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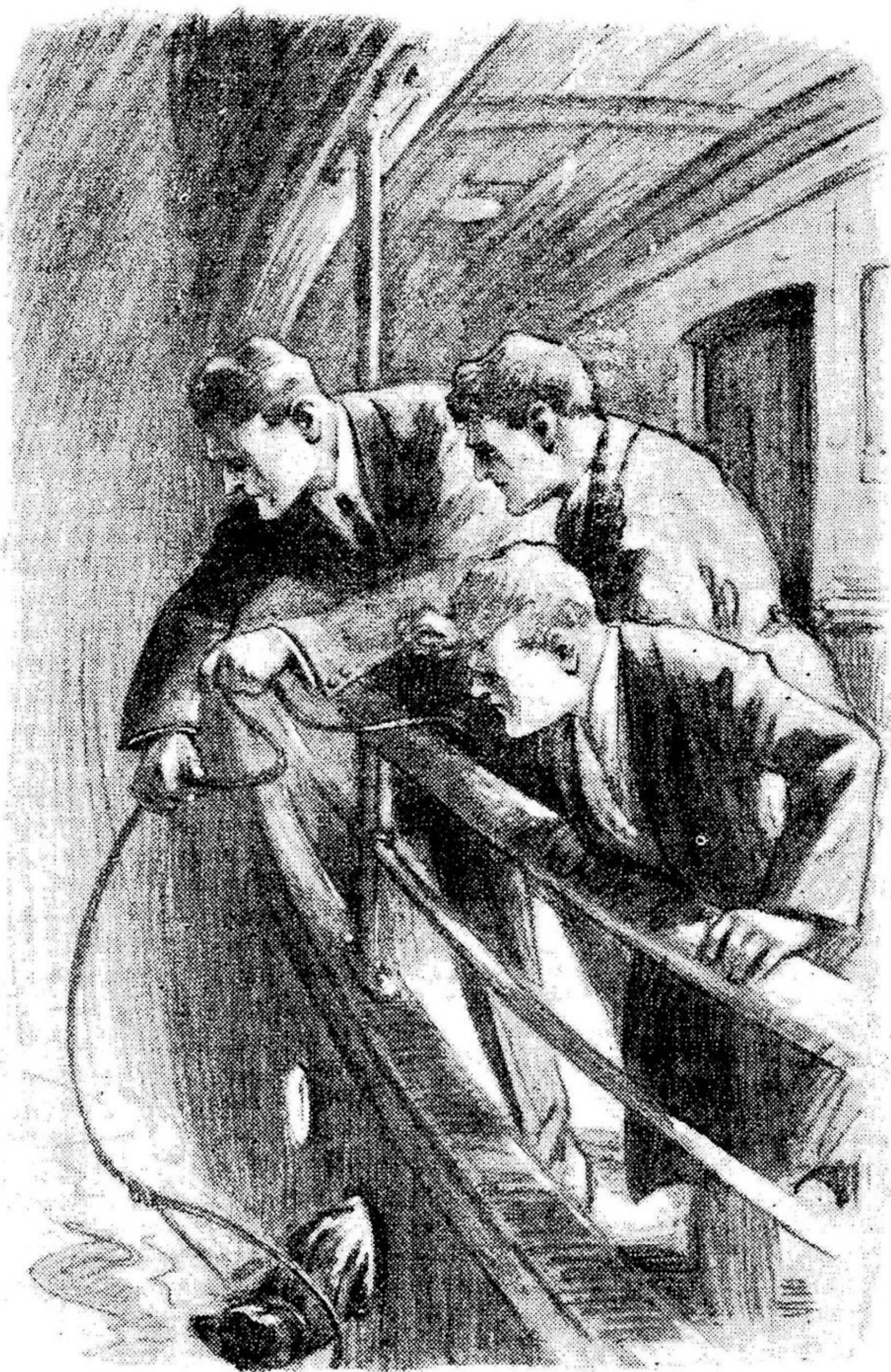


Nipper and Co. start off for Australia in this grand opening
yarn of a new adventure series!

New Series No. 140.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY,

January 5th. 1929.



Slowly the bundle emerged from the port-hole. Making allowance for the wind, Nelson Lee cast the rope. The throw was a perfect one, for the noose settled completely round that bundle

Opening Story of a Grand New Adventure Series!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

Bound for Australia and the Tests! A life on the ocean wave! Edward Oswald Handforth votes it "the stuff to give 'em" but when he finds himself afflicted with seasickness—his outlook on life changes considerably! Start reading this fine yarn now, lads—Ed.

CHAPTER 1

Startling News!

"**M**AD!" said Handforth, with conviction. The celebrated leader of Study D at St. Frank's was standing in the bow window of the dining-room at his own home, in the West End of London. He had just watched Church and McClure slither down from the top of a motor-bus and dart across the road, utterly regardless of traffic and at the peril of their lives.

"Never saw such idiots!" said Handforth angrily.

He did not approve of his two chums' recklessness. He could realise, of course, their eagerness to join their leader, but there was really no need for such suicidal methods.

Edward Oswald Handforth also overlooked the fact that he, himself, was in the habit of dodging across traffic-filled roads, even when there wasn't any hurry at all. But Handforth, like the majority of other people, was blind to his own little habits, and very alive to the habits of others.

He turned round, hesitating. He was wondering if it would look well for him to rush to the front door and open it. Better leave it for one of the servants. He had the dining-room to himself, for breakfast was over, and the table had been cleared.

Handforth was spending a few days at home, prior to going back to St. Frank's for the new term. He and many other juniors had spent a very merry and excitable Christmas at Reggie Pitt's castle, in Sussex, but that party had now broken up, the guests returning to their own homes for the final week of the vacation.

Handforth did not hesitate for more than a moment. Then he strode across the room, opened the door, and ran into the big lounge hall. A moment later he had the front door open. Church and McClure had just arrived, and were about to ring the bell. They were both looking flushed, and their eyes were gleaming with intense excitement.

"You idiots!" said Handforth, by way of greeting. "What do you mean by tearing across the road like that? You might have got killed——"

"Have you heard the news?" asked Church breathlessly.

"What news?"

"About St. Frank's!" gasped Church. "About the new term——"

"This is no time for talking about St. Frank's!" interrupted Handforth, with a pained expression. "Why remind me that school will start again in a few days? I've got so many things to do in London that I shan't have half the time——"

"But—but we're not going back to St. Frank's—at least, not all of us," put in McClure excitedly. "You haven't heard the news, Handy, or you wouldn't be so calm."

"I'm always calm!" retorted Handforth sternly. "I don't believe in getting excited. Well, are you coming in, or do you want to stand on the step all the morning?"

Church and McClure went in, and they didn't even take the trouble to remove their overcoats. With their caps in their hands, they went with Handforth into the dining-room.

"It's—it's staggering, Handy!" said Church, as his hand absent-mindedly strayed to the sideboard and selected a banana. "When I first heard it, I was bowled over."

"Same here!" said McClure, reaching for an apple.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Handforth tartly. "When I saw you yesterday you were normal. Now you come here raving like a couple of maniacs."

"My pater told me about it this morning," said Church breathlessly. "Half the school is going abroad this term, Handy."

"Rot!" said Handforth, staring.

"It's a fact," went on Church, waving his half-peeled banana in his excitement. "The school governors have chartered a big liner, and, instead of the fellows going back to St. Frank's as usual, they're going on a cruise round the world."

Handforth did not seem to be particularly impressed.

"And where do I laugh?" he asked, with a sniff. "If this is supposed to be a joke, Walter Church, I'm jiggered if I can see the point. And keep that silly banana out of my face."

Church transferred the banana to his own, and he carelessly dropped the skin on the floor. It wasn't his usual habit to indulge in these thoughtless practices, but he was very excited.

"It isn't a joke!" he insisted. "It's true! Isn't it, Mac?"

"Absolutely true!" said McClure. "I couldn't believe it at first, so I rang up Nipper, and he says it's official."

"I've never heard such drivel!" said Handforth disparagingly. "Half the school going abroad! A trip round the world on a liner! Why, it's a crazy idea!"

"But—but don't you think it'll be grand?" asked Church, staring.

"I don't think anything about it, because it's not going to happen!" replied Handforth indignantly. "Great Scott! What do you chaps mean by coming here and trying to stuff me up with this fatheaded story?"

"But it's an official fact——"

"It's spoof!" interrupted Handforth. "Somebody has been pulling your leg, my son. Why, if there was any truth in it, do you think I wouldn't have heard about it? My pater's here all the time, and he hasn't said anything."

"Is he here now?" asked McClure quickly.

"Yes, in the library."

"Then go and ask him," said Mac eagerly. "That'll settle it, won't it? He's bound to know, because the school governors have notified all parents. It's true, Handy—honour bright."

Handforth started.

"Honour bright?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes."

Handforth knew that his chums would not say that unless they were quite convinced of the truth, and suddenly his face became flushed. A wave of wild excitement swept over him.

"By George!" he panted. "I'll go and ask the pater—now!"

He dashed round, trod on Church's banana skin, and his legs flew into the air. He hit the floor with a terrific thud, and sat up, gasping.

"Who—who did that?" he asked dazedly.

"I thought you never got excited, Handy?" asked Church, deftly flicking the banana skin under the table. "You shouldn't spin round so suddenly——"

"Lemme get up!" roared Handforth, leaping to his feet. "I've got to speak to the pater about this!"

He dashed out of the room, swept across the hall, and charged into Sir Edward Handforth's library like a whirlwind. Church and McClure were close on his heels.

"Pater!" gasped Handforth.

His father was seated at the desk, writing, and he looked up and glared.

"How many times, Edward, must I tell you not to burst into a room like a—a tornado?" he asked severely. "Upon my soul! I won't be bothered——"

"Shan't be a tick, pater!" gasped Handforth. "Is—is it true that half the school is going abroad on a big liner for the next term?"

Sir Edward laid his pen down, and a twinkle came into his eyes for a moment. Apparently, he now understood the reason for his elder son's excited condition.

"True?" he repeated thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, it is."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Handforth, clutching at the desk. "I—I thought Churchy and Mac were trying to pull my leg!"

"Not this time, Edward," said his father. "It is perfectly true—that the liner, St. Francis, has been chartered by the

school governors. She has accommodation for at least half the school, and she will sail from Caistowe within a few days—indeed, on the very day that the new term begins.”

“There you are!” murmured Church triumphantly.

“What did we tell you?” said McClure.

But Edward Oswald Handforth was too dazed to make any comment.



CHAPTER 2

Something Like An Idea !

SIR EDWARD smiled amusedly.

“This news seemed to have bowled you over, my boy,”

he said whimsically. “Yet, it is not particularly startling. Large parties of schoolboys have gone on world tours before now, although, I will admit, in not precisely the same way.”

“And do you really mean to say, pater, that half the school is going?” asked Handforth dazedly.

“Yes, half the school.”

Handforth gulped, and hesitated fearfully before he asked the next question.

“And—and—and am I included, pater?” he asked, gripping the desk.

“You are!” smiled Sir Edward.

“Hurrah!” roared Handforth, so violently that his father, who was in the act of putting his cigar back into his mouth, nearly swallowed it.

“Silence!” thundered Sir Edward. “How dare you, Edward? Calm yourself, you young idiot!”

“Not long ago, sir, he said that the idea was a dotty one!” grinned Church.

“But—but I thought you were only spoofing!” ejaculated Handforth breathlessly. “Oh, my only hat! Half the school going abroad! And I’m included! It’s—it’s too good to be true!”

“You’re a lucky young dog, I’ll agree!” nodded his father. “I never had such good times when I was at St. Frank’s! You ought to count yourself very fortunate, Edward, for being able to get away from the cold, English wintry months of January and February. The St. Francis will cruise at full speed for Australia—”

“Australia!” gasped Handforth, freshly dumbfounded. “Then—then we might be in time to see something of the Test Matches!”

“You’ll see two of them, at least,” nodded Sir Edward enviously. “Gad! I almost wish I could go with you, boys! I’m positively envious.”

“The Test Matches!” said Handforth dreamily. “Two of ’em are over, and the third Test, at Melbourne, is practically over, too.”

“But you’ll arrive in good time, I imagine, to see the fourth Test at Adelaide,” said Sir

Edward. “That doesn’t commence until February 4th, you know.”

“It’s too much for me to grasp all at once!” said Handforth dizzily. “You’re not fooling, pater, are you?” he added, with a sudden note of anxiety in his voice. “It’s official, isn’t it?”

“Quite official!” smiled Sir Edward. “The entire occupants of the Ancient House and Modern House are going on this trip.”

“And we’re in the Ancient House!” breathed Church happily.

“What are the West House and the East House fellows going to say?” asked Handforth, with a whistle.

“I imagine they will be considerably upset,” chuckled Sir Edward. “However, their turn will come in due course—for I understand that the other half of the school will go for its world’s trip after you have returned. It is a kind of experiment.”

“It’s the idea of the year, pater!” declared Handforth.

“I have had all the details from the school authorities,” continued Sir Edward. “You will be away for quite a number of weeks, but you must not imagine that it will be a mere holiday. On board this liner you will carry on with your school work in exactly the same way as at St. Frank’s. There will be lessons, and so forth, just as if you were ashore. The liner, in point of fact, will be a floating school.”

“But aren’t you paying a lot more in fees, pater?” asked Handforth, in wonder.

“No,” said his father. “The whole scheme is being financed by a famous millionaire—who prefers to remain anonymous. He is standing all the expense. He is a great patriot, and he desires our British Public Schools to benefit. He wants our boys to gain world knowledge, and he has chosen St. Frank’s as the first school in the country to have the benefit of the new scheme.”

“He showed his sense there, sir!” said Church, with a nod.

“As near as possible, the liner St. Francis will be a replica of St. Frank’s,” continued Sir Edward. “The liner has been converted into a very perfect floating school—at the cost of a great deal of money. However, this millionaire can well afford it—he can easily indulge these fancies of his. And you boys will be the gainers.”

“But what about clothes, pater?” asked Handforth, with a start. “If we’re going to Australia, we shall need white togs, and—”

“You needn’t worry, young ’un,” smiled his father. “Everything is being prepared. When you leave for school, at the end of the vacation, your trunk will be provided with all the necessary equipment for tropical waters.”

“And when did you know all this?” asked Edward Oswald wonderingly.

“I have known of it for some weeks.”

“And—and you didn’t tell me!” said Handforth accusingly.

“I thought it better—for my own peace of mind—to let you remain in ignorance,” chuckled Sir Edward. “I might tell you that your mother was very pleased when I

told her of that decision. We like our lives to be peaceful—although I fear there will be very little peace between now and the first day of the new term," he added dryly.

Handforth went out with Church and McClure a minute afterwards, and in the hall they stared at one another with sparkling eyes. Handforth was inclined to be indignant—because his father had kept this glorious news from him for so long.

"Couldn't trust me!" he said, with a snort. "Just as if I should get excited!"

At that moment a step sounded on the stairs, and, glancing up, the chums of Study D saw Willy Handforth, of the Third, strolling down. Handforth's eyes gleamed. Willy belonged to the Ancient House, and so he would be going on this trip, too. Handforth regarded this as perfectly ridiculous, but it couldn't be helped.

Willy Handforth belonged to the Third—he was a mere fag—and it was obviously his place to remain at home. But being an Ancient House fellow, he would naturally go.

"Just a minute, Willy!" said his major bluntly.

Willy was very obliging.

"As many as you like, old son," he said. "I'm in no particular hurry this morning. What's all the excitement about?" he added, as he regarded the three flushed faces. "Has anything happened?"

"Not yet—but it's going to happen!" said Handforth mysteriously.

"I suppose you're arranging a spree?" asked Willy. "Well, that doesn't affect me. All my arrangements for to-day are made. I'm going out with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon."

Handforth roared with laughter.

"It's something better than that!" he grinned. "But I'm not going to tell you, my lad!"

"No?" said Willy calmly.

"No!" retorted Handforth. "I think it's a dotty idea, anyhow, to allow any Third-Formers to go on this world trip."

"Oh, that!" said Willy cheerfully. "You mean the voyage in the liner—to Australia?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth, with a violent start. "Then—then you know all about it?"

Willy nodded.

"I've known for about ten days," he replied sweetly. "The pater told me just before Christmas."

"Wha-a-at!"

"He suggested that I shouldn't mention it to you, though, because you're so excitable," added Willy. "I haven't even allowed Chubby and Juicy to come here, in case they started jawing in your presence."

Handforth exploded.

"Do you mean to say that you knew all about it—and that it was kept from me?" he gasped. "By George! I've never heard of such a thing in all my life!"

"We ought to have some fine times on that liner," said Willy, nodding. "I've been making plans for the past week, and it's

rather a pity that you've been told, Ted. We shan't have any peace now."

"Why, you—you—"

Willy grinned, and strolled away—leaving Edward Oswald positively speechless.



CHAPTER 3

All Aboard!

O heave ho, and all that sort of thing, what?"

Archie Glenthorne, the genial ass of the Remove, gave utterance to that greeting on the platform at Victoria Station, a few days later, as Handforth & Co. arrived on the departure platform.

"Good old Archie!" said Handforth cheerily. "What do you think of the new wheeze?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, old scream, I'm not quite sure," said Archie cautiously. "I mean to say, a life on the ocean wave, what? A dashed ripe scheme, as it were, but liable to be frightfully strenuous. Absolutely!"

"Well well!" said Vivian Travers, of Study H, as he came along with Jimmy Potts. "So here we are again, dear old fellows! You don't know how pleased I am to see these familiar faces. Unhandsome, perhaps, and not over clean—but I am vastly cheered."

"Are you talking about me?" demanded Handforth, who found Travers looking straight at him. "You silly ass! If you're telling me that my face is unhandsome and unclean—"

"Not yours alone," murmured Travers.

Before Handforth could say anything else, Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson came boisterously into the picture, and Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey arrived, with Singleton and Johnny Onions and Pepys and Nick Trotwood and a few others.

"You lucky bounders!" said Reggie Pitt enviously. "You're going on this trip, and we're not!"

"Lucky be blowed!" said Nipper calmly. "It's only natural that the two best Houses of St. Frank's should be selected."

"You howling idiot!" roared Castleton, of the West House. "What do you mean—the two best Houses? I'll back the West House any day against—"

"Cheese it!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "We shall have our turn later on, old man."

"A bird in hand is worth two in the bush," said Billy Nation, of the Modern House.

"If you're going to start trotting out your rotten proverbs, we'll gag you!" said Handforth threateningly. "Where's Travers? I want to punch him on the nose!"

"Here I am, dear old fellow," said Vivian Travers. "But I shouldn't advise you to punch me on the nose. If you do, I might feel inclined to practise a little of my jujitsu."

"So that's that!" said Nipper. "Leave Travers alone, Handy. We haven't seen him for weeks, and the beggar has an unfair advantage over all of us."

"For the love of Samson!" ejaculated Travers. "How do you make that out?"

"Haven't you been abroad for Christmas?"

"So I have!" nodded Travers, grinning.

"My people took me to Madeira, and we only got back a few days ago."

"You've got your sea legs, then," said Nipper. "Going aboard this liner won't seem anything novel to you. And while the rest of us are seasick, you'll probably be enjoying your meals with disgusting gusto."

"Seasick!" echoed Handforth, with a snort. "I'm not going to be seasick!"

"Better not be too sure, Handy," warned Nipper.

"Seasickness is only a matter of will-power," said Handforth. "Any fellow who makes up his mind *not* to be seasick, won't be seasick."

The others chuckled, but they did not argue. Everybody was talking about the wonderful new order of things. The West House and the East House fellows were inclined to be gloomy, but everybody belonging to the Ancient House and the Modern House was full of excitement. And not only the juniors were affected. Groups of Sixth-Formers and Fifth-Formers were collected on the platform, and they were all talking animatedly and joyously.

During the journey down, there was only one subject of conversation. And when the little station of Bellton was reached only the West House and East House fellows emerged. They stood on the platform, waving to the others, after a frantic amount of handshaking, as the train steamed out.

It was understood that the liner party was to sail from Caistowe that very day, as soon as the whole crowd was aboard. In all probability, the other fellows would be allowed to go to Caistowe, in order to see the liner off, but there had been a great deal of leave-taking, just to be on the safe side.

Reggie Pitt, during Nipper's absence, would be the Junior skipper at St. Frank's, and he had promised to keep the flag flying.

At Caistowe everybody else tumbled out of the train. Two of the first fellows to greet the new arrivals were Lionel Corcoran, of the Fourth, and Tom Silward Harborough, of the Remove.

"Thought we'd come along to see you off," said Corky cheerily. "Lucky beggars! I wish I could come with you, but I'm an East House chap."

"Besides, you've got the Blue Crusaders to look after, eh?" said Nipper, as he shook hands. "I understand that the Blues are at St. Frank's?"

"Been there for some days now," nodded Lionel Corcoran. "You heard about our place at Bannington being smashed up, didn't you?"

"There was an explosion at the Grange, wasn't there?" asked Handforth.

"Yes, and the Head has very generously allowed the club to make its headquarters, temporarily, at St. Frank's," said Corky, nodding. "We're all installed in the Ancient House."

"You're welcome to it!" grinned Nipper. "We shan't be wanting it for a month or two."

He suddenly became grave, and he looked at Corky in an earnest way.

"What's this we've been hearing about your club and the League of the Green Triangle?" he asked. "Is there any truth in it?"

