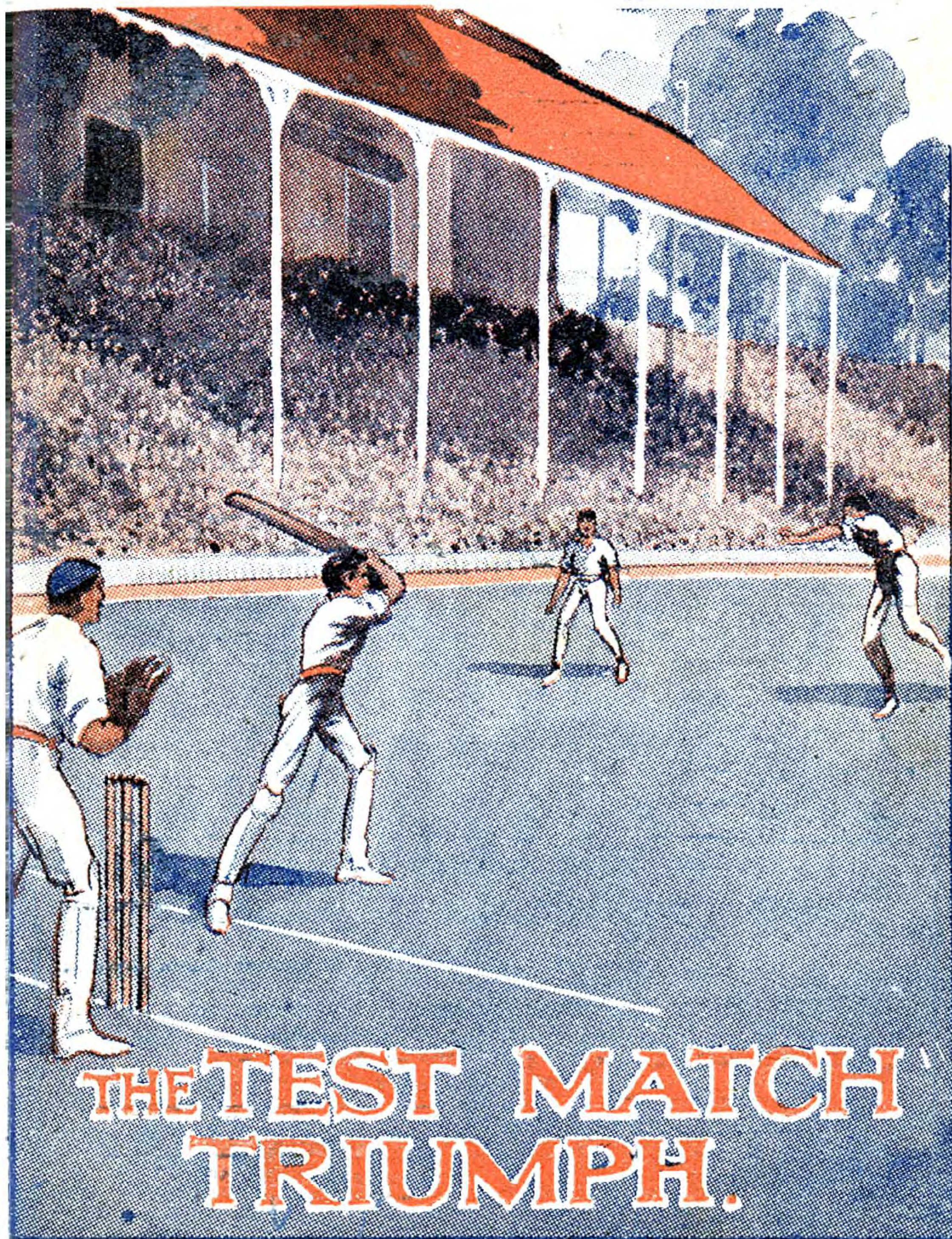


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

WELCOME VISITORS!

"GOOD old Jerry!"
 "Bravo!"
 "Good man!"

Jerry Dodd, of the Remove at St. Frank's, smiled as he came down the steps of the Ancient House. These 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 fifth and sixth frankly acknowledged Jerry Dodd's amazing superiority.

Of course, it concerned cricket. No matter what kind of a duffer Jerry was at lessons, no matter where he came from, he was the most astounding cricketer that St. Frank's had ever possessed. And, because of his performances, the famous old school was being talked of throughout the country.

