled into a most appalling din. And, gazing out of his study window into the Triangle, he beheld scores of juniors engaged in a fantastic war-dance near the gates.

But the Head needn't have worried. It was only the Remove escorting Jerry Dodd back to St. Frank's in triumph. There was not the slightest doubt that Jerry was the most popular fellow in the whole school at that moment. He

was not only the idol of the juniors, but he had gained the full admiration of the senior forms.

No longer was he regarded as a wonderful junior cricketer. He was given the full credit that was due to him, and every decent fellow in the Sixth freely acknowledged that no member of the first eleven could hold a candle to him. Jerry Dodd's triumph was complete.

And a little surprise awaited him—a surprise which reminded him of the dramatic incidents of the morning. In fact, Jerry had practically forgotten the whole affair of the Indians. It seemed remote and far away after the exciting events of this great day.

Nelson Lee had returned to St. Frank's about half an hour earlier, and after the juniors had exhausted some of their energy—and incidentally the total suppy of Mrs. Hake's ginger pop—Nelson Lee appeared.

"Now, boys, I think you have had Dodd quite long enough—he needs a bit of a respite," he said pleasantly. "I want Dodd to come with me."

"Is anything wrong, sir?" asked Jerry. "I hope the Head doesn't figure that I was to blame for playing——"

"Not at all, Jerry," smiled Lee. "This is quite a private matter. Nipper, however, had better come with us."

It was not long before we were in the Ancient House, and then we went straight along to the headmaster's study—both Jerry and I rather wondering what was in the wind.

We were considerably astonished when we found the Head had four visitors, one being Mr. William Dodd, another a well-dressed and legal-looking stranger, and the remaining two were our old friends, Messrs. Podge and Midge. They were looking very important and dignified.

"Come in—come in!" said the Head. "Allow me to congratulate you, Dodd, upon your wonderful performance. It was all the more wonderful because of your startling experience this morning."

"I guess I'd forgotten all about that, sir," smiled Jerry.

"I am glad that the unfortunate incident does not worry you," said the Head. "And I am glad to tell you, my boy, that the matter is now fully cleared up. This gentleman on my left is Mr. Ridgeway, of the firm of Anstey and Ridgeway, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn. Before making a statement he requested that you should be present."

"Well, I figure I'm here, sir," said Jerry.

"Exactly," agreed Dr. Stafford. "And now, Mr. Ridgeway, perhaps you'll be good enough to state your particulars."

Mr. Ridgeway coughed and adjusted his pince-nez.

"It affords me great pleasure to meet you, my boy," he said, beaming at Jerry. "Perhaps you have been unaware of the fact so far, but since your arrival at St. Frank's you have been closely guarded and watched over by detectives—these two gentlemen on my right, Messrs. Podge and Midge."

Jerry seemed to swallow something with difficulty.

"I've got you, sir!" he said. "Guarded, eh? Why, yes, I do seem to remember having seen these gentlemen before. Sure, sir!"

Messrs Podge and Midge bowed.

"As a matter of fact, they received their instructions from me," went on Mr. Ridgeway. "Previous to that I had received a long communication from your father, my boy, and I thought it only wise to take certain precautions. We feared, in fact, that you might be molested by a band of mysterious Burmese."

"By jingo! I was molested, sir," said Jerry.

"Precisely, and it was the duty of Messrs. Podge and Midge to guard over you," continued the solicitor. "I have

every reason to believe that they performed their duty in a creditable manner."

At this point it was only with great difficulty that I prevented myself from exploding, and even Nelson Lee had some trouble in keeping a straight face. For we knew that Messrs. Podge and Midge had made an unholy hash of the whole affair from the very start.

"This afternoon I received an urgent telegram from Mr. Podge stating that the Burmese had been placed under arrest," continued Mr. Ridgeway. "As it happened, only this morning a special letter arrived from Australia—from your father. I therefore considered it to be a happy opportunity to come down and acquaint you with the facts that are in my possession."

"Very good of you, sir," said Jerry.

"It is my duty to reveal to you an incident in your father's earlier life which he had hoped to keep secret for ever," said the solicitor gravely. "Let me hasten to add that this secret is quite honourable, and casts no discredit upon Mr. Dodd. It would have been better, perhaps, to have kept this knowledge from you until you reach your majority; but in the circumstances it is necessary that it should be told at once."

"Jumping kangaroos!" said Jerry. "I hope it's nothing serious!"

"Not at all—not at all!" said Mr. Ridgeway. "But you are aware of the fact that these men from Burma have attempted to brand you. The brand was the Twin Stars of the Rhoon religion. It is necessary that you should know the reason for this. I will explain."

"I figure that's what I'm waiting for now."

"I can do so in a few words," declared the solicitor. "Many years ago, when your father was quite a young man, he had occasion to visit Burma. He was, in fact, the representative of an Australian firm. Well, the subject is a somewhat delicate one, and I will pass over it lightly. You must remember that your father was only a very young man. It was, therefore, not unnatural that he should—er—fall in love with a certain young lady of the Burmese race."

"Say you're pulling my leg!" ejaculated Jerry quite startled.

"I assure you that I am doing no such thing," said Mr. Ridgeway. "Your father not only fell in love with this young lady, but he married her—No! Let me finish, please! Mr. Dodd was, I repeat, very young, and perhaps he did not fully realise the possible consequences of his act. The Burmese lady was the daughter of a very rich merchant, and they belong to that peculiar sect which worships the so-called god of Rhoon. Well, your father was obliged to submit to the indignity of being branded with the Twin Stars—not that he cared particularly at the time, being youthful and irresponsible. But the whole affair was a sad tragedy."

"I reckon I'm sure puzzled, sir," said Jerry wonderingly.

"Of course, you are, my boy—of course you are," Mr. Ridgeway hastened to say. "Let me explain to you that your father has directed that I should tell you all this. The peculiar circumstances make it necessary. To continue, Mr. Dodd married this Burmese young lady, and then came the tragedy. For, not two hours after the ceremony, and before the festivities could begin, the bride was bitten by a poisoned snake which had concealed itself in a large basket of flowers. I will pass over this tragic occurrence. The young lady died, of course—almost immediately. Your father, broken-hearted, left the country. He stayed for some time in Calcutta, finally returning to Australia. By this time he had realised his folly. He knew, in fact, that his love for the Burmese maiden could never have been lasting. And so he settled down in his old home

in Australia and allowed that unfortunate episode to die. He attempted to blot it completely out of his own mind. In due course he met and married your mother, and—but it is needless for me to tell you all this. Not until a few months ago did Mr. Dodd realise the possible results of his youthful folly in Burma."

"Why, what happened, sir?" asked Jerry.

"Your father was visited by a gentleman from Rangoon," said Mr. Ridgeway. "This man was, in fact, the brother of the young lady who had died from the snake bite. And it seems that when your father allowed himself to be branded he took certain oaths. And he was startled to find that it is one of the sacred laws of the worshippers of Rhoon that the male children upon attaining the age of fifteen should be branded with the Twin Stars, no matter who the mother may be. If the father is branded, so must the son be branded. Your father was in a difficulty, for he refused to allow any such thing. He had long since forgotten his vows—indeed, he had never seriously entered into them. After much thought he decided to send you to England, where he imagined you would be safe. As events, have turned out, you were not. These Burmese followed you and strenuously attempted to brand you on the appointed day—that is, this very day. They have failed and are now in the custody of the police."

"But is it not possible that other members of this faith will suddenly appear and attempt to brand the boy?" asked Uncle Bill anxiously.

"No, sir," said the solicitor, with decision. "If any member of this faith is not branded on the specified day, he is considered to be an outcast, and is no longer wanted by the sect. It is a sacred rule that every attempt should be made to apply the brand at the right time. But if these attempts fail, then no further action is taken."

"I am exceedingly glad that this unfortunate matter is completely over," said Nelson Lee, rising to his feet. "We have had some exciting times with these determined Burmese, and the explanation is comparatively simple."

I could not help being amused by Messrs Podge and Midge, who seemed to be under the impression that they had earned all the credit. As a matter of fact, they had made nothing but blunders the whole time.

Jerry Dodd was rather thoughtful for an hour or so, and this was only to be expected. But it was better that he should know the full truth, and he soon recovered his usual spirits. There was no longer any mystery.

But with regard to the cricket—well, the most momentous event of all would soon take place. It was an event which not only staggered everybody at St. Frank's, but the sport-loving population of the whole country.

CHAPTER 14.
Welcome Visitors!

"GOOD old Jerry!"

"Bravo!"

"Good man!"

Jerry Dodd smiled as he came down the steps of the Ancient House. Those shouts, and many others of a similar nature, reached his ears from all parts of the Triangle. Jerry was accustomed to it, but he could not help feeling rather elated at the way in which his school-fellows were honouring him.

For two days past, the Australian junior had been the hero of St. Frank's—the one fellow of importance in the whole school. And he was not only lionised by the juniors, but by the seniors, too.

The whole school was still talking about Jerry's performance in that charity match. In the studies, in the passages, out in the Triangle—it didn't matter where, groups of fellows were gathered together chatting.

Handforth was as eloquent as usual. With Church and McClure as an audience, he had been holding forth at some length. Church and McClure, of course, were obliged to listen; they could hardly get out of it.

"My principle is to give credit where credit is due!" said Handforth firmly. "And you can't get away from the fact that Doddy is just about the limit when it comes to cricket. He isn't human, by George!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Church, for the sake of something to say. "He's human enough; but he happens to be clever. Cricketers like Dodd aren't made—they're born! No amount of practice could turn out such a player!"

This was a subject for argument, and Handforth, who loved an argument better than his meals, seized upon it at once.

"Oh, that's rot!" he declared. "Sheer, unadulterated piffle!"

"Look here——"

"Don't interrupt!" said Handforth, frowning. "You make out that cricketers like Dodd can't be made? That's absolutely preposterous. It's all a question of practice, my sons! Just that and nothing else! If a fellow chooses to set himself to it he can do any old thing. For example, if I liked to go into cricket whole-heartedly I could beat Jerry at his own blessed game!"

"Oh, of course!" said McClure readily. "But we're talking about ordinary people, Handy—not about marvellous wonders of your sort. You're capable of anything—particularly in the talking line."

Handforth looked suspicious.

"If you're rotting——" he began.

"Rotting?" repeated McClure innocently. "What on earth put that idea into your head? Everybody knows what a wonderful chap you are, Handy. But there's just one little thing I'd like to know. How is it that Jerry Dodd can play like this, and he's had hardly any practice at all?"

Handforth stared.

"Hardly any practice?" he repeated. "Why, he's been playing against Helmford and Bannington——"

"Yes, and so have you," put in Church pointedly. "Not only that, but you've been practising at other times, and Dodd's been swotting away at his books in his study. According to your argument, Handy, you ought to play about six times as well as Dodd, because you've had six times as much practice."

Handforth regarded his chums witheringly.

"What's the good of talking to you chaps?" he asked, with a hopeless gesture. "I might just as well go up to the giddy fountain and start jawing at it. At any rate, it wouldn't make any fatheaded remarks!"

"It wouldn't be bored stiff, either!" murmured Church.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"If you think you can say things like that, you're mistaken!" roared Handford, pushing up his sleeves. "If you want to say anything, why can't you say it, instead of mumbling? I'm going to punch your nose as a lesson!"

Church dodged, knowing what was coming. But, unfortunately, he performed this action a trifle too soon, and Handford was ready for it. He altered the direction of his blow, and Church received a punch fully in the centre of his chest; and not on his nose, as Handforth had intended.

"Yaroooh!" howled Church desperately.

He went staggering backwards, lost his balance, and fell sprawling. The Study D trio had been talking near the gateway, and Church fell right in the centre of the two great stone posts.

And, at that very second, a powerful touring car turned swiftly into the Triangle.

The whole thing happened within a

second, and could not possibly be avoided. Those in the car believed the gateway to be clear. Then Church fell sprawling right in the path of the oncoming vehicle.

It was impossible to swerve without crashing into the gateway—and, indeed, there was no time to swerve.

McClure gave a yell as he saw what was taking place. Then the big car ran completely over the prostrate junior, and it did not come to a standstill until it had travelled another five yards. The brakes had been applied with all force, the tyre treads tearing up the gravel fiercely.