"I'm afraid there is," said Corcoran gravely. "You know old Zingrave, don't you?"

"Professor Cyrus Zingrave!" said Nipper dreamily. "The chief of the Green Triangle! One of the most astounding criminals who ever lived, Corky! And do you really mean to say that he's up against the Blue Crusaders?"

"He is!" said Corcoran. "But we're fighting him, and we're not going to knuckle under."

"I almost wish that I was staying behind," said Nipper slowly.

"Rot!" put in Tich. "I'm an Ancient House chap, and I'm staying behind, but that's because the Blues won't let me go. I play regularly for the club, you know, and I can't be spared. At least, so I'm told."

"Well, you'd rather stick by the club, wouldn't you?" asked Corky.

"Well, yes," admitted the famous school-boy winger. "Of course, I'd love to go to Australia, to see the Test Matches, but footer is my real love."

"As for the Green Triangle, forget all about it!" said Corcoran, with a smile. "Don't you fellows worry about us. We shall be all right at St. Frank's, and I don't think we shall allow old Zingrave to get the better of us."

"It's just my luck!" grumbled Nipper. "I'm torn, you know. I'd simply love to stay behind and help in this tussle against that old rascal Zingrave. But what can I do? I'm the Remove skipper, and the fellows expect me to go on this trip—"

"And you must go!" interrupted Corky. "It's your duty, old man. Hallo! Here's Fatty and all the other Blues! They've come to see you aboard."

The gigantic sixteen-stone goalie of the Blues, Fatty Fowkes, came boisterously in amongst the juniors, and with him were such stalwarts as Dave Moran and Ben Gillingham and Rex Carrington. All these professional footballers felt very closely associated with St. Frank's now, since they were living at the old school, and using the Ancient House as their temporary quarters.

It was a merry throng that went from the station to the docks, where the great liner, St. Francis, was moored, with steam up, all ready to sail for the Southern seas with its cargo of schoolboys.



CHAPTER 4

The Floating School!

SURPRISE upon surprise awaited the St. Frank's fellows.

They had expected something novel,

knowing that a large amount of money had been lavished upon this enterprise, but never in their wildest dreams had they believed that any liner could be so transformed as this one was.

The St. Francis was, to all intents and purposes, a second edition of the old school.

The Remove found that it was in sole possession of Deck C. In the same way, the Sixth-Formers were accommodated on Deck A, the Fifth on Deck B, the Fourth on Deck D, and the Third on Deck E. Each Form had a deck to itself; not the whole deck, of course, but the cabins and bath rooms which these decks contained.

And these cabins were not like ordinary ship's cabins now. They had been converted into excellent replicas of school studies, with maps on the walls, with a little table in the centre of each, and with chairs and a lounge.

Nobody had any trouble in finding out where they had to go, for they were just told to go to their old studies.

Handforth & Co., for example, went to Cabin D—which stood for Study D, of the Ancient House. On the Fourth Form deck, Bob Christine and Roddy Yorke and Charlie Talmadge promptly took possession of Cabin No. 1. Buster Boots and Bray and Denny found that Cabin No. 6 was theirs, and so on.

Nipper & Co. were in Cabin C, Travers and Potts in Cabin H—just as at St. Frank's.

"It's a jolly fine arrangement!" said Handforth, as he and his two chums stood in Cabin D, looking round. "Jolly cosy in here, too!"

"The only difference is that we shall sleep here," said Church. "At St. Frank's we have separate bed-rooms, but aboard we shall use our cabins for sleeping in as well as for doing our studies in. But what real difference does it make? The stewards come and make the beds as soon as we're out in the morning, and we don't know anything more about it until night. During the day we shall just use this room exactly as we used our old studies."

"It's simple," said McClure, nodding.

"What about the class-rooms?" said Handforth. "Let's go and explore."

They soon found that the ordinary lounges and smoking-rooms had been converted into class-rooms. The St. Francis, before being converted, had been a two-class boat, with any amount of big reception rooms. The Remove, for example, found that its class-

room had originally been the second class smoking-lounge.

Right amidships the great domed lounge was now "Big Hall." Everybody was told that it would be better to use the old familiar terms. There were common-rooms on all decks, and there was a big laboratory, and a gymnasium, and, in fact, everything that could be found at St. Frank's. The liner was, in every sense, a floating school.

A large section of the deck had been cleared, and nets could be fixed up, so that football practice could be indulged in—rather limited practice, perhaps, but it was better than nothing. And cricket would be equally possible.

"It's the goods, eh?" said Travers, as he happened to meet Nipper & Co. on deck. "By Samson! It takes a good bit to surprise me, but I'll admit I'm bowled over to-day!"

"Begad, rather!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "It's wonderful, dear old boy! It is, really! There's even a tuck-shop on board."

"Not really?" grinned Travers.

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, joining them. "I've just been in the good old place, indulging in a cup of the good old Ceylon juice."

"Let's go along and inspect the place!" said Nipper briskly.

Sure enough, on one of the lower decks they found an excellently-equipped tuck-shop. Originally it had been the second-class passengers' barber's shop, but now, of course, it would not be needed. It was not only well stocked with tuck of every description, but, most surprising of all, Mrs. Hake herself was presiding behind the counter.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper. "I didn't expect to find you here, Mrs. Hake!"

"It's for the benefit of my health, Master Nipper," smiled the good lady. "I didn't want to come at first, but Mr. Lee persuaded me."

"Who's looking after your tuck-shop at St. Frank's?" asked Watson.

"My widowed sister, Mrs. Mullins, has been kind enough to oblige," said Mrs. Hake, beaming. "I think she'll get on all right, young gentlemen. And I'm sure I'm glad to be here with you all—although I don't know what will happen to me if the ship gets into a storm!"

They chuckled, and ordered a few fancy pastries.

Afterwards they soon found that there were many other familiar faces on board. Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous Housemaster-detective of the Ancient House, was naturally there, and so was Mr. Stockdale, the Housemaster of the Modern House. Professor Tucker was also booked for the trip, and so were Mr. Langton and Mr. Pycraft, and one or two other masters.

The Remove learned, however, that Mr. Crowell had been forbidden to come to sea—by his doctor. The Remove hardly knew whether to be pleased or disappointed. Mr. Crowell was a good sort in his way, and the Form felt that it would miss him. Mr.



"By George! I'll go and see the pater now!" exclaimed Handforth excitedly. He dashed round—and trod on a banana skin. His legs flew into the air, and he hit the floor with a terrific thud.

Crowell was remaining at St. Frank's, to continue his duties as usual, although he would now only have half a Form to preside over.

"What about us, then?" asked Handforth. "Who's going to look after us? I hope we're not going to have that rotter, Pycraft, shoved on to us!"

"No; he's in charge of the Fourth," said Nipper. "We've got a new man."

"A new master!" said Handforth, staring. "What's he like?"

"Haven't seen him yet," replied Nipper. "I think his name is Mr. Norton. I dare say we shall make his acquaintance in due course."

At present everything was somewhat confused.

Reggie Pitt and a number of other West House juniors had come on board, and Lionel Corcoran and Tich Harborough and crowds of others were about, too. In fact, during that afternoon everybody had a fine old spree.

The St. Francis was due to sail at about tea-time, and it wasn't until late in the afternoon that the bells clanged, announcing that all visitors were to go ashore.

There were many "good-byes," many handshakes, then. Reggie Pitt promised Nipper that he would look after everything at St.

Frank's, and Nipper felt certain that events would go smoothly at the old school.

At last, however, all the visitors had gone ashore, the last handshakes had been made, and now there were only handkerchiefs and caps waving from the dock—and other handkerchiefs and caps waving on the decks of the big liner.

And so she was pulled away from the dock by the tugs, and then she vanished into the gloom of the wintry evening, out into Cais-towe Bay. The floating school was starting its voyage—its glorious trip into the Southern Seas.

"Well, we're off at last, you chaps!" said Handforth breathlessly, after all the excitement was over, and after the liner had got out into the open sea beyond the harbour mouth. "It was a bit of a wrench, parting with those other chaps like that; but now that it's over I'm feeling better."

"Same here!" said Church. "Hard lines on them, you know, being left behind."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "Their turn will come later on. We're off now, and—Hallo! What's that?"

A bell was clanging, and then Biggleswade of the Sixth came bustling along.

"Move yourselves, young 'uns!" said the prefect.

"Move ourselves?" repeated Church. "What for?"

"Don't you know what the bell means?" asked Biggleswade. "The whole school must collect in Big Hall!"

"Oh!" said Handforth. "How were we to know?"

"You'll soon get familiar with the different bells on board," said Biggleswade, with a grin. "Buck up, my sons! Mr. Lee's a bit faddy, and he doesn't like juniors to keep him waiting!"



CHAPTER 5

The New Master!

MR. NELSON LEE, who was in full charge of the school for the voyage, stood on the platform in Big Hall, whilst the school remained attentive and silent.

The illusion was almost complete.

At the top of that great domed lounge a raised platform was provided. On the normal voyages it was probably used as a stage for concerts, but now it was rather severe, as befitted the Big Hall of a Public School.

"There is not much that I need tell you," said the nominal headmaster, in a cordial voice. "To all intents and purposes, this ship is St. Frank's, and everything will go on in exactly the same way. During the first two or three days, perhaps, a little laxity will be allowed, for there is just a chance that some of you will be slightly indisposed."

There were a few chuckles, and Nelson Lee's eyes were twinkling.

"However, we shall soon get over that period," he continued. "Everything on board this ship will be virtually the same as at St. Frank's. The hours will be precisely similar. The rising bell will ring as of yore, breakfast will be served in the big dining hall at the usual time, and lessons will commence daily without, I hope, any hitch. In other words, it will be the same old grind."

"Not quite the same, sir!" shouted Handforth. "We shall have new scenes every now and again, and storms and gales, perhaps, to liven things up."

"I think we can do without the storms and gales, Handforth," replied Nelson Lee dryly. "However, if they come, I dare say we shall weather them without any trouble. Half-holidays, of course, will remain in force. When we are not in port, there will be no restrictions as to bounds."

The school chuckled at this.

"We shall touch at various ports during our voyage," continued Nelson Lee. "At such times there will be special concessions, and parties of you will be allowed to go ashore."

"Hurrah!"

"Which is the first port we reach, sir?"

"Don't be in such a hurry," smiled Nelson Lee. "We haven't got well into the Channel

yet. Full notice will be given to the various Forms well in advance of our reaching any particular port. There will not be many delays, however, since we shall strive to get to Australia as quickly as possible. The school governors are anxious that St. Frank's should see as much of the Empire as possible."

"A jolly good idea, too, sir!"

"Rather!"

"And as soon as we reach Australian waters, we shall cruise in them for some weeks," continued Nelson Lee. "After that, perhaps, we shall touch at New Zealand, although there is no need for me to go into any of these details now. I just want you to be comfortable, and make up your minds that there will be no real difference between this life and the normal life of the school. This evening, as at St. Frank's, your time is your own. But to-morrow the school regime will start in earnest. That's all, I think, so you can dismiss as soon as you like."

So the school dismissed, talking animatedly. A little later Nipper happened to meet Nelson Lee in one of the electrically-lit corridors of Deck C.

"I was hoping that I would get a word with you, sir," said Nipper. "I've been wondering if we were right in coming on this trip."

"Right, Nipper?" repeated Lee. "It wasn't so much a matter of choice as a matter of duty."

"I know that, guv'nor, but what about the Green Triangle?" asked Nipper eagerly. "I was having a word with Corcoran before we sailed, and he is jolly sure that the Blue Crusaders are up against the League of the Green Triangle. And old Professor Zingrave is at the bottom of the mischief, too."

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"Yes, I was sorely tempted to remain in England," he said slowly. "But I had already undertaken to preside over the school during this trip, Nipper, and I could not very well back out of it. Dr. Stafford was very keen upon my coming. And, really, I doubt if we could have done much, even had we remained."

"But I mean, sir—the Green Triangle!" said Nipper. "We had some stirring times in the old days——"

"Things will be different now, Nipper," interrupted Lee. "I do not think Professor Zingrave is very powerful now, and the Green Triangle is not the grim organisation it was. Indeed, I doubt if it is an organisation at all. For years Zingrave has been inactive, and this new League of his is not likely to be a very powerful menace."

"Well, I hope that Corky puts up a good fight, sir," said Nipper. "If anything startling happens, we shall hear of it, shan't we?"

"Assuredly," smiled Nelson Lee. "We are in wireless communication with the world constantly, and all important news will reach us. By the way, what do you think of your new master? Have you seen him yet?"

"Not yet, sir," said Nipper. "Is he a decent chap?"

"I have every reason to believe that Mr. Norton is an excellent fellow," replied Nelson Lee. "He's an old St. Frank's man, and he has resigned a very fine position at a Public School in the Midlands in order to take up this appointment. He was an athlete of considerable distinction, and an all-round sportsman. I rather think that the Remove will like Mr. Norton."

"Well, we'll hope for the best, sir," said Nipper.

A little later on, as Nipper was going on deck, he happened to run into the new master, and he was rather surprised. He had pictured a much younger man.

He bumped into Mr. Norton by accident, and the new master turned on him with a scowl that was positively savage.

"Cannot you be more careful, boy?" he asked sourly.

"Sorry, sir!" said Nipper. "You're Mr. Norton, I suppose?"

"Whom did you think I was—one of the stewards?" asked the new master. "Who are you? And what is your name?"

"Hamilton, sir—I'm the captain of the Remove."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Norton, looking at Nipper curiously. "You are the captain, are you? Then I will take this opportunity of telling you that I am a man of very particular habits. I want no nonsense in my class. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir," said Nipper.

He looked at Mr. Norton curiously. The new master was a man of about middle age, powerfully built, with a heavy frame. He wore a big moustache, and small side-whiskers, which gave him an old-fashioned aspect. His eyebrows were bushy, and his eyes, behind his big spectacles, were strange-looking. Nipper, when he looked into those eyes felt uncomfortable. From the very first moment he took an intense dislike to Mr. Godfrey Norton.

"There's something rummy about the new man!" said Nipper, when he went into Cabin C, and joined Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. "Have you seen him?"

"Not yet," said Watson. "What's wrong with him?"

"I can't tell—but I don't like him," said Nipper. "He makes me uncomfortable. Unless I'm very much mistaken, we shall have some trouble with him in the Form-room. He looks like being a tartar."

Tea was very much the same as usual. The fellows were allowed to provide it for themselves, and they were already settling down comfortably to this new life. They were enjoying the novelty of it immensely.

In the Common-room that evening there was a good deal of talk about Mr. Norton. Only a few of the fellows had seen him, and they, in just the same way as Nipper, had received a very unfavourable impression.

"I ran up against him in one of the passages, half an hour ago," said Handforth. "He stopped me, and wanted to know who I was. Questioned me like a Dutch uncle!

And all the time he stared at me out of those rummy eyes of his."

"You can't judge a man by his eyes," said Church. "I don't suppose there's anything wrong with him."

"Give him a chance, dear old fellows," said Vivian Travers. "I haven't met the gentleman personally, but I dare say we shall give him as good as he gives us—if not better. Woe betide the Form-master who gets 'fresh' with his Form!"

This was a big consolation. In fact, the Remove made up its mind, then and there, that Mr. Godfrey Norton would be ragged considerably if he started any "funny tricks" with the Form!



CHAPTER 6

Business As Usual!

CLANG! Clang!

"That's the bell for morning lessons," said Nipper, turning away from the rail.

"Come on, you chaps! We don't like going below, but there's no help for it. It's 'business as usual,' you know."

"It seems a dirty trick!" grumbled Handforth. "By George! I'd love to stay out here, on deck! The breeze is glorious!"

It was morning, and the floating school had spent an excellent night. Nobody was feeling "squiffy," and appetites, at breakfast, had been on the large side. The St. Francis was speeding through the wintry waters so steadily and majestically that it was difficult to realise that one was really afloat. As for seasickness, the very idea of it was ridiculous.

It was glorious on deck—with the sea breeze blowing in one's face. Land had completely disappeared by now, and all those seniors and juniors on the promenade decks felt that it was a sin and a shame to go into the "class-rooms" for work.

"They ought to have given us a clear week!" said Handforth sternly. "It's all rot to expect us to work on the very first day like this!"

"After a week at sea, old man, we shouldn't want to do any work at all," said Nipper. "Far better to start right away. It's a half-holiday to-day, anyhow, and the morning will soon be over."

"By jingo, yes!" said Church. "It's generally a half-holiday on the first day of term, isn't it? Let's get in, you chaps."

Everything was so novel that there were very few grumbles. It was even enjoyable to be in the class-room—for, after all, work on this first morning would only be a pretence. Fellows would be getting their books out, and it was the recognised thing to indulge in a good deal of ragging during the first morning of term. Masters expected it—and, being long-suffering mortals, they put up with it.

However, Mr. Godfrey Norton appeared to be a gentleman of different calibre. The Remove had scarcely arrived in the classroom before the new master appeared, and there was an immediate silence. At first, at least, it was better to humour him.

"Good-morning, boys!" said Mr. Norton genially.

"Good-morning, sir!" chorused the Removites.

There was no doubt that Mr. Norton's tone was friendly; yet, somehow, there was a quality about it which sounded false. None of the fellows could quite understand their feelings, but they were convinced that Mr. Norton was by no means as genial as he pretended to be. Some of the juniors were quite ready to assert that he was exceedingly nervous.

He took his place at the desk, picked up a pointer, and rapped it on his blotting-pad peremptorily. Then he adjusted his spectacles, and looked round the room. It was very pleasant in there. Scarcely any motion was perceptible, and outside, through the portholes, the sea could be glimpsed, with the sunlight sparkling on the waters.

"Now, boys, I am unfamiliar with the general routine of St. Frank's," said Mr. Norton. "Who is the head boy of this Form?"

"I am, sir," said Nipper.

"Then you will kindly stand out here, and give me a few details regarding the general methods," said Mr. Norton vaguely. "You all have your lesson books, I take it?"

"Why, yes, of course, sir," said Nipper, in surprise.

"Good! Then we will get on with our work!" said Mr. Norton. "To begin with, we will take—arithmetic."

"But it isn't quite usual, sir—" began Nipper.

"Enough!" snapped the master. "Go back to your place, boy! We will take arithmetic!"

So they took arithmetic, and it wasn't long before the Remove discovered that Mr. Norton's knowledge of arithmetic was elementary. And when it came to the higher maths he was hopelessly at sea.

Vivian Travers, with his usual coolness and daring, tripped up the new master two or three times, and he did it deliberately, with the idea of starting a rag. Unfortunately, Mr. Norton had no knowledge that he had been tripped up, and the rag rather fizzled out. However, it served to show the Remove that this man was extraordinarily ignorant, to be in such a position of responsibility.

During the break, after second lesson, the juniors went eagerly out on deck, and they were now aware of the fact that the liner was beginning to dip slightly. The wind was freshening, and the Atlantic rollers were making themselves felt.

The one subject under discussion was Mr. Norton.

"Can't make the beggar out," said Nipper, frowning. "We could all teach him a whole lot!"

"He doesn't know half as much as the Form," agreed Handforth, with a grunt. "We're going to have an easy time with this merchant! It would be pretty good if he wasn't such a queer chap. I don't like his looks!"

"Perhaps we'll be able to give him a twisting during third lesson," said Travers complacently. "What's it going to be?"

"Well, he said something about geography," remarked Potts.

When they went back for third lesson, Mr. Norton was irritable and impatient. He hardly waited for the Form to settle down before he opened an atlas and selected a map of France.

"Now, you!" he said, pointing to Handforth at random. "Stand up!"

Handforth stood up.

"Tell me," said Mr. Norton, consulting his map, "what county is the town of Amiens in?"

"County, sir?" said Handforth, staring.

"Yes, county."

"But there aren't any counties in France, sir," said Handforth.

Mr. Norton looked hastily at his map again.

"What do you mean?" he snapped. "Are you trying to be funny, young man?"

"They're called departments in France, aren't they, sir?" asked Handforth, in astonishment.

"Eh?" said Mr. Norton. "Yes, yes! Quite so! Departments! I believe you are right. Sit down!"

Handforth sat down, very startled.

"You!" said Mr. Norton, pointing at Travers, in an unwary moment. "Where is the city of Rennes?"

"In the Ardennes, sir," replied Travers promptly, and quite at random.

"Good!" said Mr. Norton. "Tell me what Rennes is famous for."

"Half a tick, sir!" said Handforth, looking at his own atlas. "I can't find that town on my map—not in the Ardennes, anyhow. Rennes is in Ille-et-vilaine."

"If you interrupt again, boy, I will thrash you!" said Mr. Norton curtly. "Now, tell me," he added, looking at Travers, "what is Ardennes famous for?"

"You said Rennes just now, sir."

"I said nothing of the sort!" shouted Mr. Norton. "You seem very ignorant—all of you! I think you had better spend your time in drawing maps. I won't be bothered with such dunces!"

And he set the Form the task of map drawing, and the Form wondered. Mr. Norton was proving that he was colossally ignorant of geography. In any case, the whole procedure was all wrong. The Remove had not been taking France at all, and Mr. Norton would not listen to Nipper when he suggested that they should carry on from the point where they had left off, under Mr. Crowell's regime.

When it came to inspecting the maps, the new master hardly gave them a glance. He seemed heartily glad when the time for dismissal came, and those juniors who had per-

petrated atrocities instead of maps had nothing said to them.