So it was hardly surprising that Jerry was admired by all and sundry. His great performance in the charity match at Bannington had opened all eyes. For Jerry Dodd, a schoolboy of fifteen, had

played havoc with the famous Eastshire County Eleven, captained by the renowned county cricketer, J. H. Keen.

During that match, Jerry had done things which would have been regarded as impossible. He had, in fact, toyed with the professionals with the greatest possible coolness and ease. They could do nothing with him. Both at bowling and batting he had them "beat to a frazzle," as Farman, of the Remove, put it.

It happened that Jerry's uncle, Mr. William Dodd, was staying at St. Frank's at the time, and he had witnessed his nephew's exhibition of clever cricket. And Uncle Bill was a highly important personage—being, in fact, a member of the picked Australian eleven now touring in England.

It is almost unnecessary to say that Mr. Dodd was overjoyed with Jerry. He had always had great faith in the junior; but this match had brought out qualities which even Uncle Bill had not quite expected.

The whole school was still talking about that match. In the studies, in the passages, out in the Triangle—it didn't matter where, groups of fellows were gathered together chatting. And in nine cases out of ten the subject under discussion was cricket. And Jerry's name was bound to crop up in the course of these confabulations.

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 a question of cricket. He ain'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 Helmsford and Bannington——"

"Yes, and so have you," put in Church pointedly. "Not only that, but you've been practising at other times, and Doddy'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 Handforth, 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 Handforth 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 scream 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 steel-studded 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 DeValerie 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. Church would be there—mangled up—

"It's all right, you chaps—don't be silly asses!" said Church breathlessly. "It was all Handforth's fault for biffing me!"

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.

"Ain't you killed?" panted Handforth.

"Not quite!" said Church, glaring. "But that's not your fault!"

"But—but 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 most terrific scare—I got the wind up frightfully!"

"Why, it's Lord Dorrimore!" shouted Pitt eagerly.

"Oh, welcome to St. Frank's, sir!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

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," ex-

plained 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 Heaven 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 under 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, and then— Oh, but it's no good talking about it. 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 our adventures in Mor-dania, and earlier, when we had all gone to the Amazon.

Not only Dorrie created interest at

St. Frank's, 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. Kutunaland, 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 study mate. 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 very 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 then 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 lovable 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 awhile. "I never knew such a man for springing surprises! We've got nothing prepared—and it would have been far better if 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. So preparations weren't necessary."

"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. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson had been anxious to join in, but there was hardly room.

"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. "That is surely not the occasion to discuss my little professional qualities——"

"Maybe not, sir, but I'll allow I want to talk to you a big piece," said Mr. Farman. "Guess that'll wait until later—the professional stuff, I mean. So I'll get busy handing out the other talk."

"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, gov'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. Gee! 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, we 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—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 aw-

fully thrilling, you know—with cowboys, and Indians, and desperadoes holding up the pony express!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We might be even 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—letters which stated that Mr. Farman had invited them, and which asked for permission to go.

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 II.

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's emotions were somewhat difficult for him to define. He 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 looking forward to 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 country, 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 latter 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; but they've got some pride, I expect—they kind of reckon that a boy of your age ought not to play as well as they can."

Uncle Bill smiled at the thought, and the luncheon proceeded. Then, later on, 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 sniles.

"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 who 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 pose, 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 had the courage to admit something which he can't exactly like. 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 year's 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, not quite so good-natured.

"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. It's only natural that you should see this thing in a somewhat warped light. 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 exclaimed. "This sort of thing is madness. 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 for who plays, and I'm blamed if we happen to lose a match. 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 so utterly opposed to all precedent that it 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. One or two writers, in fact, had chosen to be somewhat facetious. Uncle Bill had hardly expected that his suggestion would be received in this way. For a few seconds he was furious; 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.

He deserved this—or, rather, Uncle Bill did. They never ought to have come up to London. And Jerry wasn't half such a good cricketer as he was made out to be. Inwardly, he knew that he could play well, but he had no exaggerated ideas of his own importance. Quite the contrary, in fact.

"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 Justico, 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 doom 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 suicidal for you 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 low-down 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. Cricket's a sport—not a subject for causing ill-feeling. 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 English Eleven—to play in a 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, and one doesn't always see that. 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 English 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 bowling 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 futile to think that this extraordinary wager would ever materialise.

But the cogs of fate were working steadily and certainly!

CHAPTER III.