"Good heavens!" gasped Handforth, as pale as a sheet.

"Church—he's been killed!" shouted McClure shakily. "You—you rotter, Handy! It was your fault!"

"I—I didn't know——"

Handforth broke off, nearly choking. He couldn't see things clearly, and he felt dazed. Fellows were running up from all parts of the Triangle, and the three men in the car were leaping out. The juniors didn't even know who they were—they had no eyes for the visitors. They were thinking solely of Church.

Pitt and De Valerie and one or two others fell to the ground and gazed under the car, hardly daring to look closely, for fear of what they would see.

"It's all right, you chaps—don't be silly asses!" said Church breathlessly.

The juniors gasped and swung round. Church appeared from behind the car, walking rather unsteadily, but perfectly whole. He was dusty and dishevelled, and red in the face.

"How did you escape?" roared McClure, grabbing Church by the arm and gasping with relief. "Oh, my goodness! I—I thought——"

"By Gad! You young bounders!" exclaimed one of the men, who had climbed out of the car. "You gave me a terrific scare—I got the wind up frightfully!"

"Why, it's Lord Dorrimore!" shouted Pitt eagerly.

"Oh, welcome to St. Frank's, sir!"

Lord Dorrimore frowned.

"Never mind about me," he said. "What about this youngster? Oh, it's you, Church. I've met you plenty of times. I'll be awfully obliged if you'll just explain why you thought it necessary to fall down in the middle of the gateway."

"I didn't," exclaimed Church hotly. "It was Handforth——"

"That's right, sir," said Handforth, pushing forward. "I—I didn't know that your car was just coming in. You see, I punched Church, and he fell over. I'm awfully sorry—it might have been terribly serious."

"I can't understand why it wasn't, by gad!" said Dorrie.

"Oh, that's easy enough, sir," explained Church. "You see, I was lying flat, and the wheels didn't touch me, and the chassis only just grazed my back as it went over. Didn't you see me crawl out from the rear?"

"No, I'm hanged if I did," replied his lordship. "Thank heavens we didn't come down in the racer. She's built low, and you'd have been—well, we needn't go into details of that sort."

I was on the scene by this time, and I pushed my way through the crowd, which was a considerable one. The visit of Lord Dorrimore was a surprise, and nothing could have happened better to make his arrival a dramatic one. It was astonishingly lucky, however, that Church had not been hurt.

Handforth was one of the best of fellows. Aggressive, self-important and obstinate, he would never admit himself in the wrong in ordinary circumstances. But in an exceptional case, he would do his utmost to make a handsome apology. He took hold of Church and led him aside.

"I say, old man, forgive me," he said, in a low voice.

"Oh, don't rot!" muttered Church. "It's all right——"

"No, it's not—I ought to be kicked!" said Handforth firmly. "That's the worst of me, you know—I always do things without thinking. You—you might have been killed. I'll do anything you like to square things. You can punch my nose until your giddy knuckles are sore, if you want to!"

Church felt uncomfortable.

"Oh, that's all right. Don't be an ass, Handy," he said awkwardly. "Everybody knows it was an accident. We needn't say anything more about it."

Nothing more was said; but for the rest of that day Handforth was sweet as honey to his chums. These three, although constantly arguing, were very much attached to one another. They were certainly a remarkable trio.

Meanwhile, Lord Dorrimore was the centre of an admiring throng. The sporting peer was exceedingly popular at St. Frank's. He knew many of the juniors intimately, for he had been with us during many holiday adventures.

Not only Dorrie created interest at St. Franks, but one of his companions received a great ovation. This individual was no less a person than Umlosi, the giant Kutana chief, whose home was in Central Africa, where he was the king of a small but select tribe. Kutanaland, in fact, was a highly moral and civilised little country.

But Umlosi had always possessed a roving spirit, and he had been to St Frank's on one other occasion.

"Wau! It is wondrous to see thy smiling face once more, O Manzie!" he exclaimed, as he caught sight of me. "Thou art even as I left thee, except perchance, for a slight difference in size. Thy eye is as the shining water—as of old!"

"Thanks!" I grinned. "I didn't know I had watery eyes."

"Thou art mistaking my meaning, O my son!" rumbled Umlosi, in his deep voice. "Thy eye is bright—it glistens with the sparkle of the waterfall that seethes over the rock in the sunlight. And what of my master, Umtagati?"

"Oh, he's all right—I expect he'll be out in a minute, as soon as he catches sight of your lily-white face," I replied cheerfully. "It's great to see you here, Umlosi—we didn't expect you at all. We didn't even know that you were in England."

Umlosi smiled one of his broad smiles.

"My father, N'kose, insisted upon my coming across the great waters," he replied. "It was my will to part from him when he stepped into the great floating kraal. But my father would not listen to my words of protest."

"That's just like Dorrie," I said. "If he's made up his mind to a thing it's all up. Well, I must say your father is looking bright and cheerful."

"He is ever thus, O Manzie."

It was one of Umlosi's little peculiarities to refer to Lord Dorrimore as his "father." And this, on occasion, was liable to lead to amusing confusion. But we, of course, were well accustomed to Umlosi's habits.

The third visitor was just as distinguished as Dorrie and Umlosi, but he was a stranger to us—although not for long. Justin B. Farman, of the Remove, had been out cycling, and while the crowd was still gathered about the motor-car in the Triangle, Farman cycled in, accompanied by Owen major, his studymate. The American junior looked astonished.

"Gee! There seems to be some excitement flying around," he remarked. "Guess things have been happening."

"Looks like it," said Owen major. "My only aunt! It's Lord Dorrimore! Do you see? Dorrie and—and—— Yes, it's Umlosi, as I'm alive."

And then Farman gave a great shout.

"Say, ain't this just bully!" he yelled excitedly. "It's my dad—my own poppa from California!"

Farman ran forward wildly, hurled himself from the ground, and flung

himself breathlessly into the arms of the stranger. They had not seen one another for many months, and so it was hardly surprising that they embraced vigorously, and with great feeling.

"Gee whiz, dad!" panted Farman. "I knew you were over on this side, but I didn't expect you around St. Frank's until next week. Say, this is fine!"

Mr. James Farman was a big, bluff, hearty son of the West. He was somewhat ungainly, indeed, but all the more attractive because of this. His neat blue serge suit did not seem to sit comfortably upon his massive frame, and his stiff collar was obviously a continual torture to him. Out West he was known throughout three States as "Big Jim," and he was one of the most likeable men imaginable.

He certainly did not look like a multi-millionaire—which he actually was. And now he seized hold of his son, and held him away at arm's length.

"Guess you've grown some, my boy," he said, with twinkling eyes. "And you've sort of grown in one direction, I'm thinking. I reckon you must be at least three inches taller without being a heap wider."

"That's all right, dad!" said the American junior. "I don't need to be broader than I am—not at present, anyway. But say, what's the idea of coming down? I'm just about busting with curiosity."

Mr. Farman chuckled.

"Guess you'll know all about it soon, son," he replied. "By glory, we seem to have caused a heap of excitement—and there was nearly a nasty accident, too. I figure these young fellers will remember my arrival at St. Frank's!"

Nelson Lee, by this time, had emerged into the Triangle to see what all the commotion was about. He was delighted to see Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, and it afforded him great pleasure to be introduced to Mr. James Farman.

"But why on earth didn't you wire me, Dorrie?" he asked, after a while. "I never knew such a man for springing surprises! It would have been far better of you had let me know in advance."

"Keep your hair on, old man," said Lord Dorrimore calmly. "We're not going to stop long, just a few hours."

"If you imagine that I shall allow you to return to London to-night, you have made a little mistake," said Nelson Lee. "It is well advanced to evening now, and I shall not let you go until to-morrow, at the earliest."

They passed into the Ancient House, talking, and very soon Nelson Lee's study was comfortably filled. It contained the three visitors, Justin B. Farman, and myself.

"Well, Lee, old man, I suppose I'd better explain this visit right off," said Dorrie, as he lolled back in an easy chair. "Or, to be exact, I'll let Mr. Farman explain. It was he who suggested the trip."

"I am only too glad to have you here," said Nelson Lee cordially.

"I guess that's real handsome of you, Mr. Lee," said Big Jim hoisting his big frame forward in his chair. "I've got to say right here that I know a whole lot about you. Say, your name is practically as well known on the other side as it is on this. As a detective, Mr. Lee, as a man who goes after what he wants and gets it, I guess you're the real goods."

"Oh, come!" protested Lee. "This is surely not the occasion to discuss my little professional qualities——"

"Maybe not, sir, but I'll allow I want to talk to you some." said Mr. Farman "So I'll get busy handing out my say-so."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"Seeing that I haven't explained, that would be rather difficult," smiled Mr. Farman. "Well, Mr. Lee, I've felt often enough that I'd like to thank you personally for everything you've done for my son—and, moreover, I'd sort o' feel honoured if I was permitted to return the compliment."

"I am still at a loss, Mr. Farman," said Nelson Lee. "I cannot remember having done anything particularly noteworthy for your son——"

"Guess your memory is short, Mr. Lee," interrupted the other. "On two or three occasions you have taken Justin abroad—to South America, and to Africa. He enjoyed himself a heap on these occasions."

"But it was Lord Dorrimore who acted as the host on these trips," replied Nelson Lee. "I cannot claim to have——"

"Guess I'll need to interrupt again," said Big Jim. "When I first saw Lord Dorrimore he handed out the information that he wasn't in any way connected with the trips, and that I had to thank you. I guess the honours are just about even, eh? It's up to me to thank you both—and I do it right now."

Both Nelson Lee and Dorrie protested that no such thanks were necessary. But Mr. Farman brushed aside their objections.

"Well, it's this way," he said. I'll get to the point without beating about the bush. I'm generally kind o' blunt. If you ain't fixed up for this holiday—well, I'd sure take it as a big compliment if you accepted an invitation from me. I want you to come out to Montana, and spend a week or two on my ranch."

"This is very kind of you Mr. Farman," said Nelson Lee. "I shall be only too delighted to accept your invitation——"

"Say, that's great," said Big Jim, jumping up. "I guess that's all I wanted to hear. Say, we'll make it a dandy trip. I want you and Lord Dorrimore, and Nipper, and—— Well, I'll need a whole crowd."

"You mean that some of the other fellows can come, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"Sure thing."

"How many will you invite?"

"Guess I'll leave that to you, sonny," replied Mr. Farman smilingly. "You can get busy right now handing out invitations on my behalf. The more you can invite, the better. I can promise them a good time, believe me. My ranch ain't exactly a one-hoss affair—say it's the dandiest ranch in the whole o' Montana. And that's not boasting, either."

"A summer holiday on a Western ranch!" I exclaimed dreamily. "Oh, there couldn't be anything better! I've longed to go out to the Western States again many a time—and now it's fixed up! I say, guv'nor, isn't it topping?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am sure we shall thoroughly enjoy ourselves, Nipper," he said. "It is very generous of Mr. Farman to invite us in this way."

"Rather!" I agreed. "Thanks awfully, Mr. Farman!"

"Generous—nothing!" said Big Jim. "My notions ain't exactly equivalent to yours, sonny. I figure it's generous of you to honour me by coming. Lord Dorrimore has promised, too! We'll have a dandy time!"

"You can bet we shall," said his son heartily.

It was not long before I left the study. As a matter of fact, my desire to remain had vanished. For I was eager to hurry out and acquaint my chums with the good news. I didn't need to go far to find them.

Just at the corner of the passage they were waiting with a crowd of other juniors; they were all curious to know what the confab was about. And it did not take me long to acquaint them with the truth. At first they wouldn't believe it.

"You can't spoof us like that, my son!" said Tommy Watson. "Mr. Farman has invited us to spend the summer holidays on his ranch in Montana? Rats!"

"Try something else, Nipper!"

"That one's not good enough!"

"It's certainly frightfully steep, begad!"

I looked at the juniors and chuckled.

"You may think it's spoof but you're

off-side," I remarked calmly. "What I've told you is the absolute truth, and if any of you want to come on this trip you'd better hurry up and write to your people—or, better still, write your letters and give them to Mr. Farman and Mr. Lee. I expect they'll write as well."