"Well, he's a rummy sort of bird," remarked Fullwood as they all went out on deck. "Never knew such a master!"

"There's something queer about him," declared Harry Gresham. "Anybody might think he had never given a lesson in geography before!"

"I don't like his fierce looks," said Handforth suspiciously. "I think we ought to keep our eye on the man!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy," smiled Nipper. "I expect he's nervous, and perhaps his former school was a pretty dull place. Bother him! Let's go and make arrangements about the cricket. It's a half-holiday this afternoon."

"Cricket?" said Handforth, staring.

"Cricket!" repeated Nipper. "It's a game, you know. You play it with a bat and a hard leather ball, and some stumps——"

"You — you silly ass!" howled Handforth. "I know what cricket is, don't I?"

"Well, you seem a bit doubtful——"

"It's only just the beginning of January!" interrupted Handforth. "Football's the game for winter — not cricket! You've got the seasons mixed up, my lad!"

But Nipper hadn't. The St. Francis was bound for sunny climes—for Australia—and cricket was most decidedly the all-important game of the moment.

was a keen, bitter sting in it. White caps were appearing on the waves, and there was every prospect of a big blow.

Willy Handforth was quite serene; it was obvious that seasickness had not affected him yet. But his major, although he tried to appear careless and indifferent, was undoubtedly beginning to feel the effect of the motion.

There had been cricket practice that afternoon at the nets, and the fellows had thoroughly enjoyed the novelty of it. Cricket in January! But they were all in favour of it, since there was more than a chance that they would be able to have some games in Australia; and they wanted to be in form when they arrived. Nobody had touched a bat or a ball for several months, so practice was essential.

"Better go to bed," said Willy wisely.

"It's no good playing about with seasickness, Ted. I dare say you'll get over it in a few days——"

"I tell you I'm not seasick!" interrupted Handforth aggressively. "What rot! Seasickness is a kind of weakness. Any chap with a strong will will never be seasick."

"Then it's a poor look-out for you, old man," said Willy sympathetically.

He strolled off, leaving Handforth boiling. But somehow Edward Oswald did not feel up to

the task of rushing after his minor and slaughtering him. He clung to the rail, looking fascinatedly at the water. Presently Archie Glenthorne came along and joined him.

"What-ho!" murmured Archie. "Yo heave ho, and so forth, what? For once, old fruit, the prospect of tea fails to allure me."

"Great Scott!" said Handforth. "If you can't drink tea, Archie, you're in a bad way! Pull yourself together, man!"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie feebly. "Absolutely, in fact! But I have a feeling, laddie, that before long I shall be losing something. And, dash it, it'll be something I don't want. So the sooner it comes up the better. Good gad! I suppose we don't reach a port soon?"

Archie's eye was glassy, and his cheeks were pallid. Handforth, after one glance at him, moved away without answering. Just then a hail came from Church, farther along the deck.

"Been looking for you everywhere, Handy!" sang out Church. "Come on! Tea's ready!"

"I—I don't want any!" said Handforth carelessly. "I'm busy!"

WHEN THEY WERE FIRST AT ST. FRANK'S!

The early adventures of Nipper
and Co. of the Remove appear in

THE POPULAR

EVERY TUESDAY

CHAPTER 7

The Fellow With the
Strong Will!



FEELING a bit groggy, Ted?" asked Willy Handforth sympathetically.

Edward Oswald started.

"Eh?" he said, with a gulp. "Groggy? What do you mean, you young fathead?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Willy coolly. "Only you look a bit white about the gills, old man. Horrible feeling, seasickness—isn't it?"

"I'm not seasick!" roared Handforth indignantly.

It was nearly tea-time, and Church and McClure were preparing the meal in Cabin D. Handforth was on deck, leaning over the rail. The wind was still freshening, and there

"Busy?" said Church, staring, as he came up. "You don't look very busy."

"I'm thinking."

"Oh, thinking!" said Church, nodding. "Poor old Handy! Got the collywobbles, eh? Mac and I don't feel seasick yet——"

"I'm not seasick!" snapped Handforth. "And to prove it, I'll come down and have tea! Any fellow with a strong will is perfectly safe."

He went down to Cabin D, and when he entered the little apartment it was looking very cosy and bright. The table was set for tea, and there were all sorts of dainties.

The main item on the menu was a dish of sardines, and McClure was serving them out. Handforth gave them one look, closed his eyes, and shuddered.

"None for me!" he said hoarsely.

"Not sardines?" asked Mac. "But I thought you were keen on sardines?"

"I've—I've gone off them!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "I'll have a cup of tea, but don't put any milk in it!"

Church gave Mac a significant glance, and nothing further was said. Handforth, while he drank his tea, kept his eyes averted from the table. He felt he couldn't possibly bear looking at those oily sardines!

Never for a moment would he admit that he was feeling excessively groggy. How could he admit it? Hadn't he maintained all along that any fellow with a strong will could laugh at seasickness?

He went along to the Common-room after the meal was over, but there weren't many juniors there. The majority of them were out on deck, promenading up and down, or leaning over the rail, watching the sea. Everything was so novel, so entertaining. Nobody could get rid of the idea that this was a holiday, and not school, with its ordinary routine.

Handforth left the Common-room and went on deck again. He leaned over the rail in a forlorn kind of way. A number of other juniors were standing about, heavily over-coated, and with mufflers round their throats. It seemed to Handforth that the wind was blowing a full gale, and the ship was tossing and rolling in the most ghastly way. Actually the sturdy St. Francis was hardly rolling at all.

A sailor happened to come along, and Handforth plucked him by the arm as he was about to pass.

"Is—is this gale likely to last?" he asked, with an attempt at cheeriness.

"Gale, sir?" said the sailor. "What gale?"

"Well, it's blowing a bit, isn't it?"

"This ain't a blow, young gent!" grinned the sailor. "This is only a bit of a breeze! You wait until to-morrow!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

"There's a reg-lar snorter comin' along," said the sailor cheerfully. "Glass is goin' down pretty quick, too. By this time to-morrow we shall be in the thick of it, I expect."

"Will—will the ship pitch more than she's pitching now?" asked Handforth, startled.

"Why, bless your heart, sir, she ain't pitchin'—yet!" said the sailor. "We might as well be ashore for all the movement there is. Wait until to-morrow, and then you'll feel her heavin' and rollin' and pitchin'."

And the sailor walked on, leaving Handforth limp and flabby.

"Looks bad, Handy!" said Nipper, with sympathy.

"What looks bad?" demanded Handforth, trying to pull himself together. "If there's a storm coming, I shall be jolly pleased. What's the good of being at sea unless we have a storm?"

"Cheese it, old man!" grinned Nipper. "You're looking a bit wonky. Why not go straight to bed?"

"I'm not going to bed until bed-time," replied Handforth stubbornly. "Don't be an ass! There's nothing wrong with me!"

He wouldn't admit that he was feeling bad, and he even went in to supper with the rest of the Remove and the other Forms. Handforth was not the only one who kept up this pretence. Quite a number of fellows, with sickly smiles, maintained that they were feeling "perfectly all right."

Nipper and Travers and Jerry Dodd and Fullwood, and a few others, were unaffected by the ship's motion. They enjoyed a very hearty supper, much to the horror of those who were feeling the effects. These unfortunates had an idea that they would never eat another mouthful of food as long as they lived. Food was no better than poison to them. They shuddered at the very thought of it.

So, when bed-time came, there was quite a rush for the cabins. Handforth was the first in Cabin D, but he did not undress. Church and McClure, who were serenely unaffected, turned into their bunks, and voted them to be first-class. Handforth sat on one of the chairs, leaning against the little table. His face, by this time, was assuming the colour of old parchment.

"Better go and see the doctor, old man," said Church gently.

"The—the doctor?" breathed Handforth.

"Dr. Brett!" nodded Church. "He's on board, you know."

"Rats! I don't want to see any doctor!" said Handforth dully.

He flopped himself on his bunk, and pretended to go to sleep—after switching the electric light out. He felt better in the dark—without the eyes of his chums on him. He, the strong willed, was feeling very self-conscious about it. He was angry with himself, too, for being ill at all. He couldn't understand it. Such a thing as this ought not to have happened.

Church and McClure went off to sleep in a very short time, for they had had a tiring day.

At about midnight Handforth crept out on deck, trembling in every limb. He crawled to a corner where it was sheltered, and he

crouched near the rail, looking bleakly at the dark sea below. He felt a bit better out here in the open. Yet, he wouldn't have cared very much if the *St. Francis* had struck a rock just then, and he had been drowned. Life, for Edward Oswald Handforth, had ceased to have any charm.

It was while he was in this condition, and was crouching in that corner, silent and still, that he happened to see a stealthy figure moving along the deck nearby, where all was dim.

Handforth took no notice at first, but then, happening to glance round, he beheld a glimpse of Mr. Godfrey Norton's features. The new master of the *Remove* was stealing along—positively stealing—and he appeared to be carrying something half-concealed under his coat. He went quickly, and his very walk proved that he was steady, and perfectly well.

Handforth was so startled that he almost forgot his illness.

"By George, that's funny!" he muttered, pulling himself together. "What's the man doing out here at this time of night?"

He left that sheltered corner, and half-thought about making an investigation. But there was now no further sign of Mr. Norton, and Handforth, in any case, was feeling too groggy to bother.

Indeed at that moment, Handforth's entire internal system appeared to turn three or four somersaults, and the unhappy leader of Study D staggered to the rail.

The next few minutes were painful and harrowing.

But when Handforth stole back to his bunk he was feeling greatly relieved, and he even managed to climb between the sheets, and go off into a deep sleep.



CHAPTER 8

Trouble In The Class-Room!

NEXT morning the floating school awoke to find a regular gale blowing.

The liner, in spite of her size, was rolling and dipping considerably, and when the fellows came out on deck they found the waves high and angry. As far as the eye could reach, there was a long vista of white-capped, tumbling waves. The wind, roaring over the ocean's surface, was whipping the wave-tops off, and sending them drifting over the water in fine spray.

The decks were wet, and now and again the *St. Francis* would shudder from stem to stern as a particularly heavy wave struck her. Not that this sea was considered to be rough by any of the officers or members of the crew.

"We must be getting into the Bay of Biscay, I suppose?" said Tommy Watson feebly, as he clutched at the starboard rail. "My hat! I was as keen as mustard on this trip yesterday; but I'm not so sure that it's a good wheeze to-day!"

"It's a rotten idea!" said Harry Gresham. "Give me *St. Frank's* every time—*St. Frank's* on solid land."

Nipper chuckled.

"You'll soon get over it, my sons," he grinned. "Once you've got your sea-legs, you'll be as right as ninepence."

Handforth, strange to say, was nearly recovered. He had had his bout early, and now he could afford to smile in a superior fashion at the other unfortunates. Not that Handforth was quite right yet. He decided, on the whole, that it would be a good scheme to miss breakfast this morning.

Church and McClure were looking somewhat ill, although they maintained that they were still all right. And they, with a group of other juniors, listened without much attention while Handforth related his experience of the night.

"I tell you, there's something mysterious about the new master," he said. "In my opinion, he's a wrong 'un!"

"Draw it mild, old man," said Fullwood. "That's a pretty steep accusation, isn't it? Mr. Norton is queer, we know, but there can't be anything actually wrong with him. I understand he came from a big school in the Midlands somewhere."

"That makes no difference," argued Handforth. "He may have been kicked out, for all we know. Anyhow, I'm going to keep my eye on him."

"Oh, well, there's no harm in that!" said Nipper dryly. "Keeping your eye on him, Handy, won't do him any harm, and I don't suppose it'll do you much good."

Nobody had much sympathy for Handforth. It was generally felt that Mr. Norton was an unpleasant sort of "beast," but there was certainly no reason to suspect him of being anything else. After all, a master was a master, and some masters were worse than others.

At breakfast-time it was announced that any boys who felt ill were to report to the ship's sanatorium. Lessons would be excused for all those who were feeling unfit for work.

As a consequence, only about half the *Remove* turned up in the class-room that morning. Fully three parts of the Fourth kept away from lessons, and the Third, almost to a man, decided that it was a jolly good wheeze to be ill!

"Weaklings—miserable weaklings!" was Mr. Norton's sour comment, as he regarded the empty places. "What's the matter with all these boys? Have they no stamina—no vitality?"

"They're seasick, sir," said Nipper. "The ship's rolling a good bit, you know—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Norton.

"This is nothing—a mere breeze! You boys don't know what a storm is!"

"Some of us do, sir," said Nipper. "This isn't the first time we've been to sea."

"That'll do!" said the new master curtly.

This morning he was even worse than yesterday. His ignorance of school routine was colossal, and the Removites stened in amazement as he pretended to give them a lesson in grammar. Extraordinarily enough, Mr. Norton seemed to have no knowledge whatever of the real theory of grammar, and the mistakes he made during the course of a single hour left the fellows wondering how on earth he could ever have passed any examinations.

Not that much thought was given to real work that morning.

After the interval, the ship was rolling more than ever, and two or three of the fellows had not returned to the class-room; and some of those who had were looking slightly yellowish. Now and again one of them would make some gurgling excuse, and would dive out and make a dash for the deck.

"This is intolerable!" said Mr. Norton, at length. "I positively forbid any other boy to leave his place."

"They can't help it, sir," said Handforth. "They're only seasick."

"Seasick or not, I will not be subjected to this ridiculous farce! Hey, boy! Yes, you!" shouted Mr. Norton, lifting up a pointer, and indicating Archie Glenthorne. "What are you doing, here? Sit up!"

Archie, who was just about "all in," hadn't the slightest idea that Mr. Norton was speaking to him. Archie had been game all through, and he had not yet given up. But he was looking very ill, and he was lolling over his desk in a most helpless attitude.

"I think he'd better go out, sir," suggested Nipper quietly. "I advised him to go to his cabin during break, but he wouldn't listen—"

"He will listen to me!" shouted Mr. Norton violently, as he strode up to Archie's desk. "Now then, you young fool! Pull yourself together!"

Crash!

He brought the pointer down across Archie's shoulders, and the unhappy Removite gave a leap into the air.

"Good gad!" he gurgled. "I mean, dash it! I know perfectly well that I would welcome a swift death, dear old soul, but is it really necessary to—"

"Sit up, confound you!" roared Mr. Norton. "I won't have this lolling about! You are pretending, all of you! Trying to escape work, eh? Well, I will show you whether I am to be fooled in this way!"

"If it's all the same to you, laddie—that is to say, sir—I think I'd like a little spell of ozone," murmured Archie dully. "What ho! The good old vessel seems to be turning upside down, what? Or is it me? Whoa!"

The ship, rolling over, caused Archie to sway giddily, and he crashed heavily against

the new master. Indeed, in Archie's efforts to save himself, he half-clutched at Mr. Norton's whiskers, whereat Mr. Norton gave a mad shout of fury.

"Keep your hands away, hang you!" he snarled passionately. "You young fool! You confounded young hound!"

Crash! Thud! Thud!

Again and again Mr. Norton brought his pointer down on Archie's body, and the unfortunate junior backed away, startled, agonised. But Mr. Norton did not stop. He followed Archie up, still slashing away like a madman. And when the pointer broke, he seized Archie by the scruff of the neck, yanked him round, and flung him to the floor with insane violence.

"Steady, sir!" shouted Nipper, leaping forward.

The master swung round, his eyes burning evilly.

"Go back to your place!" he panted, glaring at Nipper with a baleful expression. "This will teach you that I am a man of purpose! Bah! I'm tired of you all! You can finish the lesson by yourselves!"

And this extraordinary new master, turning on his heel, flung out of the class-room, leaving the Removites scared and bewildered.



CHAPTER 9

Handforth Investigates!

WHIS mad—absolutely mad!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Poor old Archie!" murmured Nipper,

as he and two or three others helped Archie to his feet.

"A frightful sort of blighter, what?" said Archie feebly. "Good gad! That is to say, odds brutes and hooligans! The good old spine appears to be strained somewhat."

Archie was really hurt, but he was so ill inwardly that he took less notice of his bodily pains than he would otherwise have done. He was assisted to his cabin, and he retired into a bunk.

There were no more lessons for the Remove that morning. Handforth and Nipper and the other fit juniors discussed Mr. Norton's singular behaviour, and they could make nothing of it.

"I tell you there's something queer about the man!" declared Handforth firmly. "He doesn't know anything about school work. He's not like a Form-master at all! And his temper! By George! Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Never, dear old fellow," said Travers. "I'm beginning to think that you're right. Mr. Norton needs watching."

Mr. Norton's behaviour would have occasioned much more comment if all of the fellows had been normal. But the weather was getting steadily worse, and by lunch-



Handforth gave one look at the oily sardines ; then shuddered and turned away. " None for me ! " he said hoarsely. Handy was discovering that life on the ocean waves did not agree with him !

time the liner was forcing her way through a very heavy sea. The wind howled wildly, and the school ship plunged and tossed alarmingly, in spite of her great bulk.

There were very few fellows in the dining saloon, and afternoon lessons became a myth. Practically everybody kept to the Common rooms and the cabins. Work was quite impossible. And the majority of the masters made no attempt to rally their pupils. Nelson Lee had passed the word round that the boys were to be left alone.

This storm was unexpected, and as soon as it had blown itself out things would get normal again, and, after that, no doubt, the school routine would settle down evenly.

The evening closed in threateningly, with masses of black clouds overhead, and with the wind fiercer than ever. There was no pleasure in going on deck, since the rain was pouring in torrents now, and the wind was sending it shooting into every shelter. There wasn't a dry inch of the deck anywhere, and everybody kept well within doors.

Dinner wasn't much of a meal that night, although quite a number of fellows turned up at the tables. Handforth, by this time, had fully recovered, and, although the ship was now tossing alarmingly, he didn't mind in the least.

His seasickness was gone, and he was intent upon solving the mystery of Mr. Godfrey Norton.

Church and McClure went to bed early, and they had long since come to the conclusion that this idea of taking the school for a cruise was the maddest thing that had ever been thought of. They longed fervently for their comfortable bed-room in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. Who but a born idiot would want to go to sea, anyway?

"I'll tell you what," said Handforth, in the Common-room, just before the ordinary bed-time. "I believe that Norton is mad. That's the explanation! He's a lunatic!"

"Why bother about him?" asked Fullwood wearily. "Leave the rotter alone! I dare say he'll turn out better within a day or two. Everybody has been irritable and ill-tempered to-day. Perhaps he's ill, and won't admit it."

But Handforth wouldn't hear of any of these excuses. He declared that he was going to keep a watch on Mr. Norton that evening, and the other fellows let him ramble on. They didn't believe that he would really do anything of the sort.

Yet, after lights out, when everybody was supposed to be snug in their cabins, Handforth ventured out. He went downstairs until he came to Deck G, and he loitered about here, hoping to see some sign of the new master. Mr. Norton's cabin was on this deck, and Handforth was rather surprised at this, for most of the other masters had their cabins higher up in the ship.

But it had been Mr. Norton's choice to have his cabin well down, and this, in itself, struck Handforth as being suspicious.

For Deck G was practically deserted at all times. There were only one or two electric lights glowing in the passages, and it was easy enough for Handforth to dodge about there without being seen. Not that it would have mattered much even if he had been seen, for all the school routine was at sixes and sevens just now. He could easily have explained that he was taking a walk round because he couldn't sleep.

After hanging about for nearly half an hour, he cautiously approached Mr. Norton's cabin, and, almost as he got outside the door, he heard a sound that caused his hair to bristle.

For from within that cabin came a groan—a loud, unmistakable groan, like the sound of a man in dire agony.

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth, startled.

He heard a footstep inside the cabin, and he dodged away like lightning. After the first moment or two he cooled down. Perhaps Mr. Norton was ill—seasick, like the others? A loud groan, in such circumstances, wouldn't be very surprising. Or perhaps Mr. Norton was having a nightmare.

At that moment the cabin door opened, and Mr. Norton himself strode out. Handforth, lurking in the shadows, could see him distinctly, and he was startled to see that the new master was perfectly fit. He was quite steady on his feet, and he was smoking a cigarette. He looked up and down cautiously for a moment, and then hurried off.

"Great Scott!" breathed Handforth. "What the dickens does it mean? Norton is as well as I am, and yet there was that awful groan coming from his cabin! I don't believe he made that sound at all! He's got somebody in there, torturing him!"

It was quite characteristic of Handforth to think of some such melodramatic idea. He regarded Mr. Norton as a scoundrel, and the more he thought of that groan, the more he convinced himself that there was some ugly work afoot.

"By George!" he muttered. "He's gone, so I might as well have a look into the cabin!"

With Handforth, to think was to act. He was always impulsive. He dodged down the passage, reached Mr. Norton's door, and opened it.

Darkness greeted him. He hesitated on the threshold, his heart thumping rapidly. The ship gave a heave just then, and he was pitched forward, half into the cabin. He clutched at the doorpost, and his fingers touched the electric light switch. With a gasp, he pressed it down.

He looked round the cabin wildly, eagerly. But, rather to his disappointment, there was nothing unusual to be seen. It was a large cabin, and it was for this reason, perhaps, that Mr. Norton had selected it on Deck G.

There was a comfortable bed, and a big lounge. A wardrobe stood on one side, a fixture to the wall. But there was not the slightest indication of any human presence. All sorts of odds and ends of clothing were littered about, and a big trunk was open. There was nothing suspicious about all these things, however, even to Handforth's mind.