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 which had 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, dear old fellows. 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 sha'n'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 bunk house, 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 bedrooms, 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. "When you get among the foothills of the Rockies, or down in the valleys, you begin to realise what a wonderful thing nature is. And I've got an idea that we shall have some excitement, too. Farman gave me a hint that his father wants the gov'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 talk a piece. 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 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 idea of the thing 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 with both your eyes as far open as they can get."

"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 resorting to flattery," 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 dis-

appear. Say, it's just maddening, and I want 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?"

"Geo! 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 monetarily 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, in case I let loose something you won't like. You're a white man, sir, and I'm proud to know you."

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 and 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 Italy or Spain, or some fatheaded place like that. 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 knut," 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. He makes me tear my hair sometimes. 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 agreed to 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—absolutely chock full of brains and crammed with topping ideas. Firm, decisive and 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—curiosity is a silly game, anyhow. 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 tremendously 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! Ain't it wonderful what a lot of noise they can make? I expect they've seen something important in that newspaper. Must be the 'Evening News.' 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 at the atmosphere. 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 IV.

THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME!

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, as he had guessed, was a late afternoon edition of the "Evening News." 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 professional, 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 the Charity Match recently played at Bannington, Sussex. It is feared in many quarters that this astounding decision will not enhance our prospect of winning next week's Test."

The newspaper nearly fell out of Handforth's grasp.

"It's—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 'Evening News,' and they're pretty reliable!"

"It's official, too!"

The juniors simply could not understand it. The information in the newspaper seemed altogether too preposterous to have any semblance of truth. 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



Jerry was immediately seized by a noisy throng of juniors who had found their way through. It was a terrific reception, and he was rather mauled about.

much of it!" 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.

"Souise 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 Dodd here?" shouted Handforth. "Yes, by George! There he is! I say, Dodd, 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, Dodd!"

"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. Keon 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 darndest 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 knew within him 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 a great and 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 committee'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 at a time of stress.

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 filled Jerry with confidence and joy. 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 25

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 three-day one—would continue until the Monday.

And it so happened that on the Wednesday a big liner left Liverpool 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, and then have comfortable time to spend a day at home 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 V.

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 instead of three?"

"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 Committee 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 fully understand that he had made a colossal 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—and, moreover, I've got an idea it would be rather tedious, for there would necessarily be a lot of repetition.

This was a three-day match, and I've only room to describe what happened at the most important part of the game—but this, I fancy, will be ample.

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 with 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 English 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, and had prevented several batsmen from making runs. It was recognised by all that Jerry's bowling was of the most deadly and dangerous character. Better than anybody else, the Australians themselves realised the stupendous 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, and into the field. The two English 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, in spite of the difficult bowling. The pitch was in perfect condition, and favoured neither side.

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 carried his bat into 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 number had gone up on the board—and that number 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 fielding, 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 to the one which had been expressed 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 English Test Eleven.

Accordingly, the onlookers were now anticipating something extra good from Jerry. They believed that he would make a sensational innings, 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 a medium quality 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 stinging, 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. "Ain'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. 'Two's and fours came in rapid succession. And, somehow, Jerry seemed to possess the knack of slipping the ball away between the eagle-eyed fieldsmen, who were placed in the most advantageous positions by the worried Conway.

Again and again, Conway changed the field, but it was all to no purpose. Jerry was ready for every trick that was attempted. Fieldsmen were placed in certain positions so that he should be caught out, and so that the leather would be rapidly fielded.

But, somehow or other, this young demon of a batsman managed to elude the enemy every time.

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 when the leather would have a certain twist

upon it. 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, every fibre of his being, was centred wholly upon the game. And it was his concentration which made Jerry Dodd such a wonderful cricketer. All cricketers concentrate to a certain extent—they are obliged to—but Jerry was a notable exception, in the sense that he concentrated, not partially, but wholly.

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 this the ball was missing for a time.

The score board 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, and content with the whole world. 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 Dodd 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, his wicket was intact.

There was hardly a ball that was sent down to him that was not whirled away into the distance.

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 seventeen minutes later, nearly all the St. Frank's juniors in the stands went off their heads, and the general public rose and cheered—and it is very seldom that cheers are heard at a cricket match.

The score stood at 193, and of this total Jerry Dodd had scored the 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 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 terrible things that Doddy will do for us in our own cricket programme."

"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 bowler 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. Conway and his men were in despair. It was not one of those slow games, which drags on hour after hour with few runs being scored, but a quick-fire, breathless tornado which nothing whatever could stem.

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.

It was sensational.