"You—don't mean it's really true?" asked Watson excitedly.

"Of course it's really true."

At last the juniors were convinced. A fresh wave of excitement was soon running through the Remove. Handforth was tremendously interested, and enthusiastic, too.

"By George! A summer holiday in the Wild West!" he exclaimed. "I've often longed to see the prairie and a ranch and all the rest of it. It'll be awfully thrilling, you know—with cowboys, and Indians, and desperadoes holding up the pony express!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We might even be ambushed," went on Handforth. "On the trail to the ranch, for example. It's quite likely that the Indians will track us down, and get one or two scalps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the thunder are you asses cackling for?" demanded Handforth, glaring round.

"My dear old chap, if you picture Montana like that, I'm afraid you'll be slightly disappointed," I said. "The West isn't as wild as it used to be, and the information you've obtained from reading penny dreadfuls isn't exactly reliable. There are no wild Indians out West now, and not many desperadoes——"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I know what I'm talking about, and if we go out to Montana I shall carry a revolver, and a jolly good dagger—it's just as well to be prepared."

All the other fellows chuckled, and during the remainder of the evening a great many of them were busy writing letters to their people asking for permission to go to Montana.

Jerry Dodd, of course, did not write to his own father, for the latter was in Australia, and, in any case, Jerry would not be able to come, for he had fixed up everything with his uncle for the holidays. He was to spend the vacation with Uncle Bill—touring round England and playing cricket.

Jerry was looking quite excited that evening—but not because of the American's visit to St. Frank's. His own reason was very different. Uncle Bill, in fact, had made a suggestion which filled Jerry with pleasure.

"Look here, old fel', you're coming up to London with me to-morrow," said Mr. Dodd firmly. "It's all fixed up—I've got permission from the headmaster and we needn't get back until the next day."

"By jings!" said Jerry, his eyes wide open. "You didn't say anything about this before, Uncle Bill! What's the idea? Why are you going up to London?"

"It's a simple reason, I figure," said Uncle Bill laying a hand on Jerry's shoulder. "I'm so darned proud of you young 'un, that I just can't keep you to myself. You're coming to London, and I'll introduce you to the Australian team—and to a number of British cricketers, too."

"Jumping kangaroos!" panted Jerry. "Do—do you mean it, Uncle Bill?"

"You bet your life I do," smiled Mr. Dodd proudly. "I'm so crazy about you, Jerry, that I've simply got to exhibit you around. There's a big luncheon at a swell restaurant to-morrow, and I'm invited—there'll be all our fellows present, and others, too. I'm going to show you off—I'm going to let them see what you're really like."

Jerry nodded rather uncomfortably.

"I don't altogether catch on to that idea, uncle," he said. "It doesn't seem right to show myself like that——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Uncle Bill. "We're going, and I reckon that's all there need be said about the matter."

CHAPTER 15.

A Momentous Wager!

LONDON had heard all about Jerry Dodd before he arrived. In fact, the whole of England had been talking about the striking articles which had been appearing in the newspapers. These reports had originally appeared at some length in the "Bannington Gazette." And they had proved of such interest that they had been reprinted in all the London dailies.

Jerry was already known as the boy who had beaten Eastshire County. Enterprising reporters had interviewed several members of the Eastshire Eleven, and these men, being sportsmen, had kept nothing back. They had explained quite frankly how the St. Frank's schoolboy had made hay of them.

Naturally, this created a great deal of interest in the cricketing world, and the public had been quick to take interest in the matter. Thus, Jerry Dodd's name was well known in England by this time, and Londoners were wondering when they would have an opportunity of seeing Dodd's astonishing prowess.

"My boy, you're a celebrity," said Uncle Bill, as he and Jerry were travelling up to town in the train. "I reckon your name is on everybody's tongue, and you've had one or two photographs published, too!"

Jerry Dodd nodded gloomily.

"By jings!" he exclaimed. "I was tricked about that, Uncle Bill. One of the Bannington reporters came along and had a chat with me. I didn't think anything when he asked for a photograph—I reckoned he wanted it just for himself; and now it's being reproduced in half a dozen newspapers."

"Such is fame!" chuckled Uncle Bill. "Why, you ought to be pleased, young man, although I'll admit the newspaper reproductions don't flatter you. You're going to meet the Australian cricketers to-day, and I've got an idea they'll be greatly interested. I dare say they've been talking about you a lot."

Jerry was aware of a sense of great pleasure at the thought of meeting the Australian heroes. At the same time, he felt horribly nervous and afraid. He did not consider that he had done anything very noteworthy, and he had a horror of swanking. The very idea of it made him want to turn back as soon as the train steamed into Victoria.

But Uncle Bill would not listen to any of his protests, and very soon they were in a taxi speeding towards the West End. It was a rather dull day, but very humid, and both Jerry and his uncle were warm.

"We'll get there just at the right time, old fel'," said Uncle Bill. "This luncheon starts at one o'clock, and it's now twelve-thirty. I reckon we'll do it nicely."

"By jings! I don't like it!" muttered Jerry.

But when the ordeal actually came, his nervousness disappeared, and he was his usual confident self. The restaurant was a very tip-top one, and everything was of the highest class.

As Uncle Bill had said, Jerry was introduced to a good many English cricketers in addition to the Australians. Included among the number, was J. H. Keen, the Eastshire captain. But, of course, an introduction in his case was not necessary.

"Well, this is an unexpected pleasure," said Keen heartily, as he took Jerry's hand. "I wasn't anticipating seeing you to-day, young man. The demon cricketer, eh? By Jove, you put it across us fairly drastically at Bannington!"

"I'm sorry——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Keen. "To begin with, you're not sorry at all—and neither am I. It was a first-class game, and we were beaten because we couldn't stand up to the quality of your play. You may be a boy, but you've

got the skill, by Jove! If you were only five years older, Dodd, you'd be playing for your county, or ought to be!"

"I reckon you're too complimentary, sir," said Jerry modestly.

He and Mr. Dodd were in a luxurious smoking-room, for luncheon was not quite ready, and all the guests had not yet arrived. There was little opportunity for Mr. Dodd to introduce his nephew generally. He promised himself this pleasure later—when they all retired into the smoking lounge after the luncheon.

The lunch was a great success, but Jerry did not eat with his usual appetite. For one thing, he was excited, and he was rather self-conscious among this distinguished throng. He felt insignificant, too, for hardly anybody took any notice of him.

Uncle Bill was secretly annoyed at this. He had anticipated the opposite. He had believed that his colleagues would welcome Jerry with a great show of enthusiasm—he had thought that the Australian team would recognise the youngster's phenomenal qualities and commend them accordingly.

Such, however, was not the case. The Australians took very little notice of Jerry. One or two glances were cast in his direction, but they were mostly glances of idle curiosity—as though they wondered who this boy was, and why he was here. It was the same with the English professionals.

"They don't seem to be going loony over you, my lad," murmured Uncle Bill, between courses. "But wait till afterwards—wait until I have introduced you to the whole crowd. Perhaps they don't know what you've done."

Jerry shook his head.

"I reckon you've been too flattering, Uncle Bill," he said. "I've done nothing particular, and these gentlemen don't take notice of the newspapers. Why should they? Newspapers always exaggerate everything."

"It's not that," said Mr. Dodd. "They've heard all about you, don't you worry."

After the lunch all the cricketers adjourned to the smoking lounge. They broke up into groups, chatting and laughing, and Mr. Dodd and Jerry were left isolated. It may as well be said at once, that Uncle Bill was one of the lesser lights of the Australian team; but a splendid cricketer, for all that.

Indeed, but for his recent mishap—when he had sprained his wrist—he would probably have been quite prominent. But the Australians had been meeting with such phenomenal success of late that they had hardly missed Uncle Bill.

Accordingly, he was rather neglected now. Not that he allowed this to go on for long. He got his cigar well alight, and then noted the fact that all the distinguished guests were present.

"Gentlemen!" shouted Uncle Bill, raising his hand for silence. "I'm sorry to interrupt your little chats, but I'd just like to say a few words, if you don't mind. I've got a pleasant operation to perform."

Everybody turned and looked in his direction, and conversation automatically ceased.

"Thanks!" said Uncle Bill. "Now, gentlemen, allow me to introduce the most wonderful cricketer that this generation has revealed—Master Jerrold Dodd!"

There were a good many large smiles.

"Hear, hear!" said J. H. Keen promptly. "I heartily agree, Mr. Dodd except in one little detail. Your nephew is the most wonderful cricketer produced in this generation—or any other!"

There was a roar of laughter at this remark.

Jerry turned rather red, and Uncle Bill looked grim. There had been nothing humorous in Keen's statement

—he had meant every word of it. Perhaps Uncle Bill was unduly prejudiced in favour of Jerry, and, if so, this was only to be expected. The others did not appreciate the position.

They saw before them a sturdy-looking youngster, with a frank, open face, and curly hair—a youngster who was somewhat flushed and decidedly self-conscious—a youngster who stood awkwardly and did not know what to do with his hands. Indeed, at that very moment, Jerry Dodd felt that he would have given worlds to escape from this ordeal. As a rule he was confident and quite graceful in his poise, but under all these eyes he seemed to do everything that was wrong.

Looking at the matter impartially, it was hardly to be expected that these hardened, world-travelled cricketers, would regard Jerry Dodd as the most wonderful player that this or any generation had produced. J. H. Keen's remark was true enough, but it really sounded like a joke. Hence the laughter.

But that laugh was unfortunate, for it put everybody into a humour which could have only one result. Jerry was not accepted at his true worth—he was regarded as a fairly clever youngster, who had been made a great fuss of without deserving it.

Uncle Bill did his utmost to destroy this impression.

"You're kind of wrong in laughing here," he said quietly. "I'm very glad to see that one of our cricketing opponents—Mr. Keen—has borne out my statement. His team was beaten by my nephew, and that's the absolute truth."

"The Eastshires must have been off colour that day!" chuckled somebody.

J. H. Keen turned.

"On the contrary, we were in tip-top form," he said promptly.

"You don't seem to get the hang of it," went on Uncle Bill, addressing the gathering in general. "It's not my habit to boast, and I'm not trying to boost Jerry in the slightest degree, just because he happens to be a relation of mine. He deserves recognition for what he's done, and I've got something to suggest which may hit you a bit humorously in your present mood; but which is dead true."

"I can quite understand your enthusiasm, Dodd," said the Australian captain good-naturedly. "But you can't expect us to share it in precisely the same degree. I'm very pleased to meet this youngster, and I realise that he's been doing some very clever things. In a few years' time he'll be a first-class cricketer."

"He's that already, Conway," said Uncle Bill quickly. "And that's just where you make a mistake—all of you. You seem to have got it fixed into your heads that Jerry is a good cricketer—for a boy. You'd better hang on to the real position. He's just as clever and just as reliable as any man standing in this room! Years don't count!"

There was another general laugh.

"I think that's going a bit too far, Dodd," said one of the Australians. "We're all pleased with your nephew, and we're proud of the fact that he's a native of our own country. But don't you think your statement rather belittles us?"

"Not in the least," replied Uncle Bill quickly. "That doesn't come into the question at all. Jerry is a phenomenal player and you're true sportsmen. I take it that you'll give him every bit of credit that's due to him."

Conway nodded.

"That's just it—we do," he said. "But you are exaggerating things a bit, Dodd, and we don't blame you. The youngster is a wonderful cricketer, and, as I said before, we're very pleased to know him personally. One day, Jerry, you'll be playing for your country against England, I hope," he added, addressing the junior.

"Thank you, sir," said Jerry, flushing.

Uncle Bill struck his palm.

"You've hit it—hard!" he broke in. "Playing for his country against England, eh? That's what he ought to be doing next week, Conway, and if you'll take some good advice, you'll put him in the eleven."

There was a laugh, and then a sudden silence.

"My dear Dodd, your ideas appear to be very curious," said Conway quietly. "Do you seriously mean to suggest that we should play your nephew in one of the Test matches?"

"Yes, I do."