He switched off the light, dodged out again, and crept down the passage.

"Well, I'm jiggered if I can make it out!" he muttered, as he slipped up the stairs to Deck C. "Why on earth did Norton groan like that? I could understand it if he was ill—but he's not ill! An ill man doesn't smoke cigarettes, and walk about as steadily as Norton was walking about! And if he didn't make that rummy groan, who did?"

"Hallo! What are you doing out here, Handy?"

Handforth turned, and found Nipper near him. Nipper was carrying a big jug of cold water.

"Feeling bad, Handy?" he went on. "Montie is in the throes, and I've been putting wet towels round his head, poor chap!"

"Never mind Montie!" said Handforth. "Look here, Nipper, I'm glad I've spotted you! There's something funny about that fellow Norton!"

"Great Scott! Are you still keeping your eye on him?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Yes, I am!" replied Handforth. "And I believe he's a dangerous maniac!"

And Handforth described that groan he had heard, and he told how he had seen Mr. Norton emerge from his cabin, apparently fit.

Nipper listened attentively, and by the time Handforth had finished he was looking thoughtful. He didn't place the slightest reliance upon Edward Oswald's judgment. It seemed quite obvious to him that Handforth had heard a very ordinary sound, and in his imagination had exaggerated it into something far greater.

Nipper decided then and there to have this thing settled. He didn't like the idea of Handforth prowling about half the night, spying on the new master. Of course, Handforth didn't actually mean to spy; he called it investigating.

"Look here, Handy, old man, you're making a mountain out of a molehill," said Nipper gently. "You say you heard a groan. Are you sure it wasn't a cough?"

"No, it wasn't!" snorted Handforth. "You silly ass! Do you think I don't know the difference between a groan and a cough?"

"Well, you've admitted that Mr. Norton came out of his cabin a minute later, as right as rain, so he couldn't have groaned very painfully, could he?" asked Nipper. "If you're not satisfied, I suggest that we go along to the new master's room now and have a word with him."

Such a simple, direct plan had not occurred to Handforth.

"Go to his room?" he repeated. "What for? I thought about keeping on the watch—"

"I know that!" nodded Nipper. "But you'd better not do it, Handy. You might be spotted. Hang it, if Mr. Norton found you on Deck G. prowling about, he might think it—well, funny. And he'd probably half slaughter you."

"I can look after myself!"

"That's not the point," said Nipper. "It isn't the thing, Handy. Come on! We'll go straight to his cabin, bang on the door, and walk in. Then we shall know in two ticks whether he's ill or not."

"But what excuse can we make?" asked Handforth blankly.

"Oh, any old excuse," grinned Nipper. "I know. We'll ask him if he's got any aspirin tablets. No harm in a chap going to his Form-master for an aspirin tablet, is there?"

Setting the jug down, Nipper marched off to the staircase and hurried down. Handforth followed, rather startled by this direct procedure. He tried to protest, but Nipper took no notice. They soon arrived at Mr. Norton's cabin, and Nipper rapped sharply on the door.

Receiving no answer, he turned the handle and looked in. Then suddenly he became rigid, and he uttered a gasp.

"Good heavens!" he panted hoarsely.

For there, outstretched on the floor, face upwards and very still, was Mr. Godfrey Norton!



CHAPTER 10

Extraordinary!

NIPPER was startled, dumbfounded.

He had only come down here to dispel Handforth's ridiculous

"nonsense." And yet here was Mr. Norton, very obviously ill! So ill, indeed, that he was prone on the floor!

"What is it?" asked Handforth tensely.

Nipper did not answer. He ran into the cabin, went down on his knees, and shook the Form-master gently. There was only one shaded light glowing in the cabin, but Nipper could see quite clearly that Mr. Norton was looking pale and haggard.

"What's wrong, sir?" asked Nipper quickly. "Mr. Norton!"

"I knew it!" gasped Handforth, as he stared down. "Didn't I tell you that there was something wrong? I can't understand it, though! He came out of the cabin, smoking, and he looked all right! He must have come back—"

"I can't rouse him!" said Nipper breathlessly. "He's—he's unconscious!"

"Where's that water?" asked Handforth, looking round.

"I didn't bring it," said Nipper. "Look here! We'd better not try to deal with this thing ourselves, Handy. Come on! We'll fetch Dr. Brett! This is a case for a medical man!"

They both hurried out of the cabin, closing the door after them, and then they tore up two flights of stairs until they arrived at Deck E. Before they could proceed any farther they were suddenly confronted by Fenton. Fenton was not looking any too well, and he was mouching up and down in his dressing-gown and slippers. But he pulled himself together at the sight of the two juniors.

"Steady, young 'uns!" said the prefect. "What are you dashing about the ship for at this time of night? You're not ill, by the look of you—"

"There's something wrong with Mr. Norton!" panted Handforth. "He's lying unconscious in his cabin."

"That's nothing to make a fuss about," said Fenton feelingly. "Lots of people are lying unconscious in their cabins! I was unconscious about an hour ago, although I'm feeling better now."

"But it's not that!" said Nipper earnestly. "Mr. Norton isn't merely seasick. It's something worse—something serious. We were going to fetch the doctor—"

"For goodness' sake don't bother Dr. Brett now!" said Fenton impatiently. "I met him only ten minutes ago, and he's got his hands full with some of those Third Form kids. I'll come along and have a look at Mr. Norton."

"I tell you we ought to fetch the doctor!" said Nipper.

But Fenton wouldn't hear of it. He did not give much credence to this story; he took it for granted that the new master was merely down with seasickness.

They went down to Deck F, but before they could proceed any farther they heard a sharp command. Nipper and Handforth came to a halt, amazed. Coming up the stairs from Deck G was Mr. Godfrey Norton himself!

The uncanny part about it was Mr. Norton was looking as healthy and as fit as ever. He wasn't even seasick, and it was almost beyond belief that he could have been so ill only a few minutes before.

"What are you boys doing here?" asked the new master harshly.

"It's all right, sir," said Fenton. "These youngsters thought that you were ill—"

"I'm not ill!" interrupted Mr. Norton, his eyes burning with a strange fire. "Go away! How dare you bother me at this hour of the night? You infernal young hounds—"

"Steady, sir!" said Fenton quietly. "There's no need to be so violent—"

"Do any of you boys sleep on this deck?" broke in the master.

"No, sir."

"Then leave it!" shouted Mr. Norton. "Leave it at once! Do you hear me? If you don't, I'll half kill you! Confounded impudence!"

He was so threatening that Nipper and Handforth backed away. Even Fenton became alarmed.

"Keep your temper, sir," said the prefect. "These boys have done no harm. There's no earthly reason why you should get so angry."

Mr. Norton pointed passionately at the upper staircase.

"Go!" he snarled. "Get away from here! Am I a master, or am I an underling? Am I to be defied by mere boys? Go, I tell you! Go—go! I won't have you here!"

He advanced towards them, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing.

"Cut off!" said Fenton. "You youngsters had better get back to bed—as quickly as you can!"

Nipper and Handforth went upstairs to the next deck, and a moment later Fenton joined them. The prefect was looking worried and puzzled.

"I can't understand what's wrong with the man," he said. "He was nearly frantic with rage."

"That's because we were near his cabin," said Handforth, nodding. "There's something queer going on there, I believe! Why should he be unconscious one minute and well the next? I'll bet he's a mental case! I don't believe he came from a school at all! He must have escaped from a lunatic asylum!"

"That's about enough!" said Fenton curtly. "You'd better not say those things, Handforth!"

"Well, it's very queer, Fenton," said Nipper. "I don't blame Handy for having the suspicion. I saw Mr. Norton on the floor, too, and unless he was shamming——"

"By George!" broke in Edward Oswald excitedly. "That's it! He must have been shamming! For some reason of his own he didn't want to recover consciousness. He thought that if he shammed we should get out of the way, and——"

"You've been dreaming," said Fenton impatiently. "There's been enough of this—so let's have no more. Come along—back to bed, the pair of you!"

And Fenton would not be denied. He accompanied Nipper and Handforth to Deck C, but raised no objections when they suggested that they should go out on the promenade for a bit—just to have a look at the weather.

"Don't stay out there too long, that's all," said Fenton. "You'll only catch cold if you do, and then there'll be more patients."

Nipper and Handforth went over to the rail, and leaned against it. The rain had ceased now, and over the angry sea the moon was casting a silvery reflection. The gale seemed to be less now, although the ship was still rolling considerably.

"Well, what do you make of it, Nipper?" asked Handforth, at length.

"I'm blessed if I know what to think," replied Nipper thoughtfully. "First of all you heard a groan, and then you saw Norton come out of his cabin, smoking?"

"Yes."

"We went down to examine, and found him unconscious on the floor, and looking thundering ill," said Nipper. "After that, we met him on the stairs, looking as angry as a savage animal, but perfectly fit. It doesn't seem to tally, Handy. There's something wrong somewhere."

Handforth leaned over the rail, looking straight down into the sea, where the spume and the foam were hissing past the liner's side.

"I believe the man's dotty!" he said, with conviction. "It's the only possible explanation, Nipper. He must have sudden fits of insanity. In fact, he was nearly crazy when we met him on the stairs."

"But not crazy in the way you mean," said Nipper. "He was simply mad with rage. Anybody might think that we had interrupted him on some ugly work——"

"I say!" burst out Handforth suddenly. "Look! What's—what's this, Nipper?"

"Eh? What's what?"

"Look!" gasped Handforth, pointing down. "There's something being shoved out of a porthole from one of the lower cabins!"

Nipper leaned over the rail, and stared, too. At first he could see nothing, owing to the gloom. Then, sure enough, he could see a kind of big bundle being gradually pushed out of a porthole much lower down the ship's side.

"That'll be Deck G," said Nipper, with a catch in his voice.

"Mr. Norton's cabin!" yelled Handforth. "That's right! His cabin's on this side! What does it mean?"

As they stared down, gazing fascinatedly at that big bundle which was being pushed out, a step sounded behind them, and Nelson Lee joined them.

And never before had the famous House-master-detective's presence been more opportune!



CHAPTER 11

Nelson Lee Takes a Hand!

"UV'NOR!" ejaculated Nipper eagerly. "The very man. Look here, sir! What do you make of this?"

Nelson Lee, who was about to ask the two juniors what they were doing there, was struck by the urgency of Nipper's tone. He leaned over the side, and stared down.

"Is this some practical joke?" he asked sharply.

"No, sir!" gasped Handforth. "It's Mr. Norton! He's pushing something out of his cabin porthole! Goodness knows what it is, though! There's something funny about the man! We found him unconscious on his cabin floor not long ago, and then, when we

went down with Fenton, he was as right as rain again! And now he's pushing things through the porthole of his cabin!"

Nelson Lee did not press the juniors with questions. It seemed to him that this was obviously a moment for action. Even the little that Handforth had said was significant enough.

Besides, there was that strange bundle which was being pushed further and further out of the porthole, lower down on the ship's side. It could be seen as a curious shape, slowly emerging. Nelson Lee, quick as a flash, turned and took a coil of thin rope from a hook nearby. It was the work of a moment to make a noose.

"What are you going to do, sir?" asked Nipper breathlessly.

But Nelson Lee did not reply. He leaned over the rail, and, making allowance for the wind, he cast the rope. There was something almost uncanny in the way in which the noose settled over that bundle.

The throw had been a perfect one, and the next second Nelson Lee drew the rope tight. And only in the nick of time, too, for at the same second the bundle emerged completely from the porthole, and a great weight was suddenly put on Nelson Lee's arms.

"Help me, young 'uns!" he said quickly.

They grabbed hold of the rope, and held tightly, their hearts beating thuddingly. This mystery was beyond them.

"Quick—this way!" murmured Lee. "And don't shout, boys!"

He moved along the ship's side, that heavy bundle swinging aft at the same time. Nelson Lee's object was to get it clear of the porthole—just in case the rope should be seen from within Mr. Norton's cabin. Besides, there was a chance that the new master would thrust his head out, and see if his bundle had dropped. But nothing of this sort happened. No head appeared.

Hand over hand, Nelson Lee and the two juniors hauled up that strange prize. It was only by the merest chance that it had been saved. By all rights it should have plunged into the sea, to vanish in the foam and smother. Only Nelson Lee's quick-wittedness—and his skill—had saved it.

"It's jolly heavy, sir!" panted Handforth.

"Very heavy!" agreed Nelson Lee grimly. "And I may tell you frankly that I do not like the look of this affair. Nipper, what do you know of Mr. Norton?"

In a few sentences, while they were still hauling up the bundle, Nipper told Nelson Lee all he knew. And the famous school-master-detective listened intently. He heard how Handforth had been startled by that groan; how Mr. Norton had been seen stretched unconscious on the floor; and how he had apparently recovered by some miraculous process within the course of a few minutes.

"And now this—on the top of it, guy'nor!" added Nipper. "Mr. Norton has been acting strangely ever since the trip started—"

"I know!" interrupted Lee. "I have had

my eye on Mr. Norton since yesterday. Indeed, if there had not been so much seasickness amongst the boys, I would have had an interview with Mr. Norton during the evening. I had postponed it until to-morrow—which, it seems, was a bad mistake on my part."

By this time the bundle had been gently and carefully hauled to the rail, and now Nelson Lee grasped it firmly, and an ejaculation left his lips as his arms closed round it.

"Why, it's a sack, sir!" said Handforth, staring. "There seems to be some heavy object inside—Great Scott! It—it can't be—"

"Keep cool, Handforth!" interrupted Leo sharply. "Don't make any outcry! Come! We will carry it over to this light."

They moved down the deck a few yards. They had the whole promenade to themselves, and they set the bundle down under one of the electric lights, and Nelson Lee quickly produced a pocket-knife.

Without any hesitation he ripped open the sack, and a gasp came from Handforth as a human leg revealed itself.

"Easy—easy!" murmured Lee.

A moment later they had the sack completely off—and there, lying on the deck, was the unconscious figure of Mr. Godfrey Norton himself! His hands were bound, and his ankles were secured by means of a strap—and fixed to this strap, too, was a heavy fifty-six pounds weight, which had evidently been taken from the gymnasium.

"Mr. Norton!" ejaculated Nipper. "What—what can it mean, guy'nor?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly. "And—and he was being chucked into the sea, with a weight fixed to him! It—it was murder!"

"Is he dead, sir?" asked Nipper, with a catch in his voice.

Nelson Lee had made a quick examination.

"No!" he replied. "Thank Heaven we were in time, young 'uns! It was smart of you to call my attention so promptly."

"But it was you who saved him, sir!" said Nipper. "We should never have thought of roping him as you did! It was a brain-wave, sir!"

"Cleverest thing I've seen for years!" declared Handforth.

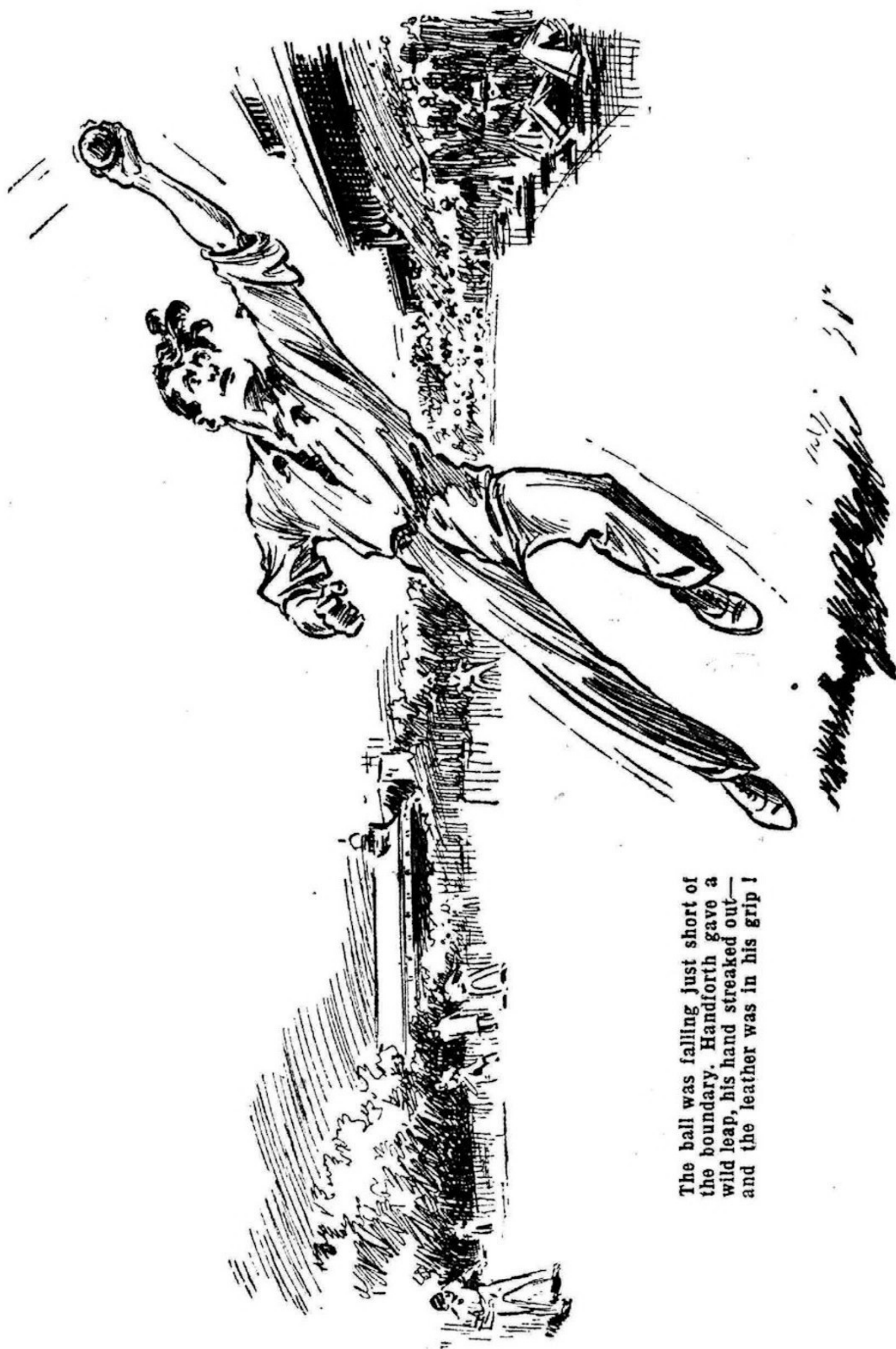
"He appears to be drugged in some way!" muttered Lee, as he bent down over the victim. "I will take him straight to my cabin—No, you had better not come with me. Remain out here until I return. And if you see Mr. Norton—"

"How can we see him, sir, if you're taking him to your cabin?" asked Handforth, in astonishment.

"Great Scott!" gasped Nipper. "Don't you understand, Handy? The guy'nor's implying that there are two Mr. Nortons!"

"What!" gurgled Handforth.

"That would explain the groan you heard, and why we found Mr. Norton unconscious, and then he was all right again!" went on



The ball was falling just short of the boundary. Handforth gave a wild leap, his hand streaked out—and the leather was in his grip!

Nipper shrewdly. "There's some horrible mystery connected with this affair!"

"I don't think you're far wrong, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee, as he rose to his feet, with the unconscious man in his arms. "But there is no time for us to discuss the matter now. Remain out here until I come back for you."

A moment later Nelson Lee had gone, leaving Nipper and Handforth excited and dumbfounded.

CHAPTER 12

The Plot That Failed!



TWO of 'em!" said Handforth, at last. "Well, whether there are two of them or not, nothing alters the fact that we only prevented a horrible crime by sheer chance," said Nipper.

"Sheer what?" repeated Handforth, with a start. "Sheer chance be blowed! I don't want to boast, but my keen eyes are responsible for what's just happened. I told you I was going to investigate, didn't I?"

"Exactly, old man, but——"

"But nothing!" said Handforth coldly. "We were standing here on deck, and when I looked over the side I saw that bundle being shoved out of the porthole! I can tell you, it gave me a bit of a shock! I only saw it by the merest accident!"

"Exactly!" murmured Nipper. "And what is 'the merest accident' but a chance, Handy?"

Handforth started again.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "I—I didn't mean—— Oh, well, perhaps it was chance. What does it matter? Some beast was trying to drown that man! Think of it! Shoving him into a sack, with a weight tied to him, and pitching him overboard in this rough sea! He wouldn't have stood an earthly chance."

"Not a ghost," agreed Nipper. "He would have sunk like a stone, and nobody would have known anything about it. Don't you see, Handy? There wouldn't have been any inquiries, or anything. Until this happened, we didn't know that there were two Mr. Norton's on board, and the dropping of one would never have been noticed by anybody."

"I'll bet it was the real Mr. Norton who was in that sack!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath. "The rotter who has been taking us in class is the spoof one! Haven't we always said that he had no knowledge of teaching? Besides, look at the brutal way he handled poor old Archie!"