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 next wicket fell, and the tenth man came in, it was within ten minutes of luncheon time. The total stood at 319. Exactly seven minutes after that the score board showed 337, and Jerry's total was now 150. It was the signal for another exhibition of enthusiasm.

As the ninth wicket fell just then, the last man came in to bat, the two captains had decided to continue until the in-

nings was over. At it happened, it was not destined to last very much longer.

Fifteen minutes after the appointed time for luncheon the score was 385, and Jerry had added eleven more runs to his own 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. Of course, the innings was now over, and Jerry Dodd was not out, having scored the extraordinary total of 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 VI.

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 awful 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. They would have starved for a couple of days rather than

miss seeing the Australians’ second innings.

There was one spectator, of course, who was a notable exception. This, needless to add, was one, 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 gives 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 English team.

“Hurrah!”

“Go it, England!”

“You’ve beaten ’em this time!”

Jerry Dodd, of course, was among the English 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 scoring. They did open it—quickly.

In fact, they gave quite a burst of speed 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 the bowling. For the English 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.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Well played, Dodd!"

"Bowled!"

"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 English 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.

"Out!"

"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 block 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.

"How's that?" yelled the wicket-keeper.

"Out!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, 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 Duddy 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 slinger, 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 doom 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 sixty 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 peg-out than give up his cricket in the middle of the season!"

"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 Mersey, 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 meet with fresh adventures and excitements. As events were destined to turn out, these expectations of ours were not to be in vain.

For, in truth, our visit to Roaring Z Ranch was to be fraught with amazing and dramatic mystery. We were on the threshold of an astounding series of strange perils and unique happenings!

THE END

TO MY READERS.

BETWEEN now and next week, I want you to imagine that the holiday party comprising NELSON LEE and NIPPER, LORD DORRIMORE, UMLOSI, Mr. FARMAN, FARMAN, Jun., WATSON, TREGELLIS-WEST, HAND-FORTH, CHURCH, McCLURE, FATTY LITTLE, PITT, CHRISTIE, TALMADGE, and LAWRENCE, are proceeding westwards across the Atlantic and North America, so that when you open your NELSON LEE next week you will find them already arrived at Rattlesnake Bend, in Montana, U.S.A. A birdseye map of the country, which will appear on page ii of cover, will show you how the new arrivals have to cross the wild and rolling prairie to reach Roaring Z Ranch. The nature of this magnificent country, with the majestic Rocky Mountains in the distance, will thus be unfolded to you at one glance. The chief landmarks will be noted in order to help you to follow more closely the series of adventures that take place in and around the neighbourhood of Mr. Farman's Ranch. And what adventures, too! There will be some thrilling bouts with "rustlers," a name given to cattle thieves out West, and daring feats of horsemanship by real cowboys. The author has taken great pains to reproduce the true cowboy drawl and turn of speech, and when you have read all about Mr. Farman's cowpunchers, who style themselves "The Happy Bunch," you will assuredly share my own opinion that the author has achieved a remarkable success. Such names as Square-Deal Reeve, Twirly Sam, Two-Gun Milligan, Slick Ed, Ace-High Peter represent a few of the new personalities belonging to "The Happy Bunch," to whom you will be introduced next week.

The first story of this grand new series will be called "THE MONTANA MYSTERY!" It is mainly about the new life of the Holiday Party at Roaring Z Ranch, and of the strange disappearance of large numbers of Mr. Farman's cattle, believed to be the work of "rustlers."

Another important feature in next week's number will be the first instalment of a Grand New Detective Serial of NELSON LEE and NIPPER at GRAYS INN ROAD, entitled, "THE GHOST OF MARSH MANOR!" It is an enthralling account of one of the great detective's earlier cases, hitherto unpublished.

To my numerous chums who remember NELSON LEE and NIPPER when they first appeared in "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," this new serial will be warmly welcome.