"I can only assume that you have taken leave of your senses——"

"I'm as sane as you are, Conway, and what I'm suggesting is sound common-sense," interrupted Uncle Bill. "It's not my place to advise you, I know, but we've got the same thought at heart—we want to win the Test match."

"We can win it without this boy's assistance," said Conway.

"Sure, I expect we can," agreed Mr. Dodd. "At the same time, we can't be too certain, and by playing Jerry we should just about destroy all doubts. I'm putting it straight to you, Conway, that you ought to find the boy a place—my place, if you like."

The Australian captain shook his head impatiently.

"I don't know what's the matter with you, Dodd," he remarked. "Your suggestion is absurd. I—I am a sportsman, I think, and I'm always willing to take a long chance, too. But this thing is absolutely out of the question. You ought to know it. It's not fair to the boy, and it's not fair to us, to bring up such discussion. Cut it out!"

"Just as you like," said Uncle Bill grimly. "It's a pity you haven't accepted my suggestion in the spirit in which it was given."

"Hang it all, man, there's no ill-feeling," interrupted Conway, with a smile. "But the thing is impossible—that's all. Just think of my position. I'm the captain of the team, and I'm responsible. What would the Australian public say if they read that I'd decided to put a boy of fifteen in the eleven to play in a Test match?"

"The Australian public would probably be furious," replied Mr. Dodd. "But that would be completely changed after the match. They would decide that the end had justified the means."

"No, no, Dodd, it won't do," said Conway. "In an ordinary match, perhaps, but to suggest playing the boy against England—well, it's preposterous. What do all you other fellows say?"

"Oh, quite impossible!"

"Out of the question!"

"It couldn't be done, Dodd!"

"We should be the laughing stock of Australia!"

"Hear, hear!"

The expressions of opinion were general.

Mr. Dodd compressed his lips, and said nothing. Inwardly, he knew that his colleagues were the very best of fellows, and sportsmen to their finger-tips. But this suggestion, coming upon them suddenly in this manner, was not worthy of consideration.

Of course, they didn't realise what Jerry could do—they had never seen him play. The cold newspaper reports were not convincing. Uncle Bill had hardly expected that his suggestion would be received in this way; then the truth came to him. His colleagues were ignorant of the truth. It simply amounted to that.

As for Jerry himself, he heartily wished that he had remained at St. Frank's. His triumphant introduction to the Australian eleven had turned out to be several kinds of a fizzle. He hadn't wanted it in the first place, but had been dragged up to London by his uncle. And now he felt just a little bit humiliated.

This was only natural. In spite of

himself, Jerry had a feeling of bitterness for his own countrymen. They didn't believe in him—they didn't accept him seriously at all. A wild thrill surged through him as he thought how glorious it would be if an opportunity would come along for him to open their eyes. By jings! He would show them! But he realised a second later that such a chance was not likely to come.

"We'll change the subject," said Conway, turning to some of the others. "I'm only sorry for the boy—I don't suppose it's been very pleasant for him to hear all this——"

"Just a moment, Conway," put in J. H. Keen, strolling forward. "I haven't been saying much, but my thoughts have been pretty busy. I feel a bit sorry for you fellows. You haven't had the extreme pleasure of seeing this youngster play cricket. If I could play half as well I should consider myself lucky."

There was a laugh.

"Why, are you briefed on this job?" asked somebody, with a chuckle.

"No—but I've got a hankering to see justice, that's all," replied Keen quietly. "You haven't been just to young Dodd. His uncle's suggestion was a splendid one, and I only wish that I had the opportunity of playing him."

Conway grinned.

"My dear man, you can play him if you want to!" he replied calmly. "He's an Australian, but that wouldn't debar him from playing for England. If you think it would help your side, you're welcome to him!"

"Hear, hear!" came many chuckling voices.

"Personally, I think you'll seal your own defeat if you make such a daring experiment," went on the Australian captain. "Without boasting, I think we're in a better position than England—and I tell you frankly I wouldn't take such a chance. It would be asking for defeat to try such a game."

"Would it?" said Keen grimly. "By Jove! If it's at all possible, Jerry Dodd will play for England next week—and then he'll have an opportunity of showing you what he can do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The smoking lounge echoed with laughter. But J. H. Keen was serious. His face was flushed, and his eyes were gleaming. He turned quickly to Jerry Dodd, and seized the lad's arm.

"What do you say?" he asked. "Would you play against Australia?"

"Sure!" came Jerry Dodd's reply, as quick as thought. "I figure these gentlemen have got a small opinion of me as a cricketer. It would give me a chance to open their eyes a bit. And cricket is cricket—it doesn't matter to me who I'm playing for. I do the best for my side, and play as hard as I can go while I'm on the field. But it couldn't be done, sir."

"We'll see about that," said J. H. Keen, with a peculiar look in his eyes. "We'll see about that, young 'un. Conway doesn't mind you playing, and you are perfectly willing to do so. Good! That makes it all plain sailing for me."

Conway looked rather incredulous.

"Man alive, you can't mean this?" he asked in amazement.

"I do mean it!"

"You mean that you'll do your best to get the boy included in the England Eleven—to play in the next Test match?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, Keen, it's none of my business, but I think that champagne we had at luncheon must have got going pretty fast," said the Australian captain smilingly. "Cut it right out, man! We can't let this little discussion lead to anything serious."

"It has led to something serious already," retorted J. H. Keen. "And I don't mind telling you, Conway, that my head's as clear as any head can be. I don't suppose I shall succeed in my

plan—but there's a faint possibility that I might."

"Well, I admire you—hanged if I don't," said Conway frankly. "You've got the courage of your convictions, Keen. Look here, I'm a sportsman, and I'm willing to make a wager with you."

"Go ahead!" said Keen grimly.

"If you succeed in this thousand-to-one-chance—if you get young Dodd into the England Eleven, I'll wager you fifty to one that he doesn't score more than five runs in either innings," said Conway. "And if he's put on to bowl he won't take a single wicket."

"That's a bet!" said Keen promptly. "Fifty to one—in what?"

"Pounds, if you like!"

"Pounds it shall be," said Keen, "and the winner has got to send the money to a deserving charity. This has made me more keen than ever to push it through."

"Well, you always were Keen!" smiled Conway.

There was a general laugh at the sally, and good humour was completely restored in the lounge. And now the die was cast. J. H. Keen was going to use all his efforts to get Jerry Dodd in the list for the next Test match. He had a fair chance of succeeding, for he was a member of the Selection Committee.

Uncle Bill was filled with enthusiasm. It had been his ambition to have Jerry play for Australia against England. But now he had a revulsion of feeling. After the way Jerry had been received, it would be most fitting for the junior to play for England against Australia.

And the thought that such a thing was possible filled Uncle Bill with hope.

As for Jerry, he hardly knew what to think at all. But, deep down in his heart, he had an idea that so much good breath had been wasted. It was surely utterly absurd to think that this extraordinary wager would ever materialise. But that remained to be seen.

CHAPTER 16.

Big Jim's Request!

"MONTANA—the prairie—the Rocky Mountains!" said Tommy Watson dreamily. "My only hat! What a ripping prospect! What a stunning time we shall have! It's almost too good to be true!"

We were partaking of tea in Study C, and, needless to say, the sole topic of conversation over the table was our proposed trip to Mr. Farman's ranch in Montana. There was no doubt about the matter. We were going. It was all fixed up.

Of course, the fellows had received no replies from their parents as yet. It was only the day following Mr. Farman's arrival, and he and Dorrie and Umlosi were still at St. Frank's. Nelson Lee had not allowed them to depart.

Jerry Dodd had returned that afternoon, and I had noticed that he was very thoughtful and quiet. He said nothing to anybody about what had occurred to upset his customary free and easy manner.

I didn't question him—it was none of my business. Indeed, I thought it was quite possible that his uncle's absence had brought about this change. For Uncle Bill had remained behind in London.

I had seen Jerry several times that day, and there was a far-away look in his eyes, and a curious firm set of his jaw, as though he had come to some momentous decision. He seemed a bit jumpy, too, and I wondered if he was expecting anything—a telegram, for example. A post-office messenger had appeared once, and Jerry fairly jumped at him. But the wire was not for the Australian junior.

I was thinking about this as I sat having tea with my chums. But only for a few minutes, and then my thoughts strayed back to our prospects for the summer holidays. I looked at my chums across the table.

"We're going to have a ripping time," I said.

"Dear old boy, I sincerely hope so," said Sir Montie, with some hesitation.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, Nipper—nothing whatever, begad!" Montie hastened to say. "But I was just thinking——"

"You shouldn't," I interrupted. "It doesn't agree with you."

"Pray, cease rotting, old boy," protested Tregellis-West. "Don't imagine for a moment that I don't want to go on this trip, or that I'm trying to back out. I want to be with you two. But, I have been thinking, you know, and I've been wonderin' what we shall do with ourselves on this ranch."

"Oh, there'll be plenty of things to interest us," I said.

"That's just what I was worrying about, dear old fellow," said Montie. "I was readin' about a ranch, and it seems there's only a lot of grass and cattle, and all that kind of bally thing. It seemed frightfully dull."

"You mustn't take any notice of what you read," I said.

"Then there's the question of clothing," went on Montie. "I shan't be able to wear anything decent—and that'll be simply shockin'—it will, really. And we shall probably have to sleep in some ghastly place they call a bunkhouse, on bare boards——"

"You prize duffer!" I chuckled. "The ranch you read about was probably a one-horse thing. Mr. Farman's ranch is about the finest in Montana—with a glorious house, all complete with electric light and every modern convenience. Farman was telling me all about it this morning. We shall have lovely bed-rooms, and there are hundreds of things to keep us interested, even if it rains all the time—which is just about impossible."

"You've relieved me tremendously, dear old boy," said Sir Montie, with a sigh. "There is just one other point I'd like to mention. I always understood that Farman came from California."

"So he does come from California," I replied. "That's where he and his people live. Mr. Farman's got a terrific mansion there. This ranch is merely a summer resort, where he goes when the fancy takes him. I think it's quite likely that we shall go through to California after staying at the ranch a week or two. And we shall have the most glorious time. A ranch isn't grass and cattle, as you seem to think. I've been on one."

"And was it really interesting?" asked Tommy Watson.

"My dear chap, you wouldn't believe how lovely it is out there in the summer," I said. "And I've got an idea that we shall have some excitement, too. Farman gave me a hint that his father wants the guv'nor to investigate some mystery."

"By Jove! That'll be good," said Tommy.

Curiously enough, Big Jim Farman was, at that very moment, sitting in Nelson Lee's study, and he seemed rather constrained. He and Nelson Lee were alone, and Mr. Farman thought it a good opportunity to broach a certain subject.

"Say, Mr. Lee, I guess there's something on my mind—and I'll feel a heap more comfortable when it's off," he said. "Maybe you'll listen some?"

"Just as much as you like, Mr. Farman."

"You've got all that about the holiday trip to my ranch?" asked Big Jim. "Well, I'm figuring there's—something else."

"Something else?" repeated the detective.

"Sure!" said the other. "Listen, Mr. Lee, and I'll tell you. I'm calculating that you'll be coming out to Montana on business. Do you get me?"

"I'm afraid I don't!"

"There's a mystery that needs investigating—needs it real bad," said Big Jim, leaning forward. "I've kinder

taken a pride in my ranch, although I don't mind allowing that's it's a sort of sideline. Well, Mr. Lee, to cut it right short, I've been losing cattle."

"They have been stolen?"

"Yes, sure—they've kind of vanished, and no doggone son can figure out where they've located themselves," said the millionaire. "Say, it's a mystery which has been puzzling two or three of the best Chicago detectives—to say nothing of the boys on the ranch. They haven't found out a thing, Mr. Lee."

"Has this loss been serious?"

Mr. Farman shrugged his big shoulders.

"Well, I can't exactly say that," he replied. "I've got a heap of money, Mr. Lee, and it don't matter a cent to me whether the Roaring Z Ranch pays, or whether it don't pay, I don't worry any. As it happens, that ranch is just about one of the most profitable propositions in Montana. It's the mystery of the disappearing cattle that I don't like. Say, I reckon you'll open your eyes some when I tell you that twelve hundred head of cattle have completely disappeared during the last two months."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "That is certainly a serious matter."