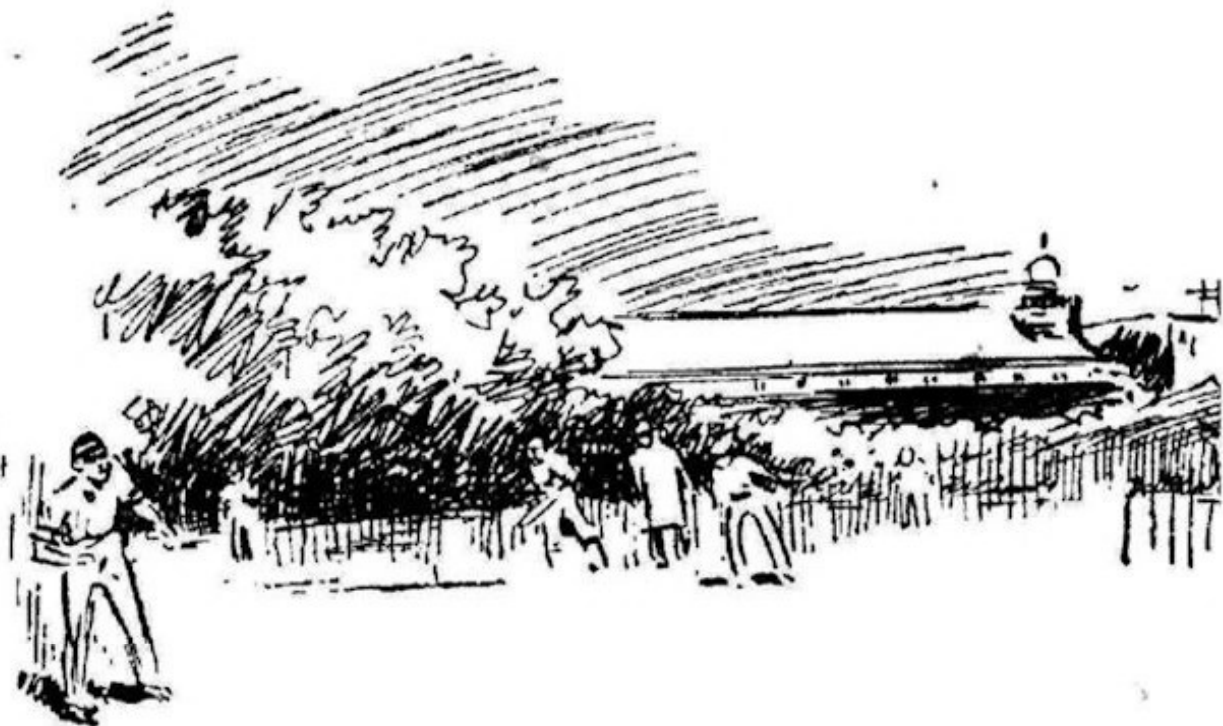
"Yes," said Nipper thoughtfully. "There's not much doubt about it, Handy. The chap who is pretending to be Mr. Norton is a dangerous criminal. And, what's more, he fondly thinks that he has committed this horrible crime. He doesn't know that his victim was lassoed, and pulled on deck."

"By George! Of course he doesn't!" said Handforth, with gleaming eyes. "I hadn't thought of that! I say, let's get this sack and these ropes out of the way, just in case he comes on deck."

They pushed them into a dark corner, and then their hearts leapt into their mouths as the lounge door opened, and somebody came out. But it was only Vivian Travers, accompanied by Jimmy Potts and Harry Gresham.

"I say, what's the trouble?" asked Potts eagerly. "We just saw Fenton dashing along like mad, and he wouldn't tell us anything."

"Spare us further suspense, dear old



The ball was falling just short of the boundary. Handforth gave a wild leap, his hand streaked out—and the leather was in his grip!

fellows," urged Travers. "Do not keep us on tenterhooks."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "It's a secret. Sorry, but we can't say anything."

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "Since when has this marvel come to pass?"

"Which marvel, ass?" asked Handforth.

"Since when have you been able to keep a secret?" asked Travers blandly. "For the love of Samson! Even our worthy friend, Nipper, is looking excited!" he added, as he glanced at the Remove skipper.

"There *must* be something big in the wind." "Here comes young Willy!" said Jimmy Potts. "Let's make him tackle his major. He can generally twist Handy round his little finger."

"Oh, can he?" roared Handforth aggressively.

Willy had just appeared, and exactly what Handforth would have done the others did not know. In any case, a further interruption occurred, for Mr. Godfrey Norton appeared further along the deck. He was strolling towards the group of boys, and



Nipper and Handforth at once became rigid.

Mr. Norton paused one or twice, and stood at the rail, looking over the tossing, moonlit sea.

"Better make ourselves scarce!" murmured Potts. "It's long after lights-out, and Mr. Norton might cut up rusty. You know what a rotter he is!"

"To-night, dear old fellow, there are no such things as rules and regulations," said Travers. "Many of us are in the throes of seasickness—"

"Wait a minute, Handy—wait a minute!" said Nipper, clutching at Handforth's arm. "Don't do anything rash."

For Edward Oswald Handforth had taken half a step forward, and his fists had automatically clenched themselves. He was glaring at Mr. Norton in a baleful way. The leader of Study D was not able to conceal his emotions, and when he remembered what this man had just done, his blood boiled. There wasn't a doubt about it—there wasn't the glimmering of uncertainty. This man had attempted to commit a most horrible crime, and he would have succeeded but for Nelson Lee's brainy action.

"Lemme go!" panted Handforth fiercely. "We've got to collar this beastly crook—"

"Cheese it, Handy!" protested Harry Gresham. "We all know that Mr. Norton is a queer sort of bird, but there's no need to—"

"Queer!" said Handforth. "He's a criminal!"

Mr. Norton came nearer, and he looked at the juniors with burning eyes.

"What are you boys doing out here?" he demanded harshly. "Get to your cabins at once!"

"Afraid we shall see too much, eh?" said Handforth recklessly.

Mr. Norton started.

"What—what do you mean?" he ejaculated, with a catch in his voice.

"You know what I mean!" retorted Handforth. "You thought you pushed that sack out of the porthole without being spotted, didn't you?"

Mr. Norton's face became livid; his eyes blazed up like a madman's. And Nipper, who saw that it was now too late to keep up any pretence, let out a yell.

"On him, you chaps!" he shouted. "Quick! He's dangerous!"

At the same second, Nipper leapt forward, and Handforth, eager enough, dashed into the fray, too.

Crash!

Handforth's right fist thudded into Mr. Norton's face, before that rascal could be aware of any coming attack. Travers and Potts and Gresham and Willy hardly knew what to do during those first tense moments, but they did not hesitate for more than a few seconds. Then they dashed into the fight.

Mr. Norton was struggling madly, and, as Nipper had half-feared, one of the man's hands had gone to his hip pocket. He evidently kept a revolver there, and he was not loath to use it.

The juniors tripped him, bowled him over, and held him down on the deck. Nipper had taken good care to hold Mr. Norton's arm, and now, as the man squirmed on the deck, Nipper deftly took out that deadly revolver.

"That's better!" he panted. "Handy, you ass, he might have killed one of us! You ought to have waited until the gov'nor came back!"

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "We've got him! Keep him down, you chaps—he's not Mr. Norton at all, but a dangerous crook!"

CHAPTER 13

The Truth About Mr. Norton!



IVIAN TRAVERS and the others were completely bewildered, but they did not relax their grip

on the prisoner. Nelson Lee arrived at that moment, with two of the ship's officers.

"I was half-afraid of this," said Nelson Lee sharply. "The boys have acted on their own."

"It's all right, sir, we've got him down!" sang out Handforth. "He came along the deck, so we simply went for him. There was nothing else to do."

"It was very foolish, Handforth—very dangerous," said Nelson Lee. "Thank heaven none of you has come to any harm."

The prisoner was screaming with rage now; struggling, kicking and nearly foaming at the mouth with the intensity of his baffled fury. But the ship's officers made short work of him. They yanked him to his feet, and snapped a pair of handcuffs over his wrists. Then, still screaming and kicking, he was forced below, to be kept a close prisoner until the ship reached port. Nelson Lee accompanied them, but he returned after a while.

By this time numbers of other fellows had been attracted. Sixth-Formers, Fifth-Formers and many juniors were crowding round, eager and excited.

"How's the real Mr. Norton, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"I am glad to say that the poor gentleman is not really harmed," replied Nelson Lee. "Within a few days, I hope, he will be up and about."

"Isn't it about time somebody explained things to us?" asked Willy politely. "We didn't know there was a fake Mr. Norton until ten minutes ago."

"Yes, what does it all mean, sir?" asked Buster Boots.

"I'll tell you in a nutshell!" put in Handforth. "From the very first minute, I suspected Mr. Norton of being a wrong 'un! And I was right, too! I kept my eye on him to-night, and I did a bit of investigating—"

"Dry up, Handy!"

"Chuck it, old man!"

"Handforth is justified in feeling pleased with himself," said Nelson Lee quietly. "For it was mainly owing to his 'investigations' that Mr. Norton's life was saved."

"It was you who saved him, sir," said Handforth quickly.

"My part was very small," said Nelson Lee. "I have every reason to believe that your activities worried the scoundrel who was masquerading in Mr. Norton's shoes. He put his vile plan into effect hurriedly, and, therefore, badly. There is no doubt that if this man had been undisturbed he would have been successful."

"But who is the man, sir, and why was he pretending to be Mr. Norton?" asked Fenton, in surprise.

"The rascal has confessed to his identity," said Nelson Lee. "His real name is Graves. He is a desperate criminal, famous for his clever impersonations. Scotland Yard has been after him for quite a number of years, and recently Graves has committed a particularly brutal crime. There is no need for me to tell you the details of this."

"We're more interested in the man himself, sir," said Fenton.

"From what Graves has said, I gather that he saw a paragraph in a newspaper to the effect that Mr. Godfrey Norton would be joining this ship as the new master of the *Remoye*," said Lee. "Graves was desperate—hounded by the police, and almost certain of capture within a day or so. So he took a bold step. In the general confusion of departure, just before the ship left Caistowe, Graves came on board, and nobody challenged him. Evidently he went straight down to Mr. Norton's cabin, and, then and there, he imprisoned that unfortunate man in his own wardrobe."

"Phew! Now I'm beginning to understand!" said Handforth, with a whistle.

"Probably Graves knocked his victim on the head first of all," continued Lee. "And then, without delay, he made himself up until he was an almost exact counterpart of Mr. Norton. Unfortunately for this rascal's purpose, Mr. Norton is a good subject for such impersonations."

"Rather!" said Nipper, nodding. "Side-whiskers, glasses, and all that."

"It was a comparatively easy scheme for such a clever man, because the real Mr. Norton was a stranger to practically everybody on board," said Nelson Lee keenly. "That helped Graves to a very considerable extent. I, for one, had never met Mr. Norton, and thus when this man introduced himself to me as the new master, I had no reason to suspect that he was a trickster. And those people who had met Mr. Norton were easily

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deceived by Graves, for they had only seen the new master for a mere moment or two. Thus, by keeping Mr. Norton hidden in the cabin, Graves had a simple job."

"It's a funny thing that Mr. Norton didn't shout for help, or something, when he was attacked," said Jimmy Potts.

"I believe that Graves, at one time, was employed by Mr. Norton," said Nelson Lee. "Thus, the unhappy man had no suspicion of what was to come. But we shall know all the details later. For the present, we had better return to our cabins. The excitement is all over now. Graves is a prisoner, and he will be handed over to the police as soon as we reach a port."

"He deserves to be chucked overboard, sir!" growled Handforth. "The villainous hound! I mean, putting the poor man into a weighted sack like that, and trying to chuck him overboard."

"I have already told you, Handforth, that this man was desperate," said Nelson Lee. "His scheme was a bid for complete liberty. He evidently thought that if he could only definitely assume the name and character of Mr. Norton, he would then be able to drop his own identity, and he would be in no further fear of capture. In order to succeed in this scheme, he was compelled to get rid of the real Mr. Norton."

Later on, the details were easily learned from Mr. Norton, after he had recovered consciousness. It appeared that Graves had confronted him in his cabin, and had asked for some money. Then, in a flash, Graves had knocked him down, rendering him insensible. When he came to himself he was imprisoned in the wardrobe, bound and gagged.

And there the new master of the Remove had been kept—right until he was rescued by Nelson Lee and the juniors. There was no doubt that Graves had been flustered and unsettled while he was preparing to commit his terrible crime. For after drugging Mr. Norton, and laying him on the cabin floor, he had apparently gone out for some purpose—probably to get hold of the necessary sack. It was during this interval that Nipper and Handforth had seen the real Mr. Norton, lying unconscious.

However, the dramatic affair was now over, and, thanks to the juniors, the plot was frustrated.



CHAPTER 14

Over the Wireless!

MR. GODFREY NORTON turned out to be a mild, inoffensive gentleman, brilliant in his work, and genial in his dealings with the Remove.

Two or three days after the wretched Graves had been put in irons, Mr. Norton

took his place in the Remove class-room. It was a bit of a shock for the juniors, for Mr. Norton so closely resembled the man who had impersonated him.

Yet, there was really a very great difference in this kindly man. His eyes, instead of being baleful, were thoughtful and pleasant. His voice was quiet, too, and it wasn't long before the Remove voted him to be a good sport. And the Remove was relieved. At the beginning of the voyage there had been a good deal of uneasiness, owing to the extraordinary behaviour of the new master. But now that this little mystery was explained, the juniors settled down to the new order of things with a keen enjoyment.

Seasickness was a thing of the past now. Everybody had got over that brief indisposition. The St. Francis, indeed, had left the cold, rough weather behind by now, and was steaming steadily and speedily southwards into the warm zones.

There was a brief stay at Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, in British West Africa, and here Graves was taken ashore, and handed over to the British authorities.

As far as the St. Frank's fellows were concerned, the murderous Graves passed completely out of their lives.

By now, of course, Mr. Norton was thoroughly recovered. The school ship was practically at the Equator, and the weather was blisteringly hot. Flannels were the order of the day, and cricket seemed the only possible game—although the heat, generally, was even too hot for cricket.

Nobody was allowed ashore at Sierra Leone because of the dangers of malaria; the stay was only a very brief one, and it really wasn't worth while going ashore. On the uplands of Sierra Leone the climate is fairly good for Europeans, but elsewhere it is very unhealthy.

And so the voyage went on, with the school eagerly looking forward to the day when the ship would arrive at Durban, South Africa. Here there would be a stay of two or three days, and everybody would be allowed ashore.

"Good egg!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "We've been to Africa before now; but not to South Africa. It ought to be jolly interesting."

"Rather!" said Church. "But it's a pity we're not going to touch at Cape Town. Still, perhaps we'll call there on the way back. It's going to be Durban this time."

"Doesn't make much difference," put in McClure. "We shall only be able to get a fleeting glimpse of South Africa, anyhow. This trip is really to Australia. On the homeward voyage, I dare say we shall stop in South Africa for a week or two."

The juniors were lounging in deckchairs, in the shade. It was a half-holiday that day, and the heat was so terrific that nobody had sufficient energy to do anything. They just lolled about, paying occasional visits to the tuckshop for iced lemonades. The sea was

gloriously blue, and life was very enjoyable.

"Pity we're not going to stop in Durban a bit longer," said Handforth regretfully.

"Durban's not far from Zululand, is it?"

"Well, it's comparatively close, I believe," said Church.

"H'm! We might have had some exciting times among the Zulus," said Handforth. "A bit dangerous, of course."

"Dangerous?" said McClure, staring.

"Rather!" said Edward Oswald. "Everybody knows that the Zulus are cannibals. Big, black savages, always going about in *impis*. That's a Zulu word for army, you know," he added carelessly. "They don't care what they do, these Zulus. A blood-thirsty lot!"

Church and McClure yelled.

"Why, you hopeless ass, the Zulus are peaceful, loyal British citizens nowadays," said Church, with a wide grin. "There aren't any *impis* nowadays, and you'll probably find the average Zulu as civilised as we are."

Handforth looked disappointed.

"Rats! I'd forgotten that!" he admitted.

"H'm! Not much fun at that rate! Oh, well, I dare say we shall have a good time in Durban, even if the blacks are civilised."

Handforth's ignorance of South Africa was colossal, and it was a good thing, perhaps, that the school was going on this Empire trip. As an educative measure, it would

be a thousand times more useful than any amount of ordinary school teaching.

By now, of course, the regular St. Frank's routine was firmly established on board. There were lessons every morning, meals were as usual, half-holidays came in the same order, and, to all intents and purposes, the fellows were going ahead with their normal work just as at home.

With Durban only four days away, a piece of interesting news became circulated. The St. Francis was in constant touch with the world by wireless, and a news bulletin appeared every day on the big notice-board in the main lounge.

And to-day there was an item which interested the juniors particularly. It appeared that Lord Dorrimore, the famous millionaire sportsman, was starting off in the giant aeroplane known as the Wanderer of the Skies, from Capetown on a non-stop flight to Cairo.

It was an ambitious venture, and Lord Dorrimore's only companion would be Mr. Hobart Manners, the designer of the 'plane.

"Why, that's the very machine we flew to India on, during the summer!" ejaculated Tommy Watson, when he read the report.

"I don't suppose it's the same machine, but one of the same type," remarked Nipper. "Probably a better one—a later model. Mr. Manners is going all out on this scheme, you know—establishing world routes for his big aeroplanes."

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"Good old Dorrie!" said Handforth. "What a pity he couldn't be in South Africa a bit longer! We might have seen something of him, then."

"He'll be in Cairo by the time we arrive—three or four thousand miles away," said Nipper. "By Jove! It'll be a tremendous flight, if he does it. I see they're only taking cargo this trip; just the two pilots, Dorrie and Mr. Manners, and a big load of mail and merchandise."

"Yes, Dorrie says that he won't risk any lives on this trial trip," said Travers. "Good man! It'll be a topping achievement if he gets to London in two stages."

Lord Dorrimore was well known to all the St. Frank's fellows. He was one of the best, and he was never content unless he was indulging in some risky sort of undertaking. Not that there was any real risk in this latest venture. Lord Dorrimore was providing all the capital for Mr. Hobart Manners' enterprise, and he was convinced that it would be capital well invested.

Little did the St. Frank's juniors realise how dramatically they were to be reminded of their old friend, Dorrie!



CHAPTER 15

The Challenge!

SOMETHING cropped up later on that day, however, which effectually drove all thoughts of Lord Dorrimore from the mind of the St. Frank's crowd.

The first hint of it came towards the evening, when some of the seniors were industriously at cricket practice, on the special deck that had been adapted for this purpose and netted round. A group of juniors were standing near by, watching with interest.

Nelson Lee came along, and he called Edgar Fenton aside as the latter walked away from the nets, with his bat tucked under his arm.

"Just a minute, Fenton, if you don't mind," said Nelson Lee. "There's an interesting wireless message here, and I think you are the man to deal with it."

"I, sir?" asked the school captain, in surprise.

"Read it for yourself," smiled Lee.

A minute or two later, Fenton was looking flushed and excited.

"We'll accept, sir!" he said confidently.

"I rather thought you would," chuckled Nelson Lee. "These South African boys are enterprising, eh?"

"Rather, sir!" said Fenton. "But shall we have enough time?"

"I think we shall stay in Durban for three days at least—and that ought to be long enough."

"By Jove, yes!" said Fenton eagerly. "If you don't mind, sir, I'll tell the others."

He moved away, and drew William Napoleon Browne and Wilson and Biggleswade and one or two other seniors round him. Handforth and Travers and Nipper strolled up, scenting that there was something special in the wind. It was very seldom that Fenton looked so excited.

"Well, we shall get some cricket before we arrive in Australia, by the look of things," said Fenton genially. "I've got a wireless message here, sent by a fellow named Joubert, the captain of a big school in Durban."

"Cricket!" said Browne brightly. "Proceed, brother! I am more than slightly interested."

"Joubert wants to get up a South African school team—fellows picked from all parts of the Union," continued Fenton. "One or two from Durban, perhaps, some more from Cape-town, and others from Pietermaritzburg, and Ladysmith and Johannesburg. Anyhow, a South African team. And he has challenged St. Frank's to a match as soon as we arrive in Durban."

"Good egg!" said Handforth eagerly. "Of course, you're accepting, aren't you, Fenton?"

"Naturally," said the school captain.

"They might have arranged two games while they were at it," said Handforth indignantly. "What about the juniors? It's all very well for you seniors, but where do we come in?"

"Alas! brother, I fear you will have to content yourself by watching the deeds of your elders," replied Browne gently. "However, there may be another solution to this problem—"

"A fat lot of consolation we shall get out of watching you seniors!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "We want to play—and, by George, I don't see why we shouldn't get up a game of our own! These South African chaps have challenged us, so why shouldn't the juniors send a challenge to them?"

"It's not a bad idea," said Nipper thoughtfully.

But Fenton and the other seniors moved away, and they went down into their own Common-room, where they could discuss the situation in a more leisurely fashion. A decision was necessary at once, so that the South African schools could have time to get their men to Durban in readiness for the match.

"There's one thing I didn't mention in front of the juniors," said Fenton. "This challenge is worded rather curiously. They want us to play a *representative* St. Frank's eleven."

"That means, I take it, an eleven drawn from the school's best players?" said Reynolds.

"Obviously," replied Fenton. "I think we shall have to include some juniors in the team."

"And why not?" asked Browne heartily. "Why not, brother? Much as it may pain you to admit the fact, there are stalwarts in the Junior School who can wield the

willow and hurl the leather even better than many seniors."

"Yes, some of those kids are as keen as mustard," said Fenton, nodding. "In any case, we shall need juniors in the team. Some of our best men are left at St. Frank's—Sinclair and Morrow and Stanhope, only to mention three. Don't forget we've only got half the school here on board."