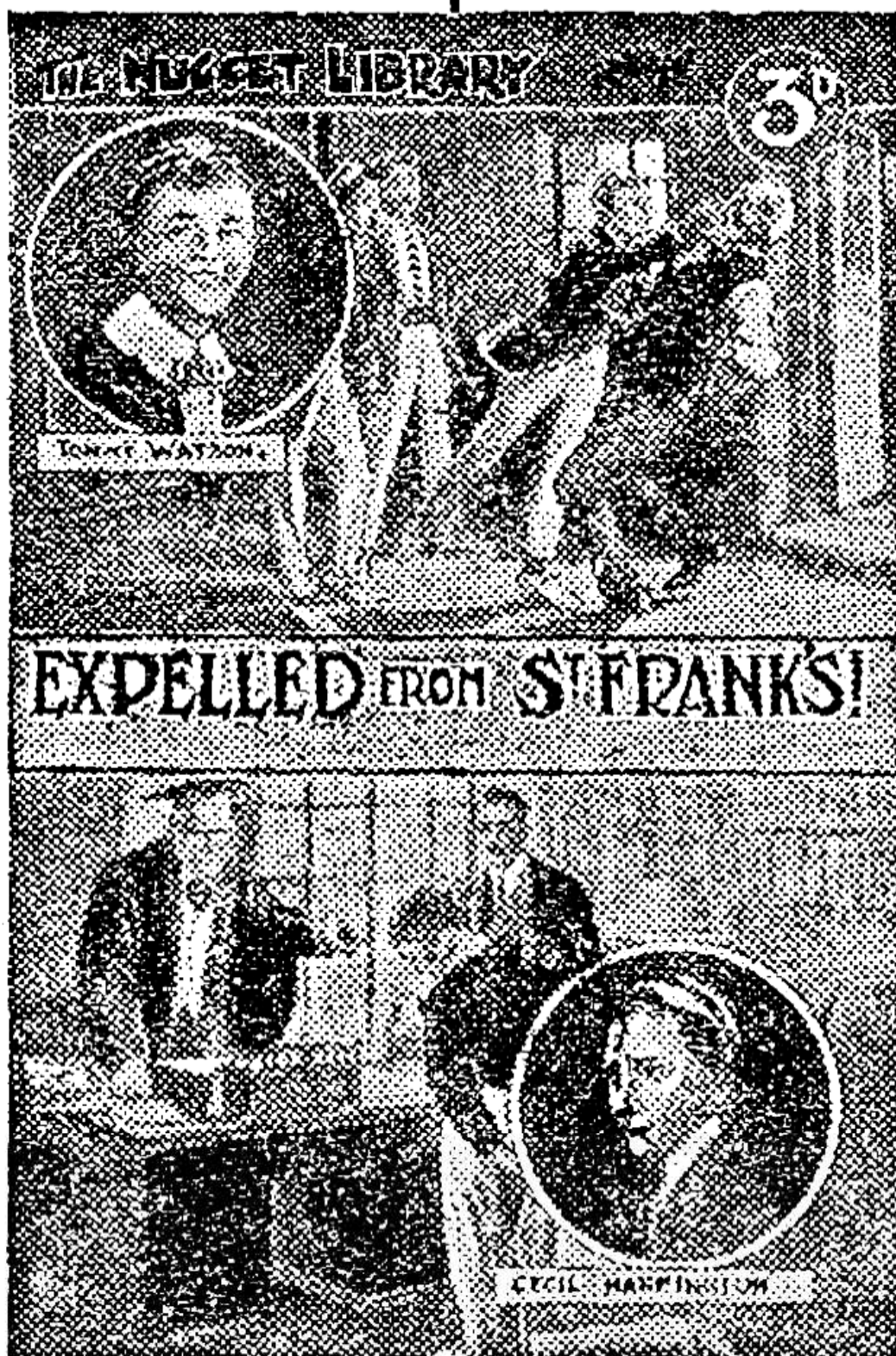
THE EDITOR.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Beginning of an Adventure.

THE funds of No. 3 Study were in a disastrous condition. There had been a serious deficit in the budget for the past three weeks. Afternoon teas had dwindled to cocoa and condensed milk, with plain bread-and-butter. Bloater-paste, ice-creams, and such delicacies were dreams of the past. School-shop had cut off further supplies till their account had been settled. In short, there was a famine in the land.

But that was not the worst of the trouble. In their days of prosperity No. 3 had been rash enough to desire and surreptitiously order an air-gun from old Crooks, the shop-keeper in the village. The arrangement was that they paid him five shillings down with the order, twelve more were to be forthcoming on the delivery of the gun and slugs when Crooks had obtained them from London.

Crooks was a thorough-paced old villain, who made a fairly good thing out of the school; but his terms were strict cash and if that was not forthcoming, he invariably went straight to the Head with a long-winded complaint which caused unpleasantness.

The gun was due to arrive. No. 3's combined wealth amounted to something in the neighbourhood of fourpence-halfpenny. The exact sum was doubtful, as Prosser was supposed to have mislaid two coppers through having a hole in his Sunday suit pocket. Anyhow, it was neither twelve shillings nor one, and black trouble loomed ahead, air-guns being strictly forbidden.

