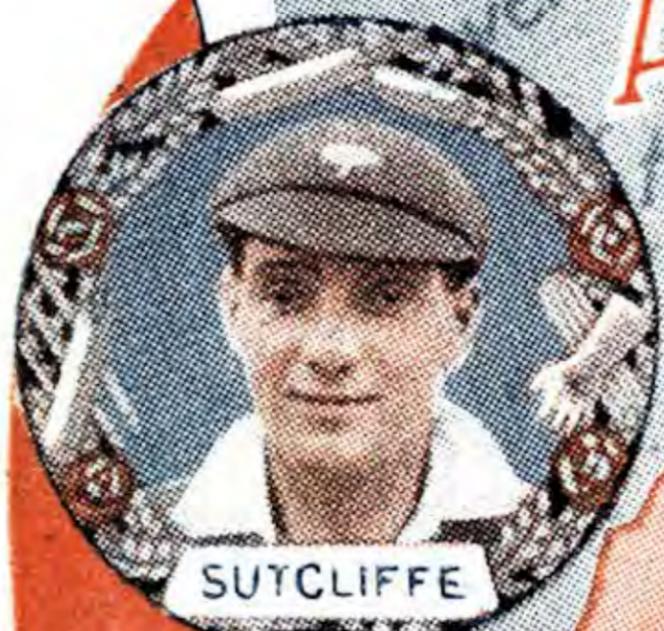
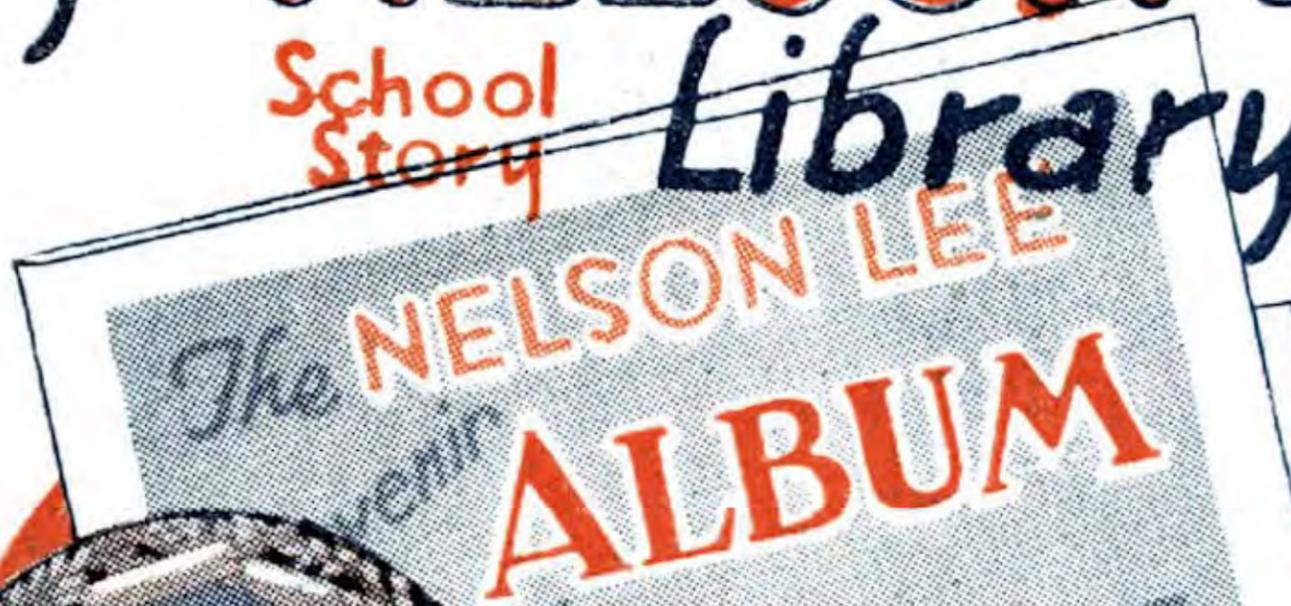