"It sure is, Mr. Lee."

"And it is difficult for me to accept your statement, Mr. Farman," went on Nelson Lee. "Please do not misunderstand me—I'm not suggesting that you are romancing. But, really, I cannot possibly understand how twelve hundred cattle could vanish from your ranch without leaving any trace."

Mr. Farman nodded.

"If you can't understand it, you can surely reckon that I'm more than a heap puzzled," he said grimly. "That's just the problem, Mr. Lee. I don't figure to be a cent's worth of good at your game, and that's why I want you to come out to Montana and look around."

"It would give me great pleasure to do anything that is within my power," said Lee at once. "I have already accepted your generous invitation, Mr. Farman, and when I am on the spot I shall lose no time in looking into this matter—although, frankly, I must tell you that there is very little prospect of my being successful."

"I don't accept that, Mr. Lee," said the other. "I guess I've got a heap of faith in you. A man with your record is unique—I don't reckon there's another like you in this country, or any other!"

"My dear sir, you are too flattering," smiled the famous detective. "Give me a murder mystery to look into—a forgery, or a bank robbery—and perhaps I can make something of it. But I am not a ranchman, and I should surely think that your cow-punchers would be better fitted to look into this matter than I am."

"Sure, one would figger that way," said Mr. Farman. "But my men on Roaring Z have done everything they can—and they've failed. The whole ranch is kept under observation—boundaries are watched day and night. And yet, in spite of all these precautions, the cattle continue to disappear. Say, it's just maddening, and I want you to put a stop to it."

"The boundaries are watched, and still the cattle disappear," mused Lee. "Over a thousand head. H'm, it is certainly somewhat remarkable. Are you convinced that your employees at the ranch are reliable?"

Big Jim brought his fist down on the desk.

"Reliable?" he repeated. "Say, they're just about the most loyal crowd of fellers a man could wish for. Buck Mason—I guess he's my manager—he's sure as trustworthy as wrought steel. He's got command of all the men, and what he don't know about that crowd ain't worth learnin'. There's no leakage, Mr. Lee—traitors don't exist on Roaring Z Ranch."

"I'm altogether surprised at what you have been telling me," said Lee.

"I imagined that cattle rustling had died out in the West——"

"I guess it breaks out now and again, but hardly ever on such a scale as this," said the millionaire. "Well, Mr. Lee, you've fixed it up that you'll investigate this matter professionally?"

Lee smiled.

"I hardly said that," he replied. "I shall be your guest, Mr. Farman, and ——"

"My guest, yes; but I don't reckon to ask any guest of mine to work while he's under my roof," said the millionaire. "That's why I want to fix this thing up square at the start. To get straight down to it, my idea is that you ought to come out in a professional capacity. Do you get me?"

"I think I understand the drift of your remarks," said Lee. "In plain words, you want me to look into this mystery for you, and accept remuneration for my services?"

"Gee! I'm real glad you've said it, Mr. Lee," exclaimed Big Jim, with relief. "That's just what I've been trying to convey. While you're on my ranch you'll be working at your own job, an' it therefore stands to reason that you ought to receive full payment for your services. I guess I'll allow you to name your own figger—I shan't grumble any."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Farman, but I cannot possibly agree to any such proposition. In point of fact, if you insist upon this arrangement—well, I must decline to accept your invitation."

Big Jim looked dismayed.

"Say, you don't mean that?" he asked anxiously.

"I do!"

"But, see here——"

"We will speak plainly, Mr. Farman," interrupted Lee. "You have invited me as your guest to spend a week or two on Roaring Z Ranch. I accept that invitation gladly. You require certain investigations to be made into this cattle mystery. It will give me great pleasure to do everything I can—as your guest, but not as a professional detective. You are only offending me by suggesting that I should be rewarded for any slight service that I may possibly perform."

Mr. Farman thrust out his hand.

"Guess I didn't understand my man," he said simply. "I'm sorry, Mr. Lee. I won't say another word on the matter, in case I let loose something you won't like."

They continued talking for some little time, Mr. Farman giving Lee all the known details of the strange cattle mystery.

"I guess we've got everything fixed up good and proper," said the millionaire. "As soon as I know exactly how many of us are going across, I'll have all the passages booked on the first available liner. The sooner we leave England the better, because I'm reckoning to have you with me for two or three weeks. Would it matter a heap if you didn't get back until the new term here had been going some time?"

"I'm afraid we must be back in time for the autumn term, Mr. Farman," said Lee. "But we shall have plenty of time, I imagine."

Meanwhile, out in the Triangle, Handforth & Co. were discussing the proposed trip. And Handforth, as usual, was doing most of the talking.

"Goodness knows how many of us will be able to go," he was saying. "De Valerie was talking to me this afternoon, and he's just dying to come on the trip. But his pater and mater have made all arrangements to go to Scotland. He doesn't think his people will let him come to Montana."

"I wish I could be certain that my people will agree," said Church. "I'm awfully anxious, you know. The pater's all right—he'd do anything. But my mater's so blessed fussy—she might put the stopper on the whole giddy business as far as I'm concerned."

"I'm pretty safe, I think," said McClure. "How about you, Handy?"

"Oh, I shall go—there's nothing more certain," replied Handforth confidently.

"But your pater's a bit of a hard nut," said Church. "He's obstinate and pig-headed——"

"Why, you insulting rotter!" exploded Handforth, glaring. "My pater may be a bit hot-tempered, but I can manage him all right. Of course, at times he goes a bit beyond the limit. When he likes he can be as mule-headed as half a dozen giddy donkeys, and he's simply a terror for jawing and arguing. He only needs half a chance, and he'll keep on for hours—the most blundering ass you could think of."

"Of course, you don't believe in insulting your pater, do you?" asked Church sarcastically. "I thought you were talking about yourself, Handy. It's queer how you take after him in practically every respect."

Handforth nodded.

"Rather!" he agreed. "You can't get any change out of my pater—he's as firm as a rock. Why, you awful rotter!" he added, realisation suddenly dawning upon him. "Are you trying to make out that I'm mule-headed—and—and—and all the rest of it?"

"Well, you said it," grinned Church. "And, after all, it's only natural that a son should take after his father. And it's a bit off-side, the way you've been running down your respected pater!"

Handforth snorted.

"Running him down!" he said hotly. "Who has? My pater's one of the best—firm, decisive, generous—just like me in every particular, in fact!"

Church and McClure made no comments. Certain valiant efforts to choke back their laughter prevented them from doing so. And while Handforth was wondering why they were making peculiar sounds, a commotion near the gateway attracted his attention.

He glanced over in that direction, and saw that Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey and Somerton and one or two others were standing in a group talking excitedly and gazing at a newspaper which one of them held.

"I wonder what's the matter with those asses?" he said, frowning.

"Oh, nothing! I'm not curious!" replied Church.

"Neither am I—nobody can call me curious!" said Handforth promptly. "Do you think I care what they're kicking up all that dust about? Must be something pretty big, too, by the way they're shouting."

"Shall we go over and see?" asked McClure.

"Just as you like," said Handforth carelessly. "Of course, I don't mind—I'm not curious. But if you chaps are keen——"

"Not at all," interrupted McClure, with a wink at Church. "We're not keen—in any case, it's none of our business. Let's stroll over to the gymnasium."

"Good!" said Church.

Handforth hesitated. As a matter of fact, he was filled with a burning and intense curiosity to know what the commotion was about, and why the crowd of juniors were so interested in that newspaper. But Handforth would have bitten his tongue before suggesting to his chums that they should inquire.

They strolled leisurely towards the gymnasium.

"Blessed if I know what we're going here for!" grumbled Handforth. "Confound those chaps yelling like that! I expect they've seen something important in that newspaper. Perhaps —— Oh, rats! Just as if I care anything about it!"

He stalked on, expecting that his chums would follow. Instead of doing so, they slid noiselessly away and ran

to the excited group near the gates. Handforth walked on, sublimely unconscious of the fact that his chums were not behind.

"It may be something that affects us," he observed to the thin air. "You never know, and perhaps one of you had better— Why, what the dickens —— The—the awful blighters!"

Handforth had discovered the truth, and for a second he stood glaring fiercely round him. Then, greatly relieved, he ran at full pelt for the crowd of juniors, and within a moment he forgot all about his warlike intentions towards his faithful chums.

Reginald Pitt turned an excited face towards him.

"Have you seen this, Handy?" he shouted.

"Seen what?" demanded the leader of Study D.

"Why, this paragraph about Jerry Dodd!" yelled Gray. "It's almost too amazing to be true!"

CHAPTER 17.

Picked to Play for England!

HANDFORTH made a grab at the newspaper.

"Lemme look!" he said quickly. "What's Jerry Dodd been up to?"

He cast his eye over the front page of the paper, which was a late afternoon edition of a London newspaper. At the top of two right-hand columns some big headlines were staring at him.

And they ran in this way:

"UNPRECEDENTED CRICKET SENSATION!

"SELECTION COMMITTEE'S AMAZING DECISION!

"BOY OF FIFTEEN FOR TEST MATCH!"

Underneath these headlines Handforth read the following statement:

"We are officially informed that the Selection Committee have chosen the St. Frank's College junior schoolboy, Jerrold Dodd, to play in the forthcoming Test match at Earl's Cricket Ground.

"Although Jerrold Dodd is an Australian by birth, he will play for England against Australia. It is understood that this decision has been arrived at in consequence of a sporting wager between Conway, the Australian captain, and a well-known English amateur, who does not wish his name to be disclosed.

"It will be remembered that Jerrold Dodd put up an astonishing performance against Eastshire County in a Charity Match recently played at Bannington, Sussex. It is feared in many quarters that this astounding decision will not enchance our prospect of winning next week's Test."

The newspaper nearly fell out of Handforth's grasp.

"It—it's a joke!" he gasped faintly.

"You ass! It can't be!" shouted Owen major. "Jerry Dodd—to play in a Test match! Oh, my goodness!"

"It's impossible!"

"It can't be true!"

"Oh, absolutely!"

"Some silly ass must have been pulling a reporter's leg, or something," said Pitt. "I don't see how this can be true, you know. Jerry's a marvellous player, we know, but a Test match! Think of it! England against Australia!"

"And he's playing against Australia, too!"

"Great pip!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Against Australia!" repeated Handforth. "And he's an Australian!! Oh, there's something wrong about this—there must be! But—dash it all, it's in the paper!"

"It's official, too!"

The juniors simply could not understand it. The information in the newspaper seemed altogether too preposterous to be true. The shouts continued,

the crowd grew larger, and the excitement grew with it.

Morrow and Fenton, of the Sixth, strolling out of the Ancient House, found their voices drowned by the ever-increasing commotion. Fenton frowned as he gazed upon the seething crowd of juniors.

"Young asses!" he exclaimed curtly. "What on earth's the matter with them? Making this infernal din in the Triangle!"

"We shall have the Head out here in a minute," said Morrow. "Better stop it, eh?"

"Of course!"

Fenton strode forward, still frowning, and he forced his way into the crowd of excited juniors.

"Now, then—now then—not quite so much noise!" he shouted. "Have you youngsters gone off your heads, or what? Do you want a hundred lines each?"

"Oh, come off it, Fenny!" exclaimed Pitt. "How can the chaps help it? Haven't you seen the news?"

"What news?"

"About Dodd!"

"I've seen nothing about Dodd, and that's got nothing to do with this noise," said Fenton sharply. "If you're not quiet within ten seconds I'll——"

"But—but you don't understand!" yelled Handforth, grabbing Fenton by the sleeve and nearly pulling him over backwards. "Doddy's been chosen to play in next week's Test match!"

"Look here, I'm not going to allow ——" Fenton broke off, suddenly realising what Handforth had said. "What's that about Dodd?" he asked. "Playing in the Test match? Don't stuff me up——"

"It's true, I tell you!" roared Handforth. "Doddy's been chosen by the Selection Committee—it's all fixed up. That's why the chaps are so excited."

Fenton looked round grimly.

"Stop that noise at once!" he shouted angrily. "And don't try to spring any more of those idiotic yarns. Why, what the—— Confound you, Handforth——"

Edward Oswald was poking the newspaper into Fenton's face, and the Sixth Former seized it, and glanced at the headlines. Then his angry expression vanished, and was replaced by one of blank amazement.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he muttered. "I say, Morrow, look at this! It seems to be true—although it's out of the question!"