"I tell you what it is, old man," said Raughton, the other No. 3, in a tone of gloomy hopefulness. "Crooky will never dare to complain to the Head, 'cos guns are taboo, an' he'd be forbidden to deal with us at all if it came out."

"Rats!" said Prosser. "Crooky'll stick on the injured innocent dodge, an' all about his bein' an old man who fought for his country in the Crimea, and the Head'll lam into us for corruptin' him."

That afternoon they met Crooky in the outer shrubbery, and temporised with him.

At first he was furious, but at last they obtained four days' respite in which to raise the wind.

He showed them the gun, but on so account would he allow them to handle it; also he raised the price a shilling, in view of having to wait.

By the evening's post Prosser wrote a heartrending appeal to his uncle, who was generous on occasion. It was really an artistic piece of literary work.

Raughton stood over him, and helped him out with some of the longer words, which looked well, though they were occasionally vague as to meaning.

St. Armon's is a very old school. It was a grammar school as long ago as Queen Anne's time, and was spoken of in local guide-books as one of the finest specimens of the architecture of that period in the country.

From time to time the original building had been added to, some of the extensions being comparatively modern.

No. 3 Study, with a half a dozen more, was situated in what had once been the attics of the old house—weird, creaky places, with flush windows just under the roof.

They had been patched and repaired from time to time, as age and bear-fights chipped pieces off here and there; but there was a quantity of the original woodwork left.

St. Armon's was proud of its antiquity; it also boasted of no fewer than three ghosts, one an old admiral, who haunted the stairs, apparently for no particular reason, and whom it was averred the Head constantly met late at nights.

The second ghost took the form of a "doom-tree," from which a branch fell whenever a member of the original owner's family died. This stood at the far end of the avenue on the right.

The third was little more than a vague story of some gambling episode in the time of the Georges, which resulted in sudden death and murder, and the disappearance of a large sum of money. Details were hard to come by. But if you laughed at the story in the presence of a St. Armon's boy, he became either icily polite, if you were a stranger, or endeavoured to drive belief into

you with directness and brute force if you were intimate.

Ghosts are scarce, so perhaps St. Armon's touchiness on the subject is pardonable.

Crooky and the gun were due again on the Thursday afternoon. The interval was spent by Prosser and Raughton in hungry suspense. Study tea had been abolished by mutual consent. The cats, for whom the gun was chiefly desired, basked in security on the roof of the schoolhouse opposite, and still no answer came from Prosser's uncle.

Thursday morning came. Despair reigned, for the post had brought no letter. The second post, however, sent Prosser racing up the study stairs flourishing a postal order.

"Half or whole?" asked Raughton, struggling to seem indifferent.

"Whole!" panted Prosser. "One whole. large, fat sovereign! Good old Uncle Ned! I'm off to the Bussar's to change it."

"Don't get silver!" shouted Raughton after him warningly.

He was wise in his generation, and knew that school-shop plus a healthy hunger might still prove their downfall if once they tampered with their capital.

"Right-ho!" came the answer, and Prosser clattered off.

He was back in under five minutes, with the coin tightly clenched in his fist.

Upper School always worked in their studies in the afternoon, so No. 3 held consultation in private.

"Behind the ear's as good as anywhere," said Raughton thoughtfully, slipping a Cicero off the window-sill with his elbow.

"Rot!" said Prosser. "My cousin, the chap who's in the Service, he's done a lot of big-game shootin'. He says behind the shoulder's the only sure place; gets the heart and lungs, and— Golly! I've dropped it!"

There was a metallic clink and a glint of yellow metal as the precious coin rolled wildly over the uneven floor. Prosser grabbed. Raughton endeavoured to do the same, touched the coin with his foot, and sent it gyrating off on a new course. It caught the mouse-eaten wainscoting, quivered over a crack, wobbled, and disappeared.

"You silly ass!" said Prosser.

"I didn't let it fall, anyway. Let's try and prise that board up. I've marked the spot."

They got the head of an iron golf-club in the crack, and Raughton armed himself with a poker from the stove outside. The wood was old, and the board gave with a loud crack.

"Lucky No. 4's an Army class!" said Prosser.

Army class had to go to form in the afternoon. They wrenched the board away, and the one next it, peering anxiously among the dusty, worm-eaten rafters for the

missing coin. They could not see it anywhere.