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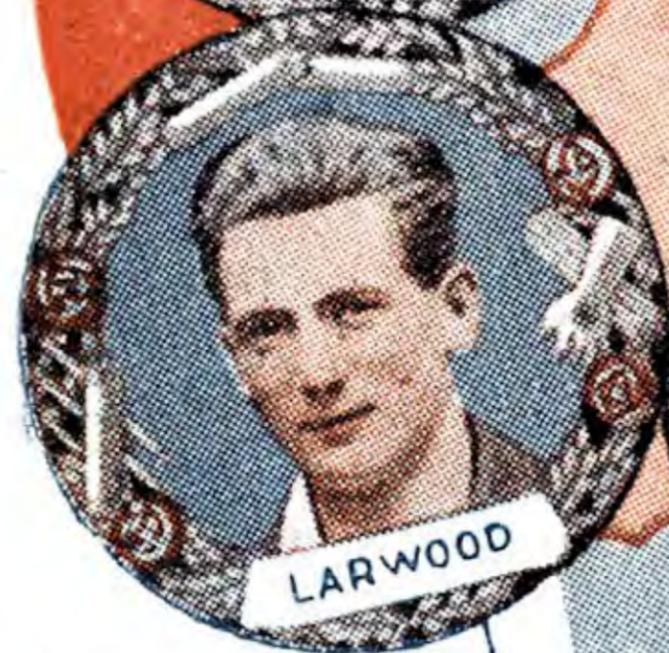
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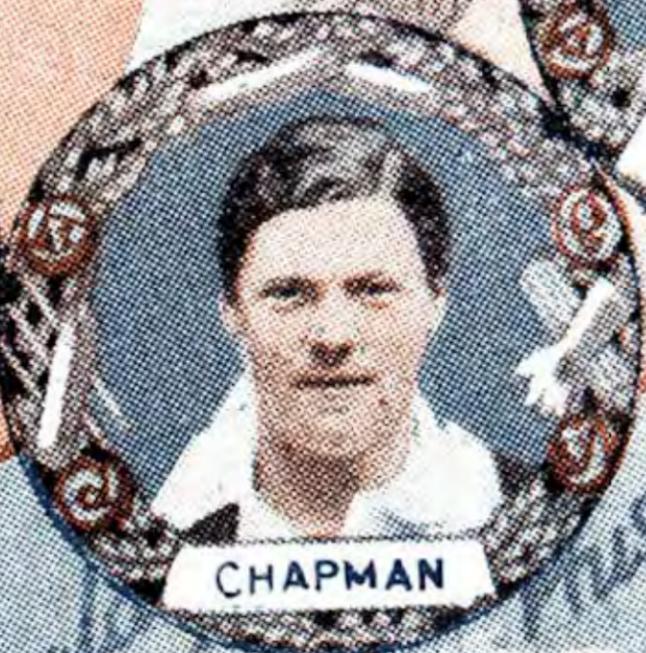
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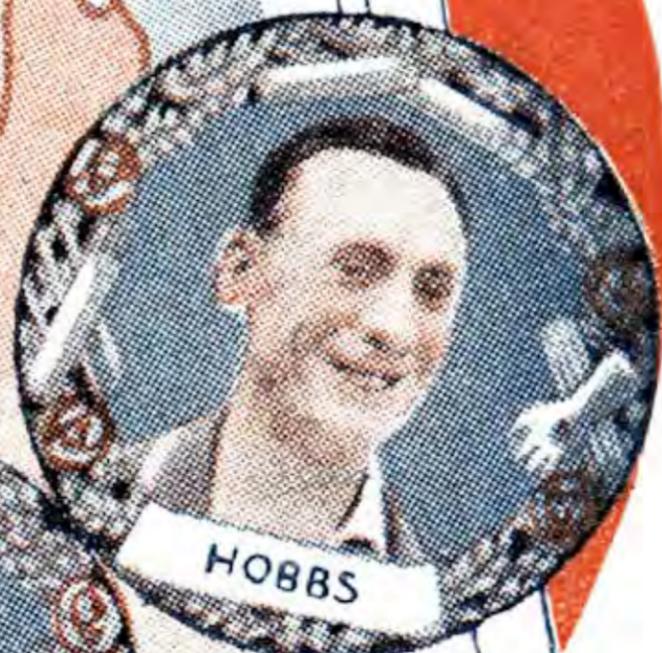
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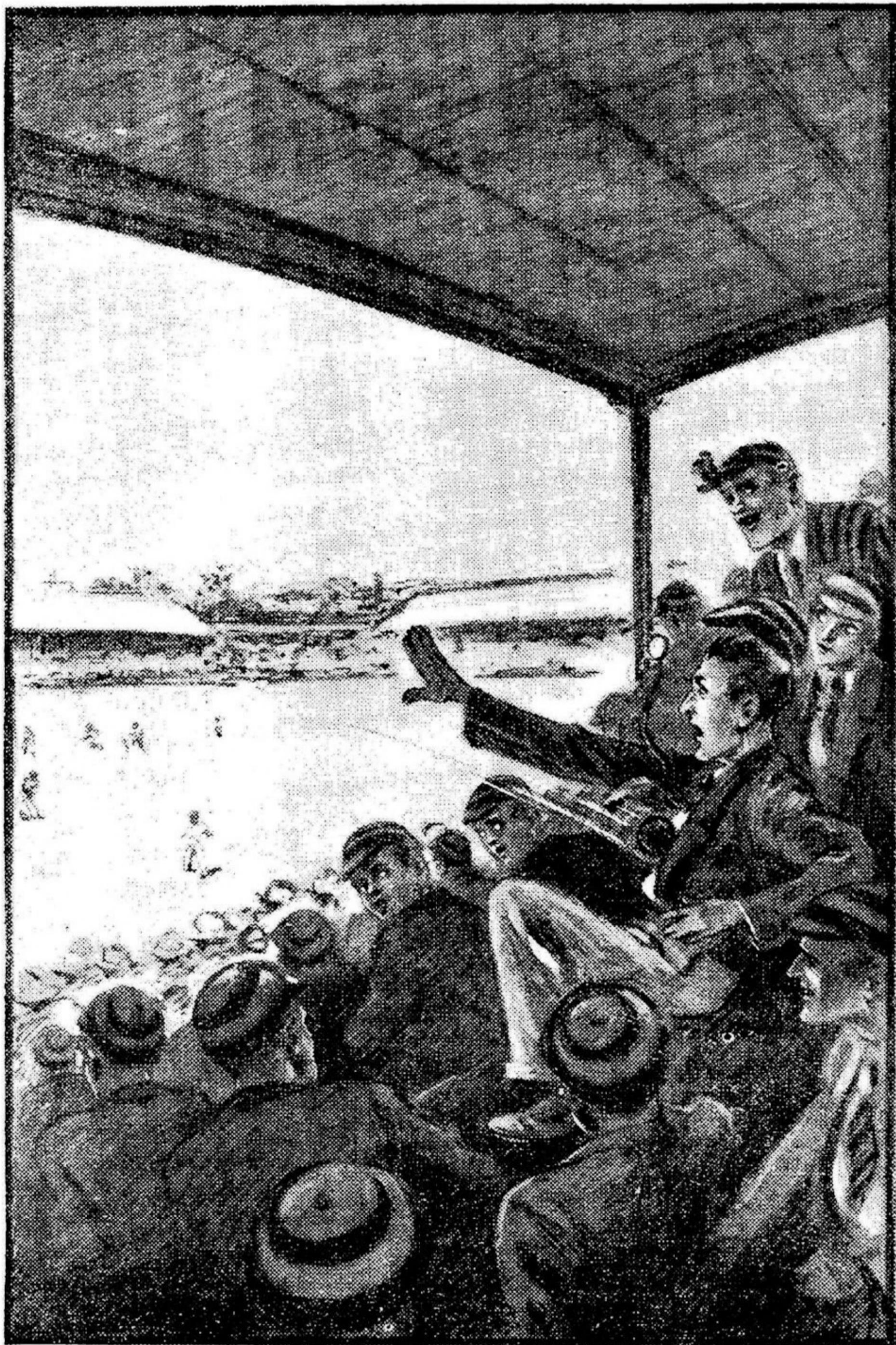
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Clack ! It was a glorious swipe, and neither batsmen attempted to run ; for that hit was obviously a boundary. It was more. The speeding leather entered the covered enclosure, and fell with a dull thud upon Archie Glenythorne's chest. "Ugh !" gurgled Archie, with a violent start.