The two seniors continued staring at the headlines, forgetting all about their original plan to quell the disturbance. And, meanwhile, a crowd of the juniors got themselves together some little distance away, all talking excitedly. They were doing this when I came out with Tregellis-West and Watson.

After some little trouble I succeeded in discovering the truth, and it is needless to add that I was nearly knocked over backwards.

"By jingo, this is a surprise!" I said, taking a deep breath. "But he's worth it. He'll put up a terrific game, and he'll probably turn the tide in favour of England. That's my opinion, anyway."

"Begad! I think something must be wrong," said Sir Montie, shaking his head.

"Well, I suggest that we rush to Dodd's study and see if he is there," said Handforth. "He's bound to know something about it—you know he went to London——"

"Yes, my hat!" said Church. "So he did!"

"And he's been looking rather jumpy all day," I remarked. "He seemed as though he were expecting something."

The others did not wait for me to finish, but hurried off. And, in a surging crowd, they charged into the Ancient House lobby and down the Remove passage. Arriving at Study F, they burst in like a flood, and sent Tom Burton flying over backwards—the Bo'sun emerging at that moment.

"Souse my scuppers!" he gasped, as he thudded to the floor. "We've struck

a rock! Tell the skipper to reverse engines—we're sinking! What's the matter, shipmates?"

"Is Doddy here?" shouted Handforth. "Yes, by George! There he is! I say, Doddy, have you heard?"

"Heard what?" asked Jerry curiously. "I've been doing my prep. I noticed a bit of a din out in the Triangle, but I didn't trouble——"

"Then you don't know?" yelled Handforth.

"By jingo! I reckon I'm wondering what's troubling you," said Jerry Dodd. "Say, why can't you get it out?"

"You're going to play in the Test match, Doddy!"

"You've been chosen——"

"The Selection Committee——"

"It's all arranged——"

Jerry heard the disjointed sentences in a dreamy kind of way. He was dazed for the moment. Then somebody put the newspaper into his hand, and he looked at it almost nervously, as though afraid to see what the printed words had to tell him. And as he read his face flushed deeply.

"Jumping kangaroos!" he muttered. "It's true, then! He's done it—Mr. Keen fixed it up! By jings! And I thought it was impossible!"

"Can you explain it?" demanded Handforth—who wasn't curious.

"Yes, it's easy enough, I reckon," said Jerry, recovering his coolness. "Mr. Keen said he was determined to arrange it if he could—and now he's done it. Say, you fellows, isn't it just great?"

"Rather!"

"Good old Doddy!"

"You deserve it, my son!"

"Go in and win, Jerry. You're capable of doing it!"

"It's the chance of a lifetime!"

Everybody was shouting at once, and Jerry hardly had room to breathe, Study F being so full. But he didn't care. The apparently impossible had been bestowed on this junior schoolboy, and this decision of the Selection Committee was without precedent in history.

"We want to know how it came about!" said Handforth firmly. "It's no good beating about the bush, Doddy—you've got to tell us the truth. How did you wangle it, my son?"

"Say, I didn't wangle it at all!" replied Jerry.

"And is it true you're going to play against Australia?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that rather unpatriotic to your own country?"

"No, I'm darned if it is!" replied Dodd promptly, his eyes glittering. "They scorned me—the Australian Eleven, I mean. They laughed at me, and wouldn't even listen when my uncle suggested that I should be given a chance. Well, I've got an opportunity of proving that I'm a bit of good, and, by jings, I'm going to play the game of my life!"

And Jerry Dodd explained exactly what had occurred during that visit to London. We all listened with great interest and close attention.

"My only hat! And it's come off!" said Pitt breathlessly. "Keen's been able to work the giddy oracle! I say, Jerry, this is an amazing piece of luck for you, and you'll have to make good, too."

"You bet I shall!" said Jerry quietly. "If I don't—well, I'll look kind of small, won't I? It's up to me to put up a good show, and if I don't try my darnedest you can call me a fool!"

The news spread throughout the school like wildfire, and Jerry Dodd received congratulations from all sides. Seniors and juniors came to him, and wished him luck, and he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels when bedtime came.

And he went to sleep that night feeling happier than he had ever felt in his life before. He had confidence, and he felt that he would put up a good performance on the momentous occasion.

The next day he was up in good time, and he spent every available minute at the nets on Little Side. Although tuned up to perfection, so to speak, he knew that it would be better for him to put in all the practice he could.

He was under no misapprehension regarding the difficulty of the proposition. He had faced the Eastshire county men, and he had proved himself more than equal to all their prowess.

But this match against the Australians was different. The tourists were a formidable team, and they had been gaining success after success. Jerry would need all his skill and courage to face the ordeal.

He was filled with overwhelming joy. Never for a moment had he dared to hope that the thing would come off. But it had. J. H. Keen had evidently prevailed upon his colleagues of the Selection Committee to include Dodd in the team. It was a triumph for Keen—or would be after the match, if Dodd performed as the Eastshire skipper anticipated.

At present the committe's decision had raised a veritable storm of criticism. In the newspapers that morning which Jerry succeeded in seeing he found many expressions of opinion from famous men, and scathing comments by experts, who wailed about the foolishness of trying risky experiments.

In fact, it was quite obvious, from all the newspapers had to say, that a most terrible blunder had been made, and that even now it was not too late to alter it. These suggestions might have made Jerry uneasy, but he had received a letter that morning from Uncle Bill—a letter which had delighted Jerry. Mr. Dodd had received J. H. Keen's positive assurance that no alteration would be made to the selected team, whatever the newspaper experts had to say.

St. Frank's, as a whole, was agog with excitement over the stupendous news which had come. The school felt that it had been honoured, and every fellow was proud of the fact that Jerry belonged to St. Frank's. And it was generally conceded that Jerry thoroughly deserved the honour. He was an amazing cricketer, and it was only fitting that he should be given a chance of proving what he could do in a really big and important match.

And, at the same time, there was another excitement at the old school. The Remove, in particular, was seething. Answers came from parents with regard to the projected Montana trip. Fellows were pleased, and fellows were disappointed. It was a time of great doings.

The Test match would take place on the following week, and, as it happened, the first day of the match fell on the day following the break-up of the school. This would be on a Friday, and the match—a four-day one—would continue until the Tuesday.

And it so happened that on the Wednesday a big liner left for New York. And Mr. James Farman was already making plans to book passages on this boat. Nothing could have suited the fellows better. They would be able to see the Test match before starting off on their Western trip.

The days passed rapidly, without the juniors thinking much about work. There was a match at St. Frank's during this interval—a match against Redwood College. Jerry played wonderfully for the Remove, and Redwood returned home thoroughly and hopelessly beaten. They had expected a beating, so they were not so very disappointed. The Redwood fellows had known, of course, that they would be called upon to face the redoubtable Jerry Dodd. And Jerry, by this time, was famous throughout the country.

Newspaper reporters had come to St. Frank's, seeking interviews. Photographers, cinema men, and others had appeared two or three times—and, indeed, the whole school had rarely known such a week of excitements.

By the Wednesday—that is, the day

before the school broke up—everything was fixed and settled.

And it so worked out that exactly twelve juniors would make the trip to Montana—twelve including Justin B. Farman himself. The list, when I finally looked over it, was as follows:

Justin B. Farman, Watson, Tregellis-West, myself. Handforth, Church, McClure, Fatty Little, Reginald Pitt, Bob Christine, Talmadge, and Lawrence.

Of course, quite a number of others had been invited, these others including Jack Gray and De Valerie, and Somerton, and quite a lot more. Many of these fellows were keenly disappointed because they could not accompany us.

But they were not allowed to do so—their people had other plans for the holidays. And by now the passages to New York were booked and every final detail had been settled. But before we started on this momentous trip the Test match was due to come off.

Some exciting times were in store!

CHAPTER 18.

England v. Australia!

EARL'S was packed to suffocation. The famous London cricket ground was so full that the gates had been closed, and thousands of people had been unable to obtain admittance. It was the second day of the Test match, the weather was gloriously sunny and hot, and London was thrilled through and through by the doings of the previous day.

It was now within five minutes of the time to start play for the day. Needless to say, hundreds of St. Frank's boys were in the enclosures—seniors, juniors, even fags, were there in great strength. Looking round, I estimated that fully three parts of the fellows had come to this match to see Jerry Dodd wipe up the Australians, and to cheer him to the echo.

"My hat! There's a crowd here to-day," said Handforth. "And we're going to see some topping cricket, too. Jerry hasn't batted yet, and this'll just be his great performance."

"I shouldn't be surprised if the match was over before the time for pulling stumps," remarked Pitt. "Wouldn't it be glorious if the Australians were beaten in two days?"

"Oh, it's too much to hope for that," said Gray. "Jerry played a great game yesterday—fielding and bowling. To-day we shall see him at the wicket."

And the juniors were not the only ones who were singing the praises of Jerry Dodd. The pessimists and the carping critics were beginning to realise that the Selection Committe had made no blunder when it had made its momentous decision.

Conway, the Australian captain, had already lost his wager, and he was not feeling any the more pleased because of this. For he was beginning to understand that he had made a blunder in ridiculing Uncle Bill's suggestion that Jerry should be included in the Australian team.

If it were possible, I'd like to describe the whole match in detail, but that's out of the question.

Conway had won the toss at the commencement of the game, and, consequently, the Australians batted first.

They had opened well, and it was rather fitting, perhaps, that their first wicket should fall to a spectacular catch by Jerry Dodd. That had been a great catch, and Jerry had shown other remarkable qualities in fielding, earning the applause of the onlookers time after time.

Soon afterwards, when the score stood at 73 runs for three wickets, the England captain tossed the ball to Jerry Dodd, having decided that he would give the boy a trial for a couple of overs.

Jerry bowled throughout the rest of the innings.

For he displayed remarkable qualities. The second ball he sent down found the wicket of one of the most deadly Australian batsmen. Within

five minutes Jerry took a second wicket, and a third followed shortly afterwards.

His uncle was caught out from a ball delivered by the other bowler, and Uncle Bill was secretly overjoyed at his nephew's performance. It would probably cost Australia the match—but the fault of this would rest entirely upon the shoulders of Conway, who had had the chance of playing Jerry, and who had given Keen full permission to play the junior if he wanted to.

The Australians' first innings finally ended exactly at the score of 150. Jerry had taken three wickets. It was recognised by all that Jerry's bowling was first-class. Better than anybody else, the Australians themselves realised the blunder they had made. Conway was ready to kick himself for his obstinacy, but he was a sportsman, and he was the first man to congratulate Jerry at the conclusion of the innings.

There was not much time left on that day, and at the close of play England was two wickets down for 63 runs. The game was now to be resumed at this point. And, in the great pavilion, Conway found an opportunity to have a word with Jerry.

"Well, my lad, what have you got up your sleeve for us to-day?" he asked ruefully. "You put it across us fairly yesterday, and I don't mind admitting I'm infernally curious to see you with a bat in your hand."

"I'm figuring on getting more than five runs, sir," said Jerry with a smile.

"Yes, confound it, I expect you'll get something more like fifty!" exclaimed Conway. "Well, I shall be happy to send that fifty pounds to any charity that Keen wishes to name—I deserve to lose the money."

"I'm sorry——"

"Get away with you!" interrupted Conway. "I'm the fellow to be sorry, not you. We can afford to lose a match, anyhow. And it won't be so much of a disgrace, considering that you—an Australian youngster will be responsible. But we haven't lost yet, my lad."

Five minutes later a tremendous outburst of cheering announced the fact that the Australians had streamed out on to the turf. The two England batsmen followed.

Most of the people in the crowd were waiting for one event only—and that was the appearance of Jerry Dodd. He had shown what he could do as a bowler, and they now wanted to see him at the wicket.

As it happened, they were not destined to wait for long.

England opened the day's play well; the two batsmen played steadily and carefully.

It was not until the score had mounted to 85 that one of the batsmen succumbed to the fast work of the star Australian bowler. The batsman retired—he was one of the most famous English cricketers—and he met with a great reception as he returned to the pavilion.

