FUN WITH THE **SPORTS FIENDS!** LIVELY YARN INSIDE!

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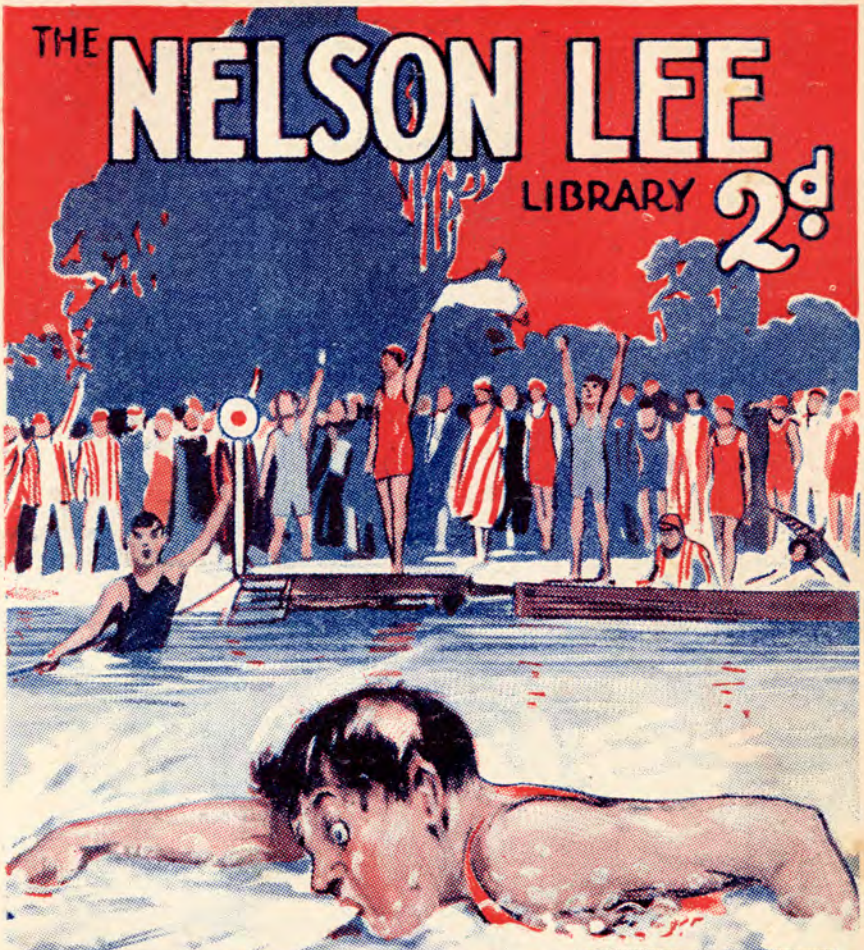
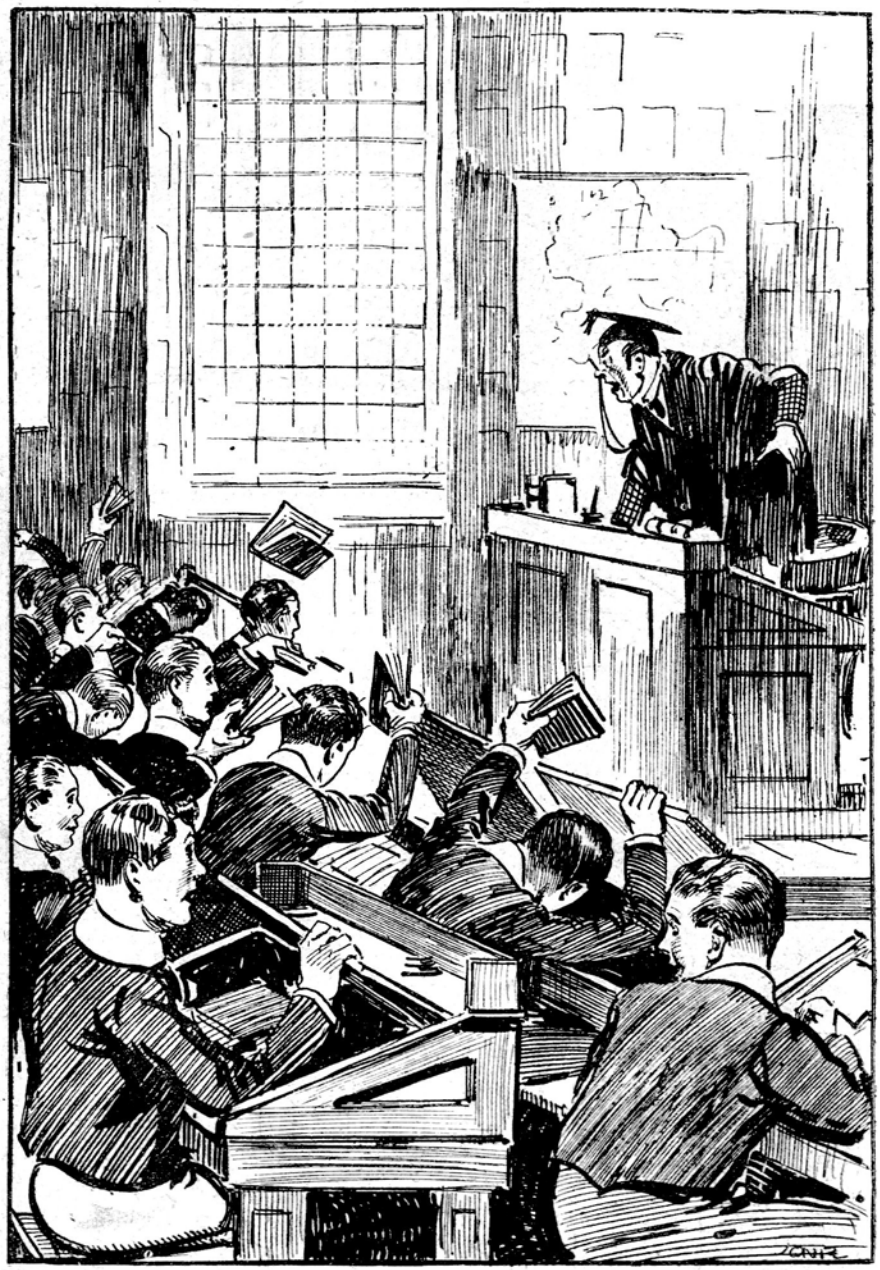


HANDFORTH MAKES A SPLASH — BUT WILLY GETS THERE FIRST!
(See this week's Rousing Long Complete School Yarn.)

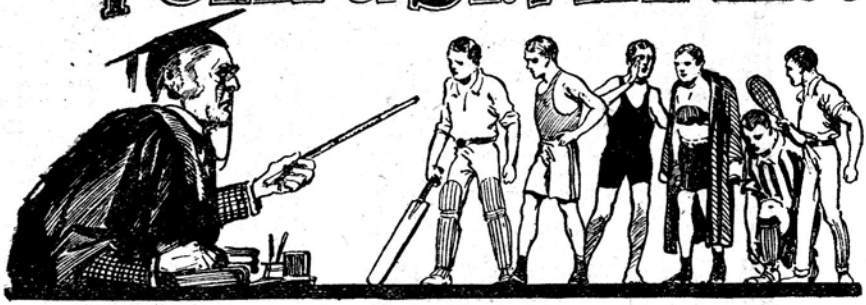
THE FOLLY OF St. FRANK'S!

New Series No. 3. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. May 15th, 1926.



"We will take geography!" announced Mr. Crowell harshly, and then things happened. Every fellow in the detained Remove closed his books with tremendous force, crashed up the cover of his desk, and then slammed it down with a terrific bang! Mr. Crowell stood aghast at the uproar.

THE FOLLY OF ST. FRANK'S!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

"Sports maniacs!" is what Mr. Crowell calls the Remove, and he is determined to break them in. Read how Handforth & Co. defied him in this stunning long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

TROUBLE IN THE REMOVE FORM-ROOM.

A BUZZ filled the air.

It was the loud, persistent hum of conversation. Everybody in the Remove Form-room at St. Frank's was apparently engaged in the task of saying as much as he possibly could before Mr. Crowell arrived.

Morning lessons were about to begin, and the Form-master was a minute late—quite an unusual event for the punctual and punctilious Mr. Crowell. As a general rule, he was at his desk while the Form was marching in.

The May morning was bright and sunny, with occasional patches of cloud and a light shower at intervals, as though April had overstayed her visit. The Remove felt that it was little short of a crime to remain indoors on such a morning.

Hardly any fellow was in his correct place. Dick Hamilton, the popular skipper, was talking earnestly with Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell. Tregellis-West and Watson were arguing heatedly with Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. The celebrated Edward Oswald Handforth was not satisfied with mere talk. He was in the act of rolling up his sleeves, and Church and McClure, his long-suffering chums, were urging him to keep cool. Their anxiety regarding their leader's temperature was not entirely disinterested, since they were the objects of Handforth's war-like preparations.

"Handy, old man, keep calm!" said Church hastily. "Crowell may be here at any minute, and if he catches you like this he'll probably shove you in extra lesson for the afternoon."

"And it's a half-holiday to-day," added McClure anxiously. "There's a House match on. We can't afford to take risks——"

"You can't spoof me with these arguments," interrupted Handforth grimly. "You've just told me, Walter Church, that I don't stand an earthly in the swimming contest! You'll either apologise, or I'll slaughter you!"

Church brightened up.

"Good!" he said promptly. "I apologise."

"Eh?"

"I apologise."

"You—you howling ass!" roared Handforth. "Now I can't biff you!"

He looked very indignant, but Church merely smiled. McClure, greatly relieved, winked, and thoughtfully stroked his chin.

"Of course, Handy, Church's right, you know," he said. "You don't stand the ghost of a chance in these swimming races."

"What?" gasped Handforth. "Are you asking for a black eye, too? Take that back, you fathead, or I'll smash you!"

"All right," said McClure. "I'll take it back."

"You—you silly chumps, you're just trying to pull my leg!" snorted Handforth, grasping the idea with more speed than usual. "I'm not going to take any notice of your apologies, and I mean to biff you!"

"Steady!" panted Church. "Old Crowell, you know——"

"Blow Crowell!"

Fortunately for Church and McClure, a sudden note of alarm from the doorway caused everybody to scamper to their places, and the next moment Mr. Crowell strode in, just in time to see the last of the scamper.

"As I thought!" he exclaimed acidly. "It is impossible for me to be a few seconds late without the whole Form behaving like irresponsible children. Silence! Do you hear me, boys? Silence!"

The buzz of low talk died down, and Mr. Crowell closed the door. He was obviously in one of his short tempers—caused, in the first place, no doubt, by his own lateness. He was a man who hated to set a bad example to his boys, and he was angry with himself for having made even a minor slip.

"Better look out for squalls this morning!" murmured Reggie Pitt. "We can't afford to take any chances."

"No fear!" agreed Singleton. "It's a fine day, and we've got a big programme on. What with the House match this afternoon, and the swimming practice in the evening, we mustn't take any risks of detention."

Mr. Crowell rapped his desk.

"Singleton!" he said tartly. "You are talking!"

"Sorry, sir," said the Hon. Douglas hastily.

"As you are not the only one, I shall not single you out for special punishment," continued the Form-master. "It seems to me that there is a great deal of talk generally. It has been growing worse every day this term. I won't have it! Unless there is absolute silence in this room, I shall be compelled to take drastic steps to ensure obedience."

The Form became very quiet, and the morning's work commenced. Most of the fellows brought their books out wearily; they considered all lessons an imposition. Any decent Form-master ought to have known that this was a very special term.

Lessons were all very well in their way, but why on earth couldn't Mr. Crowell realise that sport was the chief business of St. Frank's at the moment? Hardly anybody was thinking of studying. From the fags upwards, the entire school was devoting itself to sport.

The schoolboy Test Matches alone were of paramount importance. The idea had been Dick Hamilton's originally, and St. Frank's had entered into it with full-blooded enthusiasm. England v. Australia at St. Frank's! Why, the very thought of it was enough to thrill a fellow!

And this year, too, of all years, the famous Australians were over here, to test their prowess against England's best! The series of schoolboy matches was resolving itself into a form of minor counterpart of the real thing. The first match in the series of five had already been played, and St. Frank's—representing England—had just managed to win. The interest in the next match was already growing apace, although it wasn't due to come off till the following week.

All the games were being played at St. Frank's. The Australian team was gathered together from other famous public schools—Radcliffe, Hazlehurst, Helmford, Bannington, and such-like rival colleges.

And, in addition to this Test Match fever, there was the sports carnival. Each House was striving its utmost to win the various honours. By this time the fellows had had sufficient opportunities of getting into their stride. Swimming was the big thing at the moment.

The senior events were not of much interest to the Remove, but the junior swimming races were the talk of the entire Lower School just now. And everybody except the out-and-out slackers were obeying Edgar Fenton's injunction to make every spare minute a sports minute.

Some, indeed, were going too far, and taking the school captain's advice too literally. They were regarding lesson time as sports minutes, too, and this was particularly noticeable where prep. was concerned. For days the juniors had been skipping their prep. badly, spending their time out of doors till daylight failed.

Even such slackers as Forrest & Co., of Study A, were being compelled to put in a certain amount of time at sports. None were allowed to escape. Even though they stood no chance of winning an event, they were forced to enter. And the cads didn't like it in the least.

"A lot may depend on this match this afternoon," murmured Tommy Watson, while Mr. Crowell was at the blackboard. "Fenton's jolly keen on it, and he's going to watch every minute of the game."

"Yes, he's on the look-out for the best men for the next Test team," agreed Dick Hamilton nodding. "Some of the chaps are saying that the team'll be unaltered. But I don't believe it. The Selection Committee will probably drop one or two men, and give somebody else a chance."

House matches were not usually regarded as highly important at St. Frank's. But this term they were becoming quite vital. For every player felt that he had to do his utmost. Those who were fairly safe for the next Test Match were afraid of losing their chances, and the others were just dying to distinguish themselves and to impress the Selection Committee. So the usual interest in House games was enormously increased.

At St. Frank's the best Eleven that a House could provide was utilised, irrespective of age or Form. Juniors were just as eligible as seniors, and there were quite a number of juniors in both the Ancient House and West House teams. It was these two Houses which were to cross swords that afternoon.

On the next half-holiday there would be a match between the Modern House and the East House—and Fenton would watch this

keenly, too. He was out to obtain the best possible Eleven for the next Test Match.

"Very nice!" said Mr. Crowell abruptly. "Very gratifying indeed."

The Remove suddenly sat up and took notice. While Mr. Crowell's back had been turned, practically everybody had been whispering, and the Form-master had deliberately delayed his task at the blackboard so that they should have plenty of opportunity to get thoroughly going. Just before turning, in fact, the room had hummed with the low throb of suppressed conversation. But now it was deadly silent.

"Thank you, boys," said Mr. Crowell, with dangerous smoothness. "I am sorry to interrupt your little confabs, but we are here for the purpose of learning arithmetic."

The Form said nothing, and Mr. Crowell changed his air.

"I am growing tired of this persistent inattention," he went on harshly. "The very moment I turn my back you whisper together, and completely forget the lesson. Instead of concentrating upon arithmetic, you allow your thoughts to stray to such insignificant trivialities as swimming races, and football and cricket matches. My patience is rapidly becoming exhausted."

The Remove looked highly indignant. Insignificant trivialities! Cricket and swimming!

"I am determined to check this ridiculous sports madness," continued Mr. Crowell grimly. "Yes, that is what it amounts to, and the plainer I speak the better you will understand me. I am a keen advocate of sports, but when sports are indulged in to excess they become dangerous. Unless this insanity is curbed, I shall adopt measures of the most drastic type."

His words had become curt and sharp, and he suddenly swung round on Reggie Pitt.

"Now we will continue our work," he said tersely. "Pitt, stand up, and let me see how your mental arithmetic has progressed."

CHAPTER 2.

MR. CROWELL COMES DOWN HEAVILY.

REGGIE PITT made a poor showing. Normally, he was one of the keenest fellows in the Remove, but in answer to Mr. Crowell's lightning problems he failed badly. But the Form-master had certainly gone out of his way to give Reggie some twisters.

"As I suspected," he said sourly. "You have evidently neglected your preparation, Pitt. I doubt if there is a boy in this room who has not neglected his preparation. Did you spend a full hour last evening on your lessons?"

"Have a heart, sir," protested Pitt. "It was a lovely evening last night, and most of us were on the river until——"

"On the river!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "Upon my word! Is that any excuse for neglecting your work? You seem to imagine that a fine evening justifies complete disregard of your preparation. How much time did you spend at your work last evening, Pitt?"

"About twenty minutes, sir."

"Twenty minutes!" thundered the Form-master. "No wonder you are hopelessly unprepared this morning. Sit down. You may be thankful that I still have a little patience left. Handforth!"

"Hallo! My turn in!" said Handforth briskly. "Where's my bat?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth started violently and turned red. He came to himself with a jerk. He had been day-dreaming, imagining himself waiting in the pavilion at the forthcoming Test Match. England was doing badly, and the team was relying upon Handforth to pull the game round. Edward Oswald had been so obsessed by his thoughts that he had taken Mr. Crowell's call for something quite different.

"Sorry, sir!" he gasped. "I—I was thinking——"

"Obviously, Handforth," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "You were thinking of cricket."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been thinking of cricket all the time?"

"No, sir."

"I am glad to hear that——"

"I've been thinking of the swimming, sir," explained Handforth. "If we're pretty keen on the practice, there's no reason why the Ancient House shouldn't pull off the swimming honours——"

A yell went up from every West House junior in the room.

"Silence!" stormed Mr. Crowell angrily. "Good heavens! Are my words absolutely useless? Handforth, you will write me a hundred lines for inattention, and if there is any more of this sports insanity I shall detain the whole Form."

"You can't detain us for to-day, sir," said Handforth. "There's an important match on this afternoon, and where would the seniors be without us?"

"Sit down, Handforth, and be quiet," snapped Mr. Crowell. "I am sick and tired of this continuous strife. It rests in your own hands, boys, to put things right."

So the Remove settled to work again, dimly conscious of the fact that Mr. Crowell was doing his best to avert trouble. But hardly anybody could understand why the Form-master was looking so testy. Wasn't sport the one theme which eclipsed all others?

As the morning progressed, Mr. Crowell's patience became more and more exhausted. There was scarcely a fellow who showed any real interest in his work. Even the best scholars were becoming slovenly and neglectful. They were regarding lessons with impatience, and it was a growing habit in the Remove to watch the clock. And even the weather had a big effect upon work—such an

effect that Mr. Crowell could not fail to notice it.

While the sun shone, there was a certain amount of peace in the Form-room. But if a cloud came over the sky, there were anxious glances at the windows, whispered comments, worried expressions of alarm. And if a few raindrops pattered against the windows, the fellows became almost frantic.

It was all very disturbing to a strict disciplinarian of Mr. Crowell's nature. It was the utter lack of concentration which angered him. While the boys were in his class-room, he demanded that they should devote themselves to work. But it was obvious as daylight that they worked with their thoughts straying to the weather, and to cricket and other outdoor pastimes.

Mr. Crowell didn't care two straws about the forthcoming House match. During the afternoon, when it was the correct time for cricket, he might possibly relax, and even take an interest in watching the game. But during the hours for study, Mr. Crowell demanded that study should be given full attention.

The Remove was particularly affected by the match, too, for the Remove consisted solely of Ancient House and West House fellows—and these were the two Houses concerned in the game.

If anything happened to prevent the Remove playing that day, there would be serious complications, for both Fenton and Morrow were relying upon the Removites for their respective teams. Morrow was the head boy of the West House, and naturally the captain of all House cricket.

Upon the whole, Mr. Crowell was very patient. He understood how completely the sports fever had gripped his boys, and he made every possible allowance. But there was a limit to his endurance, and it arrived during the last lesson of the morning. The subject happened to be geography, and the particular country under notice at the moment was, unfortunately, Australia.

"Tell me, De Valerie, what is the length of the Murray River?" asked Mr. Crowell. "And where does it rise?"

Cecil De Valerie started.

"River, sir?" he repeated blankly. "Oh, yes! You mean the Murray? Seven hundred miles, sir——"

"Seven hundred miles!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "Good gracious! An infant in a preparatory school would know better! And so do you, De Valerie, only you are forgetting everything you ever learnt! The Murray River rises in the Munion Range, and has a length of one thousand three hundred miles."

"Yes, sir," said De Valerie.

"This river enters the sea by means of Lake Alexandrina and Encounter Bay. Port Elliot is quite close——"

"My hat!" ejaculated Church.

"Well, Church?"