You'll All Enjoy This Amazing Long Story of Sport and Adventure!

ST FRANK'S AT THE TEST MATCH!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

What a glorious time Nipper & Co. have, watching the world's greatest batsmen in action at the Test Match in Adelaide! Edward Oswald Handforth, especially, has the time of his life. He's vowed to get the autographs of all the Australian cricketers—but Handy finds that that is easier said than done!—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

England v. Australia!

CLACK!

It was a glorious swipe, and neither batsman attempted to run, for that hit was obviously a boundary. It was more. The speeding leather entered the covered enclosure, and fell with a dull thud upon Archie Glenthorne's chest.

"Ugh!" gurgled Archie, with a violent start.

"Oh, well hit!"

"A six, by jingo!"

Nipper and Handforth and Fullwood and Travers, and a whole crowd of other St. Frank's Removites were bunched together in that particular portion of the enclosure. All around them were Fourth-Formers, Fifth-Formers, Sixth-Formers—and even fags. And Archie Glenthorne was the only fellow who did not know what had happened.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated, blinking dazedly. "I mean to say, dash it, who did that?"

"Ryder!" grinned Jerry Dodd, the Australian junior. "Good old Ryder!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie. "You're not actually praising the chappie, are you?"

"He's hit six!" said Jerry.

"I don't know about hitting six, old scream, but I know dashed well he hit *me!*" complained Archie Glenthorne. "As for the other five chappies——"

"You hopeless ass!" interrupted Fullwood. "You were hit by a cricket ball. Ryder swiped a beauty, and scored six!"

Archie started.

"Odds bonzer and bosker!" he observed. "I mean, cricket, what? The good old leather sphere struck me in the ribbery? Absolutely! I see what you mean, laddie."

"But didn't you know?" asked Fullwood, in surprise.

"I thought some sundowner had absolutely jabbed me in the midriff!" confessed Archie.

"The fact is, I was indulging in forty of the best——"

"What!"

A roar came from a seat just behind Archie, and Edward Oswald Handforth, the

famous leader of Study D, leaned over.

"What's that, Archie?" he demanded ominously. "Did I hear you just saying that you've been asleep?"

"Well, the fact is, old cobber——"

"Did I?" demanded Handforth.

"Absolutely! You see, the good old heat, and——"

"Asleep!" said Handforth, in amazement.

"Here, in Adelaide—watching the Fourth Test Match between England and Australia! Asleep—while England is in the field, and while Ryder and Kippax are batting!"

"Good gad! Really?" murmured Archie. "Are they?"

"What do you mean—'are they'?"

"Are they batting, old amplifier?"

"Are they batting!" ejaculated Handforth, scandalised. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! He's been sitting here all the afternoon, and he asks if Ryder and Kippax are batting! He thinks the Test Match is the right place for having a nap!"

"Oh, leave him alone, Handy," said Church. "Archie would nap all through a shipwreck! Don't make such a fuss!"

"Who's making a fuss?" demanded Handforth, turning round. "Look here, Walter Church——"

"And don't start a row, either," put in McClure. "Watch the game, you ass!"

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, with a start. "Who's bowling now?"

"Larwood's come on at the other end," said Church. "Chapman is as wily as the Australian skipper himself. It's a case of when Greek meets Greek."

"What are you jawing about?" asked Handforth, staring. "Chapman isn't a Greek!"

"I know he isn't, ass, but——"

"He's an Englishman!" said Handforth tartly. "And the other skipper is an Australian. So what the dickens do you mean by gassing about Greeks?"

"Oh, my hat! You've heard the expression hundreds of time——"

"Well, they're not Greeks!" argued Handforth. "Hallo! That was a narrow shave! If you're not careful, Kippax, my lad, you'll soon be out!"

Kippax, unaware of this well-meant advice, continued his brilliant innings. And everybody in that great enclosure watched with almost feverish interest.

Adelaide! The fourth of the great Test Matches between England and Australia! A sunny sky overhead, a blazing hot afternoon, white figures on the green turf! In a word—cricket!

And cricket of the most supreme order—Test cricket between the picked men of England and Australia. All those St. Frank's fellows counted themselves fortunate, indeed, that they were able to be here, watching. Even now, they could hardly believe it. Here they were, in South Australia, in the middle of the winter term, wearing white flannels, occasionally gasping with the heat, and watching the best of all cricket!

Yet the circumstances were not entirely unprecedented. The St. Francis was not the

first School Ship—although, perhaps, it was the first vessel to voyage over the world in this particular way.