Then, a minute or two later, a cheer started from a section of the St. Frank's juniors. It was taken up immediately, and was soon a great roar of applause. A certain name had gone up on the board—and that name was Jerry Dodd's.

"Good egg!" said Handforth. "Now we're going to see something worth looking at, my children! We're going to see a St. Frank's chap knock the Australian bowling into the middle of next week!"

"Better not be too sure," said Church cautiously.

"Rats!"

"But the best batsmen are clean bowled with the first ball now and again," said Church. "Wouldn't it be awful luck if Doddy met with a disaster like that? It makes me go all funny when I think of it."

"He'll be all right—he's as cool as ice, and knows every trick of the game," said Pitt. "And you can bet your boots

he'll open up cautiously, without taking any risks. He knows these Aussies are keen to get him out straight away."

Jerry was watched eagerly as he went to the wicket, walking freely and without any air of self-consciousness. As a matter of fact, Jerry was in his element. He hardly saw the crowds, and he took very little notice of the clapping and cheering. His whole mind was on the game.

From the pavilion he had followed every trick and turn of the Australian bowling, and he knew that he would have to play very well indeed if he was to score a fair number of runs. Conway had set the field cleverly, and the English batsmen, so far, had found few opportunities of knocking up runs at any speed.

The spectators gazed at Jerry with a very different feeling from the one which had been felt early on the previous day. They had expected him to cover himself with humiliation—and, instead, he had shown the crowds that he was well worthy of being included in the England Test Eleven.

Accordingly, the onlookers were now anticipating something extra good from Jerry. They believed that he would make fifty runs, at least, and he was watched carefully and closely.

For this, of course, was the first time that he had been seen with a bat in his hands. Everything depended on how he would shape during the first few minutes. It would soon be known whether he was capable of great things, or whether he would give just an ordinary display.

Jerry finished with the umpire, and he took up his position—an easy, careless position which denoted the calm coolness with which he faced the ordeal. Nervousness had completely fled—although, in the pavilion, he had been secretly fearing this moment.

It was the star bowler who sent down the ball—a twisting, deadly kind of ball, too.

Jerry half raised his bat, waited, and then he leapt into action. His bat hit the leather with a clack which was heard in every corner of the field. And away it went, low, barely a foot from the ground, speeding towards the boundary. And it was not stopped by the agile fieldsmen.

"Boundary!"

"Oh, well hit!"

"Good old Doddy!" said Handforth, seizing Church, and hugging him to his breast. "Isn't he a wonder?"

"Well, there's no need to squash the breath out of me!" gasped Church. "Stop it, you ass! Everybody's looking!"

Jerry Dodd had started his innings famously, and it was soon proved that this was not a mere flash in the pan. He sent the next ball away for a three, and had the bowling from the other end.

Then he proceeded to knock this man's bowling all over the field. Twos and fours came in rapid succession. And, somehow, Jerry seemed to possess the knack of slipping the ball away between the eagle-eyed fieldsmen.

Again and again, Conway changed the field, but it was all to no purpose. Jerry was ready for every trick that was attempted.

The bowlers were not only dismayed, but astonished. Jerry took risks which seemed likely to lead to certain defeat. But his wicket didn't fall. And, as a matter of fact, he took no risks at all. He knew exactly what was coming; an uncanny kind of sense warned him what sort of delivery to expect.

Strictly speaking, it was simply and purely a matter of keen eyesight and rapid perception.

Jerry had not the slightest idea of what was going on beyond the actual pitch and the surrounding field. He didn't look at the crowds. He didn't know they were there. He had forgotten all about the spectators.

So far as he was concerned, they did not exist.

His heart and soul were centred

wholly upon the game. And it was his concentration which made Jerry Dodd such a wonderful cricketer.

And yet he didn't appear to be concerning himself in the slightest degree. His attitude was easy and free, and he almost lounged at the wicket. But when he saw a chance, he opened out his shoulders and swung his bat with astonishing force. When he did the ball nearly always went to the boundary.

The scoreboard revealed the fact that the runs were mounting rapidly, and they were nearly all Jerry Dodd's. The bowlers could do nothing with him. They were worried and irritated.

Worried because all their skill seemed useless, and irritated because it was exasperating in the extreme that a youngster like this—a junior schoolboy—should be able to snap his fingers at all their cunning.

From the pavilion, J. H. Keen was watching the game with a bland, contented smile on his face. Keen had every reason to feel happy. This was his doing.

He was responsible for Jerry Dodd's inclusion in the Test Eleven, and his colleagues, dubious at first, now realised that Keen's judgment was rightly placed. The Selection Committee had made no blunder.

Keen, in fact, felt that he could almost claim to have discovered this phenomenal young cricketer. He had certainly discovered him during that memorable Bannington match! And the thought that Jerry was now playing for England was a very sweet one to the Eastshire skipper.

Never before had a London crowd been treated to such an exhibition of brilliant and sparkling batting. There was not a dull moment in the game. It was a sight which was declared to be without precedent by all who saw it.

Jerry, it must be said, was feeling at the top of his form. The fact that he had been spurned, and that he was now fighting for his good name as a cricketer, made him put forth every effort.

He continued as he had begun—like a whirlwind.

When he reached his fifty the applause was deafening—for this was an excellent score against such clever players as the Australians. And, taking into consideration the fact that Jerry was a boy, his performance was little short of staggering.

Other batsmen came and went, but Jerry remained there. He was immovable. No matter what bowlers were put on, he remained unbeaten.

There was hardly a ball that was sent down to him that was not driven away.

Now and again there was an anxious moment, when the ball went rather high. But there was never any real danger of Jerry being caught out.

And then, about twenty minutes later, nearly all the St. Frank's juniors in the stands went off their heads, and the general public rose and cheered.

The score stood at 193, and of this total Jerry Dodd had scored a century. The total of the Australians' first innings had long since been passed, and England was now mounting up a very useful lead.

"Great Scott!" said Tommy Watson. "A hundred, you chaps—a century against the Australians! What do you think of him?"

"Oh, it's too good to be true!" said De Valerie. "I know I shall wake up in a minute and find that this is a dream. Such things don't happen in real life. It's too wonderful!"

"Good old Doddy!"

"Three cheers for Jerry Dodd!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we deserve 'em!" said Handforth. "Doddy's a Remove chap, and we're proud of him. We shall get a lot of glory out of this—and think of the great things that Doddy will do for us in our own cricket matches."

"My hat! Rather!"

"Don't jaw so much, you asses!" said Pitt. "Watch the game! There he goes again—— My goodness! That was a beauty!"

The fieldsmen were running, and Jerry Dodd and his partner were running too. The ball was just saved before it reached the boundary, although it was not returned to the wicket-keeper until four runs had been obtained.

And still the score crept up.

It must not be imagined that the other English batsmen were idle whilst Jerry was doing all the work.

Quite the contrary, in fact.

For a solid hour, Jerry was partnered by two of England's most famous cricketers, and they caught something of Jerry's spirit—that seemingly reckless, confident sangfroid which carried him through in complete triumph.

And the runs literally leapt up. Jerry's present partner was doing splendidly, scoring whenever he got the bowling. The 200 mark had been passed long since—and, in fact, the total now stood at 247.

And so it continued.

Everybody who saw it declared that this match was the most wonderful exhibition of cricket that had ever been witnessed in the history of the game.

The Australians felt utterly helpless for a time. But then, after two men had been bowled, they recovered heart to a certain extent, and they played grimly, even desperately.

Three hundred—with eight wickets down. It was a fine total, and both Jerry Dodd and the other batsman were going hammer and tongs. Jerry seemed as fresh as paint, in spite of his long, strenuous innings.

When the ninth wicket fell, and the last man came in, it was within ten minutes of lunch time. The total stood at 319. Exactly seven minutes after that the scoreboard showed 337, and Jerry's total was now 150. It was the signal for another exhibition of enthusiasm.

The two captains decided to continue until the innings was over. As it happened, it was not destined to last very much longer.

Fifteen minutes after the appointed time for luncheon the score was 355, and Jerry had added eleven more runs to his total. And then Jerry's partner was unfortunate enough to be pronounced out, leg before wicket.

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, Dodd!"

"Give the young 'un three cheers!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a rush on to the turf from all sides, and the St. Frank's juniors carried Jerry shoulder high from the field.

The innings was now over, and Jerry Dodd was not out, having scored 161 runs off his own bat.

He had proved his worth with a vengeance.

And Conway, the Australian captain, felt exceedingly sorry for himself. If he had only taken Uncle Bill's advice.

Conway realised that there was practically no hope of winning the match now. The first two innings were over, and England had an overwhelming lead. Indeed, it was quite possible that England would not need a second innings at all. The thought of being beaten by a whole innings filled Conway with horror.

But, somehow, he had a feeling that this would be the case.

Jerry Dodd was invincible!

CHAPTER 19.

Jerry Dodd's Triumph!

UNCLE BILL seized hold of Jerry and firmly lifted him off the ground. He hugged the junior with enthusiastic affection.

"Good lad!" he exclaimed. "Jerry, old fel,' you've done three times as good as I expected—I reckoned you'd make fifty. And you've properly put the lid on it for us!"

Jerry Dodd smiled.

"Well, I can't help that, uncle," he replied. "I'm playing for England, I know, and I'm doing the best I can. I reckon that's right, don't you?"

"Right? Of course, it's right!" said Mr. Dodd. "We deserve this licking, anyway. At least, Conway does, and he's owned up to it, too. Conway's a sportsman. But I must say you've broken all records, my lad."

"By jings! I feel like it to-day. Uncle Bill," said Jerry. "I couldn't do wrong—I took some chances, and they all came off. But, somehow, I believe the bowling was below the usual standard. They got kind of scared—although goodness knows why!"

"Anybody would be scared of you—standing at the other end of the pitch with your bat ready to knock the leather into the next county," chuckled Mr. Dodd. "Say, what are you going to give me this afternoon?"

"A duck's egg, I hope!" said Jerry.

"By glory, and I believe you will, too," said his uncle.

Jerry went off, and was immediately seized by a noisy throng of juniors who had found their way through. Jerry met with a terrific reception, and he was rather mauled about.

"My son, you're famous!" I said, slapping him on the back. "Your name will soon be ringing all over the giddy world. You've done something to-day that has never been done before!"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Jerry, laughing. "I'm getting tired of all this, you know. I'd kind of feel relieved if you said that some of my play was rotten."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "And I've got something to say to you, too, my child. It's all piffle for you to remain in England while we go out to Montana. You've got to come with us."

Jerry shook his head.

"I'd love to, but it can't be done," he replied. "You see, Uncle Bill is going to play in a lot more games yet, and I want to be with him. Besides, I shall have a chance of playing in some more big matches, I hope."

"Yes, that's right enough," I said. "We'd love to have you with us, Doddy, but we realise that such a thing is impossible. Let's hope you've covered yourself with further glory by the time we get back."

Jerry was compelled to go after a while, for luncheon had been prepared for him. He ate very little, however, since he wished to remain fresh and alert for the afternoon's play.

The public waited patiently for the game to resume. The ground was still packed to its utmost extent, and hundreds of people went hungry, not daring to leave their seats, and having no food with them.

There was one spectator, of course, who was a notable exception. This, needless to add, was Fatty Little, who occupied two seats in the grand stand—for the simple reason that he couldn't go into one. In addition to his ample proportions, his capacious pockets were crammed to their utmost capacity with articles of an edible nature.

The amount of stuff that Fatty had about him was fairly astounding, and, as Pitt remarked, if it had been distributed among the crowd, it would have provided an excellent luncheon for all, with a bit to spare.

However, Fatty was of the opinion that the crowd deserved to go hungry.

"If they were short-sighted enough to come here without bringing any grub, it's their own look out," he declared. "I had a bit of forethought."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "We ought to give a vote of thanks to Fatty for bringing lunch for the Remove, like this——"

"The Remove!" roared Fatty. "This is for me!"

"What?"

"All that stuff?"

"Great doughnuts!" snorted Fatty. "You don't call this much, do you?"