"Nun-nothing, sir," stammered Church. "Only those Bayliss chaps, of the River House School, were born at Port Elliot."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Crowell coldly. "And may I ask who these 'Bayliss chaps' happen to be?"

"They're brothers, sir—Australians."

"As you have already informed me that they were born at Port Elliot, I can hardly fail to guess that they are Australians," said Mr. Crowell. "But why they should be dragged into this lesson I cannot possibly understand. Are they special friends of yours?"

"They're members of the Australian Eleven, sir," explained Church. "Don't you remember how one of them was clean bowled by Browne last week——"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Crowell, his manner becoming violent. "Cricket again! Even when we are attempting to concentrate upon geography, you insist upon bringing cricket into the conversation!" He glared at Church. "I won't have it!" he roared. "Another mention of cricket, Church, and I will cane you!"

"It was only because you said something about Port Elliot, sir——"

"That's enough!" snapped the Form-master. "Now, let us get on with our work. Grey, you are not attending! Tell me the names of the most important lakes in South Australia.

Somehow or other, Jack Grey managed to scrape past, naming Lake Eyre, Lake Torrens, and Lake Frome.

Then Mr. Crowell switched abruptly across to New South Wales, and was anxious to know where the Hunter River entered the Pacific.

"I'll tell you, sir," said Jerry Dodd, standing up.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Dodd!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "Being an Australian boy, you naturally know these facts. Handforth, where does the Hunter River enter the Pacific?"

"Eh? I—I mean—I'm not quite sure, sir," replied Handforth, startled. "Isn't it in Botany Bay, near Sidney?"

"No, it is not!" retorted Mr. Crowell. "The Hunter River finds its outlet near the important town of Newcastle, in the Hunter and Manning Division——"

"Newcastle, sir!" said Handforth eagerly. "That's where Rogers comes from."

"Rogers!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

"One of the Aussie chaps from Redcliffe, sir——"

"This—this is beyond all endurance!" panted Mr. Crowell furiously. "You are all the same! There is not one boy in this room less blameworthy than the rest. Ever since we started work there has been nothing but unpleasantness! One long tale of incompetence and ignorance! One long series of annoying interruptions! It can be explained in one sentence. You are all sports mad, and your lessons mean nothing to you!"

The indignant Form-master glared at the Remove.

"You cannot even answer a geography question without bringing in the name of some cricketer!" he went on hotly. "My forbearance is at an end. Unless you are

made to realise that you are in this school for the main purpose of study, you will continue this—this unhappy mania. Every boy in this class will attend extra lesson this afternoon! The whole Form is detained!"

CHAPTER 3.

BEYOND ENDURANCE!

THE Remove fairly jumped. Detention! Extra lesson for the entire Form for the whole afternoon! The sudden news that Japan had been swallowed up in an earthquake would not have stirred the Remove as this sentence did. Mr. Crowell, too, made the pronouncement in his most determined manner. There had been an air of finality about his words that the Remove knew only too well.

Dick Hamilton was the first to protest.

"I say, sir, you don't mean that, do you?" he asked quickly.

"I do!" snapped Mr. Crowell.

"As Form captain, sir, I'd like to protest," went on Dick. "You know we've got an important match on to-day——"

"A match you consider far more important than work, Hamilton," said Mr. Crowell grimly. "Well, I wish every boy in this room to understand thoroughly that geography is of far more importance than cricket. This afternoon you will devote yourselves entirely to arithmetic and geography—and I hope the lesson will be an effective one. This slackness shall be cured once and for all."

"Oh!" groaned the Form.

"I shall not alter my decision," said Mr. Crowell coldly. "My mind is made up, and you might as well sit down, Hamilton."

"But, look here, sir——"

"That is enough!"

"I'd like to say, sir——"

"Enough!" roared Mr. Crowell furiously. "Unless you sit down at once, Hamilton, I will cane you!"

Dick cast a look of hopelessness at the other fellows, and sat down. Every face was expressive of alarm and dismay—and indignation was rapidly showing itself, too. It was felt that Mr. Crowell had gone far beyond the bounds of reason.

"Hold on, sir!" gasped Handforth, jumping up. "You don't seem to understand what it means! Fenton and Morrow are relying on us for this afternoon. How can the Ancient House expect to win without me in the team?"

"I am not interested in the Ancient House team, or in you either, Handforth," barked the Form-master. "I only know that I am going to cane you. I have already commanded silence, and you have disobeyed me. Stand out here."

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "But—but——"

"Here, sir!" shouted Mr. Crowell.

He wielded the cane with all his strength—and Edward Oswald Handforth looked quite bewildered as he received the punishment. Not that it hurt him much; a few swishes with the cane were nothing to the robust Handy.

"Now, sir, go back to your place!" panted Mr. Crowell. "And the next boy who mentions the word cricket will be caned even more severely! I want no further protests—my mind is made up."

The Remove hardly knew how it got through the remainder of the lesson, but there were no further interruptions. Mr. Crowell had made himself understood at last, but he had utterly failed in his real object.

He had intended this as a lesson to the Remove. He wanted to bring the fellows to their senses—to a full realisation of the fact that they were at St. Frank's for the purpose of studying. Instead of that, Mr. Crowell had aroused a tornado of indignation.

His true motive was entirely misinterpreted. Practically everybody believed that he had deliberately condemned the Remove to extra lesson out of spite. He had been in one of his tantrums, and had given way to it. For the juniors were in such a state of mind that it was incredible to them that any Form-master could be down on sports. Even Dick Hamilton, level-headed and cool, was more or less affected by the general sports fever.

"It's no good growling, you chaps—it's no good kicking up a din," he said grimly, after the Remove had poured out from the School House, and was holding an indignation meeting in the Triangle. "We can't defy old Crowell. There's no cricket for us this afternoon."

Handforth stared in amazement.

"You're willing to knuckle under?" he gasped.

"It's not a question of knuckling under, you ass!" retorted Dick. "We can't defy our own Form-master, can we?"

"In a case like this, he ought to be defied," roared Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

"We're not going to stand it!"

"No fear!"

There was a perfect roar of excited voices.

"Don't be mad!" snapped Dick Hamilton. "Crowell will be waiting for us in the Form-room this afternoon, and if we don't turn up he'll raise a terrific dust. We shall be reported to the Head, and——"

"And the Head will quash the sentence!" said De Valerie warmly. "He's bound to! He'll see the unreasonable nature of it, and tick old Crowell off."

The Remove skipper smiled indulgently.

"Don't you believe it," he retorted. "The Head's not going to take sides against one of his own masters. You all feel like defying Crowell—I feel like it, if it comes to that. But, if you do anything ramheaded, you'll regret it. Instead of being detained for this afternoon, we shall all be gated for two or three weeks, and have every half-holiday docked, too. The best thing we can do is to take our gruel calmly."

"He's right, you chaps," said Reggie Pitt sombrely. "There's no sense in cutting off

our noses to spite our faces. We're up against a brick wall, and we should only be banging our heads against it if we ignored Crowell's orders. It's extra lesson for us, and good-bye to the House match."

Fortunately, most of the others resigned themselves to this fate. A few of the more excited fellows still talked of defiance, but, as usual, they would do as the majority did, and knuckle under.

As Dick Hamilton had pointed out, there was nothing else for it. The headmaster was bound to uphold his subordinate—for there would be no discipline at all if he countermanded such an order. And it wasn't as though the detention was malicious. Dr. Malcolm Stafford would probably agree very heartily that Mr. Crowell had been thoroughly justified in his action.

The Remove couldn't see it in this way, however.

The fellows felt that they were the victims of ill-temper. And the whole day was wrecked. With no match that afternoon, they would be unable to show Fenton their prowess. And what would Fenton say, anyhow? The match would be utterly ruined. Such fellows as Dick Hamilton, Hussi Kahn, De Valerie, Fullwood, Pitt, Grey, and Handforth were the backbone of the teams. They were juniors, it is true, but they were of immense value to their sides.

There were plenty of fellows in the Remove, too, who had made other plans for the afternoon. The swimming enthusiasts had planned to be on the river. There was a great deal of interest being displayed in the forthcoming swimming contests, and a large number of fellows were keen upon qualifying.

Other juniors had planned bicycle rides, picnics, and similar jaunts. And now everything was squashed. There was scarcely a fellow in the Remove who didn't bubble over with anger and indignation. They quite failed to understand that they were caught in the whirlpool of the sports fever. They regarded Mr. Crowell's action as sheer tyranny, and their feelings towards him were bitter.

But nothing could be done—except talk.

There was plenty of talk—and there were hundreds of wild-cat schemes projected. Edward Oswald Handforth was absolutely determined to interview the headmaster. He informed Church and McClure that he would put the whole affair before Dr. Stafford, and emerge from the Head's presence with full permission for all the members of the two Elevens, at least, to play.

"We don't want to be too unreasonable," said Handforth generously. "We can't expect the Head to knuckle under completely—but he's bound to see reason about this cricket match. After I've put the whole question before him, he'll exempt all the fellows who are booked to play in the match. The Head realises the importance of cricket."

Church shook his head.

"I shouldn't be too optimistic, old man," he said. "In fact, if you'll take my advice you won't go to the Head at all. You'll only get yourself detained for the next half-holiday, too."

"And caned as well," added McClure.

"Birched, you mean," said Church.

Handforth snorted.

"Is that all the faith you've got in my tact?" he demanded scornfully. "All I shall do is to talk to the Head quietly and calmly. An affair of this sort depends upon personality."

"In that case, why not get your minor to take on the job?" asked Church. "Or Browne, of the Fifth? They're both pretty good at that sort of thing. Old Browne could make a chap believe that black's white—and young Willy is so jolly cool that he'd scare the Head out of his wits."

Handforth regarded these suggestions with disdain.

"By George!" he said, staring. "Are you trying to tell me that my minor could beat me at this game? You're dotty! I'll admit Willy's pretty cheeky, but——"

But at that moment Fullwood put his head in the doorway, and Fullwood was grinning.

CHAPTER 4.

EASY GAME.

HANDFORTH was so surprised to see Fullwood grinning that he left his sentence unfinished. Nobody belonging to the Remove had grinned since Mr. Crowell had passed the dread sentence. But Ralph Leslie Fullwood was looking as cheerful as possible.

"Heard the news?" he asked gaily.

"News?" gasped McClure. "What news? You—you don't mean to say that old Crowell has let us off?"

Fullwood shook his head.

"Cheese it!" he protested. "Don't make wild guesses like that. Nothing half so good, but I'll bet you'll be glad to hear it."

"What's the idea of coming here with a grin like a Cheshire cat?" asked Handforth tartly. "I'm just off to interview the Head. You can tell everybody that the trouble's over. I'm going to get this detention quashed——"

"Then it's a jolly good thing I came in," interrupted Fullwood, with relief. "Hamilton's sent the word round that nobody's to say anything about this detention, and he was only just in time. The Head's about the last man in the world we want to tell."

"You ass, I'm going to put all the facts before him——"

"If we have to use chains and padlocks, we'll keep you here!" interrupted Fullwood grimly. "We've just heard that Crowell is going out this afternoon. Had a sudden call, or something, and he's buzzing off at once—before dinner, even."

"Is this the news?" asked Church.

"Of course it is."

"What about the detention?"

"He's instructed a prefect to see that we all turn up for extra lesson," grinned Fullwood. "That's the position, my sons. So

Half dazed with amazement, Edward Oswald Handforth held out his hand. Mr. Crowell wielded the cane with all his strength—but Handy hardly felt the slashing cuts. He was too surprised.

Hamilton's decided to keep mum. We won't even say anything to Fenton or Morrow. No need to worry them over our troubles."

"But if our chaps can't play, Fenton and Morrow will have to be told," said McClure, staring. "I can't see there's much joy. Anyhow, I'm not going crazy with delight. Some of these prefects are worse than old Crowell at extra lesson!"

Fullwood nodded.

"I agree—but we've got Biggleswade," he said calmly.

"Biggleswade!"

"The one and only Biggy!" nodded Ralph Leslie.

Handforth & Co. looked excited. David Biggleswade, of the Sixth, was about the most easy-going prefect in the Ancient House—in fact, in the whole school. He was excessively good-natured, and he had a peculiar habit of forgetting his duties when he presided over extra lesson.

"By George, this is pretty good!" said Handforth, at length. "Old Biggleswade has let me off detention many a time. The ass starts reading a book, as a rule, and forgets all about the chaps he's supposed to look after. It'll be easy."

"I don't know about that," said Church, shaking his head. "When he's got the whole Form to look after it'll be a different thing. Still, he might let the team members out—and that would be something. I'm surprised at old Crowell choosing him."

"I expect it was a question of Hobson's choice," grinned Fullwood. "There aren't many prefects available this afternoon, you know—most of 'em are either playing cricket or busy on some other kind of sport. But old Biggy is so easy-going that Crowell just collared him."

The news was certainly good, and there were immense possibilities.

As Fullwood had said, however, this was not a subject to be generally discussed. It would be far better to keep quiet, and to proceed as though nothing unusual was in the air. The cricketers, at least, were seriously contemplating escape from detention, and if any other master heard of the plot there would be an end to all the hopes.

Even Handforth could see the force of this argument, and he decided—rather grudgingly—to abandon his visit to the Head. And Biggleswade, of the Sixth, was a much sought-after senior. Groups of Removites complimented him upon his health, and expressed the view that he was growing better-looking every day. Compliments were showered upon him generously.

Mr. Crowell, it seemed, had been called away by a telegram. It was a message from one of his relatives, who had fixed an appointment—knowing the day to be a half-holiday—without leaving Mr. Crowell any option. But the Form-master was quite satisfied that Biggleswade would deputise satisfactorily.

As soon as dinner was over, quite a number of fellows changed into flannels, as though the whole afternoon was their own. Extra lesson was supposed to start at two o'clock, but as the match would not begin until two-thirty, there was nothing whatever to worry about.

Prompt to the minute the Remove entered the class-room, and a more meek set of juniors could scarcely be imagined. Biggleswade was already in possession, and he nodded con-

tentedly as the last fellow came in and shut the door.

"All here now?" he asked. "Good! It's a bit of a bore, having to stick indoors on an afternoon like this, but I dare say we shall live through it. Arithmetic first, isn't it? You'd better get your books out, and carry on."

"How is it that you knuckled under so tamely, Bigg?" asked Pitt. "You weren't obliged to take on this duty, were you?"

"Well, not exactly," replied the prefect. "But a fellow can't kick up a fuss when he's asked to do a favour. Crowell's had to go off to meet an aunt, or somebody, and he couldn't leave you fellows to look after yourselves. So I'm here. I was only going to read in a hammock, anyhow."

He opened a book, and prepared to bury himself in it.

"Are we supposed to go ahead now?" asked Handforth.

"Why not?" said Biggleswade. "You don't want me to look after you like a crowd of infants, I suppose? I'll give you an hour of arithmetic, and then you can have a ripping time with the geography."

"What about the House match this afternoon?" asked Dick Hamilton carelessly. "Some of our fellows are down for the game, Biggleswade, and we haven't told Fenton and Morrow anything about this detention."

"You young ass, they'll be wondering where you've got to," said Biggleswade, frowning. "You'd better buzz out, Hamilton, and give them the tip. They'll be able to find substitutes——"

"But why play substitutes when we're available?" asked Dick. "You're not going to tell me, Biggy, that you approve of this detention? I mean, it's a bit thick when a Form-master messes up a cricket match like this!"

Biggleswade put his book down.

"As a matter of fact, I've got a bit of sympathy for you kids," he said generously. "Crowell must have been a bit peeved this morning. Hard lines. But it's no good asking me to let you off. I told Mr. Crowell I'd stay here the whole afternoon—I gave him my word, and I can't break it."

"Did you give him your word that you'd keep us here?"

"He took that for granted," said the prefect, with a grin. "I'm not giving any hints, mind you, but if you cricket men slip out for a drink of water, or something, I might forget to inquire about you if you don't come back. I might, you understand," he added casually, picking up his book again.

Biggleswade was rather keen on sports himself—not as a participator, but in a general sort of way. And if he kept his word and remained in the Form-room all the afternoon, he felt that he would be doing his duty.

And for five minutes the Remove made a fine pretence of hard work.

Then Dick Hamilton gave Reggie Pitt a meaning glance and stood up.

"Mind if I pop out for a drink, Biggy?" he asked.

But Biggleswade was leaning back in his chair, with his feet on Mr. Crowell's desk, thoroughly immersed in his book—which happened to be neither connected with arithmetic nor geography. As a matter of fact, it was one of the latest detective thrillers, and Biggleswade had just reached the most engrossing point.

Hamilton and Pitt strolled out, and grinned at the rest of the Form. Three minutes later Handforth & Co. casually rose in their places, and slid out of the room. McClure wasn't included in the Ancient House Eleven, but he saw no reason why he should remain behind.

Scarcely another minute had elapsed before Jack Grey and Hussi Kahn departed, closely followed by Cecil De Valerie and Fullwood. Even Forrest & Co., the cads of Study A, whose only interest in cricket was when they had a bet on it, took their leave—or, rather, took French leave.

Biggleswade had had no intention of allowing this general exodus. He had intended to wink his eye at the cricketers, for he was keen upon seeing them play in the match, for the game would continue long after this period of detention was over.

The prefect's book held him in its grip. Biggleswade happened to be one of those readers who bury themselves in a story. He had been known to sit in the Senior day-room and read throughout an appalling quarrel, and had known nothing whatever about it later on. Biggleswade became absolutely isolated from his immediate surroundings once he was fairly into a book.

Thus, about fifteen minutes later, when it chanced that he reached the point where a knotty problem was solved, he glanced up at the class. Then he started, abruptly allowing his feet to fall to the floor, and stood up.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Biggleswade blankly.

The Remove Form-room was absolutely empty!

CHAPTER 5.

A SURPRISE FOR MR. CROWELL.

BIGGLESWADE stared at the empty apartment with sudden alarm.

"Here, I say!" he ejaculated. "What the—— Of all the confounded young sweeps! Not one left!"

For the moment Biggleswade was quite concerned. Easy-going though he was, the absence of the entire Form scared him. He could easily have found some excuse for allowing the few cricketers to escape—but the whole Form! This was a bit too steep even for the good-tempered Biggy.

For a moment he thought about dashing out and rounding up the truants. But then he shook his head and frowned. For one thing, it would be a superhuman task to

find the Remove now, let alone compelling the fellows to come back. For another thing, he had given his word to Mr. Crowell that he would remain in the Form-room until four o'clock.

"Oh, well, what's the use?" murmured Biggleswade, shrugging his shoulders. "I didn't give the young asses permission to dodge out like that! They'll have a warm hour the next time I'm in charge of 'em! Young bounders!"

He settled himself in his chair again, and the next chapter proved so entertaining that he not only forgot where he was, but he completely overlooked the match and all uncomfortable thoughts of Mr. Crowell. Not that there was any real cause for worry.

The chances were that Mr. Crowell wouldn't return until long after tea, and it was extremely improbable that he would make any inquiries. Biggleswade would report that he had presided in the Form-room for the stipulated two hours, and nothing more would be said.

Outside, the Remove was gleefully congratulating itself.

The various members of the cricket Elevens were already on Big Side, and the start of the match was imminent. Neither Fenton nor Morrow knew anything about the Remove's detention—or, if they had heard rumours, they had set them down as obviously false, since the Remove was very much in evidence.

The juniors considered that they had won a decisive victory. It was a triumph of Right against Tyranny. They had never considered Mr. Crowell in the light of tyrant hitherto, but when a man deliberately messed up a cricket match he was little better than a Spanish Inquisitor.

"Nothing to worry about now," grinned Handforth as he stood near the pavilion, with his chums and several other juniors. "Even if Crowell finds out the truth, he won't be able to do much. Old Biggy will get it in the neck instead of us."

"Biggy won't mind—and Crowell won't roast him much," said Church. "That's the best of Biggy—he's so jolly good-natured that nobody can actually go for him bald-headed. The way he let us out was heavenly."

Some of the other fellows were already on the river, and some, indeed, were in the river. Forrest & Co. preferred to adjourn to a stuffy study in the East House, to indulge in a card game with Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth. Some fellows have a peculiar idea of amusement.

The afternoon was not very promising for cricket, however. That April look was still very much in evidence. The blue sky could be seen practically everywhere, but ominous clouds came up in continuous battalions—clouds that were fleecy white at the edges but uncomfortably thick-looking in the middle. And when one of these happened to pass directly overheard, a sprinkling of rain fell. Sometimes the sprinkling became quite a brave little shower.

"A few more of those jokers, and the pitch won't be worth much," growled Fenton as he glanced at the sky. "I don't like the look of those dark beggars over to windward. We shall never finish the game to-day if there are a lot of interruptions."