"Which makes it all the more necessary to play some juniors," declared Browne. "Let us, then, select this team here and now. There is no time like the present."

And for the next half hour the selection committee was extremely busy. At last Fenton stood up, with a paper in his hand.

"Well, this is the eleven," he said. "Wilson, Reynolds, Fenton, Sixth Form; Browne, Stevens, Fifth Form; Hamilton, Dodd, Gresham, Handforth, Remove; Boots, Christine, Fourth Form."

"Excellent!" beamed Browne.

"I don't agree to it!" said Wilson, with a frown. "Only three Sixth-Formers, only two men from the Fifth, and four from the Remove! It's—it's all wrong!"

"We want the best men, remember," said Fenton.

"Yes, but hang it—six juniors in the team!" protested Wilson.

"Never mind juniors or seniors, we're selecting cricketers," said Fenton. "Hamilton is a good man, and so is Dodd. Gresham we must have! Isn't he the son of 'Hat Trick' Gresham, the famous England player? I'm not quite so sure about Handforth—"

"Then be sure at once, brother!" interrupted Browne. "Let me urge you to include Brother Handforth. Fail to do so, and this vessel will inevitably be sunk, her very plates rent asunder by Brother Handforth's roars of indignation."

"He's reckless," said Fenton, pursing his lips. "We might drop Handforth and include you, Conroy."

Conroy, of the Sixth, nodded.

"A darned good idea, too!" he said, with some feeling. "I was wondering what I had done."

"With all respect for your prowess, Brother Conroy, let me point out that you are no bowler," said Browne.

"Neither is Handforth!" retorted Conroy.

"But Brother Handforth is a mighty slogger," said the genial, lanky Fifth-Form skipper. "Do you not remember the match when Brother Handforth saved the game by scoring a hurricane century? Yes, and playing for the Senior Eleven, too! Have you ever scored a century, Brother Conroy?"

Conroy coloured.

"Well, no," he admitted, "not—not exactly a century—"

"Or not exactly half a century," said Browne. "In point of fact, your average is somewhere in the region of fifteen or sixteen per innings. Quite a good average, too. But we wish to show these South African stalwarts something in the way of fireworks, and who can provide fireworks better than Brother Handforth?"

Fenton nodded.

"Browne's right, you fellows," he said. "We can't drop Handforth. Conroy, old man, I'm sorry, but young Handforth has a better claim than you."

Conroy shrugged his shoulders.

"Go ahead, then," he said, with a rueful grin. "You're the skipper, and I'm not questioning your decisions."

And so the matter was settled.

CHAPTER 16

St. Frank's In South Africa!



TEST match!"

"By Samson! It's something to look forward to, dear old fellows!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good old Fenton!"

There were many exclamations of satisfaction in the junior Common-room that evening, after Edgar Fenton had pinned up a sheet of paper on the notice board. The juniors were naturally elated when they found that over half the team had been selected from the Remove and the Fourth.

Yet this was a perfectly logical selection.

A number of Fenton's best men—that is to say, best cricketers—had been left behind at St. Frank's, in the West House and the East House. But there was a very strong number of junior cricketers on board, and in a matter of this kind age did not count.

"It's going to be practice now, my sons almost every spare minute until we get to Durban," said Nipper briskly. "It's a shame we shall be cramped a bit. Good as the arrangements are on board, we need a proper field. Still, it can't be helped, but I'm afraid it'll be a bit of a handicap for us—particularly as we shall have to start the match practically as soon as we get to port."

"Who cares?" said Handforth lightly. "We'll put it across these black chaps!"

"Black chaps!" roared Vandyke, of the Fourth. "What do you mean, you silly idiot? You don't think you're going to play against a team of Zulus, do you?"

"Well, no—"

"Or Swazis?"

"Eh?"

"Or Basutos?"

"Look here—"

"I'm a South African!" went on Vandyke indignantly. "Proud of it, too! I'm an Afrikaner!"

"I've seen the advertisements of your tobacco," nodded Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you funny fathead!" bellowed Vandyke. "I don't grow tobacco! I'm a South African, and yet I'm not black!"

"Don't take any notice of him, old man," said Nipper gently. "He's only trying to be funny. He probably thinks that all South



Archie Glenthorne was seasick, but the new Remove Form-master did not make any allowances for that. He brought his pointer down across Archie's shoulders again and again, causing that junior to cry out in agony.

Africans live in kraals, and that they generally go about carrying assagais."

"Carrying which?" asked Handforth, staring.

"You wouldn't understand, old man," murmured Nipper. "An assagai is merely another name for a spear."

"It's the name of a tree, too," said Vandyke.

The South African junior cooled down a little bit. He, of course, was eagerly looking forward to this short stay in his native land. He did not hail from Durban, but he would be glad enough to step ashore in that famous port.

For the next day or two there was very little work done in the class-rooms. Cricket was the order of the hour. Nothing else really mattered. All the members of the eleven were excused from lessons, and they put in all the time at the nets. The other fellows, however, were very restive, and it was then that Mr. Norton proved himself to be a real sportsman. For he winked at all irregularities, and took no notice of the cricket chatter which went on from time to time during work hours.

Mr. Pycraft, the master of the Fourth, was not so broad-minded. He kept the boys hard at work, and inflicted impositions with monotonous regularity.

As the school ship went further south, so the oppressive heat lessened. The St. Francis was now well below the Equator, and the devastating tropical zone was left behind.

One morning, very early, the school was awakened by the complete silence and stillness which ensued after the stopping of the engines. Coming out on deck in the dawn, everybody found that Durban had been reached.

In the night the great school ship had crept up to Port Natal, and now, with the Point on one hand, and the Bluff on the other, the great ship was being taken through into Durban Bay—into the harbour.

High above the seashore, the Bluff reared its lofty head. The famous Bluff Lighthouse was in full sight, and it reminded most of the juniors very acutely of the lighthouse on Shingle Head, near St. Frank's. But then, as Handforth truly remarked, one lighthouse was very much like another lighthouse.

"It's good to see!" murmured Vandyke dreamily, as he stood on deck, leaning over the rail. "By jingo! I'm mad to get ashore now."

"I think we all are," smiled Nipper. "There's a fine view from here. Durban seems to be a wonderful place."

The panorama was indeed enchanting. The scene was one of colour and animation, even at this early hour of the morning.

On the Point railway lines there was a constant coming and going of freight trains, and in the harbour itself there was any number of big ships.

Liners and tramps of the ocean highways, discharging cargoes from England, Australia, or the United States—taking aboard the produce of South Africa—maize, wool, hides and skins, citrus fruits, sugar, cotton, and countless other commodities.

Now and then a ferry boat could be seen crossing the harbour. At Island View, there was the big oil station with the gigantic tanks of the great petroleum companies. Much more picturesque was Salisbury Island, a glorious jewel in a setting of azure.

After their long trip from home, the school was glad enough to see all these welcome sights. And later, when at last they were ashore, they were filled with wonder at the beauty of this great South African town, with all its modern splendour.

In West Street, for example, the fellows found it difficult to realise that they were so far from the homeland. West Street is the Oxford Street of Durban.

People of all nationalities were on view—here a Kaffir girl in her beads and blankets, there an English girl, attired in the latest of Paris fashions. Mohammedans, Arabs, Zulus. The ricksha boys, with their gorgeous trappings, were plying for hire. The Bantu policemen, dressed in their neat knickerbocker uniforms. There were the African police officers, too, dressed very much in the same style as the London bobbies, save that they wore peaked caps, instead of the usual helmet.

But, after all, it was cricket that mattered most with the St. Frank's fellows.

As it was still quite early in the day, the match was booked to start at once. The weather was glorious, and a great crowd of South African schoolboys had greeted the St. Frank's fellows as they had come ashore.

And now, with a sort of escort of honour, the visitors were being taken to the cricket ground.



CHAPTER 17

Playing The Game !

THE St. Frank's eleven was honoured in a very signal manner. For this "Schoolboy Test Match" was to be played at Kingsmead, the fine International Sports Ground where the real Test Matches between British and South African elevens were played. There were spectators by the thousand by the time the game was due to start. All Durban was interested in this match.

Joubert, the captain of the South African team, proved to be a bluff, genial youth, with an everlasting smile. All the others were fine, well-set-up young fellows, too.

There had been only one shadow cast upon the gaiety of the occasion that morning. There was some disconcerting news regarding Lord Dorrimore.

Quite a sensation had been caused in Capetown, it appeared, and even Durban was gravely disturbed. In Johannesburg there was keen anxiety. For Lord Dorrimore had vanished—utterly and completely!

He and Mr. Manners had set out from Capetown, according to their schedule, and the great 'plane had been seen over various points in South Africa. And then, during the night, the machine had vanished. She had

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



failed to turn up at Johannesburg at the scheduled time—although the machine had been seen clearly over Bloemfontein, which was on the direct route.

She had not even been seen at Kroonstad, a town further north, although all the inhabitants had been looking out for the great 'plane.

In some strange way, Lord Dorrimore must have got off his course, and it was reckoned that he had descended somewhere on the veldt, probably at a place where there were no telegraphic facilities.

It was hardly likely that he had crashed, and nobody was getting really worried yet. The machine had been missing for three days, it seemed, and still no word had come from his lordship. Yet everybody was confidently expecting that good news would soon arrive.

"I'm not worrying about Dorrie," said Nelson Lee confidently. "He's an irresponsible beggar, anyway, and there's no telling what tricks he might get up to."

"Well, I hope we get some news about him, sir," said Nipper.

"Don't let this matter play on your mind, young 'un," advised Lee. "Dorrie is a very uncertain quantity. Go ahead with your cricket, and enter into it wholeheartedly."

And when Nipper found that the game was practically on the point of starting he took Nelson Lee's advice.

It was glorious there, in that magnificent

"ST. FRANK'S IN SOUTH AFRICA!"

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enclosure, with the cheering South African crowds and with the bright, azure blue of the sky overhead. The St. Francis would only remain in Durban Bay for a bare three days, so there was no time to be lost.

This was to be a double-innings match, and it would probably occupy the whole of the three days. So cricket was paramount.

Fenton won the toss, and he promptly sent the South African schoolboys into the field. And Fenton and Gresham walked out of the pavilion, amid great applause, to open the St. Frank's innings.

The Remove looked upon it as an honour for Gresham to be the school captain's partner, and Gresham soon proved that he was well deserving of the distinction.

He settled down rapidly, and commenced to score with those brilliant strokes which he had learned from his distinguished father.

Fenton was playing well, too, although both the batsmen were handicapped by their long spell on board ship. Furthermore, they had had no real practice since the previous summer; and the conditions were quite new to them. Things were very different here from the soft, springy turf of the St. Frank's playing fields.

After Fenton had scored twenty-three runs he was caught in the slips, and Wilson took his place. Wilson was stubborn, and he was cautious. While Gresham was knocking up his total to fifty, Wilson obtained a couple of runs. But later he opened out a bit, only to meet with disaster after he had made ten.

And then came the mighty Browne, cool, confident and self-possessed.

He and Gresham settled down into a splendid partnership, and between them they raised the total to 116 before Gresham gave the ghost of a chance to the wicketkeeper. This player accepted the chance, and Gresham was stumped.

"Well played, Gresham!"

"Good for the Remove!"

Reynolds went in next, but was unlucky enough to be bowled first ball. Then came Stevens, of the Fifth, Browne's only particular chum. These two were still undefeated when the lunch interval came. They had found it extremely difficult to get runs, however, for the bowling was excellent and the fielding superb.

Soon after lunch, Browne was caught in the long field while attempting to hit one of his slashing boundaries. However, he had done well, scoring forty-seven off his own bat.

Nipper was next, and he played quietly and brainily; and later, after Stevens was out, Handforth joined him. Handforth slogged in his usual reckless way, and for about ten minutes he put up a spectacular performance. He scored three boundaries in succession in one over, but eventually he paid the penalty for his recklessness when he entirely misjudged a loose-looking ball. It curled under his bat, and lifted his middle stump out of the ground.

Jerry Dodd followed, but he was unlucky. The redoubtable Australian junior only scored ten runs, but he vowed that he would make up for this when he was called upon to do some bowling.

Then came Boots and Christine, although they did very little. St. Frank's were all out for 234. It was a respectable total, but Fenton doubted if it would be any good against these stalwart South African boys.

Fenton was right.

For the Afrikanders proceeded to give their visitors an enormous amount of leather hunting. At the close of play, the South Africans had scored 316 for six wickets, and matters were not looking any too healthy for St. Frank's.

However, they soon forgot cricket in the evening when they were again feted, and taken all round Durban to see the sights.

An enjoyable interlude it proved, too.

They went along the Marine Parade, lined with its magnificent hotels, overlooking the blue waters of the Indian Ocean. They saw the wonderful bathing beach by moonlight, and, indeed, indulged in bathing themselves. For night bathing is a favourite pastime in Durban.

The St. Frank's fellows were fascinated by this night bathing. The water had a temperature of about seventy-two degrees, and after the heat of the day this "dip" was more than welcome. None of them wanted to come out.

Later they were taken through the town; they had rides on the tramcars and motor buses, and were taken here and there in private cars.

From the esplanade they went up the gentle rise of Gardiner Street, arriving at the Town Gardens, and soon they were in the very heart of Durban. There, after they had inspected the statues in memory of Sir John Robinson, Queen Victoria and others, they enjoyed the cooling evening breeze.

They were proudly shown the structural beauties of the great Town Hall, which, indeed, is one of the finest buildings in South Africa. The brilliant electric lights, the waving palm trees, the general air of summery languor, were all very charming to the visitors.

But at last the day ended, and the St. Frank's fellows sought their beds, tired but happy. The only worrying thought was in connection with Lord Dorrimore.

The evening newspapers contained the disconcerting information that no further news had come to hand. The great aeroplane, with Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners on board, was still missing!



CHAPTER 18

A Stiff Fight I

WITH the morning, everybody was bright and energetic again. They had all returned to the school

ship the previous night, for rules and regulations were being adhered to. Of course, there had been a little laxity, but in general things were going on in just the usual way.

Even Nelson Lee was looking worried this morning. For the mystery of Lord Dorrimore was as inexplicable as ever. Search parties had been out in every direction, particularly in the Orange Free State and in the Transvaal. The entire route of Lord Dorrimore's flight was explored. And it had been established, in fact, that he had not come to earth at any point along his course.

For some reason, which nobody could fathom, the machine must have turned off its course, and flown away. And, as there was still a total absence of news, people were beginning to fear that the aircraft had met with disaster.

"Poor old Dorrie!" said Nipper, as he met Nelson Lee on deck, just after breakfast. "I've seen the morning paper, sir. Still no news."

"It is very puzzling, Nipper," said Lee, frowning.

"Looks as if he's met with a bad smash, sir."

"I'm afraid there's no other conclusion," said Lee. "The machine was equipped with an extraordinarily efficient wireless, and in the event of a minor accident, Dorrie would have wirelessly his position. But how could the machine have vanished that night, so completely and so mysteriously?"

"You'd think lots of people would have heard the engines," said Nipper. "Dorrie couldn't very well have flown hundreds and hundreds of miles out of his course without attracting some attention. Perhaps something went wrong with his compass and other instruments? Perhaps, instead of going north, he went east, and found himself over the Indian Ocean?"

"In that case, he would surely have flown back," said Lee. "The whole affair is most mystifying."

Everybody was talking about it that morning. In fact, Dorrie's disappearance and the schoolboy Test Match were the sole topics of conversation. The weather continued to be gloriously fine, and, on the stroke of time, the St. Frank's players were back in Kingsmead.

The spectators were more numerous than ever now, and they largely consisted of schoolboys, not only from Durban schools, but from other great colleges of the Union. They had come in their hundreds to watch this unique match.

The South Africans continued their innings, and Browne and Jerry Dodd were put on to bowl. Jerry had on early success, for in his first over he took a wicket. The South Africans were all out in less than an hour, their total score being 370. There had been a bit of a last wicket stand.

"Not much chance for us, I'm afraid," said Fenton, as the team collected round him. "We've a deficiency of 136 on the first innings."

"A mere trifle, brother," said Browne, waving his hand. "We are now settled down, and we are more accustomed to these semi-tropical conditions. Let us take heart, and also let us take our willows and wield them with great gusto."

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth. "We've got to win! By George! We're not going to let these South African chaps beat us, are we?"

"No fear!" said the team.

"You can count on me for a century, anyway," continued Handforth confidently.

"Not if you play as recklessly as you played in the first innings," said Fenton. "For goodness sake, Handforth, do try to curb yourself!"

"Curb myself?" said Handforth, staring. "When I'm at the wicket, I'm all out for

runs. And when the ball comes down, I slosh at it. That's my game!"

Fenton and Gresham opened the St. Frank's innings as before, and all the spectators noticed a difference this time. The English schoolboys were more confident, more sure of themselves. They settled down to a fine first-wicket partnership.

By lunch-time the 100 had gone up on the board, and no wicket had been taken.

The South Africans had been confident that they would win, with their 136 runs lead, but now they began to change their opinions.

During the afternoon Gresham got his century, and a tremendous outburst of applause, too. Fenton gave a chance to third slip when he was sixty-three, and third slip did not fail to take that chance.

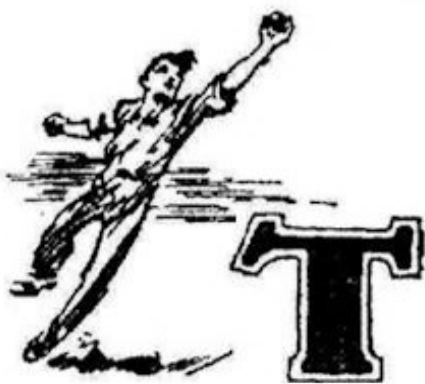
Browne put up a fine performance in this innings, and so did Jerry Dodd. Handforth slogged as usual, and he obtained a hurricane 51 before being clean bowled. Fenton was quite satisfied. He had never expected 50 from Handforth in this second innings.

At the close of play the score stood at 292 for six wickets, so things were now looking rather better for the visitors. Still, there was not much chance of a win—unless the "tail" put up a marvellous performance on the morrow. It was far more likely that the "tail" would collapse.

Still, it was a fine game, and everybody was enjoying it. It was splendid practice, too, for the forthcoming visit to Australia. The St. Frank's fellows were getting the cricket feeling. They had long since forgotten that it was really winter-time—cold, bleak January. Here, in South Africa, it was practically the height of midsummer.

And still there was no news of Lord Dorrimore and the missing aeroplane! Even those who had been hopeful at first were now shaking their heads dubiously. So many gallant men had flown off in aeroplanes, and had never been seen or heard of again.

Yet Lord Dorrimore's case was different from these others. His route should have taken him overland all the way. Yet he had disappeared as though the earth had opened and had swallowed him up, machine and all!



CHAPTER 19

A Close Thing!

THAT evening there was another round of entertaining for the St. Frank's fellows—another visit to the bathing beach, with a glorious dip in the Indian Ocean. It was splendid fun, dodging the great rollers as they came crashing in. It was like daylight there, for there were innumerable electric lamps, lighting up the whole vast area of the bathing enclosure.

Yet somehow the fellows did not take quite such an interest in the proceedings as they

had done yesterday. They kept thinking of their old friend, Dorrie. He had always been such a good sort, had Dorrie. It was a shock to realise that he might be no more.

"I can't believe it, and I won't believe it!" said Handforth stubbornly as he and a number of other juniors stood, in the centre of the town, near the Post Office Corner, which was really the hub of Durban.

"I'd like to share your opinion, Handy, old man," said Nipper. "It's awful to think of Dorrie being killed!"

"He'll turn up sooner or later!" said Handforth, as he leaned against one of the pillars of The Kenilworth and watched the passing traffic. "By George! Durban's a pretty busy place, you know! I'd no idea they had towns like this in South Africa!"

"Which merely proves the braininess of the school governors in sending us abroad," grinned Church. "There's nothing like seeing things with our own eyes."

"It's not time to get back to the ship yet," said Handforth. "What about going for a tram ride?"

"We can go for a circular trip round the Berea, if we like," said Vandyke eagerly. "Come on! We can get a tram at the post-office here. A Musgrave Road one will do—or a Marriott Road car. It doesn't matter which. And the fare's only about sixpence."

So for the remainder of the evening they continued to enjoy themselves, and once again they slept like tops, to awaken refreshed and energised in the morning.

And still no news of Dorrie!

By now everybody was resigned to the fact that the sporting peer had met with a fatal accident, and, having come to this conclusion, worrying ceased. The suspense was over. Lord Dorrimore's death was regretted by all, especially as his ambitious non-stop flight to Cairo had so abruptly ended in disaster.

However, the cricket match again made the St. Frank's fellows forget the tragedy. They did splendidly this morning. The "tail," instead of collapsing, put up a fine fight, and St. Frank's had scored 403 before they were finally dismissed. This, indeed, was a magnificent total, and it was one which made the South African boys open their eyes with respect.

"There's nothing much wrong with English cricket by what I can see," remarked Joubert, the Afrikaner skipper, with his cheerful grin. "You fellows have given us a proper twisting this time!"

"We shall try to beat you, too," smiled Fenton. "Still, I don't think you're in very much danger."

Nobody else thought so, either, for the South African team required only 268 runs to win, and after their first innings performance this appeared to be a comparatively easy task.