"Must have rolled," grunted Raughton. "Shift back that rug, old man; we'll have another board up."

Rip came the third, and, the spirit of destruction being strong upon them, another and another followed.

"My Christian aunt, what's this?" cried Raughton. "There's a jolly big hole here, or something."

The last two boards had disclosed a square opening, partially covered by a worm-eaten old trapdoor, which had fallen away, hanging only by a single hinge, and jammed askew.

There was an iron ring in the near side, which they tugged at, and the trap came away bodily, leaving an opening two feet square.

"Those look like steps, or something," said Raughton again. "Here, give us a hand, old man. I'm goin' down."

"May be rotten," said Prosser. "Hang on; I'll get a candle. Rummy show, isn't it?"

They got a candle tied on to a piece of string, and, with reminiscences of a stinks lecture, lowered it down first.

It burnt clearly and brightly enough, and they could see perpendicular wooden steps leading down for ten feet at least.

"Haul up!" said Raughton. "I'll take it in my hand. Here goes!"

He slid gingerly over the edge, feet foremost, and began to descend. When his head was three feet below floor-level, he yelled to Prosser, and he in turn began to lower himself.

A loud crack from beneath warned him that a step had given way, but no serious damage was done.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Great Find.

DOWN and down they went—twenty, twenty-two, twenty-three steps, a good foot apart—and then a hail from Raughton warned him that he was near the bottom. The next moment they were standing side by side in a narrow passage-way which branched off at right angles from the stairs.

"Where the deuce are we?" asked Prosser.

"Don't know. Somewhere on a level with the Head's rooms, I should say. Take the candle, and hold it higher."

The flickering rays showed them a few feet of passage, with roughly finished brick-and-plaster walls.

"Deuce of a rummy place!" whispered Prosser, craning forward.

Presently, very faintly, there came to them a muffled sound which reverberated through

the passage-way, producing a curious buzzing in the ears. They both checked, wondering what it could be, and, if the truth be told, a little frightened. Suddenly Raughton burst into a subdued giggle.

"It's school-bell—four o'clock. My aunt, it made me feel queer all over for a bit! Sounds jolly odd in here." He gave a prolonged whistle. "I'd forgotten all about the money. We're due to meet old Crooky at half-past. An' worse than that, our study door's open, and any idiot passing will see that the floor's up. There'll be ructions!"

"No, there won't. Army class have extra prep. on till five, and we can cut back by then. We must chance Crooky. Come on!"

They pushed a little way further, till Raughton stumbled over something, and nearly fell. They held the candle down, and could see a dusty, grimy-looking object which glinted dully.

Raughton picked it up, giving it a tap against the wall to shake the dust off it. It gave out a metallic ring, and at the same time he gave a low cry of astonishment.

"By Jove, old man, look at this! It's a sword one of those slim chaps used to fight duels with! Look, it's got jewels let into the hilt of it, and it's been gilded, I think. I know the kind of thing; we've some at home. This is a jolly swagger one, though. The chap that had this must have been no end of a big bug! It's rusty, too—all the lower part. I wonder——"

"Blood!" whispered Prosser excitedly. "He'd killed somebody with it, an' done a bolt along here, droppin' the sword in a funk or a hurry."

Two yards farther the passage widened out into a small room, ten feet square, with a ceiling so low that they could touch it by raising a hand at half-arm stretch.

Accustomed as their eyes had become to the narrow passage, they could not at first take in their larger surroundings.

Prosser held the candle, Raughton carried the sword, which he held with the point advanced.

Suddenly he gave a cry, and hit out wildly. Prosser caught the alarm, and, in endeavouring to spring aside, lost his hold on the candle, which fell to the floor, and went out, plunging them in darkness. By instinct they kept together, and backed up against the wall.

"What—what is it?" asked Prosser shakily.

Raughton pulled himself together with an effort.

"I don't know," he answered uncertainly. "It's there—over there in the corner, whatever it is. Gave me a deuce of a jump. Haven't you got any matches? We must have a light. This darkness is making me a regular funk!"

After a deal of groping and fumbling, Prosser found a couple of wax vestas in his waistcoat-pocket, and struck one on the brickwork. At first his hand was so shaky that the flame gave little or no light; at length, however, it burnt up sufficiently to enable them to find the candle-end and light it. Raughton sheltered it with his hand, for it was guttering badly in the draught from the passage, and then held it out towards the far corner.