"Well, it's no good kicking," said William Napoleon Browne, the genial captain of the Fifth. "We must learn to take the weather philosophically, Brother Fenton. We have to take it one way or another, so why not philosophically? Gladly would I command the clouds to disperse, but there are limits even to my capabilities."

"Sun's shining now, anyhow," remarked Stevens.

Morrow won the toss, and decided to open the batting with Reggie Pitt as a partner. The Ancient House took the field, and Browne opened the bowling. The game proceeded just as though no such inconvenience as extra lesson were in existence.

Quite half the Remove stood round the ground, watching eagerly—to say nothing of seniors and Fourth-formers and fags. A general interest was being taken in this House match, for it was much more important than the average House match. With the second Test Match looming, Fenton was on the look-out for the best talent for his Eleven.

The teams were the strongest possible. All the best men of the Ancient House were in the field, and the Remove was particularly gratified because of the fine showing that the juniors were making. Nobody believed that the West House stood a chance of winning, for they were facing such famous bowlers as William Napoleon Browne, Jerry Dodd, and Edgar Fenton.

But the West House was quite optimistic, for they had Morrow and Pitt and Hussi Kahn to rely upon. The Indian junior was renowned for his bowling, and he was in particularly good form at present.

The game opened well for the West House, too. Morrow and Pitt showed every sign of making a capital first wicket stand. All Browne's wiles were useless. And Fenton, bowling at the other end, was equally futile. After the sixth over, and when the score-board showed 32 for no wickets, Jerry Dodd went on to bowl, but even he could do nothing to shift the West House batsmen.

And it was just at this period, when the interest in the match was becoming great, that Mr. Crowell arrived on the scene.

Unquestionably this was a misfortune of the first magnitude.

Having conveniently gone out for the afternoon, Mr. Crowell might at least have remained absent until tea-time. One expects such trivial considerations from any Form-master.

But Mr. Crowell's relative—or whoever it had happened to be—had detained the master of the Remove for only an insignificant half-hour. And Mr. Crowell was back again, determined to relieve Biggleswade of his duty. Mr. Crowell was a man who had strong ideas on discipline, and he was rather afraid that Biggleswade might be lax with his boys.

Half-way across the Triangle, Mr. Crowell paused. He had caught a glimpse of the

cricketers on Big Side, and he smiled grimly. The match was evidently going on, in spite of the absent juniors. It was just as well that the young rascals should have this lesson, and learn that they were by no means indispensable.

"H'm! There seems to be quite a little excitement," murmured Mr. Crowell as a round of applause went up. "Perhaps I might be permitted to steal a minute's glance at the game. Biggleswade expects to preside in the Form-room the whole afternoon, so another minute or two can make no difference."

But he only got to the other side of the East Gate before he came to an abrupt halt. The playing fields stretched right in front of him. And there, batting, was Reginald Pitt! And there, in the field, were Dick Hamilton, De Valerie, Fullwood, Handforth! And round the ground were many other members of the Remove.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Crowell blankly.

He was startled and shocked. These boys had all been sentenced to detention! They were supposed to be in the Form-room at this very minute, at extra lesson! And apparently the whole Form was at liberty!

"This—this is outrageous!" gasped Mr. Crowell furiously.

He was positively red with anger, but he did not lose his head. He made no attempt to reproach any of the Remove fellows, and create a scene in public. The very first thing was to see Biggleswade and demand an explanation. The time for action would be later.

The juniors themselves were so engrossed in the game that they had no inkling that Mr. Crowell was back. Such an outrageous thought never occurred to them. It was taken for granted that he would have the decency to remain away for the rest of the afternoon, and by this time all thoughts of detention had vanished.

Mr. Crowell was well on the warpath, however.

His feelings towards Biggleswade were not merely antagonistic, but positively violent. Just like the dolt! Of course, he had gone off, and allowed the Remove to do as it pleased!

"One moment, Handforth minor—one moment!" snapped Mr. Crowell as he passed Willy Handforth in the Triangle. "Where's Biggleswade?"

Willy looked surprised.

"How should I know, sir?" he asked. "I'm not Biggleswade's fag."

"Have you seen him this afternoon?"

"No, sir."

"I might have known it!" snorted Mr. Crowell acidly. "Heaven only knows what you boys are useful for! I have never asked a question and received a satisfactory reply!"

He stalked off, and Willy grinned.

"The rats, my lad," he said, turning to Chubby Heath. "You there see a perfect example of a gentleman with the rats. Somehow, I'm rather glad that I'm not Biggleswade."

Mr. Crowell stormed into the School House, and hurried into the Remove Form-room, although he had no expectation of seeing his quarry. But he did see him. David Biggleswade had finished his book, and he had succumbed to the genial warmth of the May afternoon.

He was fast asleep in Mr. Crowell's chair, with his feet in the centre of Mr. Crowell's desk!

CHAPTER 6.

DRASTIC ACTION!

"UPON my word!" exploded Mr. Crowell.

This was really the last straw! Biggleswade took not the slightest notice of the sudden ejaculation, but remained there, with his mouth wide open and with an expression of peaceful contentment on his long face.

"Biggleswade!" roared Mr. Crowell.

The prefect stirred, opened his eyes, and nearly rolled off the chair. He looked round lazily, and then caught sight of Mr. Crowell. The manner in which he leapt to his feet was an education in acrobatics.

"Biggleswade, what does this mean?" demanded the Form-master tensely.

"I—I—— Why, hallo, it isn't three o'clock yet!" said Biggleswade as he glanced up at the clock. "I mean—— Hardly expected you back so soon, sir."

He paused, feeling somehow that his words had been feeble. But he hardly knew what else to say.

"I left you in charge of my Form, Biggleswade," exclaimed Mr. Crowell grimly. "I extracted a promise from you that you would remain in this room until four o'clock——"

"Well, I'm here, sir."

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "I come back unexpectedly, and what do I find? What, Biggleswade, do I find?" he repeated furiously. "I find the Remove at liberty—some of the boys actually playing cricket—and I find you fast asleep in my chair, looking more like a—a dying porpoise than a human being!"

Biggleswade felt justly indignant.

"Oh, I say, sir!" he protested.

"What explanation can you offer, Biggleswade?" panted Mr. Crowell.

"I mean—hang it!—a dying porpoise!" protested Biggleswade. "The—the fact is, sir, I just dropped off. Dozed, you know. It's a bit warm in here——"

"I am waiting for your explanation regarding the absence of the Remove," interrupted Mr. Crowell harshly. "You have apparently kept your word with regard to remaining in this room. But why did you release the boys from detention?"

"I didn't, sir."

"You didn't?"

"No, sir; they went."

"Went!" roared Mr. Crowell.

"They all turned up, sir, and we were get-

ting along famously," explained Biggleswade. "Arithmetic. One of the fellows asked if he could go out for a drink of water. Nothing wrong in that, I suppose, sir? Anybody's liable to get thirsty on a summer's afternoon."

"Never mind the water, Biggleswade. What about the boys?"

"Well, I happened to look up, you know, and they'd gone," explained Biggleswade feebly. "Every confounded one of them! Rummy thing, too, sir, because I didn't know anything about it till it was too late."

The prefect was obviously telling the truth, and Mr. Crowell compressed his lips.

"Biggleswade," he said, "you're a fool!"

"Oh, I say, sir——"

"I don't like to be so blunt, Biggleswade, but there is absolutely no other word that I can use," stormed the Form-master. "And this, I suppose, is the real explanation!" he went on, picking up the novel. "Good heavens! Have you been reading this trash, sir?"

"That book cost seven-and-six, sir. It's a ripper!"

"The best thing you can do, Biggleswade, is to get out of my presence before I thoroughly lose my temper," interrupted Mr. Crowell, breathing hard. "I honestly believe that you are mentally deficient. I can think of no other explanation for your conduct. Go, sir! I will deal with this matter myself!"

"You'll have a bit of a job to round them up, sir."

"I am not asking for your comments, Biggleswade!" shouted Mr. Crowell.

The prefect backed away and bolted. A most undignified proceeding for any Sixth-Former, but Biggleswade bolted. He had a feeling that Mr. Crowell was only just at the beginning of his explosion.

For a few moments Mr. Crowell stood quite still, vainly attempting to recover his composure. He didn't quite know whether to be enraged with Biggleswade or with the Remove. Biggleswade had acted like an idiot, but the Remove was obviously to blame for taking advantage of his good-nature.

"I am thankful that I returned," muttered Mr. Crowell fiercely. "It is just as well, it seems, to come back unexpectedly. The young scamps! They shall pay dearly for this!"

In a cool moment, Mr. Crowell would have dealt with the Remove later, after allowing his heat to die down. But Biggleswade had exasperated him to such an extent that he possessed a burning desire to take instant action. For once the staid Mr. Crowell was beside himself with fury.

He strode out of the School House, and practically ran to Big Side. He had made up his mind. He had decided to take a certain course of action—a course of action which would be an everlasting lesson to these impudent truants.

"Boys," he thundered as he came up, "everyone of you will return to the Form-room at once!"

A number of Removites swung round, staring.

"Oh, corks!" gasped Owen major. "Old Crowell!"

"Souse my scuppers!" breathed Tom Burton.

"Every Remove boy will fall into line and march to the Form-room!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "Quickly, now! I am not in the mood to stand any nonsense! The boy who attempts to run away will be gated for the rest of the term!"

Without waiting to see the result of this threat, Mr. Crowell strode straight on to the cricket field. At the moment the batsmen were running. Morrow had just hit a 3; he and Pitt were still in. The West House was in the highest glee, for this partnership was performing wonders.

"Hold on, sir!"

"Off the field, sir!"

"You're interrupting the game, sir!"

Mr. Crowell didn't even hear these shouts. He was scarcely aware that a cricket match was in progress. He could see Handforth and Pitt and Hamilton, and several other Remove juniors—white flannelled and cool-looking against the green of the playing-field. And those white flannels acted upon Mr. Crowell very much as a red cloak acts upon a bull.

"I say, sir, hold on!" exclaimed Fenton, running over. "Browne can't bowl with you here, sir. If there's anything you want——"

"Yes, Fenton, there is something I want," interrupted Mr. Crowell grimly. "Every Remove boy on this field will follow me!"

Fenton simply stared. And every Remove boy on the field felt stunned. The sight of Mr. Crowell had been a bit of a shock, but this order was an absolute staggerer. Surely the heavens were about to fall!

"Follow you, sir?" repeated Fenton. "But—but I don't understand! These Remove fellows are in my Eleven, and Pitt's batting for the West House. They can't leave now, sir—in the middle of the match!"

Mr. Crowell fairly trembled.

"Oh, they cannot?" he said hotly. "We will see about that, Fenton! Am I a mere nonentity, to be defied and ignored? Stand out of the way, sir! Hamilton—Pitt—De Valerie—Handforth! Follow me indoors at once!"

"Look here, sir, you can't do that!" shouted Fenton, flushing. "You can't mess the game up——"

"Silence, sir!"

"If you've got any quarrel with these juniors, sir, can't you leave it till after the match?" demanded the school captain. "Pitt's batting wonderfully for the West House, and if you force him to go away—— And there are my men, too—Hamilton and Dodd and the others. Hang it, sir, you can't wreck the game like this!"

"These boys were detained for the afternoon, and they wilfully broke detention," snapped Mr. Crowell. "I intend to teach them a severe lesson. It is quite useless to argue, Fenton—I am not in a mood to be

persuaded. These boys will leave this field at once."

"But the game, sir——"

"Confound the game!" burst out Mr. Crowell. "Cricket—cricket cricket! I am sick of cricket—sick of this excess of sports! You are all tarred with the same brush—you can think of nothing but games! Heaven only knows what the school is coming to!"

He strode off, approaching the wicket.

"Well I'm hanged!" muttered Fenton blankly.

Reggie Pitt found himself being glared at by the incensed Form-master.

"Sorry, sir," said Reggie quickly. "I suppose we were all pretty wrong in dodging Biggleswade—but we'll take our gruel, sir. If you'll only let the match go on, we'll toe the carpet later——"

"You will follow me now, Pitt," interrupted Mr. Crowell harshly. "And so will every other Remove boy on this field! That is my final word! Fenton, you need not come to me with further pleadings——"

"But these boys are needed, sir!" shouted Fenton angrily. "How do you expect me to find substitutes at a minute's notice—and right in the middle of a game? Look here, Mr. Crowell, you can't mean to say——"

"That's enough!" roared Mr. Crowell. "Any more of your impudence, Fenton, and I shall report you to the headmaster. I am not going to be defied by these juniors—by the boys of my own Form. I don't care if fifty cricket matches are ruined! They are coming back with me!"

CHAPTER 7.

MR. CROWELL MEANS IT.

THE bombshell had a very powerful effect.

Mr. Crowell's angry words carried to every corner of Big Side. The match was interrupted, and the crowds stood round, staring in amazement. Quite a number of Fourth Formers and fags hissed, too—a most unwise proceeding, for the sound only strengthened Mr. Crowell's determination. He had taken up this stand now, and nothing on earth could shift him.

In a way, Providence stepped in and eased the situation immensely. It would be difficult to say what exactly would have happened if a shower of rain had not suddenly started.

One of those heavy clouds had come over, and this was a much more formidable one than its predecessors. There was hardly any blue sky left, and the rain came on with a sudden determined violence. Mr. Crowell or no Mr. Crowell, the match would have been interrupted in any case.

Ten minutes later the Remove was in its Form-room again, with the exception of a few absentees who had not yet been found. But prefects had been dispatched in every direction to round them up.

The rain was a great consolation for the Remove, for it was something to know, at least, that there would have been a stoppage in any case. But the Remove was seething, nevertheless. The Form's rage against Mr. Crowell knew no bounds.

They considered that the master had had no justification for his high-handed action. Of course, they were wrong. Mr. Crowell's justification was very strong—although, perhaps, it would have been wiser had he curbed his temper. He had only antagonised the greater part of the school by compelling the Remove to go back into detention. For there were a great many sports maniacs at St. Frank's just now. The majority of the seniors were caught by the fever, and this Remove sensation was being discussed in all quarters of the school. From the Sixth downwards, the fellows were saying that Mr. Crowell had ruined himself for good. Even the Head would be down on him.

In the Remove a glowering, ill-concealed fury was boiling. Mr. Crowell didn't know it, but his Form was very close to the point of open revolt. Even Dick Hamilton, usually so self-possessed, was inflamed by the recent incident. He had caught the sports madness almost as keenly as the others, and a sense of proportion was lacking in the Remove.

Forrest & Co. were hustled in by a prefect, and two or three minutes later five other Removites were rounded up. The Form was now complete—and was hard at work on arithmetic. At least, Mr. Crowell did his utmost to keep them hard at work. But they were in no mood for such mental exercise.

Mr. Crowell himself had cooled down considerably, and although he didn't regret his action, he had one or two twinges that this affair wouldn't do him much good. He had never angled for popularity, but he would hardly have been human if he had been indifferent to it. And at the moment he was just about as popular as a cloud-burst at a Test Match.

"I intend this to be a lesson to you, boys," he said grimly. "You cannot convince me that Biggleswade gave you permission to leave. You deliberately ignored him, and you shall pay for your outrageous effrontery."

The Remove was silent.

"In order to make you thoroughly appreciate my determination, I shall keep you here until six o'clock," went on Mr. Crowell firmly. "So, you see, you have only added to your detention."

"Six o'clock, sir!" gasped Fatty Little. "But what about tea, sir?"

Mr. Crowell gave an acid smile.

"I am afraid you will have to dispense with tea for this afternoon, Little," he replied. "De Valerie, what is that you have got in your desk?" he rapped out. "Stand up, sir! What have you got there?"

De Valerie stood up.

"Nothing, sir, only my lesson books, sir," he replied. "You can come and look, sir, if you like, sir. I wouldn't do anything, sir, to annoy you, sir."

The Remove listened with keen pleasure. This was the first sound of enjoyment since they had been hustled indoors. De Valerie was deliberately ragging the Form-master—

although Mr. Crowell could scarcely complain. Politeness was a virtue he had always encouraged. And the Form, as a whole, took its cue.

Mr. Crowell compressed his lips.

"You may sit down, De Valerie," he said coldly.

"Yes, sir," said De Valerie. "Thank you, sir."

"I note that several of you are lounging at your desks," went on Mr. Crowell, glancing severely over the room. "Sit up! I won't have this lolling about. We are here to work—not to play!"

"Yes, sir," said the Form.

On certain celebrated occasions there had been similar rags to this, and everybody knew exactly what to do. The whole Form spoke in one voice, and Mr. Crowell started.

"That is enough!" he snapped. "I won't have this ridiculous chorus. Attend to your work immediately."

"Yes, sir," said the Remove. "Thank you, sir."

The fellows were just beginning to enjoy themselves. It was still raining, and the match couldn't have continued, anyhow. This fact alone cheered up the cricketers, for it gratified them to realise that no substitutes were being played in their places.

And ragging Mr. Crowell was quite a genial pastime. It was a sort of revenge—he was being paid back for his high-handed action. He had asked for trouble—and he was going to get it! It wasn't likely they were going to calmly sit there until six o'clock—and work! Every boy in the room made up his mind to do absolutely nothing.

This, of course, was a wrong spirit, but with so much sports enthusiasm in the school, lessons were generally regarded as a nuisance. Extra lessons were simply too outrageous for mere words!

The next step in the rag was to make a feverish pretence of work. Desks were opened and banged, books were pulled out, and pens scratched speedily. Everybody seemed to be in a ferment of haste. And Mr. Crowell, who was greatly experienced in these things, read the signs, and knew that he would get no work out of the Remove until this spasm was over.

"Fullwood, there is no need for you to bang your desk in that fashion!" he rapped out thickly. "You are no worse than the rest, but I shall make an example of you unless you cease this ridiculous travesty of application."

The rest of the Remove grew silent, and waited for Ralph Leslie Fullwood to make the next move. In the old days—when he had been a recognised bounder—he would have insulted Mr. Crowell right and left. Not deliberately, but with a subtlety all his own. But Fullwood was different now, and he could be relied upon to act decently. At the same time, the exceptional circumstances drove him to a touch of his former calculated insolence.

"Don't you want me to work, sir?" he asked smoothly.

"Yes, Fullwood. I do——"

"Then I've got to have my books, sir.'

"I am not questioning that point at all," snapped the master. "Certainly you may have your books, but you will kindly make less noise. And there is no necessity to make these exaggerated pretences of undue haste."

"No, sir," said Fullwood.

He sat down, and the Remove felt that it had been swindled. Ralph Leslie had utterly failed to carry out the promise of his earlier record. But there was an amused glint in Fullwood's eye which assured his immediate neighbours that he was merely biding his time.

As the minutes passed, Mr. Crowell's temper became more and more ragged. The worst of it was, there was nobody he could single out for punishment. These juniors were old hands at the game of ragging, and they knew exactly how far to go without overstepping the mark. And although they seemed to work hard, Mr. Crowell knew that arithmetic was the last thing in their minds.

Thoroughly exasperated, the Form-master closed his books.

"We will take geography," he said harshly.

He stood there, aghast. Every fellow in the Form closed his own books with terrific force, and scrambled them away. Geography books were pulled out, and all faces were eager and intent. One might have thought that the Remove looked upon geography as a glorious recreation. Mr. Crowell wisely ignored the scene. Comment would only have made matters worse.

"We were dealing with Australia this morning," he said coldly. "We will continue with that subject. You will take your atlases, and make an outline map of Australia. Unless these maps are worthy of seventy-five marks, I shall be very angry. All those who fail to receive such marks will be detained another hour."

This gave the Remove a bit of a shock, and the pretence of work became something rather more real.

"Please, sir," said Fullwood, "how big is Australia?"

"Really, Fullwood, that is not the question," replied Mr. Crowell. "Get on with your mapping——"

"But I'm only asking for information, sir," said Fullwood. "I'd like to know where the Murray River rises. And why do they call it rising, sir? A river always comes down, doesn't it, sir?"

"Fullwood, be silent!" panted Mr. Crowell.

"There's the Darling River, too, sir," went on Fullwood. "I suppose it must be a very small river—so they call it a darling——"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Crowell helplessly. "You know very well, Fullwood, that these ridiculous questions are totally unnecessary. The Darling River is one of the largest in Australia. Let me have no more of this nonsense."

"Isn't the Darling River the same as the Murray River, sir?" inquired Fullwood. "They both enter the sea at the same place——"

"We are not dealing with rivers, Fullwood!" interrupted Mr. Crowell angrily. "If

I thought that you were genuinely seeking information, I would satisfy you, but I have no intention of falling into your impertinent traps. If you ask me another question, I will send you straight before the headmaster for a flogging!"