By the luncheon interval the Afrikanders had settled down. The two opening men were scoring freely and easily, and the total had already reached 73. After lunch they continued, and it was not until 132 had gone

up that the first wicket partnership was broken.

Gresham and Dodd were bowling now. Owing to the intense heat, Fenton was finding it necessary to change his bowlers fairly often. The St. Frank's skipper was delighted with the good work of Harry Gresham, and Jerry Dodd, too, was now getting well into his stride—so well, indeed, that he took two wickets in succession during the very next over, and the game began to look more interesting. On the top of this, Harry Gresham clean bowled the next man, and when the score had reached 200 six wickets were down.

"Think we shall do it?" asked Nipper, as he happened to come near Handforth on the field.

"Do it?" repeated Edward Oswald. "Of course we shall! St. Frank's has got to win!"

And then came a sensational period of play.

Jerry Dodd sent down a ball which looked easy, and the South African batsman sloshed away at it, and sent it soaring off to the boundary. But Handforth, after a quick glance, judged that the ball would fall just short. And Handforth was running, as fleet as the wind, his eyes turned upwards. When he had nearly reached the boundary he gave a wild leap, clutched, and the leather was in his grip!

"How's that?" he gasped, as he flung the ball back into the sky.

"Out!"

"Well played, Handy!"

"Oh, well caught!"

Nobody had expected that catch to come off. It had been a really splendid effort.

Another wicket fell soon afterwards, and then came a stand. The score mounted to 254 for eight wickets.

There was acute tension in the air now. South Africa wanted 14 runs to win, and there were still two wickets to fall. Would they be able to do it, or would St. Frank's bring off a spectacular victory?

Browne was bowling now, and Browne sent down a stinger. The batsman flicked at it.

Click!

Stevens, in the slips, had made no mistake. Like a flash of lightning, his hand had sped out and had held the ball.

"Last man in!" gurgled Handforth. "By George, there's a chance for us yet!"

But hope dwindled soon afterwards, for the last man was cautious. He and his partner played steadily, and the score was taken to 266!

"That's done it!" murmured Fenton. "One more run, and it will be a draw. Any decent hit now will give the South Africans the victory. Well, it's been a first-class game, anyhow!"

Browne took his run, the batsman stiffened, and the ball went hissing down the pitch.

Clack!

Up went the leather, shooting wickedly overhead towards the boundary.

Nipper took a tremendous leap upwards, and there seemed no hope. But his outstretched hand touched the ball and stayed its rapid flight.

"Oh!" went up a great gasp.

The leather bounced from Nipper's hand, but he grabbed again and recovered himself, and this time he held the ball firmly.

The South Africans were out—beaten by one run!



CHAPTER 20

An Old Friend!

H, well played!"
"Good old Nipper!"
"Well done, St. Frank's!"

The South Africans were disappointed, as was only natural, but they did not stint their praise. Dramatically, unexpectedly, the St. Frank's eleven had gained the victory, but it was a close victory. And there was no need for the Afrikanders to feel despondent. The game had been a splendid one from start to finish.

"There's certainly nothing wrong with English cricket," said Joubert dryly. "As long as the homeland Public Schools can turn out players like you chaps—well, there's nothing much to fear."

"It's a pity you can't stay longer," said one of the other South Africans. "I understand you're sailing to-night?"

"Yes—late," said Nipper, rather reluctantly. "We haven't seen half of Durban yet, and we wanted to go to lots of other places in South Africa, too. Still, there'll be another chance when we're on the way home from Australia."

"You mustn't forget to pay a long visit—two or three weeks," said Joubert. "I want you to come to my own school, and I'll show you round."

The St. Frank's fellows had endless offers of this kind, and they hardly knew what to do, since it was quite impossible for them to accept all. The cordiality of the South Africans was wellnigh overwhelming.

Nipper and Handforth managed to get away, after a spell, and they were standing by themselves, looking at the animated scene. Suddenly Handforth stopped talking, and stared.

"Look!" he ejaculated at last, clutching at Nipper's arm. "Look at that big black chap, over there! He's Umlosi."

"Rot!" said Nipper. "There are plenty of coloured people here, you know, Handy, and it's easy enough to mistake— By Jove! I believe you're right, though!" he added, with a catch in his voice. "It is Umlosi! There aren't two men in the whole of Africa with his physique."

They were looking at a gigantic gentleman of ebony hue, who was approaching.

Umlosi was the great Kutana chieftain, who had always been Lord Dorrimore's staunchest friend. How many adventures had they had together! A good many of the St. Frank's fellows, too, were very well acquainted with Umlosi, and had had their own adventures with him. They had shared perils galore.

"Greetings, Manzie!" boomed Umlosi, as he approached, his eyes troubled. "Wau! It does my eyes good to rest them upon your well-knit figure!"

"Umlosi!" ejaculated Nipper, as he ran forward, and shook hands. "We didn't expect to see you down here. Kutana land is thousands of miles further north, isn't it?"

Umlosi had chosen to address Nipper by a name that he, himself, had invented. It was a native word, meaning "water," but Umlosi used it in the sense that Nipper's eyes were always sparkling.

Before they could talk any more, Nelson Lee came up, having seen Umlosi from some little distance away.

"'Tis good, Umtagati, O my master!" rumbled the Kutana chief. "'Twas my wish to seek ye out."

"What are you doing here, Umlosi?" asked Nelson Lee, after he had shaken hands.

"I seek ye, Umtagati, the wizard, and 'tis for you to make use of those great powers of magic which are yours!"

"You are referring, I take it, to Lord Dorrimore?"

"Wau! Thou hast spoken well, Umtagati," said Umlosi gravely. "I come to seek your aid. My snake tells me that my father is alive, and not far distant."

"You really think that Dorrie is alive, then?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"'Tis more than a thought, Manzie," said Umlosi. "'Tis a conviction—burning within my breast. My snake has told me——"

"Your snake?" put in Handforth, staring. "I didn't know you kept pets."

"Don't be an ass, Handy" said Nipper. "Umlosi means that his instinct tells him this. He has rummy dreams, you know, and——"

"Thou art surely right," interrupted Umlosi. "In my dreams, I have seen

N'Kose, my master. I have seen him in trouble, but alive and well. And I ask you, Umtagati, to come north with me, on to the great plains. Together we will seek my master. Together we will find him."

"I'm afraid it is impossible, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee quietly. "As you know, I am on a big ship at present, and it is sailing from Durban to-night. We are off to Australia——"

"And thou would'st do this, knowing that thy friend is in peril?" asked Umlosi, in wonder. "Nay, my master, thou art speaking strangely."

"If I could believe that Dorrie was really alive——" began Lee.

"My father lives!" insisted the giant black. "Do I not know it? Does not my snake tell me so? Have I not dreamed wondrous dreams?"

Nelson Lee's eyes suddenly became animated.

"Perhaps—yes, perhaps it can be managed," he murmured. "Umlosi, you will come with us to the great ship. There we will talk. And there, perhaps, we will make some arrangement."

"Does this mean that we shall stop in South Africa longer, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"It does not," replied Nelson Lee. "The St. Francis will sail to-night. Perhaps I shall remain behind—following on to Adelaide by the next big liner."

Here was a fresh piece of excitement. Nelson Lee, although in full charge of the school ship, was thinking about staying behind! But he knew full well that Umlosi was a man of exceptional powers, and Nelson Lee had faith in this strange instinct of Umlosi's.

What if Lord Dorrimore was really alive, and in need of help?

So Nelson Lee virtually decided that he would accompany the Kutana chief on this trip, in the hope that the life of the missing Lord Dorrimore would be saved.

In any case, it was quite evident that there were going to be some dramatic events in the immediate future!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND YARN—

Tracking
down Lord
Dorrimore!



Adventure
and Mystery
on the Veldt!

—DON'T MISS READING IT!



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4



GERARD WOOD

You ought to feel quite pleased with yourself, Peter Edward Baker (Adelaide). The St. Frank's boys are already on their way to Australia, and, what is more to the point, their first port of call in the Commonwealth will be Adelaide, your own town! What is still more to the point, the fellows are going out to Australia, so that they can have a look at the Test Matches. How's that?

* * *

Still, it's a pretty long trip to Australia, and all my Aussie coppers mustn't be impatient if the School Ship pauses a bit on its way in South Africa. This, I expect, will please you—Neville Kirkman (Pietermaritzburg)—especially as the crowd visit Durban. This isn't your own town, but at least it is in Natal. Besides, my correspondence tells me that I have a very large number of readers in Durban, and my job is to please the majority. I not only find your letters "a weeny bit interesting," but exceedingly so. So don't stop them on any account, old man. If you want your photo in the Readers' Gallery above, I'm afraid you'll have to send me something better than those snaps which I received from you on December 14th of last year.

* * *

I think you have been trying to pull my leg—J. Herman (Tarkastad, S. Africa)—when you tell me that you feel fresh after a 40-mile walk. I know that you South Africans are jolly energetic, but there's a limit. By the way, this and next week's yarn ought to interest you particularly, and all other South African readers, too. Please let me know what you think of it, and don't hesitate to haul me over the coals if I've made any slips. And please don't rag me for not taking the boys to Cape Province, or to Capetown, or to Rhodesia, or to the Transvaal. I can't take them everywhere, and they have at least been to South Africa; so I hope you'll all be pleased. By the way, Julius. I'd like permission to publish your photograph, which I was so pleased to receive from you last February.

Glad to hear—Gerard Wood (Macclesfield)—that your entire family is still keen on the Old Paper. This is the sort of thing that encourages me more than anything. It's fine to know that my yarns are read and appreciated by father, mother, sisters and brothers. Perhaps, when your people spot your photo at the top of the page this week, they'll be so pleased to see it that they'll give me their own separate permissions to publish the photographs that are in my albums?

* * *

Let's hope you will like the new series which is just starting. Henry Pose (Melbourne). The St. Frank's crowd will be in Australia for quite a number of weeks, but I can't guarantee that they'll stay very long in Melbourne. However, there'll be a strong Test Match interest, and quite a few adventures of the kind that usually come in the summer holiday stories. I am glad that you and your brothers always buy the Old Paper, and the POPULAR.

* * *

Yes—Fred H. Clitheroe (St. Leonards-on-Sea)—Handforth has been abroad lots of times before the Indian trip. Willy is his only brother, but they have two sisters—one married, named Edith, and Ena, who is at the Moor View School.

* * *

I'm not sure whether the general run of readers want the Moor View girls to be in the stories more than they are—W. Goddard (Forest Gate)—and I always want to be sure I'm pleasing a majority. However, you may rest assured that Irene & Co. will appear in the yarns from time to time.

Another Exciting Instalment of our Stunning Football and Detective Serial!

What's Wrong with the Rovers?



(Introduction on page 38.)

Slowly but surely the mystery surrounding Northmouth Rovers is disentangling itself; and what looked like a plot against a football club is proving to be something much bigger, as Nelson Lee and Nipper discover this week.

A Night Flight!

IT was not usual for Nipper to show great excitement, but he was certainly showing it now. Nelson Lee, whilst admitting that he had cause for it, was thankful that Clarice Colton had stopped in her car. In such moments dangerous information may be given, and the great detective, whilst admiring the girl who was driving them to Wintlesham, was not in the least disposed to take her into his confidence any more than was absolutely necessary.

"I think your theory is probably correct, Nipper, but you don't want to proclaim it to the world," Lee said. "Here's the victim coming round, and Miss Colton crossing the road. There's a car approaching, so we'll leave the discussion to another time. Miss Colton, stop that car, please. This man may need hospital treatment."

The girl stepped into the light of the approaching headlamps, and held up both hands. Nelson Lee and Nipper bent over the gagged and bound man who had been thrown from the car as it went into the ditch, and who was looking up at them with puzzled, frightened eyes.

The detective pulled the gag from his mouth just as the other car was stopping, and then cut the rope that bound him.

"I am obliged to you," the man said, in a low voice. He tried to get to his feet,

but he was so stiff as to be incapable of movement, and rolled back into the road. "I shall soon be all right, though I've had an extremely unpleasant experience. My name is Denver—Lord Denver."

There was a gleam of interest in the detective's eyes as he helped the man to his feet. No wonder his face had seemed familiar to him, for Lord Denver was the millionaire steel magnate, now very much in the public eye because of a huge order secured in face of fierce competition from foreign firms.

"What happened?" asked the detective sharply.

"All I can tell you is that I left my hotel in London shortly before ten this morning," was the reply. "I remember a man colliding heavily with me; felt a needle prick in the back of my neck, vaguely remember being helped into a taxi, and when I recovered consciousness I was lying gagged and bound in a motor-van. Just this side of York, they stopped, turned into a quiet lane, and gave me some food. Then another car drove up. I was placed in the back seat, and covered with a rug. The next thing I knew was when, after travelling miles at a terrific speed, the car suddenly swerved into the ditch, and I was thrown out. Gee whiz! I'm getting agony in my arms and legs now."

"Can you describe the man who drove you on the last stage?" demanded Nipper.

His lordship, suffering agony from return-

ing circulation, gazed a little coldly at the youngster who was apparently so indifferent to his sufferings.

"I am not in a position to describe any of the men!" he snapped. "The only one I saw in daylight was the man who collided with me outside the hotel, and save that he was a well-dressed man of about middle age, with an apologetic manner, I can't describe him. I know one of the men had reddish hair, and I believe it was the man who was driving me just now. The thing is, what am I to do now?"

Nelson Lee and Nipper glanced at each other. Bert Barter, the Rovers' centre-half, whose place Nipper had taken in the team, had ginger hair, and they knew that upon at least two occasions he had driven Mr Minter's car—which was now wrecked in the ditch.

Pretty Clarice Colton was staring in bewilderment from one man to the other.

"The best thing you can do is to drive straight to the Harbour Hotel, Northmouth, 'phone Detective sergeant Stone, tell him the whole story, and tell him that Nelson Lee advised you to take his advice," said the famous detective to Lord Denver.

The millionaire started, and gazed with interest at the man who was supporting him.

"Nelson Lee! I've heard of you, and you would be the very man to——"

"Perhaps we can have a talk in the morning, but at the Harbour Hotel I am known as Mr. Nelson, a surveyor, so I must ask you to be discreet," put in Lee quickly. "And I advise you to be very careful. This is a mighty big business, Lord Denver. I am already behind time for an appointment, and mustn't stop any longer. But the man from the Yard will take certain precautions for your safety, and I advise you to be guided by him."

Lord Denver was stamping up and down to

ease his cramped legs, and swinging his arms. He looked a little scared. The motorist Clarice Colton had stopped was going to Northmouth, and was perfectly willing to take the steel magnate to the Harbour Hotel before going to his own destination.

Nelson Lee gave him a word of advice.

"Stop for no one—not even a policeman in uniform—and get to Northmouth as quickly as possible. If there should be any trouble, give this card to Detective-sergeant Stone of the C.I.D., and he will put things right."

Just as the car drove off a policeman cycled up. Leaving him to take possession of the wrecked car, Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Miss Colton went back to their own. They were soon cutting through the chilly night air once more. Clarice, a little excited, greatly bewildered, and feeling that she was taking part in some great adventure she could not understand, but had all the force of the law behind her, let the engine out as she had never dared let it out on the road before.

Nipper longed to discuss the strange affair with his chief, but he knew that Nelson Lee would not take the pretty girl who was driving them into his confidence; which was perhaps natural enough, seeing that she was in love with one of the men still under suspicion.

But this incident on the road showed that they were up against a mighty big thing. This was no local gang. A millionaire had been spirited away from London, which meant that a large and well organised gang must have been engaged in it.

But what was wrong with the Rovers?

It could be definitely said now that whoever else might or might not be involved, two men most certainly were, and those two men were Minter, the manager of the Rovers F.C., and Bert Barter, the centre-half!

What's Gone Before.

NELSON LEE, the world-famous detective, and his assistant

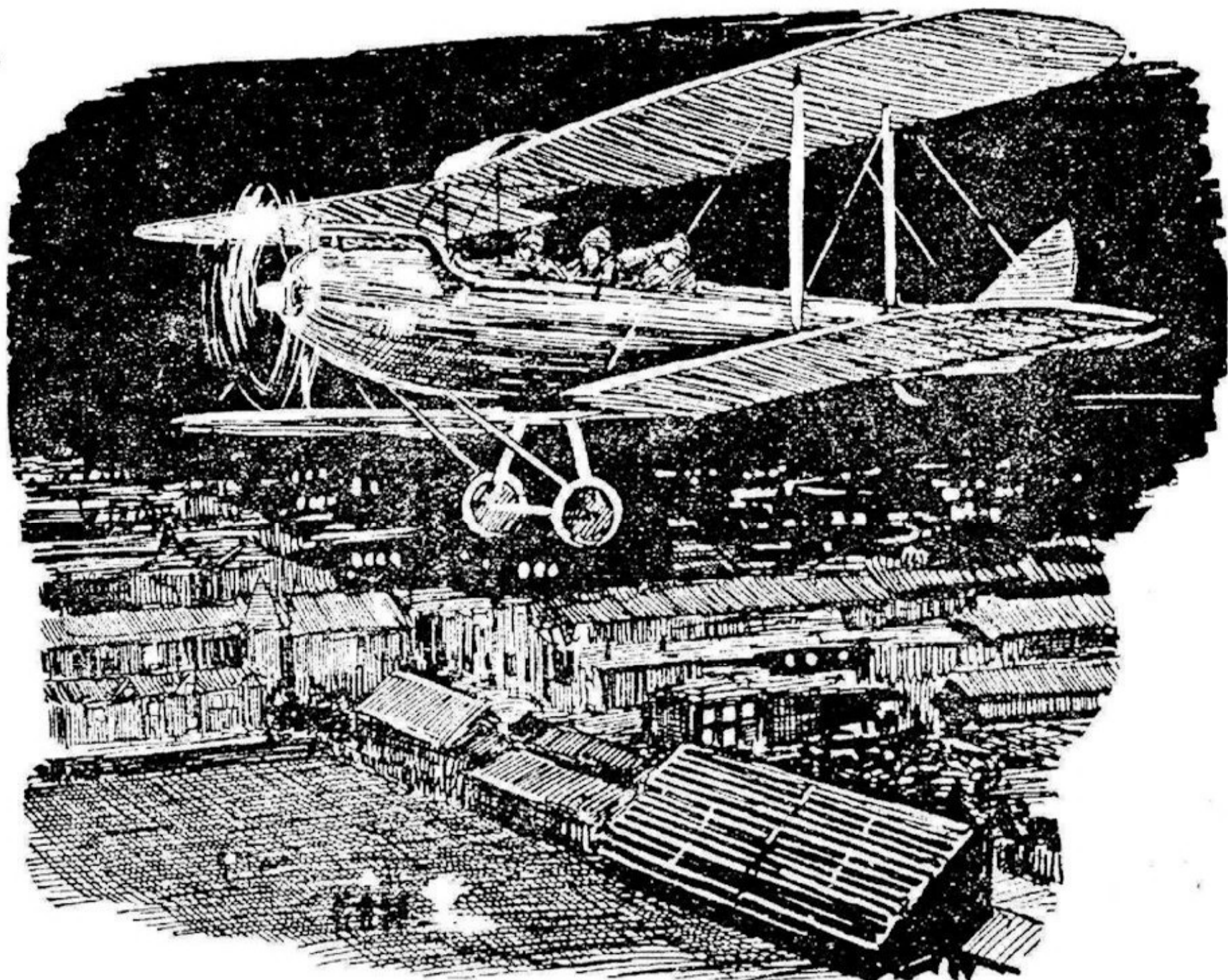
NIPPER, are investigating the mysterious disappearance of James Ridley and Mark Mayhew, two directors of Northmouth Rovers, the famous First Division football club. Lee fears that they have been kidnapped, and suspects

DICK RIDLEY, nephew of James Ridley, and International centre-forward of the Rovers, and

STEPHEN LANGTON, the club's chairman, of being implicated in the mystery. He is also suspicious of Bert Barter, Minter, and Coles, centre-half, manager and trainer of the Rovers. Detective-sergeant Stone, of Scotland Yard, is called in, and he tells Lee that he thinks

EDWARD COLTON, another director of the Rovers, is responsible for the disappearance of Ridley and Mayhew, and that Colton is also carrying on a big game of smuggling, but Lee does not agree that Colton is involved. Following Nipper's discovery that Dick Ridley has secretly invented a wonderful silent aeroplane engine—financed by Langton—Nelson Lee gets Clarice Colton, the Rovers' director's niece, to drive him and Nipper to Wintlesham Military Aerodrome. On the way, they nearly come into collision with another car. The driver gets away before Nelson Lee can see him, and in the roadway beside this car—which is wrecked—is the bound and gagged figure of a man. "By Jove!" says Nipper excitedly. "I bet this chap was due for the same place as Ridley and Mayhew!"

(Now read on.)



The aeroplane was right over the football ground now, and Nipper, looking down, saw flickering lights moving on the playing pitch.

Over the Rovers' Ground!

"All right?" asked a cheerful voice.

"Quite!" said Nelson Lee. And Nipper, sitting in the back of the aeroplane beside his chief, pulled his fur-lined leather coat closer round him, and snuggled down further behind the small windscreen.