The first glimpse showed them a dark, huddled mass on the floor, which resolved itself into all that remained of a dead man's figure. The body had wasted away till it was simply skin and bone. He was lying on his back, with arms splayed out. Just beyond the skinny clawlike hand lay a broken sword, snapped three inches below the hilt. His clothes, which were thickly covered with fine dust, had once been rich brocaded silk. He was in breeches and stockings, and some dirty-looking wisps round the neck and wrists had once been ruffles of costly Mechlin lace. The flickering light caused the jewels in his shoe-buckles to glitter brightly.

The two boys tiptoed nearer.

"See," whispered Prosser, "he was killed! Look at that stain on his chest!"

Raughton relaxed his grip on the sword. The means of the man's death was obvious, remembering the rusty blade.

"By Jove, look there, too! Money—heaps of money!"

By the dead man's side were two small sacks or bags. One of them had burst open, and a great pile of gold coins showed dully.

Raughton bent down and picked up the nearest sack. It was filled with spade guineas, and was so heavy that he nearly dropped it in sheer surprise.

"You take the other, old man!" he said. "Let's get out of this. We must go to the Head straight away. Ugh! It's ghastly, isn't it?"

The candle was burning low as they hurried back. Then, having replaced the loose boards, and covered them with a rug, they marched down to the Head's rooms, full of dust and importance, each carrying a bag. They were admitted after a little delay.

The Head was in a distinctly bad temper, and loathed untidiness. But when he heard their story, and saw the spade guineas which they emptied out on the study table, irritation gave place to astonishment, and he questioned them eagerly. At the end he himself and one of the other masters made a personal inspection, under Raughton's guidance. When they emerged once more,

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY.....PRICE 2:

he asked Raughton for the key of No. 3 Study.

"I shall have to lock you out of house and home, I'm afraid, till this has been arranged, and the poor man down there properly disposed of. It's most extraordinary—most extraordinary! There must be over five thousand pounds' worth of gold there! I'll take charge of it for the time being. By the way, Prosser, did you find the sovereign, after all?"

"No, sir."

"Humph! Well, I suppose this money is all treasure trove, in which case you will get a percentage of it, which will make you

budding millionaires till school-shop gets the benefit. Meanwhile, I dare say you could do with a portion on account—eh? In my younger days sovereigns were scarce; I don't suppose they're any more plentiful now. This is on account, mind!"

And, smiling, he handed them each a sovereign from his pocket.

The true story was never discovered; but later, when the ownership of the treasure was settled, they each received a hundred pounds as their reward.

As it was, they raced off to pacify the indignant Crooky, who had been waiting over an hour.

THE END.

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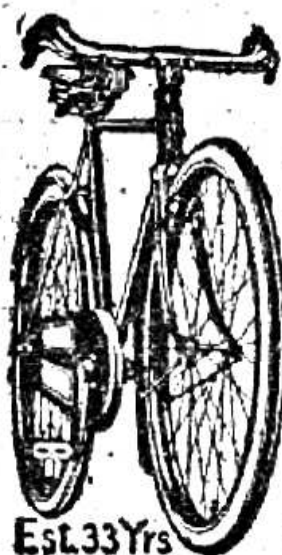
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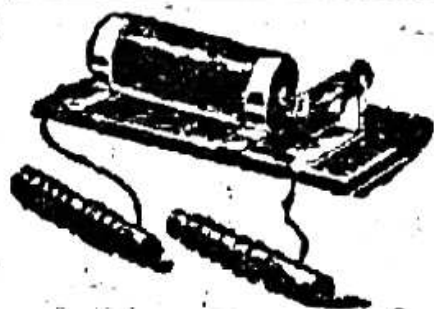
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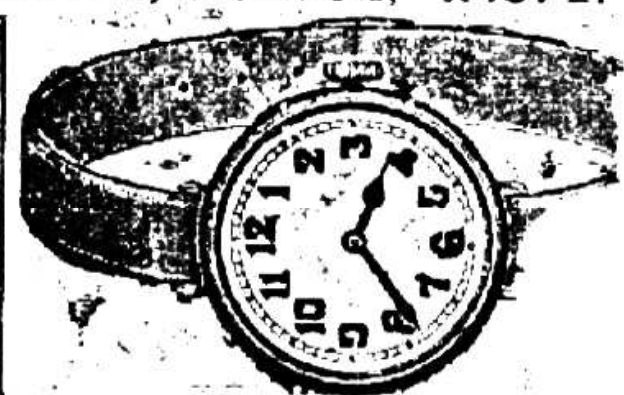
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