CHAPTER 8.

THE RUMOUR.

THIS was something in the nature of a challenge, and Ralph Leslie Fullwood was not the kind of fellow to ignore it. To sit down now would be to admit defeat.

"Can't I ask questions, sir?" he said indignantly. "You're our Form-master, and who else have we got to ask? I've sometimes heard the Murray River called the Darling-Murray River, sir."

"I have already warned you——"

"In that case, sir, why don't they call the Murrumbidgee River the Dear-Murrumbidgee? Dear and darling mean the same thing, don't they, sir?"

Mr. Crowell took a deep breath, and the Remove tittered.

"Come out here, Fullwood," snapped the Form-master. "Stand beside my desk for a moment. If there is any disturbance in this room during the next minute, I shall report the whole class to the headmaster."

He pressed a bell-push, and waited—his face grim and set. Ralph Leslie Fullwood was quite calm, and he did not consider that he had gone too far. At any ordinary time, Mr. Crowell would have taken his banter in good part.

The door opened, and a prefect looked in.

"Ah, Wilson, I am glad you have come so promptly," said Mr. Crowell. "You will take charge of this Form while I am absent. If you report any disturbance upon my return, I will take the necessary steps. Fullwood, come with me."

"Hang it all, sir——"

"Come with me!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

Fullwood shrugged his shoulders, and went. He was marched out of the School House, across the Inner Court, and straight to the Head's private residence. The rain had stopped now, and the sun was shining. But the shower had been so heavy that there was no chance of further cricket for some little time.

Fullwood felt half-inclined to apologise—for he suddenly realised that he was in the wrong. But the expression on Mr. Crowell's face indicated that he would accept no apologies. And a minute after it was too late, for he was hustled into the headmaster's presence.

"I am sorry, Dr. Stafford, to disturb you at this hour, but I have brought this boy before you for punishment," said Mr. Crowell tensely. "He is guilty of studied insolence."

"Indeed," said Dr. Stafford, adjusting his glasses. "I am sorry to hear this, Mr. Crowell. Fullwood, are you not ashamed to be in such a position?"

Fullwood was silent.

"He is not the only boy," continued the Form-master. "Indeed, he is no more guilty than the others, but I have brought him before you, sir, as an example. It seems to me that the whole Remove has taken leave of its senses. I have had an appalling amount of trouble this afternoon."

And Mr. Crowell described exactly what had happened. The Head listened grimly as he learned of the way in which the Remove had broken detention, and as Mr. Crowell described the ragging in the Form-room.

"My patience was utterly exhausted, sir," concluded the Form-master. "I felt there was nothing for it but to bring this boy before you for punishment."

The Head stroked his chin.

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Crowell, I will leave it in your hands," he replied slowly. "Since he is no more guilty than the rest, I shall rely upon your discretion to see that he and the other boys are dealt with as they deserve. This feverish madness for sports is undoubtedly the root cause of the whole trouble."

Mr. Crowell flushed with pleasure.

"I am glad, Dr. Stafford, to hear you speak in that way," he exclaimed. "For I regard this sporting activity as madness, too. I am the first to acknowledge that sports are necessary in any school—but when the interest in sport eliminates the interest in study, I think it is time to call a halt."

"You are quite right, Mr. Crowell," nodded the Head gravely. "As it happens, I shall have something to say to the whole school in the morning, and my subject will be this over-indulgence in sports."

"I am intensely relieved, sir," declared Mr. Crowell. "My boys are becoming almost unmanageable. From morning till night they are in a frenzy to be out of doors—playing cricket, swimming, running, or some such exercise. There are one or two notable exceptions, but the majority are more like lunatics than human beings. They are backward in their lessons, they never give a thought to preparation, and my work is one constant fight against inattention."

"Quite so—quite so," nodded the Head. "But yours is not the only Form affected by this germ, Mr. Crowell. The whole school has caught the fever, and I am determined to stamp out the malady."

"You're—you're going to stop sports, sir?" gasped Fullwood.

"You see, sir!" gasped Mr. Crowell excitedly. "The boy is absolutely aghast at the very suggestion! They are all the same—they are all obsessed by this unhappy mania."

"We will not discuss the matter further, Mr. Crowell," said the Head quietly. "Take Fullwood away, and deal with him as you consider best. And I think I can safely guarantee that your worries will be over by to-morrow."

There was something very significant about the Head's words, and Fullwood was very

"Stop!" thundered Mr. Crowell, as he strode on to the cricket field. "Every Remove boy will return to the Form-room at once! Handforth—Pitt—Hamilton—every one of you! I will not be defied like this!" The juniors blinked at him as though they could not believe his words; he was absolutely wrecking an important match.

uneasy as he was marched back to the School House. Mr. Crowell said nothing, but he had obviously come to a decision.

"Boys, I have made up my mind to take a certain action," he said, when he faced the Remove again. "Fullwood, you can go to your place. I shall not visit special punishment upon you—since you are no more guilty than the others."

"Thank you, sir," said Fullwood gratefully.

"In face of the headmaster's attitude, moreover, I shall not attempt to prolong this unhappy farce," continued Mr. Crowell. "I shall leave the whole matter in abeyance until to-morrow. You may dismiss."

The Remove was so surprised that it sat quite still.

"We're free to go, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton quickly.

"You may dismiss," repeated Mr. Crowell.

"Hurrah!"

It was only just about tea-time even now, and Mr. Crowell's sudden decision had so relieved the Remove that it cheered with enthusiasm. In those few seconds, Mr. Crowell's standing had been enormously strengthened. He was popular once more. He was quite a decent old stick.

The juniors piled out into the Triangle, and Handforth and a number of others crowded round Fullwood.

"What did he mean about the Head?" demanded Handforth.

"Yes," said Reggie Pitt. "He said something about the Head's attitude. Do you know anything about it, Fully?"

Fullwood nodded.

"We'd better look out for squalls, my sons," he replied. "The Head talked about putting a stop to sports, and other rot of the same sort. It's my personal opinion that he's going to put a stopper on sports in general."

"What!" yelled the crowd.

"Well, it seems like it," said Fullwood. "He didn't say it in so many words, but you can take it from me that there's trouble brewing."

It can scarcely be said that Fullwood's words were rash. He had, in fact, been quite guarded. But in less than half-an-hour a rumour was circulating throughout St. Frank's to the effect that cricket was going to be banned, and that the sports carnival would be quashed.

That rumour created a sensation.

In the Fifth and Sixth there were hurried meetings called to discuss the situation, and these senior gatherings were much less dignified than usual. Fenton, of the Sixth, and Browne, of the Fifth, however, succeeded in calming their Form fellows.

As they pointed out, there was no earthly sense in kicking up a fuss about a mere rumour. There was no doubt that the Head was planning to say something to the school regarding sports—quite a few of the masters verified this. But it would be sheer idiocy

to get up a deputation or make a song before the Head's actual viewpoint became known.

In the Lower School the excitement lasted only a short time. There were all sorts of wild-cat schemes projected, and there was a general air of defiance. Hands off sports! Interfere with sports at your peril! That was the main trend of the arguments.

But nothing was done, for the simple reason that the entire Lower School adjourned to the River Stowe. Rain might spoil cricket, but it had no effect upon swimming. And this evening there were four races planned—one for each House. The four winners would compete in the semi-finals for the swimming honours on the morrow. So there wasn't much time to think of what the Head might be doing.

A second heavy downpour of rain after tea caused Fenton to abandon the cricket match. The whole of Big Side was soaked and the wicket impossible. But the sky was clear now, and the river was looking splendid. For swimming, the weather was as good as one could hope for.

CHAPTER 9.

HANDY IS SURPRISED!

ALEC DUNCAN, the New Zealand junior, clapped Tom Burton on the back. They shared Study F with Jerry Dodd, in the Ancient House, and were all good friends. Until recently Augustus Hart had been in that study, but the latter had transferred into the West House, and was, indeed, included in the West House swimmers.

"This is your race, Bo'sun, old man," said Alec cheerily.

"Souse my main deck!" grinned Burton. "I haven't reached port yet, messmate! Sea swimming is more in my line, you know."

"Rats!" said Duncan. "You're the most powerful swimmer in the Lower School. And that overarm stroke of yours is devastating. What do you say, Jerry?"

"Why, the Bo'sun is as good as champion," replied the Australian boy. "He's a dinkum swimmer, and our House will get the honours."

But Tom Burton still shook his head.

"Don't forget who I'm up against," he said. "Hamilton—Church — Tregellis-West—Handforth."

"Of course. I'd forgotten Handforth!" chuckled Alec Duncan. "He's already planned what he's going to do with the cup, hasn't he? Poor old Handy!"

"Hallo! Who's sympathising with me?" demanded Edward Oswald Handforth, halting as he was about to pass. "What's the idea, you New Zealand fathead?"

They were standing just outside the Junior dressing cabins, and the River Stowe stretched invitingly in front of them, with a number of fellows already monkeying about on the diving-boards.

The river flowed right past the St. Frank's playing fields—a very handy arrangement—and there were not only several ambitious boathouses, but two long sets of dressing cabins. Swimming and boating were greatly in favour at St. Frank's, and the school authorities had provided every facility.

The races planned for this evening would be four in number, and the Ancient House would start the ball rolling. The course was from the diving-boards down to the top end of Willard's Island—a long, broad stretch of deep water, with only one bend. It was an ideal swimming course.

The juniors were taking a big interest in the proceedings, for now that the cricket was abandoned for the evening there was nothing else to claim their attention. And as all the Houses were represented in these races, there were scarcely any absentees.

Willy Handforth & Co., of the Third, were rather indignant because they were not eligible. These races were confined to the Remove and Fourth—which Forms, after all, were practically the same as regards age and standing. The fags were younger, and therefore beneath contempt. At least everybody thought so—with the exception of the fags.

"It makes me sick!" snorted Willy. "Have you heard my major boasting about the way he's going to win? The poor chap can't help it, of course. It's his optimism. He doesn't really brag; it's only his way. But I could leave him standing in any race he liked to fix."

"How could he stand in the water?" asked Chubby Heath.

"Fathead!" retorted Willy.

The juniors were not the only spectators, for Mr. Beverley Stokes was on the scene—and Mr. Clifford, too. And several prefects had been told off to keep an eye on the general proceedings, and hold themselves ready in case of emergency. Mr. Clifford was the official starter, and as he happened to be the sports master, this position was fitting. Fenton was acting as judge at the finishing line, with another prefect to help him.

Also, quite a large contingent of the Moor View girls had come along to witness the races. Irene & Co. were in force, and they had arrived on the scene quite unconventionally. In fact, they swam down from their own private stretch of the river, and were adding greatly to the beauties of the scenery.

The first race proved very exciting, in spite of the fact that Tom Burton was generally regarded as a certain winner. Indeed, the swimming honours were already looked upon as his. But he had some keen rivals in Dick Hamilton and Church. The fact that Church was looked upon as a possible caused Handforth to roar. It amused him to think of one of his chums being classed as a better swimmer than himself.

At last they were off, and a yell went up from the river banks as the six Ancient House juniors swept down the long stretch. After the first twenty yards, Hamilton was leading, with Church a close second, and Tom

Burton just behind him. For some unaccountable reason, Handforth was at the very rear.

"Go it, Ted!" grinned Willy, from the bank, as his major hustled past.

"Shut up, you young ass!" gurgled Handforth.

"Better not waste your breath, old man," said Willy. "How about a race with me afterwards? I'll give you twenty yards start."

This offer so upset Handforth that he almost abandoned the race. But, suddenly realising that he was ten yards in the rear of the nearest swimmer, he gave a grunt and forged ahead.

Although the banks were lined with cheering spectators, the greatest crowd of all had gathered on Willard's Island and on the opposite banks. And as the swimmers swept round the bend, a roar of encouragement went up.

"My hat! Hamilton's leading!" shouted Watson. "Come on, Dick! Buck up, Montie! You're miles behind!"

Tommy Watson was particularly interested in his own chums. Dick Hamilton was certainly leading, but Tregellis-West was fourth. Tom Burton, the favourite, was practically abreast of Hamilton, with Church dangerously close.

"Hurrah!"

"Hamilton wins!"

"Rats!" yelled Duncan. "The Bo'sun's beating him!"

"By cripes!" gasped Jerry Dodd. "So he is!"

In the last twenty yards, Tom Burton put forth a great effort, and swept past the finishing line scarcely a head in front of Dick Hamilton. Walter Church was third, with poor old Handy far behind.

"Good old Bo'sun!"

"It was Dick's race, though!" growled Tommy Watson, disappointed. "Burton didn't realise he'd have to make such a fight for it. I believe it was a tie!"

But there was no question that Tom Burton had won the race. Dick Hamilton had surprised everybody by his powerful overarm swimming, and it could hardly be said that the Bo'sun had gained a runaway victory. He had been compelled to fight every inch of the course.

Handforth pulled himself out of the water, looking puffed and astonished. It struck him as being extraordinary that he should have arrived last. The expression on his face caused the immediate spectators to chuckle hugely. And Edward Oswald was not particularly gratified when he saw that Irene Manners and Mary Summers were sitting on the river bank, sunning themselves.

"Poor old Handy!" grinned De Valerie. "What happened? Did you get the cramp or something? There must be some explanation, old man. Weren't you going to win this race?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was my minor!" said Handforth thickly.

"Oh, Ted!" chuckled Irene.

"Well, not exactly my minor," growled Handforth. "He put me off my stroke, you know—although I was a bit behind even then. I think I must have made a false start or something. It's all rot, because I was certain of winning this race."

"There's nothing to grumble at," said Dick Hamilton. "The best swimmer has won—and good luck to him. Burton, old son, you're going to win the honours for the Ancient House, don't forget."

And the next race, between swimmers of the West House, proved nearly as exciting. Doyle and Levi gave Reggie Pitt a stern battle, but Reggie broke away in the last stretch, and won with comparative ease. Most of the fellows were surprised, for they had never considered Reggie to be much of a speed merchant in the water. He had evidently been putting in a lot of hard practice.

"Splendid, Reggie!" said Doris Berkeley enthusiastically after the race.

And that was all the appreciation that Reggie Pitt needed, for Doris happened to be his particular girl chum.

The Modern House race was interesting, too, for both Bob Christine and Len Clapson were fast swimmers, and the Modern House was perfectly convinced that one of them would win the honours in the final. Terry O'Grady, the new Irish boy, was in this race, too, and he distinguished himself by coming in third.

Bob Christine was the winner, although he had to contest every foot of the way with Clapson, and the race almost ended in a dead heat. But both the judges proclaimed Bob the winner.

As for the East House race, this was regarded as a joke. The other Houses thought that it was like the East House's cheek to enter at all. For at St. Frank's there was one House which was exceedingly backward in all sports, and this was the East House.

Armstrong, the junior captain, was boastful, however, and entertained high hopes of winning the swimming honours for himself. A great deal of his enthusiasm was taken away when he figured as the last swimmer in the race. It was won by Donald Harron with ease. In fact, there had been nobody but Harron from the first yard. He finished up while the rest were nearly half-way down the course.

The semi-finals, on the morrow, would be between the Ancient House and the Modern House—Tom Barton versus Bob Christine. Reggie Pitt and Harron would swim for the West House and East House respectively.

But another type of excitement was due before then.

CHAPTER 10.

A WALK-OVER FOR WILLY.

THERE was still plenty of time left before calling-over, and most of the swimmers remained in the water, enjoying the warmth of the May evening. It was like

midsummer, and the wind had died down, leaving a perfectly clear, tranquil sky. The sun still possessed plenty of heat.

"It's all rot, of course," Handforth was saying, with considerable indignation. "I'm blessed if I know what happened at the start, but something went wrong. That first race was mine really."

"The fact that you came in last was a mere oversight, of course," said McClure consolingly. "Old Church didn't do so badly, did he?"

Handforth grunted.

"It was like your cheek, Church, my lad!" he said severely. "What the dickens do you mean by getting in third, and whacking me? I've never heard of such nerve!"

Church grinned.

"Awfully sorry, old man," he said apologetically. "If I'd known that you were so keen on the race, I'd have slowed down a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any of your silly sarcasm!" snapped Handforth. "I simply can't understand what happened—that's all. Why should a dud swimmer like you beat an old hand like me? I'm not boasting about my powers, but the whole thing's a puzzle."

Willy Handforth, who was also in the water near by, chuckled.

"A pretty easy one to answer, old chap," he said sympathetically. "Church happens to be the best swimmer, that's all. I know it's a bit of a shock for you to realise that you're whacked, but facts are facts. You're too big, Ted. That's your trouble."

"He's no bigger than Burton—and Burton won," grinned McClure.

"Well, he's too clumsy," amended Willy.

"You—you——"

"Hold on, Ted!" interrupted Willy. "I'll tell you what! Let's settle the point. How about another race—now? Third versus Remove? You represent the Remove, and I'll represent the Third."

Handforth glared.

"You dotty young chump!" he snorted. "It wouldn't be fair!"

"I know that," agreed Willy. "I'll give you twenty yards start."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or twenty-five, if you like," added Willy generously.

Handforth gulped and turned red.

"You silly kid!" he roared. "Do you think I'd accept a start from a cheeky fag? I won't even consider such a race! I'm not keen on showing you up, my lad! And I'm rather particular who I swim with."

"Why not have a race with the girls?" suggested De Valerie. "I'll bet that Irene could beat you any way."

The girls promptly approved of the idea, and Handforth, in desperation, decided to accept Willy's challenge. He had heard rumours that both Irene and Doris were considered to be mermaids. In the water, they were as rapid as any fish. He couldn't take the risk of being beaten by a girl.

But it would be quite another thing to remove some of Willy's cheek. It would do the young ass good to show him up as a boasting kid. Handforth decided to finish the race with Willy half-way down the course.

"It's a go then?" asked Willy briskly. "Good man! We'll swim just the same distance—from the dressing cabins down to Willard's Island. Is there any message you'd like me to take, Ted?"

"Message?"

"Well, I shall be there long before you," explained Willy blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth did not deign to reply to this sally. He was more than ever determined to show Willy up. And a cheering crowd encouraged the pair as they took their places at the starting-post. A number of the girls swam off, so that they should be opposite Willard's Island to witness the finish.

"Hallo! They're off!" chuckled Dick Hamilton.

"Ten to one against Willy," said Forrest briskly. "Any bets? I'm willing to make a book——"

"You'd better look out, my son, or you'll get biffed into the river!" warned Russell. "Bookies aren't allowed on this course. We can get plenty of sport without descending to gambling!"

The race provided immense amusement.

Handforth started off grimly, swimming powerfully, and with such a tremendous spurt that he was well away in the first ten yards. Willy came on behind, with easy, swinging strokes.

"Go it, Handy! You're leading!"

Handforth needed no telling. He swam harder than ever, confident that he could finish while his minor was still half-way down the course. But he received a bit of a shock when Willy tucked his head down, increased the speed of his stroke, and swept level. There was something very fish-like in Willy's movements.

"Water's fine this evening, old man," remarked Willy chattily.

"You—you young ass!" spluttered Handforth. "What are you doing here? I was leading ten seconds ago."

"It's all right. I'm only giving you a bit of encouragement," said Willy calmly. "Look out! Don't swallow half the river! I'm afraid you're a bit out of practice, Ted."

Willy proceeded to forge ahead, and then he made a complete circle round his major, like a destroyer attending a battleship. Handforth, in the meantime, profited well by this manœuvre, and got far ahead. The spectators were yelling with laughter.

"My only hat!" grinned Chubby Heath. "Willy's making rings round his major."

"He'd better look out, though," said Juicy Lemon anxiously. "If he tries any more of that monkey business he'll be too late to catch up, and old Handy will crow like anything if he wins."

But Willy knew exactly what he was doing, and he settled himself down to swim his hardest. Handforth was striking out strongly, encouraged by the shouts from the banks.

He was about a hundred yards from the finishing line when something happened. A disturbance in the water manifested itself near by. Something swept up, drew abreast, and passed him, something which could scarcely be seen. Merely a glimpse of flashing arms and some foam.

How Willy managed to breathe nobody could quite understand. His head was right down in the water, and he was using an overarm stroke which carried him along like a motor-boat under full throttle. His major was left ten clear yards behind when Willy reached the finishing rope.

Willy bobbed up, dripping and cheerful.

"That's the way we do it!" he panted.

"Hurrah!" yelled the Third. "Good old Willy!"

Handforth was looking utterly alarmed.

"There's something wrong!" he gasped. "My minor hasn't won! Don't talk rot! How the dickens could a silly fag whack me!"

"It's hard to understand, old man," said McClure sadly. "But there's no getting away from cold facts. Your minor made you look like a whale. You didn't stand an earthly chance."