"No! I call it a glaring case of food hoarding!" said Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, there's hardly enough to last me the afternoon," said Fatty. "As it is, I shall be nearly starved by tea-time. A chap's got to live, you know, and this terrific heat and the glaring sunshine give a chap a tremendous appetite."

Fatty was never at a loss to provide an excuse for his hunger, and while he was speaking, he proceeded to feed his face. The food disappeared at remarkable speed, and still Fatty showed no sign of being satisfied.

At last the luncheon interval was over, and we lost interest in Fatty and his feeding exhibition when the two umpires strolled leisurely out to the pitch. They were followed by the England team.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, England!"

"You've beaten 'em this time!"

Jerry Dodd, of course, was among the England cricketers. He had already given an example of what he could do in the field—on the previous day—and he now felt that he was capable of showing something better.

The game recommenced, two of Australia's best batsmen going in to open the innings. They did open it—quickly.

In fact, they had quite a burst of run-getting during the first five minutes, knocking the leather about vigorously, and scoring two or three boundaries and some other useful runs.

And then, after this had been going on for a little longer, the English captain decided to put Jerry on to bowl. For the England captain had come to realise by this time that Jerry was the best man on the field. Jerry accepted the ball gladly.

As he gripped the leather between his fingers, he felt a warm thrill running through him. He enjoyed bowling even more than batting, and he told himself that he would do everything within his power to provide the crowd with something worth looking at. He couldn't exactly explain why, but he felt supremely confident on this particular day of days.

He took his run—a short, easy run, without any appearance of danger in it. It seemed, indeed, that the ball would have no speed when it left his fingers. But there was something deceptive in this run of Jerry's.

At the very last moment his forearm shot forward, and the ball was sent hurtling down the pitch with terrific speed.

Crash!

The batsman's middle stump sagged out of the ground, and the bails went

flying. There was no doubt about what had happened.

"Well bowled, Dodd!"

"Good man!"

It was the first ball that Jerry had bowled, and he had taken the first wicket of the innings. Jerry smiled as he got the ball back, and he did not fail to notice the curious, almost inquisitive looks which were bestowed upon him by the England cricketers.

Frankly, they could not understand him.

He was a curiosity—a phenomenon. And yet he looked just an ordinary, good-natured junior schoolboy, and one would never have given him credit for being the most deadly cricketer in the country.

The next man came in, and Jerry smiled more broadly when he observed that this man was Uncle Bill. Mr. Dodd took his place at the wicket, and held himself ready. Jerry sent down the second ball of the over.

It shot down rapidly, broke at an awkward angle, twisted under Uncle Bill's bat, and lifted his leg stump neatly out of the ground. Uncle Bill looked at his wicket ruefully.

"You young demon!" said Mr. Dodd, glancing at Jerry.

The junior waved his hand, and chuckled. And the crowd, appreciating the position, roared with laughter. They now regarded Jerry Dodd as the lion of the hour. Nothing that he could do was wrong. He was a hero of heroes.

"The hat trick, Dodd!"

"Take the next wicket!"

"You'll do it, youngster!"

Another batsman replaced Uncle Bill, and it was seen that he was Conway, the captain, who had the record of being one of the finest batsmen in the Australian team. He was a careful, steady player, with occasional bursts of brilliance. And Conway was determined to play carefully now.

Again Jerry took his run, and delivered the third ball of the over. It was a tricky, twisting ball, and Conway knew this at once. He made no attempt to swipe out at it. Instead, it was his intention to guard his wicket. Whether it was nervousness or not, nobody actually knew, but the leather whipped neatly under Conway's bat, grazed the wicket, and just dislodged the bails.

"Hurrah!"

"Well bowled, Dodd!"

"The hat trick!" shrieked Handforth. "Did you see, you chaps? The giddy hat trick! Oh, when this game's over there won't be anything of Doddy left! He'll be mobbed until he's a pulp!"

"He's a wonder!"

"A giddy marvel!"

And, indeed, these remarks were quite true. Dodd's play was astounding in its cleverness; and he had not yet finished. Still another man came in, and this man was determined to put a stop to the dreadful rot which had set in with the commencement of Jerry Dodd as bowler.

The fourth ball of the over was delivered by Jerry. This time he did not beat his man, and he never expected to. The ball was sent away, and two runs were scored. The next ball that came down had a surprising result. It broke in an awkward kind of way, and the batsman hit out.

Clack!

Up went the leather, soaring skywards. When it came down it fell neatly into the waiting hands of an English fieldsman.

"Out!"

The crowd was laughing now—couldn't help it, and it fairly roared when Jerry delivered the last ball of the over. It was a stinger, and it knocked the middle stump yards out of the ground.

Surely this was a feat which had seldom been equalled?

Five wickets down in one over for two runs!

It was overwhelming—particularly when it was realised that these men who were being treated so drastically were the famous, all-conquering Australians. It would have seemed absolutely impossible—fantastic—but with Jerry Dodd bowling, anything was not surprising.

He was a prodigy—a cricketing marvel who had suddenly sprung into prominence, and who was earning world-wide fame in this one match alone.

The Australians were amazed and discouraged. All their confidence was robbed from them—for a time, at least. But they showed rare pluck. In spite of the terrible disasters which had befallen them, they rallied.

And then they proceeded to mount up the runs. Quietly, steadily, they added to the score, taking no chances with Jerry, but knocking the other bowler about rather severely. But their fate was sealed.

This, of course, was quite obvious. And when the total reached one hundred and seventy-five, the last wicket fell.

It was the end of the match—the most astounding match that had ever been played in all probability.

The Australians had been beaten by an innings and thirty runs!

The enthusiasm which followed the game was almost more than I can describe. Jerry Dodd met with such an ovation that his brain was in a whirl by the time he succeeded in stealing away with Uncle Bill. The St. Frank's fellows had wanted to carry him off in triumph, but Uncle Bill wanted to see Jerry alive once more.

So the Australian junior's triumph was complete. He had played in a Test match, and he had proved himself to be a greater cricketer than even his own uncle had supposed. And it was a fitting conclusion to all the adventures and excitement which Jerry Dodd had passed through since his arrival at St. Frank's.

. . . . .

"Off at last!"

"Good-bye to old England for a time, anyhow," said Handforth, leaning comfortably over the rail. "By George! It's a pity we couldn't bring Doddy with us. But I suppose he's better left behind playing his beloved cricket."

"Yes, of course," said Church.

"What could he do in America—out West? They don't play cricket there, and Jerry would rather die than give up his cricket!"

"Well, blow Jerry Dodd!" said McClure. "He's a ripping chap, and he's done a tremendous lot to enhance the honour of St. Frank's. But we're setting out on this trip to the Wild West now, and we've got tons of things to think about."

The party had, indeed, started. They were on board the liner, just slipping down the Solent, en route for the wide Atlantic and New York.

We were on our way to Montana—to the Far West—to Roaring Z Ranch, where we expected to have many exciting adventures. As events were destined to turn out, these expectations of ours were to be fully realised.

JOBS THAT THRILL!

Breaking Fresh Ground!

THE fellow who sets out to look for a way of earning a living to-day doesn't have far to look if it is real excitement he is after. The trouble is that once a thrilling job has been found it ceases in time to thrill, and something better—or worse—has to be sought to satisfy the thirst for adventure!

Those people who hang by their eyebrows from towering cliffs on the cinema screen have solved their problem. They get more thrills in earning a living than the ordinary fellow could hope to encounter in a million years.

So do stunt airmen, who calmly jump from speeding 'planes on to express trains and daily perform other miracles of human daring at a fixed price per stunt. But occasionally some dare-devil breaks fresh ground entirely, and does something that only he could have dreamt of—like whirling over Niagara Falls in a rubber ball!

Ways of Risking Necks!

To say that he, who performed that remarkable feat, broke fresh ground is rather wide of the mark. It was water he broke, and when they dragged him out of the ball he was unconscious. Made of rubber, the skin of the ball was three feet thick, and the space inside was six feet across.

The police warned him that if he attempted the mad game of rolling over the Falls inside that rubber contraption they would lock him up as soon as the performance was over. But he was a racing motorist to whom the sensation of risking his neck on four wheels was beginning to wear flat, and he wanted a fresh sensation. He got it!

Another exciting job is that of the fellow who sits high above the streets mending telegraph-wires. Look at him from the ground and he seems the size of a rabbit. What are his feelings as he sits in the frail "cradle" suspended from the cable? Ask him, and he will tell you that he dreads most of all not air-sickness or a fall, but the paralysing cold.

The World's Worst?

An Australian boundary rider gets all sorts of stirring adventures—in books—but so far as his real-life experiences go he would declare emphatically that his is really the world's worst job. For weeks on end he is out on patrol, with no one to speak to—only his horse. Many are the boundary riders who have gone mad through the loneliness and monotony of that job!

The fur-trapper who gets his living in North Russia pooh-poohs the idea that the boundary rider knows what hard and solitary work is. For he, with his life in his hands, with savage animals whose skins he is after roaming about after his skin, goes into the dark forests, with a couple of dogs, and takes up his quarters there for five or six months without a break. And in the depth of winter he can reckon on only five hours' daylight in any one day!

The Dancing Marathon!

Marathon runners have shown again and again that their job can be capable of providing the wildest variety of excitement—but nothing compared with the madness that came of the dancing marathon that was staged some time ago in America.

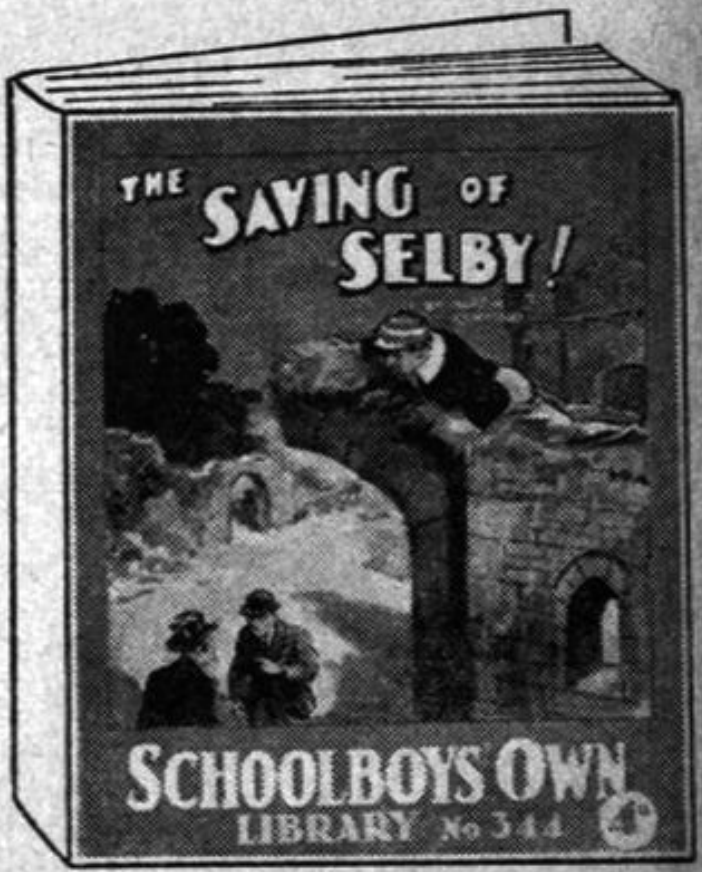
The dancers were trying to earn big sums of money, and the man who made the most of his exciting job cleared £1,000. He earned it, for he danced for 482 hours, thus breaking the world's record. With fifteen minutes' rest after every sixty minutes of dancing, the end of 230 hours found only seventeen couples left of the hundred couples who had taken on the job!

S.S.

DON'T MISS THESE GRAND COMPANION NUMBERS!

WHO says a great holiday trip into the African jungle with the cheery chums of Greyfriars? Join up with them to-day—thrills, fun and adventure all the way. And your fare only costs fourpence! Book your passage at the nearest newsagent's!

By FRANK RICHARDS.



MR. SELBY, tyrant of the Third, is one of the most unpopular masters at St. Jim's, but disliked as he is, a junior doesn't hesitate to set out and help him when the Form-master finds himself under the thumb of an unscrupulous blackmailer! You'll enjoy this gripping yarn from first word to last.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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