A couple of officers in light-blue overcoats stepped further back, mechanics stood by the chocks, a burly man in brown swung the propellor, and the engine roared. It had already had a preliminary warm up whilst waiting for the passengers, and now it was off at a rush. Something dark loomed ahead, but they were rising up over it, and the lights of Wintlesham aerodrome were being left behind.

The commanding officer's wife had taken Clarice Colton off to snatch a few hours' sleep. Nelson Lee had told her very little, but he had sworn her to secrecy about that little, impressing upon her that she must not even tell Dick Ridley the truth about that night trip.

And Captain Tony Craddock, the R.A.F.'s most dashing night flier, was heading the army's swiftest and most silent 'plane towards the sea at a speed of about a hundred and fifty miles an hour. Nipper, in the warm helmet and coat that were considerably on the large side, rather wished that he was in one of those luxurious air liners.

Gaining the sea, Craddock turned sharply and rose to a higher altitude, and Nelson Lee put the night glasses slung round his neck to his eyes. The pilot evidently had his instructions, but Nipper had had no chance of a private conversation with his chief.

"Where are we going, guv'nor?" he bellowed, above the roar of the engine and the rush of wind.

"Northmouth!" shouted his chief, still staring through the glasses.

It seemed strange to be flying back through the air to the town from which they had just arrived by road, and it struck Nipper that Nelson Lee must have changed his plans. Forty miles in that 'plane seemed nothing, and now Nipper could see the lights of Northmouth beneath him; he traced the harbour, saw the Rovers' football enclosure, saw a few scattered lamp-posts marking the end of the sleeping town.

Nelson Lee was speaking into the telephone to the pilot, and the 'plane went round in a circle, still dropping. Nipper realised that they were right over the football ground now, and they were flying low enough for him to see the stand and the terraces—and to see some flickering lights moving on the playing pitch!

With a low whistle he leant over the side, and nearly lost his helmet, but he grabbed it and peered eagerly down into the darkness.

Three or four men were moving a 'plane into the great hangar under the terracing at the east end of the ground.

Nipper did not have time to see anything more, for Nelson Lee was speaking orders into the telephone again, and the military 'plane was heading towards Wintlesham aerodrome.

"Looks as though the Bat has been trying Ridley's new engine," shouted Nipper.

"Possibly!" shouted his chief. "But more probably his flight has been postponed. You see, Lord Denver did not arrive!"

"Crumbs!" murmured Nipper to himself, as the 'plane went rushing through the darkness.

He knew two things now. Nelson Lee must be working for the Secret Service, or they would never be in this swift, military 'plane; and, beyond all doubt now, his chief suspected Stephen Langton, the man for whom Dick Ridley had made the secret, silent engine!

Something Wrong!

IT was with great reluctance that Nipper rose the next morning, or rather, later the same morning, for it had been five o'clock before he had turned in. Now, at eight o'clock, there was an icy nip in the air, and frost was on the window-panes. The Town Quay looked grey and deserted, and work on the timber wharf across the river was at a standstill.

"Crumbs! It's cold!" he said, as he plunged his head into the icy cold water that effectually banished sleep from his eyes. Then he hastily dressed, and hurried down stairs. As he gained the hall he was staggered to see his chief, looking brisk and fresh, come striding into the hotel.

"Glorious morning for a walk," Nelson Lee said. "And, by Jove, I'm ready for my breakfast!"

"I'm ready for that without any early morning exercise," said Nipper, with a grin.

They entered the cosy coffee-room, with its glowing fire, and started on the excellent breakfast placed before them. After a few minutes, Nipper glanced round the room.

"Heard anything about Lord Denver this morning?" he asked.

"He's in London by now," said Nelson Lee calmly. "He's got pluck, that chap. He knew that he was urgently needed in London, that his absence might cause a financial panic, so he travelled to London on the sleeping-train last night, though he must have been feeling like a chewed up rag. He had some supper here, then went and saw Stone, who sent a plain-clothes man with him to London."

"I've been to the police station this morning," went on Nelson Lee, "but Stone has been up half the night, and had not turned up yet. The police roused Minter at seven o'clock this morning to question him about his car. He told them that it was still in his garage, and when he took the policemen there, they found the doors closed, but in-

vestigation showed that the lock had been forced and the place was empty."

Nipper slowly finished a mouthful of egg and bacon.

"That could have been done by him when he heard what had happened," the lad said shrewdly.

"And no doubt was!" agreed the detective grimly. "But for the moment the police have to be satisfied—or must appear satisfied—with that explanation. I shall be seeing Stone this morning, and when you get back from football practice, I think I shall be able to advance some sort of theory. By the way, I shall be interested to hear if Barter is on the ground this morning."

As Nipper, his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, walked briskly towards the Bleakridge ground—which a few hours ago, he had been watching from the air—he wondered what Barter's attitude would be towards him. He felt convinced that that quarrel of yesterday had been deliberately planned with the idea of keeping him—Nipper—out of the way, but as luck would have it he had come through unscathed. And both he and his chief felt convinced that it was the ginger-headed centre-half who had been driving the car that Minter alleged was stolen.

Nipper was at the ground early, and entered the recreation-room, to find about half a dozen men gathered round the gas-stove, which little more than took the chill off the air. David Williams was one of them, and he was holding his long, thin hands to the blaze, as he said

"Land of my fathers! I hope there is some good shooting this morning! Yes indeed and to goodness I shall stand and freeze unless I'm kept busy!"

"Well, I'll try and oblige you, Dave!" said a cheerful voice, and big Dick Ridley strode in, rubbing his hands together, and looking in high spirits.

"And I expect the infant prodigy will want to be in the picture!" said Grogan, the burly left back, who was a pal of Barter's, and another of Nipper's enemies.

"And look you he's in the picture on Saturday!" flashed the Welsh goalie. "He's playing against Halston United. Yes he is, I tell you, and they're standing Barter down again."

Rutherton, the veteran back, sensing a row, quickly intervened.

"Come on, boys! You'll feel colder if you hang about over that stove. Let's change and get a move on."

There was a move into the dressing-room. More players were rolling up now, and soon a little crowd of them were at full practice out on the playing pitch. The turf was like iron, and the ball lively. Charging was forbidden, but there was a lot of pretty head work, and the gloomy goalie found himself kept busy enough to ensure reasonable warmth, especially when Dick Ridley or young Nipper had the ball anywhere in the neighbourhood of the penalty area.

Barter did not turn up, but Nipper saw Samuel Minter, looking pale and worried, talking to the trainer. Then came a breather, and Nipper turned to Grogan.

"Where's your pal, Barter? Isn't he turning up this morning?" he asked, with well-assumed carelessness.

"What's that to do with you?" growled the left back.

"Oh, nothing in particular, but we didn't part on the best of terms yesterday. He tried to spear me with a flag-post, and you naturally take a little interest in a gentleman with a hobby of that sort, don't you?"

Several players laughed.

"Poor Barter is in trouble," said Grogan. "His sister in Manchester is seriously ill, and he has been sent off. He went off yesterday afternoon, but there is little hope."

There were murmurs of sympathy. Nipper said nothing, but that unexpected speech told him two things; that Barter had been driving the car, and had been smuggled out of the way, and that Grogan was another member of the team involved in the mystery he and his chief were engaged in attempting to solve.

As the players were leaving the playing pitch for the dressing-room, Stephen Langton appeared with Minter. The manager looked gloomy and apprehensive, but the "Bat" was looking quite genial, with a smile upon his hawk-like face. As Nipper approached, he beckoned to him with a commanding hand, and, to the youngster's surprise, led him out of earshot.

"Well, Mr. Assistant-Surveyor-Assistant Detective," the chairman began, "I suppose you've seen that we want you to play for us at Halston. Barter has a sister seriously ill, and has been called to her. In any case, as I've just told Minter, I consider you the better man. I wish you would tell your chief how I appreciate his sportsmanship in releasing you to put in so much training, and that if he would care to see the match at Halston, the club would be delighted to have him as a guest. I had hoped to accompany the team, but find I shall be unable to do so, and he is more than welcome to my place."

And this was the man that Nelson Lee was after!

With all his loyalty and devotion to his chief, Nipper could not help thinking that Nelson Lee was making a mistake. Minter was in it, Barter and Grogan, too, probably, but surely not this plucky, audacious man; this daring airman with the cynical, baffling smile, and his intense interest in football.

"Thanks!" said Nipper gratefully. "I'll tell him. I expect he'd like to come. Hope the engine is going strong, Mr. Langton."

"It promises well. Don't forget to tell your chief about Saturday, and let them know at the office, for if Mr. Lee can't manage it, I'll let someone else have the vacant seat."

He turned abruptly and walked away. And Nipper, having tubbed and changed, set off for the Harbour Hotel, to find that

his chief had left a note for him saying that he would not be in to lunch.

The famous detective returned early in the evening, and, over tea in the lounge, Nipper told him of Langton's invitation. Nelson Lee looked quite pleased about it.

"I'll be delighted to accept," he said, with a faint smile. "It is both an indication that something is doing, and a probable insurance against trouble until Saturday."

Nipper munched the excellent buttered toast.

"I don't get you, guv'nor," he admitted.

"Well, I've been talking things over with Stone," explained Lee, "and we at least see a glimpse of daylight. We're agreed that Minter and Barter, and probably others connected with the club, are in league with a clever gang who are apparently ready to turn their hands to kidnapping, gun-running, smuggling, and the dope trade, and that Northmouth is the centre of their operations. From that point we differ. Stone still sticks to the theory that a ship is used—probably a trawler—but I believe our friend Langton carries the cargo, though I'll admit it's extraordinary how he has managed to land frequently in Holland without being observed."

"Your message strengthens my theory," went on Nelson Lee grimly. "There is something planned for Saturday, and Langton, who is not altogether comfortable about our presence here, wants to make sure of us being out of the way. Well, I hope to see the match, to see you at the top of your form, and to be back inside the Granite Fort when the "Bat" starts on his nocturnal flight!"

Nipper gulped down some hot tea and nearly choked.

"The Granite Fort!"

"Well, they still call it a fort, though as a means of defence it would be absolutely useless against modern artillery," said Lee. "The guns are occasionally used for saluting, so a few men are kept there. From my point of view it is useful, because it looks over the Rovers ground, and it has a drill ground which, young Craddock has just assured me, will afford sufficient room for a take-off."

Nipper gave that peculiar indrawn whistle of his. He could see daylight now, and he felt a thrill. There was to be a chase in the air. Tony Craddock, the dashing young R.A.F. pilot, was to go in pursuit of that daring night flier who was such a mystery, but whom Nipper could not bring himself to believe was a criminal.

"Do we go, too?" he asked eagerly.

"If we succeed in frustrating your footballer friend's attempts to delay us, we most certainly shall," said Nelson Lee dryly. "With anything approaching luck, the next time Stephen Langton goes into the air this strange business will be a fair way towards being solved!"

(At last it seems that Nelson Lee is getting to the bottom of the mystery. Look out for another exciting instalment next Wednesday, chums!)



Clarence Grimmett one of Australia's crack bowlers.

Batting or Bowling?

IS batting or bowling the more important in big cricket matches? Is it the batting or the bowling which wins games! These are questions which have been discussed in cricket circles from time to time.

I have been in dressing-rooms where cricketers have been gathered together, and I have heard them discussing these questions. The bowlers have said that it was they who had won the game, and the batsmen have replied it was the batting which broke the heart of the other fellows, and enabled the bowlers to reap their harvest.

Actually, of course, the best way out of the difficulty, when such a question is asked, is to reply that the successful cricket team possesses sound batsmen, deadly bowlers, and fielders who take the chances which are offered to them. It is all-round work which wins cricket matches, although it is possible to say in regard to certain games—and particularly Test matches—that a brilliant innings or a specially deadly spell of bowling has turned the scale one way or the other.

As an illustration of the part which the batsmen play, take the first Test match of the present series—the one played at Brisbane. England did none too well in the early stages; there was a danger of the side being out for a disappointing score, reckoned by Australian standards. Then "Patsy" Hen-

TEST-WINNING BOWLERS!

This specially - written article will interest all readers in view of the fact that the Test matches between England and Australia are now being played "down under."

dren came to the rescue with a great innings, and because Patsy stood in the breach so long, it was easier for the other batsmen to make runs, though in saying this I don't want to detract from the merit of that heroic innings of 70 played by the bowler, Larwood.

That was a match, however, of which it could be said that a batsman helped the bowlers to win it. Instead of Australia having to go in against a comparatively small total, they had to face a huge one—such a score that the task set their batsmen bordered on the impossible. And the England bowlers proceeded to reap the harvest which had been set by the batsmen.

When England Was Skittled Out!

On the other hand, we could go back to Test matches which have literally been won by bowlers. If ever a series of Test games was decided by the bowlers, then the matches in England in 1921 were so decided. Perhaps you don't remember them. Perhaps you are too young to recall that Australia sent to England, that summer, two bowlers who skittled England out—Ted Macdonald, who now plays for Lancashire, and Jack Gregory, who played for Australia in the first of the Test matches of the present series and broke down in the course of it.

These two men, sending them down faster than anything to which our batsmen were at that time accustomed, made it easy for the Australian batsmen to get enough runs to win the matches. What would Australia give now to have Macdonald and Gregory back in the side, bowling at their very best?

During recent years there has been what is called a world-shortage of bowlers. Australia is particularly short of bowlers at the present time. But it isn't surprising, this shortage of bowlers.

In England to a large extent, and in Australia to an even greater extent, it would almost seem as if everything possible has been done to make batting easy, and to break the hearts of the bowlers.

These Perfect Pitches!

What wonderful pitches they make in Australia. Shirt-fronted affairs, they are called, all beautifully ironed out. But where does the bowler come in on such pitches? The answer is that he seldom comes in for a harvest unless he is an exceptional bowler.

I have chatted with bowlers who have been to Australia, and one of these men expressed the feeling which the others undoubtedly held. "In Australia," he said, "you don't so much hope to get batsmen out, as you hope that the batsmen will get themselves out." The more perfect the pitches, the more difficult the task of getting batsmen out, the less likely are you to go on producing good bowlers, for the simple reason that young lads who show ability in bowling don't develop it. They don't think it is worth while.

What Australia Lacks!

Of course, it was bad luck for Australia when Jack Gregory broke down in the first match of the present series. But that is another of the effects of "too-good" pitches. The harder the ground, the more likely is it to result in the fast bowler straining himself, or damaging himself in other ways. In Australia Maurice Tate wears most expensive and specially made boots in the effort to prevent his feet getting bad, as they did during the last tour.

Never was the shortage of bowlers in Australia made more obvious than the fact that they had to call up "Don" Blackie for Test match duty when Gregory had to fall out. Blackie has been a fairly successful bowler in Australia for many years, but he was not selected for a Test match until the present series—and he is in his forty-seventh year.

A man may be wonderfully well preserved—and Blackie is certainly that—but at forty-six a man has to be exceptional to keep on bowling for "hours at a stretch" with any hope of success against the cream of the world's batsmen. In the current matches Australia has to rely on the older brigade of bowlers because the youngsters have not come on as Australia would have liked them to do. But, as I say, Australia hasn't encouraged bowling, with the result that she has produced batsmen instead of bowlers.

A "Funny" Bowler!

One of the men of Australia who can bowl "all day long" is Clarence Grimmett, but there is no pace about him. Of Grimmett, the truest thing to say is that he doesn't so much bowl his opponents out as think them out. He is always setting a new sort of trap. Grimmett is what we call, in these days, a "funny" bowler. First of all he has a queer, unusual, low action, much like the round-arm bowlers of older days. He delivers the ball quite low. But he tosses it into the air, and usually it possesses a nasty leg-break. Occasionally, however, one comes down which isn't a leg-break at all; it goes the other way—what is called a "googly."

He relies for his wickets on getting the

batsmen to mis-hit; to misjudge the pitch of the ball. He hopes to deceive them by variation of flight and amount of spin. We have a bowler of our own in Australia who is something like their Grimmett; this is "Tich" Freeman, the little Kent man who took more wickets in England last season than any other bowler has ever taken in one first-class campaign anywhere.

Of course, Freeman is "getting on," too—forty years of age—but a slow bowler who doesn't take much out of himself can naturally go on longer than a fast man who puts every ounce of energy into every delivery.

A Record-breaker—And the Reason Why!

Just before the England team went to Australia, one of our players gave me a new reason for the extraordinary success of Freeman last season. You know that a smaller ball was used in county games. Now Freeman, a little fellow in every sense, has also a very small hand, and the view of this player was that Freeman had been better able to grip the ball, and impart more spin to it, because it was smaller. That sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

Just previously I mentioned the bowlers who put every ounce of energy into their bowling, and that leads me to say something about the two men on whom we relied so much when we sent the present side to Australia—Harold Larwood and Maurice Tate. In build they are as different as chalk and cheese. Tate is a giant, big of muscle, broad of shoulder, and, though putting no end of energy into his bowling, is able to keep on a long time.

On the other hand Larwood is less like a fast bowler than any man I have ever seen getting wickets with expresses. He is less than medium height, and being pale of face he doesn't look even ordinarily strong. There is strength in him up to a certain amount, however. This strength has to be nursed, and that wise captain, Percy Chapman, knows how to nurse it. That is why Larwood has done well.

Lightning Larwood!

For three or four overs he can send them down like lightning, but at the end of three or four overs he begins to tire, just a little bit. That is the time to take off the fast bowler, even though he may be getting wickets. Chapman takes him off, gives him a rest, and then brings him back to bang down his cannon-balls once more.

It is bowlers of the Larwood type who, especially in Australia, may almost literally win matches themselves by just a few overs of deadly trundling which gets rid of the other side's most dangerous batsmen.

The success of Larwood may have a big effect on cricket of the future. It may inspire the lads of Australia, and of England, to develop into fast bowlers. And if the lads of to-day take up bowling seriously, then that world-shortage of bowlers of which I have spoken may be confined to the present decade.

OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

1929 Greetings!

WITHIN about half a minute, so far as I can calculate, of my sitting down with the honest intention of penning a few lines full of well-chosen words of good wishes to 1929, and ditto ditto to all my chums at home and abroad, when—plunk!—came a wedge of poetry from a keen reader.

The opening stanzas of the "pome" which has been written in honour of the New Year are full of ginger and pep. The writer hopes, bless his kind heart, the sun will shine in 1929; he trusts that in this New Year there'll be no cause to whine; he hopes the "good old N.L." will be as bright and cheery as ever; he sends his greetings to all readers.

Still, I haven't time or space in my small budget of good wishes to all and sundry to

run in this kind of thing. No need, either. You can wish the fulfilment of cartloads of sound wishes in a couple of lines.

However, I can assure this reader, and all other readers, too, that the "Nelson Lee" will be as bright and cheery as ever. That was my first New Year's resolution. In fact, you can take it from your Editor that the "Nelson Lee" is planning to do bigger things than ever in this New Year. No nonsense about that. The story programme is stupendous right away from the starting post this month—as witness the new Australian series, in which the St. Frank's juniors will see the Test matches now being played "down under."

A Great Surprise!

And then there's something else, too. At the moment I can only say a few words about it, for really it is a great secret surprise I have in store for all readers of the Old Paper. In a few weeks' time—note that!—the "Nelson Lee" is going to give away a superb series of free gifts that will be the sensation of the year!

There! That's got you interested, hasn't it? Then you'd better watch for announcements that will appear in future numbers.

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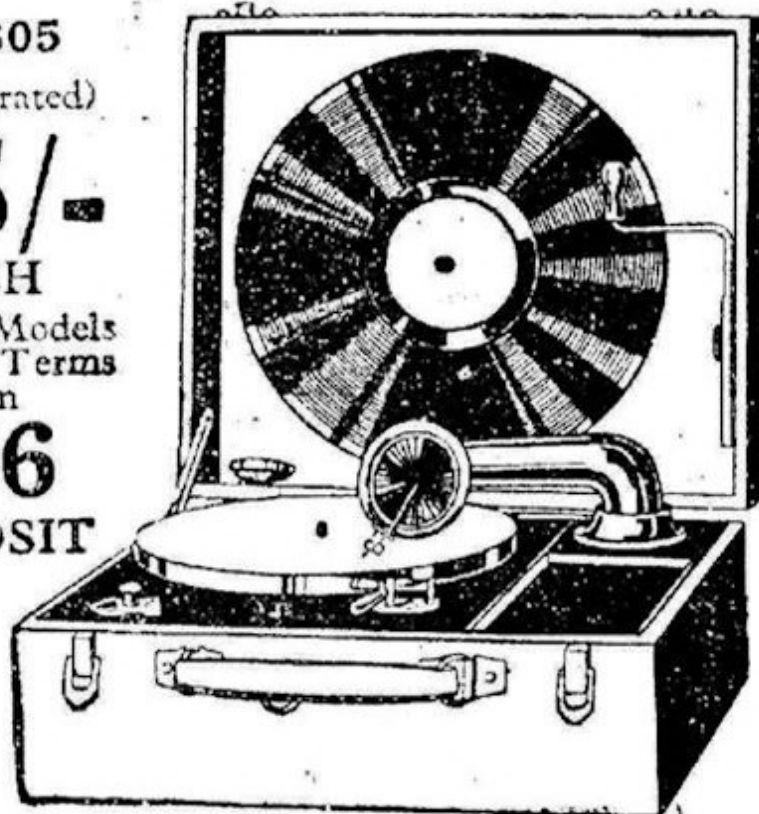
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New Series No. 140.

D/R

January 5th, 1929.