"I'm afraid cricket's more in your line, Ted," smiled Irene Manners as she pulled herself out of the water at the river bank. "Swimming doesn't seem to be your strong point."

Handforth breathed hard.

"Something went wrong!" he declared. "I don't know what it was, but I'll never admit that Willy can whack me! Why, it's dotty! I'll just show you how I can dive——"

But there was such an amount of laughter that he gave up the idea. Besides, Willy wasn't available. He had gone out to the centre of the river a little higher up, and was indulging in some fancy work.

"Imitation of a porpoise, I suppose," said Chubby Heath, grinning.

Willy was diving and turning cartwheels, and all manner of other fish-like tricks. Now and again he would vanish completely, and the surface of the water would become smooth. Then he would bob up, gasping.

"I don't like to see that!" said Doris, frowning. "I was quite nervous just now, when he didn't come up. Tell him to stop, Ted."

"Hi, Willy, you young ass!" roared Handforth. "Chuck those silly tricks! One of these times you won't come up again!"

But Willy merely waved his hand, and dived again. There was a vision of feet, and he vanished completely below the surface. The river became perfectly smooth, and there was no sign that a swimmer had been there.

"Young ass!" muttered Handforth.

He and the others went on talking carelessly, but they kept their eyes on the spot where Willy had vanished. They expected to see him come up every second. But there was still no sign of him.

"I hope he's all right!" said Irene, after a while. "He's been down an awful long time——"

"I'll give the young beggar a jawing when he comes up," growled Handforth. "Just like his rot to scare you girls. He'll be on the surface in two ticks—don't worry."

But he was wrong.

The river still remained placid, and there was no sign whatever of the Third Former. Since he had executed that last dive he had utterly vanished.

CHAPTER 11.

WILLY'S DEADLY PERIL.

DORIS BERKELEY was looking very anxious.

"Why doesn't he come up?" she muttered, staring.

Irene Manners and Marjorie Temple and the other girls were alarmed, too. But the fellows were only grinning.

"No need to get the wind up," chuckled Church. "Willy's as full of tricks as a monkey. He's done this on purpose to give us a scare. He'll probably bob up in quite a different place."

But even Handforth was becoming anxious now.

"I don't see how he could!" he said. "There's a pretty strong current here, too—and a stiff undertow. Haven't you felt it dragging when you're swimming? Nothing dangerous, of course, but—— Why doesn't he come?" he added tensely. "The silly idiot!"

A silence fell. Nobody could exactly explain why, but the comedy had suddenly changed into drama. Of course, Willy would show up in a moment or two, but this suspense was a bit trying. Everybody decided to give the reckless young fag a stern word when he came ashore.

A number of other fellows had walked down the river bank, and were inquiring what the anxious looks were about. Every second that passed seemed a minute, and all eyes were fixed tensely upon that spot where Willy had last been seen.

"Oh, he's only fooling," muttered Chubby Heath. "The water's deep there, and he couldn't have been dragged down. Willy's like a fish in water—about the safest chap in the Third. The fathead's only being funny."

But Chubby Heath had gone pale, and there was an expression of growing tragedy in his eyes. Edward Oswald stood there, as still as a statue. Nobody seemed to know exactly what to do.

For they all thought that Willy was merely hoodwinking them—and they would only look foolish if they dashed to the rescue. Probably that was the very thing he had been working for, and would then enjoy the joke.

"I can't stand this any longer!" burst out Handforth abruptly.

"I expect he's only playing about——" began Church.

"That's what I think, too," exclaimed Doris. "But supposing he isn't? Oh, supposing he isn't? We're simply all wasting the time——"

"Yes, by George!" panted Handforth. "And then it'll be too late!"

He went off madly, splashing heavily in his haste. And this seemed to be the signal for the others to move, too. Everybody who was in swimming suits—boys and girls alike—swam towards the fatal spot.

On the bank, the fully dressed fellows watched with rapidly beating hearts—with their eyes strained to catch the first sign of disturbance on the surface of the water. Those moments were dramatic in the extreme.

And how real the cause for anxiety was!

For Willy Handforth was not fooling. He was fighting madly for his life—deep down, at the river bed!

At first, he had merely dived down out of sheer exuberance of spirit. It was fine sport, plunging down deeply, and allowing the undertow to drag him lower and lower. The knowledge of his own ability to defeat it only made the experience more exhilarating. And the sudden rush to the surface again was the best part of the whole programme.

Willy had performed these manœuvres so many times that the very possibility of danger never entered his head. If it had have done, he would have scorned it. He was such a good swimmer that he could remain in the water without effort. He was just as comfortable in the river as on land.

But Willy fooled with that undertow once too often.

He felt himself going down—right down to the river bed. It was a glorious sensation. He chuckled as he thought of his major watching him—and the girls, too. Nervous creatures! It was a bit of a lark to make them think that something had gone wrong! He'd never had much of an opinion about girls, anyhow! And then, suddenly, Willy received a violent shock throughout his entire body.

A blinding flash of light seemed to come into his eyes, and for a fraction of a second he was aware of an intensely acute agony in his head. Then he seemed to lose all sense of his surroundings—although he was still partially conscious of the fact that he was deep in the water.

One of those rare chances had occurred.

Willy might have dived a thousand times without coming to any harm. For the river at this point was deep and the water was clear. But he had happened to dive at the exact spot where a jagged, ugly timber projected from the mud bed. It was possibly the remains of some long-forgotten barge—or perhaps a mere gatepost, or a portion of fence. At all events, it was sticking up at an acute angle. And, diving, Willy had struck his head against it with tremendous force—and was rendered partially unconscious.

But this was not the only tragic circumstance.

As he rolled over, his legs and arms ceasing all motion, his foot slipped into a tangle of coarse and tough weeds. The weeds curled lazily round, and seemed to deliberately entwine themselves over his ankle. The natural buoyancy of Willy's body pulled him upwards, but those weeds held him there.

Handforth took the senseless Willy from the girl's arms desperate efforts to rescue Willy had been too much for h scious brother, he

But he was still partly conscious—and the effects of that sudden blow were wearing off. It had been just one of those knocks which will send a fellow silly for a second or two, but which rapidly loses its effect.

So far, the fag had held his breath. He had allowed no water to enter his lungs. The instinct of self-preservation, in spite of his dazed condition, was strong within him.

And then, rapidly, he recovered. Except for a dull, throbbing ache in his head, he was almost himself again. His lungs seemed to be on the point of bursting, but he felt no alarm—only indignation.

"Fancy leaving a rotten wreck, or something, at the bottom of the river!" he thought hotly. "I might have been brained! I'll bet I've got a lump on my head as big as an egg!"

He struck upwards vigorously, having a strong desire for some air. There was nothing to worry about. A mere second, and

Handforth took the senseless Willy from the girl's arms. As he caught his minor, Doris gave a little cry and sank; her desperate efforts to rescue Willy had been too much for her! Handforth was the only fellow near, but, supporting his unconscious brother, he could do nothing to aid her!

aught his minor, Doris gave a little cry and sank; her lforth was the only fellow near, but, supporting his uncon- othing to aid her!

he would be on the surface. But then he vaguely became aware of that tug at his ankle. It was the most uncanny sensation—just as though some monster of the depths had gripped him.

A chill came over him. He struck out again—harder this time. But the grip of those entangling weeds held him. And for the first time Willy felt a pang of pure alarm. Desperately he wriggled his way downwards, his lungs nearly choking him with the force of his sustained breath. He felt madly for his ankle.

The weeds seemed to know what he was doing, and they caught his wrist, and held it. He shook himself free, and tugged fiercely at the imprisoned leg. But the more he struggled, the worse became the danger.

"My hat!" thought Willy hopelessly. "I'm caught!"

His brain was reeling by this time, and he felt that it would be utterly impossible to hold his breath any longer. His lungs, at last, were at the extent of their endurance. Nothing could prevent him emitting the imprisoned breath. And then—— Then nothing would avert the tragedy.

Panic at last gripped him. Cool as ice usually—ready for any kind of mischief—Willy knew that he was struggling for his very life.

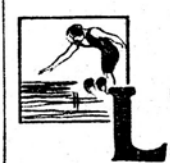
He tugged and pulled, and he twisted over with the agility of an eel. Then he freed his lungs from that choking air. The bubbles went up in a great series—triumphantly rushing towards the surface.

Willy little realised how valuable those bubbles were!

It seemed to him that death was very close. He had read of such tragedies—a fellow just fooling about in the river, amusing himself. And then, abruptly—death! Such occurrences can be read about every summer. Well, this was his turn!

And it was all his own fault, too—nobody had suggested that he should deliberately dive into the undertow, and pit his own puny strength against the slow, placid force of the river! There seemed nothing dangerous about that current, especially to a swimmer of Willy's ability.

Willy drew in a gulp of water—down into his lungs—and his fight for life was pitiful. Dimly he seemed to guess that his foot wasn't so entangled now. He half believed that he was actually free. But his brain was dulled. His movements were feeble and listless.



CHAPTER 12.

DORIS!

"LOOK!" cried Doris, pointing.

Her voice was eloquent of relief—but it was a relief which was mingled with acute alarm. Several other swimmers were close by. Some were diving—some were just coming up, spluttering and gasping. But Doris had seen something which the others had missed.

Fully twenty yards away a series of bubbles were apparent on the surface. Only for a moment—but, by a lucky providence, Doris Berkeley had seen them. And she and the others had believed that they were over the actual spot where Willy had disappeared!

But those bubbles came from a place twenty yards away.

"Quick!" shouted the girl. "He's down there!"

"Oh, he must have become entangled in the weeds, or something!" cried Irene. "The water's deep here—we can't dive. Poor Willy! Ted—Ted! What are you going to do?"

"He's got to be saved!" panted Edward Oswald huskily.

Handforth was as white as a sheet, and he hardly knew what he was doing. He looked round madly—wildly.

"Where—where?" he shouted.

But Doris was already on the spot—and Doris was diving. She was recognised as the

best swimmer in the Moor View School, and her diving capabilities were remarkable. She vanished amid a little smother of foam. And Handforth and one or two other fellows dived at almost the same moment, in the same vicinity.

Doris didn't come up, either!

The other fellows groped down there, in the dull gloom of the river bed. They groped in vain. They came up empty-handed, with dying hopes. How impossible it was to locate Willy's small form in that vast expanse of dull river bed! There seemed to be utterly no chance.

But it was Doris who had met with luck.

Or perhaps it wasn't luck. It was she who had seen those bubbles—she who knew the exact, identical spot. And her diving experience stood her in good stead, for she plunged straight down with unerring judgment. Her eyes were open, too—and she could faintly see.

Down here, everything was ghostly and unreal. A fish would flit by, frightened and indignant at this huge invader of its element. A weed would trail up, snakelike and eerie. And Doris went down further—narrowly missing that treacherous projection in her dive.

But she caught sight of Willy. She caught a glimpse of something pale amid the murk—the pale tint of Willy's flesh. His feet were uppermost, seeming to float grotesquely. And they were moving. Life was still in him, and his limbs were free. But his lungs contained water, and he had no further strength to fight his own battle.

A wave of fear took possession of the girl. For a dread second she thought he was dead. Forcing herself downwards, she gripped his ankle, and pulled him. Nothing seemed to happen.

She pulled again, and dragged herself down at the same time. Willy's form moved towards her, and a quiver passed through it. Consciousness was still with him, although it was rapidly departing. In a dreamy sort of way he knew that somebody was attempting to help him. And a little strength returned. He gripped hard—but had enough sense not to clutch madly.

Doris pulled and obtained a firm hold. Her own breath was giving out, and she felt that she could do nothing but rush to the surface for more air. But she didn't give in. She grimly and bravely held on to Willy. They would both go up together!

For she knew that if once she left this spot, she would probably never find it again. And it was now a question of seconds. A second dive would be fruitless, for by that time Willy would be—gone. So the girl clung to him, and fought upwards—the fag's dead weight seeming like something monstrous. It was only by grim determination that she pulled him with her.

For Willy's body had lost most of its buoyancy, and Doris was compelled to fight her way upwards towards the life-giving air—fight desperately every inch of the way. And, after all, she was only a girl, and her strength was not that of a powerful boy.

On the surface, a new alarm had arisen.

Doris Berkeley had vanished, too! Everything had happened in the space of a mere minute—a minute and some fleeting seconds. But it seemed as though ages had elapsed. Doris' companions were swimming about frantically, Irene Manners and Mary Summers being almost hysterical with panic. For it seemed to them that their own chum was doomed, too.

Poor old Handforth was like a maniac. He was diving desperately, exhausting himself by the feverishness of his own efforts. The alarm and anxiety in his eyes was pitiful to see. Greatly as he dreaded the thought of Doris being drowned, his chief concern was for his own brother. At normal times one might have supposed that Handforth cared nothing for his minor. But now, in a moment of crisis, he revealed his true feelings. The Removites had never seen him so pitifully distressed.

And how often had they heard of a double tragedy! A rescuer going to the same fate as the first victim!

Perhaps Doris had become entangled, too. During those terrible moments the fellows were beside themselves with dreadful fear. But Doris was not entangled—she was proving herself to be a heroine.

In spite of the fact that her senses were reeling, and she felt that she could no longer fight, she grimly clung to Willy. And at last the dimness altered—she felt that she was getting nearer to the surface.

And then, quite suddenly, she broke forth into the sunlight, and she seemed to hear faintly a chorus of excited shouts—an echo of thunderous cheering. She took in a deep breath, one that seemed to intoxicate her with delirious relief. But she was spent. She had brought Willy to the surface, but she was unable to go further.

Edward Oswald Handforth, rising from another fruitless dive, gave a cry of joy. He had caught sight of Willy in Doris' arms. It was Willy—still and pale—but he had been brought up! Six powerful strokes took Handforth to her side, and he grabbed his minor just as he was slipping back into the depths. For Doris' fingers were nerveless, and the sudden knowledge that she was on the surface served as a reaction. Everything seemed to go flat, and she gave a little sigh, and sank.

And Handforth was the only fellow near! With Willy in his arms, he could do nothing. In fact, he wasn't even aware that Doris was in danger of paying for her courageousness with her own life. Holding Willy in his arms, Edward Oswald was struggling desperately towards the nearest bank—where

juniors were plunging fully dressed into the water, in order to help him out.

Reggie Pitt was not far from Doris, however—and he, in a flash, saw her peril. He swam, he swam madly, and he dived at almost the same moment. With the powerful force of his downward thrust he was taken below the surface, and he caught a gleam of the girl as she sank. And in the nick of time, Pitt grasped her.

And the next moment they were on the surface.

"Steady—you're all right now!" spluttered Reggie. "By Jove, Doris, that was wonderful! You've saved him—you've brought him up! You ought to get the life-saving medal for this!"

The girl's eyes were closed, and she was looking pale and drawn as she lay limp in Pitt's arms. Her bathing cap had disappeared, and her dark hair was clinging limply to her head.

"Where—where is he?" she murmured dully.

"It's all right—Handforth's got him," replied Pitt. "You grab hold of me, and take it easy, Doris. Nothing to worry about now."

She was rapidly recovering.

"Oh, look!" she exclaimed, breathing hard. "They've taken him ashore—they've got him on the bank! Reggie, do you think he's alive? I'm so terribly afraid that——"

"He's got as many lives as a cat!" Reggie assured her. "Once they've got the water out of his lungs, he'll recover in no time. That's the best of these cases. Willy will be about as usual to-morrow, you see. I say, Doris, what a brick you are!"

"I'm not—and you needn't hold me!" said Doris, flushing. "I'm quite all right now. I can easily swim ashore."

But Reggie Pitt wasn't taking any chances. He helped her all the way, and by the time they landed a rousing cheer went up. Doris was seized by her girl chums and hugged excitedly. They were somewhat wet hugs, but nevertheless enthusiastic. The juniors were cheering too, showing their appreciation of her wonderful bravery.

And Willy was recovering!

About half-a-dozen fellows, including Handforth, were mauling him about in the most frightful way. They were holding him upside down, pumping his arms up and down, and generally applying the roughest methods of first-aid. And Willy was making fine progress.

Indeed, by the time Doris and Reggie pushed through the crowd, Willy was sitting up with his eyes open, and looking dazedly about him.

"You young beggar!" breathed Handforth fervently.

"Oh, hallo, Ted!" muttered Willy, tenderly feeling a lump on the side of his head. "I—I say! Who—who got me up?"

"Doris!" chorused a dozen voices.

"Doris!" gurgled Willy, horrified. "My hat—a girl!"

CHAPTER 13.

THE BOMBSHELL.

DORIS BERKELEY smiled.

"Sorry!" she said penitently. "But nobody else happened to spot you, Willy."

"I—I didn't mean that!" exclaimed Willy, with a weak grin. "But—but a girl, you know! And I've always thought you were so jolly fragile! Thanks awfully, Doris. That sounds pretty weak, doesn't it, but a chap can't say exactly what he thinks just after he's been lugged up from the bottom of the giddy river! And by a girl, too!"

"You ought to be jolly grateful, you young sweep!" said Handforth severely. "She saved your life——"

"I didn't!" denied Doris quickly. "At least, anybody might have done it—only I happened to dive in the right spot—that's all. I saw those bubbles."

"My breath," said Willy, nodding. "That's about the last thing I can remember. Oh, goodness! I'm still about half full of water. My lungs feel frightful! But look here—no taking me to the sanny, you chaps!" he added warningly. "I shall be all right in half-an-hour. I don't want any coddling up!"

"But how did it happen, Willy?" asked Pitt curiously.

Willy explained, as fluently as he was able.

"Well, it ought to be a lesson to you not to fool about any more," said his major. "Fancy diving down like that—in the most treacherous part of the river, too! You ought to be jolly well kicked!"

"I know it—and anybody can kick me who likes," agreed Willy. "By jingo, I've learnt a lesson, though! No more fancy stunts for me! I—I say, Doris, old girl, how the dickens shall I be able to pay you back? You saved my life, and——"

"Don't be silly, Willy," interrupted Doris uncomfortably. "Please forget all about it. Nobody's come to any harm, so it doesn't matter. But I hope you mean what you say about not doing anything like that again. It's so—so reckless."

"He's going to be carried to the school and shoved to bed," said Handforth firmly. "It's no good, Willy, my son. You needn't ask to be excused. My mind's made up! I'm going to fetch the doctor, too!"

"All right!" said Willy readily.

"You agree?"

"Go ahead," replied Willy listlessly. "But don't blame me if everybody's forbidden to swim in this stretch of the river again!"

"Eh?"

"Well, you know what these masters are," muttered Willy. "As soon as they've heard that I was nearly drowned, they'll shove the river out of bounds, or something. And Miss Bond, of the Moor View School, will do the same thing for the girls. The best thing we can do is to hush it all up."

"By Jove, he's right!" said Reggie, nodding. "There'll be an awful fuss if the beaks

get to know about this. Better keep it from them if we can."

And the others realised that Willy was perfectly right. Fortunately, only one or two seniors had been on the scene, and they agreed to say nothing. So the incident was never officially recorded. And by bedtime Doris Berkeley was quite herself again.

Willy, however, was pretty groggy. He had been helped back to the school by his chums, and had remained quietly in his own little study, dispensing with the formality of supper. He was dizzy and weak, and his head was very bad, a nasty bruise showing where he had struck it against the submerged timber.

But Willy's extreme youth served him in good stead, and by the following morning he was so far recovered that he partook of a hearty breakfast, and announced himself as fit. The lump on his head was smaller, and, except for a little hoarseness, his lungs were behaving admirably.

"I can hardly realise it, you know," he confided to his chums as they went into Big Hall for prayers. "It wouldn't have been so bad if I'd been saved by my major, or one of the other chaps. But a girl!"

"It is a bit of a come-down!" admitted Juicy Lemon solemnly. "I'm blessed if I know how she did it! I've always thought these girls were as useless as the giddy flowers in the Head's garden! And here's one of them lugging you up from the bottom of the river!"

"Doris is a brick!" said Willy. "If I hear you chaps saying anything against girls in future, I'll slaughter you! Hallo! Everybody's looking a bit scared this morning," he added as he glanced round Big Hall. "Yes, by jingo! The Head's going to explode a few fireworks, isn't he?"

"About sports, you mean," said Chubby Heath. "Oh, that was only a rumour."

But the whole school was agog with anxiety and curiosity. It was generally known that Dr. Malcolm Stafford was contemplating some sort of speech on the subject of school sports. But scarcely anybody believed that the Head could suggest anything to hinder cricket or the carnival. After all, these things were of far more importance than anything else this term.

But masters were peculiar people—particularly Headmasters—and one never knew exactly how to take them. It was just as well to be prepared for squalls. So the school waited rather concernedly.

As soon as prayers were over, the Head indicated that he had something to say. And the gravity of his expression was hardly encouraging. The Housemasters and undermasters were on the platform, too, and they were all looking wise, as though they knew exactly what was coming.

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important announcement this morning," said the Head quietly. "But before doing so I should like to express a few words on the subject of general sports."

Although the Head spoke softly, his voice carried to every part of Big Hall, and the fellows fairly held their breath, in order to catch every word. There were knowing glances. So they had been right! Dr. Stafford was going to deal with sports, as the rumours had indicated.

"I think you will all appreciate that I am a keen advocate of cricket and similar games," continued the Head gravely. "It has been my consistent policy to encourage sport in every form. I like to think of St. Frank's being prominent among the big public schools of this country in every type of sports."

"Hear, hear, sir!"

"We've got the best name in the south of England, sir!"

"There's no school to touch St. Frank's for sport, sir!"

"No fear!"

"I am ready to agree with those boys whose enthusiasm led them to interrupt me," said the Head smoothly. "At the moment St. Frank's has, indeed, a very high reputation for sports in general. That is just the problem. While being a strong advocate of games, I deprecate this present excess of enthusiasm. There can be too much of even a good thing. And I fear that most of you have come to the erroneous conclusion that you are here merely for the purpose of attaining perfection at some particular sport or other. But I would like you to know that St. Frank's is not exactly a training establishment for brawn and muscle. First and last, this school is here for the purpose of studying. Sports are quite secondary."

"Oh!"

"You can't mean that, sir!"

"Your attitude, I observe, is one of astonishment," said Dr. Stafford grimly. "It shocks you to learn that I should hold such views. But I repeat that you are here, sent hither by your parents and guardians to learn such unpleasant subjects as Latin and arithmetic and geography and science. We are, in fact, only justified in keeping you here on the understanding that you should learn, as every other schoolboy learns. Cricket is a fine game, and I am wholeheartedly in agreement that you should learn to box, that you should swim, and that you should indulge in the other sports which are so dear to the heart of youth.

"But you must not run away with the impression that lessons are to be entirely ignored. I have learned, to my regret, that the great majority of you have given yourselves so entirely to sports that you have come to regard study as an encumbrance. In other words, you would much prefer to have the whole day devoted to cricket and other games. Lessons are a bother and a nuisance, and the sooner they are pushed aside the better.

"But that is a totally wrong view," continued the Head. "It is your lessons that should be first in your mind, and you should regard sport as a recreation—as a relief from the exacting strain of your studies. That is the way in which to enjoy sport to the full. I greatly deprecate this present-day fever for games. It is unhealthy—it is unnatural."

"Oh, sir!"

"Games aren't unhealthy, sir."

"Everything is unhealthy if it is indulged in to excess," retorted the Head firmly. "What will your reports be like at the end of this term if I do not call a halt? What explanation can I give to your parents when they ask me why you have made no progress? It won't do. There's got to be a change, and I fear that my plea will be falling on deaf ears if I merely make a request. This sports fever has progressed so far that it needs something drastic in order to combat it. And something drastic is in my mind."

The whole school held its breath.

"Briefly," said the Head, "I have decided that there shall be a special examination this term. It will fall in the early part of the week which has been set aside for your final Test Match—which, by the way, I thoroughly approve of. There is nothing I like better than this Empire spirit. Between this day and that week you must study very hard indeed, or the consequences may be serious."

The school still listened with uneasy intentness.

"For these examinations, I may tell you, will be very severe," said Dr. Stafford quietly, "and everybody who fails to secure a given amount of marks will be forbidden any and every kind of sport for the remainder of the year, or until he so improves his studies that he is once more eligible. And there will be no escape from this. An insufficient percentage of marks, and sports will be absolutely prohibited!"

CHAPTER 14.

THE INDIGNANT SCHOOL.

MY only hat!"

"He can't mean it!"

"It's—it's absolutely outrageous!"

"Never heard such a thing in all my life!"

These and similar comments went up from every corner of Big Hall as the Head paused. There was not only a note of dismay in those voices, but an expression of consternation.

Exams! Exams this term, of all terms! Not the ordinary kind, but something especially stiff, something calculated to give the school a twisting! It was about the unkindest blow that could be dealt.

And everybody who failed to obtain a given percentage of marks would be isolated from sports for the rest of the year! The school could hardly believe its ears. Sports were a part of their lives, and this term, at least, sports were the most important items of all.

"Lest you should think there will be any exemptions—particularly for those boys who are important to the various cricket Elevens—I would like to add a few comments," con-

tinued the Head. "There will be no exemptions whatever. These examinations will be comprehensive, with papers on all subjects, and every boy of every Form will be compelled to enter. I wish you to understand that thoroughly, for I am determined to make you realise that there must be more study and less recreation.

"I do not think I have left any loophole for doubt," said Dr. Stafford drily. "You can be under no misapprehensions regarding my meaning. For, in all seriousness, unless you devote many hours a day to preliminary study, you will have no chance of passing the exams. And you know what the penalty will be!"

The school listened, rather stunned, and William Napoleon Browne was the only fellow who had enough courage to make a personal appeal.

"You have left us under no misconceptions, sir, regarding the nature of this murky business," he said smoothly. "But—if I may presume to offer a comment—is not the situation incongruous?"

"How do you mean, Browne?"

"If we devote ourselves to sport this term, we must necessarily neglect cramming for these exams, sir," explained Browne. "And thus we kill all hopes of sport next term. I trust I have grasped the situation clearly, sir?"

"Quite clearly."

"On the other hand," continued Browne, "if we are to qualify ourselves for sport for the remainder of the year, we must neglect sport for this term. Is not one evil as great as the other, sir?"

The Headmaster nodded.

"I see your point, Browne, but I will soon make the position clearer," he said. "I am not asking you to neglect sport entirely; I should not be true to my own principles if I did so. Continue your cricket by all means, continue your other outdoor recreations. But do so in moderation. These examinations will compel you to, unless you deliberately choose to sacrifice your chances after the summer vacation.

"Do not imagine that I shall then relent," said the Head grimly. "Indeed, I may hint that there will be even greater penalties. Those boys who fail utterly in the exams—those, for example, who are known to have deliberately ignored them—will not be let off with a mere sports prohibition. They will be removed from this school, for they are not the kind of boys St. Frank's desires. I feel, however, that there will be none of this type, for I have much greater faith in you. These examinations will be a test, and although you may find less time for sports practice, you will gain in the long run."

"But what about the Test Matches, sir?"

"How can we hope to win if we don't practise, sir?"

"It will not be a tragedy if you lose," said the Head drily. "I should like St. Frank's to win all the honours possible at sports, but, as I have already told you, sports are secondary to study. And that is an attitude which I shall consistently maintain. Within a few days the preliminary examination announcements will be distributed, and I shall then have something further to say on the subject. For the moment you may dismiss."

And the school hurried out of Big Hall, seething with indignation.

Once outside, the storm broke, and Dr. Stafford, hearing the echoes of it, was by no means surprised. He expected it.—He knew that he had made himself intensely unpopular. But he possessed a strong sense of duty, and he felt convinced that the boys would soon settle down to a more sane outlook.

But the Triangle was boiling with discontent.

"It's an outrage!" Handforth was saying. "How the dickens can we carry on with the sports carnival and these Test Matches if we've got to spend all our time swotting up for exams?"

"It's no good grousing, old man——" began Church.

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "I've a dashed good mind to go straight to the Head, and tell him what I think! Why not get up a deputation?" he added eagerly. "I'll be the leader——"

"It wouldn't do any good, Handy," interrupted Dick Hamilton. "I've never known the Head to be more determined. He's as firm as a rock, and the only thing we can do is to face the music."

Handforth stared.

"You mean to say you knuckle under?" he asked.

"Don't be an ass!" growled Dick. "It's not a question of knuckling under. If the whole school has got to sit for these special exams, we can't kick. It'll mean pretty hard work, too, because we can't neglect our cricket practice——"

"Who cares two straws for your rotten cricket practice?" snapped Bernard Forrest savagely. "This is what comes of being dotty over sports! The innocent have got to suffer for the guilty!"

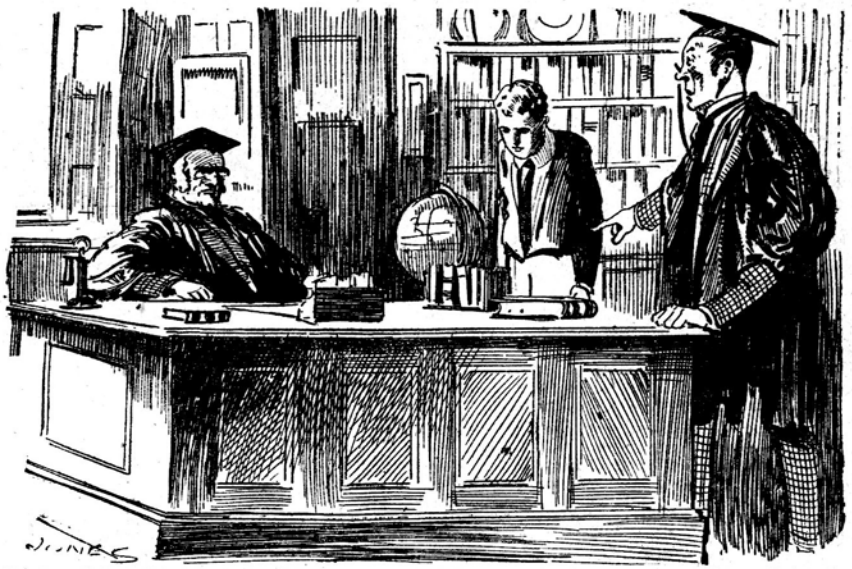
"Yes, we've got to go in for these bally exams with everybody else, although we've never cared a toss for sports!" said Gulliver indignantly. "It's a bit thick!"

"Your sport is a different kind—that's all," said Reggie Pitt curtly. "A bit of cramming will do you chaps good. You'll have less time for playing poker, and dodging away to back the gee-gees!"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Forrest.

He went off in a huff, and the indignation meetings continued.

In practically every Form it was the same, for even in the Fifth and Sixth the seniors were in a ferment of anger. It was just like the Head to impose these special exams when St. Frank's was in the midst of its most successful sports carnival! What with the ordinary school games and the Test Matches, the cricket prospects were the best that St. Frank's had ever had. And now came this edict that swotting was to be the order of the day! The whole thing was regarded as an act of sheer, unmitigated tyranny.



Mr. Crowell turned to the Head. "I have brought this boy before you for punishment," he said tensely. "He is guilty of studied insolence!" and he pointed an accusing finger at Fullwood. This was a serious ending to the Form-room rag.

The sports mania, instead of being subdued, was thoroughly inflamed. The fellows were more than ever determined to devote themselves wholeheartedly to games. Seniors and juniors alike considered that they were being badly treated, that the Head's attitude was despotic to the point of being outrageous.

And it was soon found that the other masters were the same.

The Head had infected them with his own spirit. They were opposed to sports—or, rather, they were opposed to the present fever for sports. Dr. Stafford had advised them to curb their boys at any and every opportunity.

During the day, the excitement subsided slightly, but when the evening came there was an extraordinary amount of interest displayed in the semi-finals for the swimming honours. Juniors who had been only mildly attracted before, were now feverish in their enthusiasm.

Everybody was defiant. The school was showing the Head that it regarded sports as essential, and it wasn't going to be denied!

"We'll let the Head see whether we're going to be sat on!" said Reggie Pitt warmly. "We haven't got to cram for the exam. yet, anyhow, so we'll fill every minute with swimming or cricket, or some other sort of sport."

"Hear, hear!"

"And it's no good being scared over these exams., either," went on Reggie. "I don't think the Head was bluffing, but a little extra work will do wonders. Take my advice, and forget all about it."

When the semi-finals took place, none of the juniors were giving a thought to Dr. Stafford's warning, and prep. was being neglected that evening as carelessly as ever. The school was in a reckless mood, and there was a general spirit of resentment.

CHAPTER 15.

ANOTHER SHOCK.

THE race between Reggie Pitt, of the West House, and Donald Harron, of the East House, was the first one on the programme, and promised to be exciting.

The course was exactly the same, and there were plenty of spectators. There was a certain feverish air about the whole scene—for it had been decided to polish off the events at record speed. Then the fellows would hurry back to Little Side, and put in a stiff hour at practice. Those who weren't interested in cricket would go for a cross-country run, or indulge in some boxing, or hold impromptu boat races.

Nothing was definitely planned or organised—but the idea at the back of all this was to display a bold disregard to the Head's edict. The school meant to show him that sport *was* the chief business of the school.

So the swimming races were rushed off at lightning speed, and everybody entered into the new form of sports madness. Instead of their enthusiasm being checked, it had been

increased a hundredfold. Fellows who had previously taken life easily were now keen upon indulging in some violent form of exercise—anything, in fact, to make a big show, and to prove how preposterous it was to suggest a slackening of games.

The West House, of course, were convinced that Reggie Pitt would win the race, and it came as a bit of a surprise, therefore, when Harron gave Reggie a gruelling race. Harron was an excellent swimmer, and his speed was remarkable. The West House champion was compelled to fight all along the course in order to sweep past the finishing post a mere twenty inches ahead of his rival.

"Hurrah! West House wins!"

"Only by a fluke, though!" roared Armstrong excitedly. "Great guns! Old Harron gave your man a terrific fight! With a bit of luck, he would have won! I believe Harron's the best swimmer, even now!"

"Well, anyhow, Pitt's certain for the Final," said Owen major contentedly.

"You needn't crow, you West House fathead," snorted Armstrong. "Pitt's going to have a clear view of Burton half-way down the course in the Final—and then he'll lose sight of him! It's a bit thick, the way the Ancient House is pinching all the honours in this carnival."

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "Each House is on the same footing—and the honours go to the best men."

Harron was one of the first to congratulate Reggie, and he added the opinion that the West House stood a good chance of claiming the honours.

"Afraid not, old man," said Pitt, shaking his head. "I'm scared of Burton, you know. He's too good for any of us."

"Might as well buzz off now—and see about some cricket," suggested Tommy Watson. "There's no need to wait for the other race. Our man's a certain winner. There's nobody to touch the Bo'sun."

John Busterfield Boots, the junior captain of the Modern House, grunted.

"You'd better think again," he said tartly. "It may interest you to know that I've timed Christine, and he's going to win this next race."

"Poor old Boots!" grinned Watson.

"You can cackle," growled Boots. "But if Burton beats Christine, it'll be by the thickness of his giddy scalp! Burton's a jolly good swimmer—a giddy fish—but you wait until you see Christine!"

The Ancient House fellows were highly amused—until the race between Tom Burton and Bob Christine was half-way over. Then the Ancient House juniors rather changed their expressions.

"By George! What's happening?" gasped Handforth, staring. "Christine's leading!"

"Go it, Modern House!"

"It's only Burton's spoof!" said Dick Hamilton. "He'll give a terrific spurt in a minute, and forge ahead. Poor old Christine will wonder what it is that's passing him!"

The Bo'sun saved his great effort for the last, as Dick had foretold. And a yell of delight went up when he was seen to be overtaking the Modern House junior with startling rapidity. He drew abreast—forged ahead—and swept along the final straight.

"Hurrah!"

"Ancient House wins!"

"Got it, Bo'sun!"

It seemed that the race was as good as over. Buster Boots and the other Modern House juniors were looking on anxiously. And then Bob Christine put on a spurt of his own—one that took the spectators by surprise. They hadn't believed him capable of such a final burst of speed.

"Look out, Bo'sun!"

"Christine! Go it, Modern House!"

Whether Tom Burton was taken by surprise or not, nobody could guess, but twenty-five yards from the finishing line, Christine drew level, and then it became a neck-and-neck struggle. And although the Bo'sun was regarded as an easy winner, it was Bob Christine who flashed past the post first.

"Good old Bob!" bellowed Boots. "Good man! Modern House wins!"

"Hurrah!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth blankly. "Burton's whacked! The Bo'sun, you know—beaten by one of those Modern House fatheads! It's—it's too dotty for words!"

"Well, I'd have put my shirt on Burton!" declared Dick Hamilton firmly. "Fancy the ass letting himself be beaten! We're out of the running now—we shan't see the ghost of those honours!"

It was certainly a shock for the Ancient House. Their man had been looked upon as a certainty, and this unexpected defeat altered the whole aspect of the contest. The final race would now be between Reggie Pitt and Bob Christine—and Bob, having beaten the Bo'sun, was hot favourite.

"Sorry, messmates," apologised Burton, as he came out of the water. "I tried to beat him, but he whacked me. Swab my decks! I never thought that Christine had such speed!"

"Life's full of little surprises!" said Hamilton, smiling. "Don't worry, Bo'sun—nobody's blaming you. Good luck to the Modern House for putting up such a good fight! Bob's a wonder, and he's going to give Reggie Pitt a stiff time of it in the Final."

Burton was so distressed that he offered all sorts of excuses for his failure. Possibly he had overtrained, but it was more probable that the Head's "down" on sports had affected him temperamentally. Anyhow, he had been beaten, and the Ancient House had bade good-bye to the honours. Not that the Ancient House had much to complain of—since they were well to the fore in points for the other events in the carnival.

The swimming races over, the cricketers hurried off to Little Side, and other feverish activities were soon afoot. Dr. Stafford and the other masters were fully aware of this defiant attitude, but they had been half prepared for it. There would possibly be a different feeling in the school when the subjects for the coming exams. were given out!

A shock, in fact, awaited St. Frank's.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

"THE SLAVES OF ST. FRANK'S!"

Slavery! That's what the Boys of St. Frank's have to endure—sheer slavery!

High-pressure swotting in the form-rooms, because of the Head's special exams.! Then high-pressure training on the playing fields, because the Aussies—the "red-hot" Aussies!—are getting fit for the second Schoolboy Test Match.

Nobody has a minute to spare—even Handforth can't find time to scrap!

Read all about this in next week's rousing long, complete yarn; it is full of fun, and the Test Match provides heaps of cricket thrills.

"THE WRAITH of the RIVER!"

Nobody knew who the "wraith" was—but Nipper found out! Trust Nipper to do that! He got himself into one of the tightest corners he had ever experienced, but Nelson Lee came on the scene in the nick of time.

You will enjoy next Wednesday's exciting complete detective-adventure story.

Handforth in a tangle—and with a hosepipe this time! Look out for this cover next week!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

It came two days later, when the preliminary examination papers were distributed. There were different papers for every Form. Only the subjects were indicated, so that the various Forms should know what lay ahead of them. And the whole school was literally dumbfounded.

Ordinary exams. were bad enough—but this was a twister.

Without doubt, the special exams. would be the stiffest on record. Only a brief examination of the subjects was enough to convince the school of this.

"But—but this is impossible!" gasped Tommy Watson, staring at his chums in horror. "And right in the middle of the Sports Carnival, too! And the Test Matches! What the dickens can we do?"

"Begad, that's a frightfully difficult question to answer," said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "It seems to me, old boy, that we're all in for a pretty beastly time."

"Beastly isn't the word for it," growled Dick Hamilton, frowning. "If you want to have it bluntly, Tommy, it'll mean hard, persistent swotting. Not the ordinary kind of cramming, you know—but something special."

"What about sports practice?"

"We shall have to neglect it."

"Neglect it!" gasped Watson. "But the Test Matches!"

"Even the Test Matches will have to go by the board," replied Dick. "We can't afford to lose marks in these exams. Think what it means! The Head's got us on toast this time, and it's no good denying the fact."

The whole school was in a dilemma.

The exams. had come as a complete shock—particularly when it was found that they were to be most cruelly exacting. Any real slackness would mean complete failure—and the Head had held out the prospect of removing slackers from the school! Even if enough marks were secured to avoid this, it would probably mean something almost as bad. No sports for the rest of the year—and that meant no football in the winter season!

St. Frank's was indignant and rebellious.

There was a great deal of talk about defying the Head altogether—but nothing came of it. After all, this was one of those burdens that had to be borne.

There wasn't sufficient justification for an open revolt—for nobody could start such a drastic measure as a barring-out because the headmaster instituted some special examinations. And, in their hearts, the fellows knew only too well that they had been sadly neglecting their studies. But they wouldn't admit it—not even to themselves.

Besides, any sort of revolt would mean the utter wrecking of the sports programme, including the Test Matches—and that was a thought unthinkable.

CHAPTER 16.

A MURKY PROSPECT.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE was one of the seniors who kept cool, and saw the affair in its true proportion.

"After all, Brother Horace, life is still full of compensations," he confided to Stevens, his study mate. "At first sight, it appears that we are splashing about in the ox-tail. But we must not be too hasty. While admitting that the prospects are murky, there is still hope."

"A fat lot!" growled Horace Stevens.

"It would be more correct to say a lean lot, but no matter," continued Browne. "Certain sportsmen are raving throughout the school, giving voice in no uncertain tongue. They appear to want red revolution, with splashes of genuine gore. They are even whispering that the spectacle of Dr. Stafford's head on a salver would be by no means unwelcome."

"Some of those juniors are pretty right, too," said Stevens indignantly. "Hang it all, I feel like revolting myself! And I'm surprised at you, Browne! You're one of the best cricketers, and you don't seem to care a toss! What about these Test Matches? What chance have we got if there's no time for practice?"

Browne smiled.

"That is a point which must be discussed," he replied. "There is time for everything, Brother Horace—and that is the crux of this whole question, although I fear that many do not see it. Why this panic? Why this desire to hoist the vermilion duster?"

"The which?"

"I scarcely hoped that you would understand," said Browne benevolently. "The crimson pennant, Brother Horace—the red flag. Why are our fellow humans making the air hideous with their animal cries? Verily, I fail to see the reason for this consternation."

"Then you must be blind."

"Nay, brother, it is you who are blind," denied Browne. "So far as I am aware, the Head has not forbidden sports. I could understand this riot if he had placed the veto on the Test Matches—if he had forbidden the Sports Carnival to continue. But Brother Stafford has done neither of these things. He has banned absolutely nothing."

"That's true enough."

"On the other hand, he has sprung this exam. upon the school with the force of a cyclone," proceeded Browne. "But that is surely no reason to weep? In an affair of this sort we must retain our sense of proportion—and curb all thoughts of insurrection. In a nutshell, we have merely to work extra hard, and no sports will be interfered with, and we shall be prepared for the exams. when they arrive. All this is merely a matter of organisation, Brother Horace."

"I'm hanged if I can see it."

"One day," smiled Browne, "I hope to enlighten you—for it is my intention to address the school on this interesting subject. Or perhaps I will leave it to Brother Fenton—since he is the school captain. In that event, I must prime him up thoroughly before he ventures upon the platform."

"But I don't follow——"

"If only this thing is put before the school in the right way, we can continue our mad career of sports unchecked," said Browne cheerily. "As you may be aware, Brother Horace, there are many precious minutes in the day which are at present wasted. Minutes in bed—a great many minutes, indeed, particularly in the early morning. There are minutes during the tea-hour—when, under the existing conditions, most of us squander the time with atrocious disregard of its value. When all these wasted minutes are conserved and used, there will be a different tale. Yes, I must certainly speak to Brother Fenton on this interesting subject."

There seemed to be a large amount of common sense in Browne's conclusions. For it was undoubtedly a fact that a great deal of time was wasted daily by the majority of the boys. They took life easily, and never gave a thought to utilising odd half-hours. These were generally squandered in idle talk, or in sunning themselves in the Triangle.

Browne was determined that his suggestions should go before the school, although it might be better to let Fenton voice them. For the moment, however, the school was stunned by the severity of the exams. The thought of swotting in this sort of weather scared them stiff.

Even the Final of the swimming contest promised to fall flat. There was so much talk concerning the Head's tyranny that a mere swimming race seemed insignificant and idle.

Nevertheless, nearly all the Remove and Fourth lined the banks of the Stowe that evening, when Reggie Pitt and Bob Christine took the water.

There was one excellent result of the Semi-Finals—for a Remove fellow was matched against a Fourth Former. And after Bob's victory against Tom Burton, the Fourth had every reason to feel optimistic.

But here, again, popular opinion counted for nothing.

(*Continued on page* 40.)

THE MYSTERY of the CHINESE VASE!

A star-shaped splash of yellow metal gave Nelson Lee the first clue, but it was Nipper who ran the crooks to earth.

CHAPTER 1.

WHAT SILAS PYECROFT SAW.

"IF it costs me a thousand pounds, I'll find out who bashed me," Mr. Silas Pyecroft said savagely. "I'm not used to being beaten up, and—by glory!—I'll make someone pay for it!"

Nipper yawned. It was no joke to be dragged out of bed at four a.m., to have to rush out to Caterham, and then to find that all the fuss was because someone had tapped an American on the head. Even the guv'nor was frowning, as the Yankee continued to spout "hot air."

"Mr. Pyecroft, we've wasted an hour coming to Caterham," Nelson Lee snapped at last. "Unless you will state your case briefly, we cannot pretend to help you."

"I'm sure telling you," Pyecroft answered. "I've only been living here for a month, but I've been watching that mean old cuss opposite ever since I came."

"Well?" Nelson Lee asked impatiently.

"I'm a bad sleeper, an' early this morning I was lookin' through my window, when I saw a light in old Eli Day's bed-room," Pyecroft continued. "Wal, I hadn't known Eli as an early riser, an' I was wondering if he was ill, when I saw his light trailin' downstairs. Seeing that he only has the company of a manservant almost as old as himself, I made sure one of 'em must be bad, so I grabbed my bags and hopped across as slick as I could." He paused to stroke his bandaged head. "I'd gotten as far as Eli's front door, found it open, and was peepin' inside—when th' house fell on me!"

"You mean you were sandbagged?" Nelson Lee asked.

"Poleaxed, I'd say," Pyecroft grinned. "Anyway, 'fore I went down, I'd a glimpse of Eli lying on the floor, an' I came to—to find I'd been dragged inside and was lying by the old feller I'd come to help."

"But why did you not inform the police?" Nelson Lee demanded. "It appears to be an ordinary case of burglary——"

"Nix on th' police," Pyecroft interrupted. "I was just sitting up, wondering if a cyclone had struck me, when that doddering old servant of Eli's came along. He let on he'd been asleep until that moment, then 'fore I could say a word, he suddenly dropped a sack over my head, fastened it tight enough to choke me, and dragged and locked me in a room!"

The great detective's eyes had narrowed to a new interest, and Nipper had roused up with a start. The Yankee's story was beginning to make that early-morning dash appear worth while.

"It took me hours to get rid of that sack," Pyecroft went on. "When I did, it took me about one minute to break down the locked door, for I was about ready to eat the hired man that'd been so clever with me." He grinned crookedly. "Might as well have saved my temper, though, for both Eli Day and the servant Dodgson had vanished!"

"They'd run away, and left you in possession of the house?" Nipper gasped.

"Dodgson might ha' run away, but I'm all-fired sure Eli couldn't ha' crawled away," Pyecroft replied. "When I woke up beside the old chap, I saw he'd been savaged, as if a wolf had been at him—you'll find his blood all over the place when we step across."

"You say you've been interested in Eli Day," Nelson Lee said. "What do you know about him? Had he money, relatives, a business that might bring him enemies?"

"He'd neither money, relatives, nor business, far's I know," Pyecroft snapped. "He's a mean, wizened cuss who wouldn't spend ten dimes a week on food, if he could help it. He has a name round here for being the meapest thing that ever lived. He seldom puts his nose out of doors, an' when he does he bleats poverty all over the place."

Nelson Lee nodded absently. He crossed to the window, stared musingly at the house opposite, then let his glance drop to the roadway that lay between them.

"Was it raining, Mr. Pyecroft, when you crossed to Day's house?" he asked quietly.

"Nope—it was cloudy, but fine," the American replied, stepping between Lee and Nipper and the window. "Strange you should ask that, though, for when I first came to I seem to remember a rush of sound as if a waterspout was tumbling down."

"Gosh! I see what you mean, guv'nor," Nipper suddenly cried. "It wasn't a waterspout you heard, Mr. Pyecroft; it was the

running engine of a motor, and a jolly heavy one at that!"

Pyecroft's forehead wrinkled in an effort of thought.

"Sonny, I believe you've hit it," he said excitedly. "But, I don't see how you've guessed it—you weren't watching the house, were you?"

Nipper grinned.

"We don't guess, sir," he said. "And I was havin' my beauty sleep about the time you got your head cracked."

"There has been a shower—it must have come on soon after you were sandbagged," Nelson Lee explained. "If you look closely into the gutter facing Day's door, you can see the mud-marks of wheels that have left little ridges when the car was started up."

"Then that's how they got old Eli away?" Pyecroft murmured.

"We'll learn more by crossing over to the cottage," Nelson Lee said briskly. "If you will rest indoors, Mr. Pyecroft, we'll let you know the result of our investigations. Come, Nipper."

Before entering the cottage, they paused to examine the marks left by the motor.

"Look, guv'nor, you can't mistake the make of car," Nipper said excitedly. "Those two crushed triangles stabbed into the mud mean a 'Dullan' wagon, unless my eyesight's failin'."

"Exactly," Nelson Lee nodded, his glance on the entrance to Day's tiny garden. "But, look at this gate—some great weight has crashed into the woodwork, judging by these dents; and see, the little gravel walk looks as if a lawn-mower had been dragged down it."

"Gosh—it does an' all, guv'nor!" Nipper exclaimed, staring in amazement at the gravel. "And, by the way the marks twist and turn, it looks as if the lawn-mower had been doing a jazz turn on its own!"

The path was certainly scarred by a most curiously circular design—as if someone had been trying to impress a snake pattern on it. But Nelson Lee, having noted the fact, stepped quickly along the grass border and into the house.

"There's been a rough house here," Nipper gasped, close on his guv'nor's heels. "I'm beginning to believe Pyecroft when he said old Eli couldn't have crawled away."

There was no doubt that a savage struggle had taken place, and that someone had suffered terrible injuries. The chair and coat-stand that had stood in the hall were smashed to firewood, the splinters of a mirror powdered the floor thickly. Crimson spots of blood splashed one wall, and a heavy bludgeon was lying abandoned in a corner.

But Nelson Lee, after one glance at the wreckage, had turned his attention to a black ebony stool that was lying askew with one leg broken away.

"This stool's had a lot to do with last night's doings, young 'un," he said. "The marked patch on its surface shows that it has been used as a stand for some great weight." He picked up the broken leg and pointed to its splintered top. "Whatever was on the stool has been toppled to the ground so roughly that it smashed away this leg and brought a bit of the stand with it."

"Then that'll explain those marks on the gravel path," Nipper cried. "Whatever the thing was, it's simply been rolled through the front door, down the path, and been loaded up on the motor."

"And the fact that the motor was here and waiting, proves that the affair was no chance burglary," Nelson Lee said quietly. "Um—here's a queer spot of yellow on the floor—what do you make of it, Nipper?"

Nipper dropped to his knees on the bare boards and stared intently at a star-shaped splash of dull yellow.

"Don't quite know, guv'nor," he said doubtfully. "It isn't paint—it almost looks as if a spot of hot metal had been dropped here at some time."

"That's exactly what it is," Nelson Lee replied musingly.

He carefully examined the spot through a magnifying glass, scraped its surface with the blade of his penknife, then struggled slowly to his feet.

"Strange—very strange," he muttered. "I must see Pyecroft quickly—perhaps he can remember what stood on this stool." He turned to the lad, his forehead wrinkled in deep thought. "Nipper, have a run through the house—report to me instantly if you find anything of importance."

CHAPTER 2.

OLD ELI SNEAKS AWAY.

LEFT alone, Nipper began a close examination of the four rooms that formed Day's cottage. As Pyecroft stated, the old chap seemed to have been miserably poor—there was hardly a thing in the house that would have been worth the trouble of carting away. The front sitting-room held a chipped desk and two hard chairs, and dirty, ragged curtains masked only the lower half of its window. The two bed-rooms each had a rusty iron bedstead and cheap coloured blankets, and the kitchen table still held the remains of last night's supper spread out on an old newspaper.

A sordid house, and yet—each window was fastened with an up-to-date safety catch, and the wires of burglar alarms sent bells jangling every time Nipper touched the knob of a door!

"Well, if this doesn't beat the band!" the lad muttered. "I wouldn't have the old chap's goods as a gift, yet he's spent pounds on things that'll rouse the town if anybody comes near the place." He glanced in disgust at the unwashed dishes and pans that littered the scullery, then suddenly pounced on a long-handled, oval pot that stood on a high shelf. "Hallo—that's the sort of thing plumbers use for meltin' lead in; and, by crikey, it holds traces of the same stuff that's been spilt in the hall!"

For a moment Nipper stared in bewilder-

ment at the yellow stain that marked the inside of the pot almost to its rim.

"If gold quids were in use nowadays, I'd think old Eli and his servant must have been coiners," he mused. "But they couldn't pass dud quids even if they made them, so that can't——"

He broke off suddenly as a sound from the little back garden reached his ears. Creeping to the window and peeping cautiously through the ragged curtain, he was amazed to see the door of a tumble-down wash-house slowly opening! Then, from its gloomy interior, he saw a bent, bearded old man step out—a fellow whose head was bound in a soiled silk scarf, and whose face was marred by a great jagged cut that ran from lip to ear!

"Gosh!" Nipper whispered. "That'll be old Eli Day—he didn't clear off in the motor—he's been hiding in his own house! My hat—he hasn't half been knocked about—looks as if he ought to be in bed. But why is he sneaking away like this? He's been nearly killed, somebody's stolen his goods—and here he is running away as if he'd done the pinching himself!"

Nipper grew more and more bewildered as he watched the old chap's actions. Weak and shaking though he was, Eli's first frightened glance was at his own windows; then, satisfied that all was quiet in the house, he crept stealthily to the back door, loosened its bolt as quietly as he could, and slipped into the lane.

Nipper waited until he reckoned the old fellow would be out of earshot, then he also tiptoed down the garden and took a cautious glance up and down the lane.

To his surprise, old Eli had vanished; but soon he again sighted him—now slowly crossing an open field that led down to the valley.

For a time Nipper made no attempt to move, knowing that he could catch the old fellow up in a minute, if need be. Instead, he contented himself with trying to understand why the queer old skinflint had been terrified of being seen from his own house, yet was openly crossing a field a moment afterwards.

"I believe he's running away from the guv'nor!" Nipper suddenly exclaimed. "That's it—his servant, Dodgson, cleared off with whoever raided the house, and old Eli was left because they had no use for him. Then he recovered—and watched us arriving at Pyecroft's. My hat! I believe he's as anxious to keep out of our way as the fellows are who've half-killed him!"

That may have been so, but old Eli's movements soon showed the lad that he was doing more than simply running away. Crossing that first field, the old chap peeped cautiously through the hedge, then crept along in its shelter towards a grey stone house that stood a little further down the valley.

He was soon out of Nipper's sight, and the lad, bending low, crept round the field and slowly approached the hedge through which Eli Day had broken.

He was now looking straight down on the grey house, and was surprised to see shuttered windows that looked as if they had not been opened for years. There was no sign of life about the place, and Nipper was just deciding that the house was empty, when he heard a faint but regular "Tap, tap, tap!"

Old Eli had again vanished, but Nipper guessed that he was making for the sinister sound of hammering, and that he meant to enter the grey house as stealthily as he had left his own.

"And if I go back to tell the guv'nor, Eli might take fright again and we'd lose him for keeps," Nipper muttered. "'Sides, I don't like the look of the old fellow!"

Keeping to the cover of the hedge, the lad circled a second field, and scouted along with bent back until he had the grey stone house directly facing him. Parting the thick-set branches, he found himself staring into a weed-grown garden that ended against the back wall of the place. And now the "Tap, tap, tap!" came harsh and clear to his ears.

Then, for the third time, he saw Eli Day, and wondered what great need was urging the injured man on. The old chap's face looked ghastly white, the gash on his cheek had broken out afresh and blood was slowly oozing down his neck.

He was creeping nearer the house, taking advantage of every tree and bush behind which he could shelter and rest. But no sooner had he paused and dabbled the blood from his cheek than he was on his feet again—staggering with weakness, diving for cover, and finally reaching a low French-window that stood near the back door.

Except for the monotonous sound of hammering, there was still no sign of life from the house. But the old chap was evidently expecting trouble, for Nipper watched him take a snub-nosed automatic from his pocket, loosen the safety-catch, and grin fiendishly before turning his attention to the window.

Then the watching lad whistled softly as he saw the speed and ease with which old Eli broke into the house. It seemed to take him seconds only to circle a pane of glass with a diamond-cutter, to unfold a sheet of sticky brown paper and to carefully smooth it out on the pane he had cut. For a moment the old man stood with hands pressed heavily on the paper—then he peeled it quickly away, and brought a six-inch circle of glass adrift with the paper!

Flinging paper and glass into the thick grass, he crooked an arm through the hole, had the window open in a flash, and vanished from Nipper's sight.

"Gosh—that's the limit!" the lad gasped. "But it's not the first time old Eli's cracked a crib—though I'm jolly well sure he's never done one quicker, or meant more danger to those he's making for!"

It needed all Nipper's scant patience for him to allow the sinister old man time to get clear of the room he had entered. But the lad forced himself to a half-minute wait, then, dodging behind tree and bush as Eli had done, he hastened down the garden and crept into the house.

The room he had entered was quite without furniture, its bare boards dusty and dirty. Crossing the place on his toes, Nipper peeped through the open doorway, found himself at the end of a gloomy passage—and then heard the sound of raised, angry voices.

Creeping quickly along the passage, he almost blundered into Eli Day before he spotted the old fellow crouched down in the semi-darkness, and grinning wickedly at the row that was taking place before his eyes.

"You've made a mess of the whole job, Dodgson," came in hoarse, vicious tones to Nipper's ear. "Yer said we'd only to get this thing away from the house, an' we'd 'ave a fortune in our hands in five minutes!"

"'Ow was I to know th' ole skinflint'd turned it into a safe that's beyond even Ned Ginn to open?" Dodgson whined. "I tell yer, 'onest, Ned, I thought we only 'ad to crack the thing——"

"I'd like ter crack you," Ginn growled. He struck something savagely with a hammer, and a deep musical note boomed through the house. "I can open the thing—never you fret about that. But we daren't make any more noise, now th' people's wakin' up an' beginnin' ter move about."

"Then what are we goin' to do, Ned?" Dodgson stammered. "D'you think we'll be safe in this house—it's supposed to have been empty for years?"

"Of course not, you ass!" Ginn answered witheringly. "If old miser Eli 'as enough life left in him to crawl about, 'e won't take long ter remember this old 'ouse—an' it won't take 'im long ter come lookin' for us, neither!"

Back in the passage, old Eli himself was slowly drawing his gun; and, still further back, Nipper was noiselessly taking off his boots.

"Then I'm not waitin' for Eli to appear," Dodgson said, in open fear. "After what we've done—beatin' 'im up an' pinchin' what he values more'n life itself—'e'll be as gentle as a tiger that's been robbed of its cubs! I'm not waitin', Ned—I'm goin' while the goin's good!"

"We're both goin', but we're not leavin' this thing behind that's cost us so much trouble," Ned growled. "You slip out an' get the wagon from that lane we hid 'er in—an' I'll be coverin' Eli's bank up ready fer your comin'. Y'know, Joe, we ought to have chanced findin' a quiet place—we've been fools to come here——"

Nipper distinctly heard Ned's whistling gasp as old Eli suddenly stepped from the gloomy passage to the light. He was still partly in Nipper's view, and the lad could see that his gun was pointed full on the two who had robbed him.

"Put 'em up, boys!" he snapped. "Dear ole Joe, whom I've fed an' kept this twenty years—an' you, Ned, as I've got out of trouble more times than I can count. Put 'em up, I tell you—for you've finished playing yer dirty game!"

CHAPTER 3.

THE CHINESE VASE.

WITH old Eli's ominous words ringing in his ears, Nipper tore off his second boot, kept it in his hand, and crept nearer the armed old man.

Still hugging the shadow, he was now able to look into a big square hall that was desolate and empty—except for the three actors in the grim drama, and a huge vase. One hasty glance at the vase showed Nipper that a great hole had been broken in the inch-thick crockery; but, where the break should have shown a gaping hole, he saw the polished surface of an inner sheath of steel!

"So you thought you only had to knock a weak old man down, and you'd be rich for life, eh?" old Eli gibed. "Yer didn't reckon as old Eli knew th' game better'n you knew it yerself?" The banter suddenly dropped from his voice. "You thought I didn't understand the rats I've been dealin' with all me days? Well, I did, you muddle-headed oafs! And because you've made it impossible for me to hide my secrets any longer, I'm—going to kill you, an' keep you company!"

"You let up with yer silly threats, an' yer pop-gun," Ned Ginn sneered. "I owed yer one, an' I been tryin' to pay it—same as you'd have done yerself. But we ain't got away with yer vase, so put your nasty li'l barker in yer pocket. It's your win, Eli, so act sensible."

"That's your mistake—for I lose!" Eli rapped out venomously. "I lose—all that I've slaved for all my life, thanks to you fools who couldn't even rob an old man without rousin' the whole place up!"

"What d'yer mean, Eli?" Ginn asked.

"I mean that Yankee you knocked on the head," Eli snapped. "First thing he did was to bring Nelson Lee and his cub along—now d'you see what I mean?"

"I don't," Ginn said, though a new fear had come into his voice. "You've got th' wind up, Eli! You've only to go back an' let on someone's broke into yer 'ouse ordinary like, an' Nelson Lee'll never know any different."

"What's your opinion, Joe?" Eli asked quietly. "You've not had much to say since I appeared; but, tell me, d'you think Nelson Lee'll never know any different—when he finds what's in the house?"

The white-haired old man was staring at his master about as happily as a rabbit stares at a hungry snake. His sagging knees threatened to collapse at any moment, and, though he tried to speak, only a hoarse, mumbling whisper came from his throat.

"You white-livered cur!" Ginn sneered, turning away from his partner. "Anyway, Eli, if you're so frightened of Lee, why ain't you beating it, an' giving us a chance to make a getaway?"

"Because I wouldn't get far, in my state," Eli answered quietly. "If I'm caught, it means a ten-years' stretch, and I'm an old man, I'd never live to come out—so I choose

The crook found his blow stopped by an arm that seemed made of solid steel. His clumsy defence was swept aside as Nelson Lee tore into him, and a moment later the man crashed to the floor—knocked out! "Well played, guv'nor!" Nipper exclaimed.

to go out now, and to take with me the two who've made it necessary!"

For the first time, Ginn seemed to realise that old Eli really meant every word of his grim threat. He saw the black bore of the automatic steadying on a point between his eyes, and even as he uttered a shrill scream of protest, Eli fired!

But Nipper had guessed the old man's intention, and had flung his boot wildly at the back that was barely ten feet in front of him. The sudden jolt of a boot on his shoulder sent Eli staggering forward, and the bullet that was intended for Ginn's brain buried itself harmlessly in the wall near his head. The automatic, dropping from Eli's hand by the shock of surprise, dropped with a metallic ring on the big Chinese vase, and with a snarl of fury the old man dived to retrieve it!

Both Nipper and Ginn flew forward as if on springs—the lad grabbing Eli's hand a moment before it reached the gun, and Ginn laying an eager paw on the weapon that had so nearly cost him his life.

"Look at 'em, Joe," he laughed, "rollin' in th' dirt like a couple o' snappin' terriers." He kicked at them, ignoring the fact that Nipper had just saved his life. "Break away, I tell yer—there's been enough row here!"

Quite suddenly, old Eli collapsed in Nipper's arms, and the lad looked up with a face red with rage.

"Keep your rotten boots to yourself, Ginn," he cried. "You can kick the old man now and you can talk big—but a minute ago you were singing a different tune—you sweep!"

"Oh, you're Lee's pup, I suppose?" Ginn sneered, pointing the gun at Nipper's head. "Well, you're just as much me enemy as this old dotard I've kicked silly—so keep yer tongue between yer teeth, me bucko."

Nipper's lip curled, and he looked straight up into the scowling eyes.

"You have your fun while you can, Mr. Neddy Ginn," he said defiantly. "I'm thinking it won't last long."

He made an attempt to get on his feet, but the cur whose life he had saved stamped heavily on his fingers, and called Joe Dodgson to his side.

"Come on, rabbit, you 'ear what th' kid's sayin'," he growled. "'E's lettin' on Lee's not far behind him—an' maybe 'e's right. Anyway, get th' laces outer his boots an' tie 'im up—then we'll have the car round an' 'op off with Eli's fool safe."

"Let's get away now," Dodgson stammered. "The thing's unlucky, Ned; we'll never touch what's inside it."

"You do what yer told," Ginn sneered. "If yer think I'm goin' ter hand a fortune over to Mister Blinkin' Lee, you're wrong! Tie the kid up, an' let's 'ave no more whining!"

Meekly enough, Dodgson jumped to obey the evil-tempered bully; and Nipper, because a wild scheme had suddenly entered his head, lay quietly on one elbow, as if all the fight had been kicked out of him.

He watched Dodgson retrieve the boot and fumble at the lace for a moment. Then, as he had hoped, the man dropped the boot almost within reach, and bent to fasten his legs.

Like a wriggling eel, Nipper squirmed aside, snatched at the boot and flung it straight up into Ginn's scowling face! Dodging the slow hands of the older man with ease, the lad bounced to his feet, jumped aside as Ginn's clubbed gun swept downward, and flew in like a tiger-cat!

His clenched fist thudded on the bristly jaw with a force that sent a stab of pain shooting up his arm. The bully's head clicked backwards as if his neck had snapped, and before he could recover from the lad's wild onslaught, Nipper had dived at his gun-laden hand and was twisting it to breaking-point!

Quite suddenly the lad swept a leg round Ginn's knees and drove his shoulder hard into the fellow's chest; then, as the bewildered man began to topple over, Nipper tore the gun from his hand and flung it through the window!

But, if the lad's swift move had disarmed the brute, his dislike to using the weapon gave Ginn the chance of regaining his feet. With a hoarse bellow of fury the fellow crouched and hunched his broad shoulders, then bore down on Nipper.

Three mighty drives Nipper countered, then a fourth crashed into his chest with a force that drove him hard against the wall, and left him sick and dizzy.

"Gotcher!" Ginn panted, his teeth bared in a savage grin. "Now, me fresh kiddo, I'm going to beat you to a jelly!"

Too spent to speak, Nipper tried to slip beneath Ginn's arms; but the heavy brute lashed out a kick that narrowly escaped the lad's chin, then drove him into a corner and commenced to hammer him with a viciousness that was inhuman!

Few grown men could have withstood the weight of these thudding blows even as long as the plucky youngster did; but not another ten seconds could have passed before Nipper must have taken the count and left the raging creature free to wreak vengeance on him.

Then, just as Nipper felt his knees giving, and Ginn was drawing his great fist back for the knock-out, a heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and he was swung round with a speed that made him dizzy.

He stared into eyes that were as hot as his own with fury—and Nelson Lee seldom let temper master his cool, calculating brain.

"You abominable beast!" the great detective snapped. "Put 'em up! Hit a man—this time!"

Ginn struck, even before the words were out of Lee's mouth—but the blow was stopped by an arm that seemed to be made of solid steel, and the bully yelped with the agony of a jolted wrist. Then, as if a tornado had broken loose, his slow, blundering defence was swept aside, and—one, two, three!—the click of bone hitting bone echoed across the room, and Ned Ginn crashed to the boards—knocked out!

"Well played, guv'nor!" Nipper whispered, a grin on his cracked, bruised lips. His one open eye now spotted Mr. Silas Pyecroft. "Keep an eye on Joey Dodgson, sir, or he'll be after the loaded gun I chucked through the window."

"It's in my hand now, young 'un," Pyecroft answered. "And it's ready for either of them, if they try any more fancy tricks."

But Nelson Lee had forgotten the crooks, and was eyeing his young assistant anxiously.

"No great damage done, guv'nor," Nipper assured him cheerfully. "Glad you came when you did, though, for Neddy Ginn wasn't exactly wanting to hug me."

"He might have killed you," Nelson Lee answered quietly. "I don't know how many times I've warned you not to take so much on your own shoulders, young 'un."

"Now, don't get jealous, guv'nor," Nipper grinned, then explained how he had been forced to follow old Eli. "You see, I hadn't a chance to tell you—but I'd like to know how you found me so quickly."

"By following the tracks of Ginn's motor," Nelson Lee replied. "We were just passing this apparently empty house when the crack of a gun made us dash here very quickly."

Nipper nodded.

"But I don't see why these beauties have been risking life an' liberty for an ugly Chinese vase," he said. "Ginn made out it was worth a fortune—but I'd value it at about sixpence."

"It is worth almost its own weight in gold," Nelson Lee answered quietly.

"Gosh!" Nipper gasped. "Why, it weighs about half a ton!"

"The spot of yellow metal on Eli's hall floor first made me suspect the truth," Nelson Lee smiled. "When I found that the stained pan had been used to melt gold in, the stealing of some heavy object was explained."

"Gosh!" Nipper yelled. "You mean that the steel-lined vase is full of gold?"

"Full enough to need two strong men to lift it," Nelson Lee admitted. "The Yard tell me they've been looking, for years, for a receiver of stolen goods who has specialised in buying gold plate."

"Then old Eli is as guilty as these two he tried to kill?" Nipper asked, amazed.

"He's a sight worse, young master," Dodgson whined. "Ginn an' me's been pinchin' for 'im longer'n I like to think—an' 'e's robbed us shameful, 'cos 'e knew summat as'd land us in th' jug. So we turned on 'im at last—'e'd a mania for meltin' the gold and keepin' it handy—an' we'd have got away with it but for Mr. Pyecroft buttin' in."

"You can explain all that at your trial," Nelson Lee answered coldly. "Pyecroft, hand me that gun—I'll guard these men. Please take Nipper to your house, and see if you can improve his appearance."

"It'll improve, by miles, soon's I smell breakfast," Nipper grinned.

THE END.

(*Another exciting mystery story next Wednesday; "THE WRAITH OF THE RIVER!"*)

YOUR EDITOR'S CORNER.

"BETWEEN OURSELVES."

Mr. Brooks was in the office this morning. He came to collect a whole batch of letters addressed to him from readers. Those letters came from all over the world, from places as far apart as Chelsea and the Congo, Harwich and Hong-Kong. I believe that Mr. Brooks is something of a stamp collector, and his collection is certainly helped by the variety of postage stamps which come to him.

He has promised me more copy for that cheery feature, "Between Ourselves." I am keeping space for it, and it will reappear in an early issue. In any case, Mr. Brooks always replies personally to the letters sent him—so look out for your answers, you fellows who have written.

INCREASING NUMBERS!

I have just been looking through a report on the growth of the St. Frank's League. A letter from the Chief Officer appears on another page. We are now within measurable distance of the Silver Medals, so there should soon be some more good news, Leagueites!

One particular member of the League has made no fewer than eighty-two introductions. I think his photograph ought to appear on the League pages—and it will if he cares to send me one.

FISHES IN NESTS!

Oh, no, you can't catch your Editor, C. B. (Stockport). There is a fish that builds a nest—the stickleback! He does it with little bits of water-weed, and, what is more, he feeds and brings up the youngsters. His nest isn't anything like a bird's nest; actually it is a sort of little tunnel, on the floor of which the eggs are laid.

You might be interested to know, too, C. B., that the stickleback is a pretty good scrapper! He won't stand any nonsense from anybody, and his sharp little spines make good weapons in a fight. If he does chance to get beaten, all his colours fade; for him, defeat is a disgrace.

Have you got any more teasers, C. B.?

SLAVERY!

If you had to get up at six o'clock in the morning and work every minute of the day until you went to bed at night—and do it day after day—that would be pretty near to slavery, wouldn't it?

Well, that's the sort of experience which comes to the boys of St. Frank's in next Wednesday's long story. They find that they haven't a minute to spare the whole day long. When they are not working like niggers in the Form-rooms, they are out on the playing fields, getting ready for the Aussies and the second schoolboy Test Match, as well as preparing for other events in the great Sports Carnival.

"THE SLAVES OF ST. FRANK'S!" is really a corking story, and all the old favourites figure in it—especially Handforth! From the small reproduction of the cover given on page 31, you can see that he has got himself into something of a mess. Handforth and a hose-pipe—and there's plenty of fun with that hose-pipe before Handforth finishes with it!

Knowing Handforth, you could hardly expect him to get hold of a fire-hose—that is streaming water as hard as it can go!—without doing a certain amount of damage and causing trouble.

This is but one of the very many rollicking incidents in this fine story. You will thoroughly enjoy it!

A GHOST!

Well, not exactly a ghost, but something very near it! In other words, a crook whose movements are so mysterious that he earns himself the title of "The Wraith of the River!"

His nickname lends the title to next Wednesday's complete detective-adventure yarn, in which Nipper experiences about the narrowest squeak of his young life.

TWO ANSWERS.

J. K. M. (Swansea) wants to know whether the Channel Tunnel will ever be built. I am sure I don't know! Work on it was started near Dover before the war, but the idea was abandoned. There is, however, the possibility that the tunnel may be driven at a later date. The scheme—so engineers say—is quite feasible, but there are international complications. Our tight little island won't be an island any longer once the tunnel is driven, for one thing!

G. G. B. (Oldham) asks: "How do you start to collect stamps?" When I was at school, the usual way was to persuade an uncle or somebody to present you with a stamp album—and then just get stamps and stick them in! However, I am writing personally to G. G. B. I might mention here that fellows like G. G. B. ought to join the League, because there are many ardent philatelists among the members.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

(All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.)

MY DEAR LEAGUEITES,—It is a tremendous pleasure to me to have my weekly chat with members of the St. Frank's League. On this occasion, as always, it is my cheery duty to announce that the League is steadily growing in numbers and influence. More and more clubs are being formed, and it is the friendly club feeling which counts for such a lot, as we all know.

I hear from some districts that Organising Officers are badly wanted. My advice to members in such cases is to take up the duties of the O.O. themselves. All a member has to do to qualify as an Organising Officer is to make six introductions. When he has succeeded in doing this, the Bronze Medal is forwarded to him, and it is up to him then to take on the duties and responsibilities of the fully-fledged O.O. Let him notify me that he is prepared to undertake the work, and his appointment will be made at once, and his name entered in the official book of accredited O.O.s. As you see, all this is simplicity itself.

I think I have made it clear that nothing whatever need stand in the way of any member getting busy at once, and helping us on. The newest recruit to the ranks of St. Frank's League can weigh in with suggestions. I shall welcome these, and shall make it my business to reply personally to every letter received.

Peter Chrysafis, of Montreal, inquires why his chum, Paul Thibault, of the same city, has not received a certificate. Certificates are not issued to new readers until the latter have in their turn introduced other fresh readers.

Leagueite 3417, writing from 25, Hazel Street, Aylestone Road, Leicester, has good things to say of Mr. Horth's articles.

I. Swailes, 7, Cater Lane, Heckmondwike, asks for portraits of the popular characters. In the near future I hope to issue birthday-card portraits with horoscopes.

Running through all my letters is intense appreciation of the League. I can realise to the full the reason for this, since the S.F.L. stands for true comradeship and for mutual help, for bringing more sunshine into life. So let's get to it, you and I, and do our bit towards brightening up the world. By so doing we shall get a better understanding of what life means, and what a fine affair it can be made.

THE FOLLY OF ST. FRANK'S!

(continued from page 32)

Reggie Pitt had been over the course twice that day, and he had been timed by Jack Grey. Pitt was the junior captain of the West House, and he was as keen as mustard on winning these swimming honours. He knew that he would have a hard battle, and so he had trained to the utmost pitch of perfection.

It was a meeting of champions, and there was scarcely a pin to choose between them.

Even the West House considered that Christine was the winner, and Buster Boots and his crowd were already crowing. So it gave them a considerable shock when Reggie Pitt upset all the prophets, and won the race.

He only did so by an exhibition of sheer brilliance. From the very first second he took the lead—and held it until he passed the finishing post. Indeed, there was scarcely an inch of difference between the two from the first moment till the last, and Pitt was convinced that he won solely because he made the better start. Once having gained that flashing advantage, he held it. Otherwise, he would never have passed the post a winner.

"Well, by jingo, we've kept the honours in the Remove, anyhow," said Dick Hamilton heartily. "They go to the West House—but the Fourth Form is out in the cold."

"The biggest piece of luck I ever saw!" snorted Buster Boots warmly. "When it comes to a question of time, there isn't a second between the pair of them—but Christine happened to hear the starting signal a fraction after Pitt, and it was all up. What a frost!"

Somehow, most of the interest in the swimming event was forced. There was something lacking in the boisterous enthusiasm. It was unreal—it had an air of falsity.

The truth was, the juniors were just beginning to realise that there was no escape from the exams. Revolt was impossible, and to ignore the exams. was equally so. There was only one course left—to face the music with as bold a front as possible.

And it was a sober, solemn thought.

The indignation meetings were held no longer—the excitement was dying. And the whole school was settling itself to the miserable prospect of hard, persistent study. Not that the keen interest in sport had waned. It was as strong as ever. But there was a problem here that seemed incapable of solution.

How could the school do both things—go ahead with the sports programme, and make a good showing in the exams.?

Perhaps William Napoleon Browne's shrewd suggestion would provide an answer to that puzzle.

THE END.

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION — FORM No. 37.

SECTION A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No....., (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) ..... to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME) .....

(ADDRESS) .....

.....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. *The second form* is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and B, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

HINTS ON BOWLING

All cricket enthusiasts will read this helpful article with interest.

ONE thing to encourage if you have ambitions as a bowler is that there are more successful batsmen than bowlers, which means that there is more room for bowlers. No one would deny that bowling is equally as important a part of the game as batting, and yet batsmen seem easier to produce. I am afraid there is no doubt that it is the bat which holds the fascination, and maybe the fact that, while everybody bats, only a proportion bowl has something to do with the scarcity of good bowlers.

It always seems to me that bowling is more interesting than batting. The man with the bat is, after all, only defending. He can't hit how or what he likes. His strokes depend on the stuff the bowler sends down to him. He doesn't know what kind of a hit he is going to make until the ball has left the bowler's hand. Of course, sometimes he gets on top of the bowling and upsets the bowler's plans, but that is usually only when the bowler is weak, and then there isn't very great credit in hitting up runs. Again, if the bowler is poor—in that he bowls irregularly and with uneven length—the batsman is forced to restrain himself and potter about playing down to the bowling, which is very irksome if you're a keen batsman.

SCARING THE BATSMAN.

Mind, I am not belittling batting, but I do think the bowler has the better weapon, because he gets in first. His play depends on no one but himself. He has the ball, and he can please himself what he does with it. All the rest of the men on the field—batsmen and fielders—have to take their cue from him. And what glorious satisfaction there is in seeing the helpless batsman thoroughly ill at ease on those wonderful occasions when you have him on toast! What things of joy are the maiden overs, when you have a good batsman frightened—yes, frightened—of you! And to see your best balls "come off," and the wickets fall, or a catch drop into the fielder's hands! If you like power, cricket's your game, and bowling's your department.

I am not going to try and tell you how to bowl. Probably you were shown as soon as you were old enough to be able to hold a ball. Anyway, if it doesn't come naturally to you, you might just as well give up trying. But I would like to help you to improve your bowling.

In the first place, fix it in your mind that your aim is to get under the batsman's bat, and that all your balls should be directed to this end. The ball should be pitched about a yard in front of the batsman. That's worth remembering. I have never forgotten it because once, when I was practising at the nets at school, doing absolutely no good, one of the masters—who was an Old Blue—came along and picked the ball up.

"You'll do no good with that length," he said. "Look, that's the length you want!" And he pitched the ball about a yard in front of the batsman. I followed his tip, and took six wickets in three overs.

As you become more expert and acquire mastery over the ball you may find it pays to vary your length sometimes, but until you are expert you cannot do better than cultivate an even length. Without a thorough command of length you will not be able to alter the pace and flight of the ball successfully.

FAST BOWLING.

If you are ambitious, and follow county cricket, you will probably have aspirations in the way of fast bowling. Be warned before you have broken your heart over it—the fast bowler is born, and if it does not come natural to you to bowl fast you may be sure you never will. Fast bowlers are rare and precious. If you have it in you to join their select ranks you are a lucky lad, and you ought to go in for bowling for all you're worth.

As for "breakballing," I'm afraid it's impossible to teach that by writing. You need someone to show you how it's done, and to instruct you, so if you can get hold of anybody's father who knows about it, I should advise you to snap him up. If you happen to live near a county cricketer and are a member of a club, you might be able to persuade him to give your club an evening some time when he is at home.

Cricketers are usually devoted to the game, and are glad to give encouragement to youngsters who will take it seriously. I know for a fact that George Hirst, one of the greatest cricketers of all time, offered to help a newly-formed club by coaching the players when he could, and he was never tired of answering questions or giving them advice.

If you are going to make good at bowling, you will need patience and perseverance. There are some days when nothing comes off, and you feel inclined to fling the ball down and never pick it up again. But you just have to pull yourself together and carry on.

That is one of the lessons that cricket teaches. Another one is that you must keep your temper. It is wearing enough to the nerves to keep on bowling without success, but when fielders miss catches that they should have taken you may have great difficulty in restraining your temper. It seems so cruel that your good work should be wasted. But, remember, it cuts both ways. Sometimes brilliant catches are made that you hadn't expected, and which are not due to your bowling skill. In any case, everyone makes mistakes, and it's possible you would have missed the ball yourself.

Boys! Tell Dad you can have a No. 400A Mead Bike for

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