Half of St. Frank's had come on this wonderful cruise—all the occupants of the Ancient House and the Modern House. Reggie Pitt & Co., of the West House, and Armstrong & Co., of the East House, were keeping the flag flying at St. Frank's in the meantime.

But, really, most of the fellows who mattered had come on this trip. The St. Francis was a great converted liner, and it was, in every sense, a travelling, floating school. Ever since England had been left, the St. Frank's fellows had "carried on" as usual. There had been lessons daily, half-holidays, and the ordinary routine had been maintained. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, was, for the time being, the Head.

Already, the school had been to South Africa, and there had been a number of adventures in Australia, too.

And for this very special occasion—the Test Match—the fellows had been granted extra hours of freedom. During this week, for example, while the Test Match was on, every afternoon was available for watching the game.

It was near the tea interval now, and the match was in a very interesting stage. As Handforth had said, Chapman and his valiant men were in the field, and the Australians were batting. So far, the innings had been a joy to watch.

"Well, I must say that these Australians know how to play cricket," remarked Nipper, while the field was changing. "Our fellows know how, too—they've proved that conclusively enough, and it's a rare treat to watch this battle of the giants."

"Who's going to win?" asked Tommy Watson.

Nipper grinned.

"No fear!" he said cheerfully. "I'm not going to make any rash guesses, old man!"

"There's no need to do any guesswork, dear old fellow," said Travers. "It's as obvious as daylight who's going to win this match."

"Is it?"

"Of course," said Travers amiably. "The best team is going to win."

"Ass!"

Soon afterwards the umpires indicated that the time for the tea interval had arrived; the bails were removed from the wickets, and the players came leisurely in, cheered loudly by the immense crowds.



CHAPTER 2.

Handforth Goes Hunting!

DELAIDE was filled to overflowing for this great occasion.

Many people, indeed, had travelled

(Continued on page 6.)

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ST FRANK'S AT THE TEST MATCH!



(Continued from page 4.)

hundreds of miles, some from outlying cattle stations and isolated homesteads. The lure of the Test Match had been irresistible.

Not that the St. Frank's fellows were at all affected by the crowded condition of the great South Australian capital. They had their own ship, and everything was going on just as usual on board. The fellows slept in their usual cabins, and dined in the spacious, airy saloons. The seven-mile trip by rail from Port Adelaide to the city itself was regarded as a mere trifle. Fully ninety per cent of the fellows came daily to watch the play—more particularly as special arrangements had been made for their accommodation in the great enclosure.

Nelson Lee considered that there was a great deal of education value in watching this Test Match—from a sports point of view, at all events. Practically all of the boys were keen cricketers, and many of them would be able to gain innumerable invaluable tips from these masters of the game. Nelson Lee was convinced, indeed, that the school cricket, during the forthcoming summer, would be all the better because of this winter interest in the game.

As soon as the players went in for tea, Handforth rose briskly to his feet. There was a determined expression on his rugged face, and his eyes were gleaming purposefully.

"I was going to leave it until after the close of play, but perhaps I'd better do it now," he said briskly. "No time like the present."

"Do what?" asked Church.

"There's nothing like taking the bull by the horns," said Handforth. "These Australian cricketers are sportsmen, and they'll easily grant me a little favour like this. Besides, I shan't keep them more than a couple of minutes."

"But what are you going to do?" asked McClure, his voice becoming uneasy.

"Do?" said Handforth. "I'm going to get the autographs of Ryder, Woodfull, Kippax, and Oldfield, and the others—"

"You hopeless ass!" interrupted Church. "You can't get their autographs now!"

"Why not?"

"Because—because— Oh, well, because it's impossible," said Church impatiently. "Don't be an ass, Handy! How the dickens do you think you're going to get into the dressing-room? There's no admittance—"

"There'll be admittance for me," said Handforth calmly. "'Can't' never did any-

thing, my sons, and I mean to get those autographs."

"You're never satisfied!" said McClure. "You've got the autographs of Hobbs and Sutcliffe and Chapman and Hendren and Larwood and Tate—"

"They're the M.C.C. men," said Handforth. "I want the Australians' autographs."

"Better not try it, Handy," said Nipper, looking round. "You'll only get yourself into trouble if you start any of those games now. They'll never let you through."

"They might not let me through; but I'm going through, all the same," said Handforth stubbornly. "If I take any notice of rules and regulations, I'll never get any autographs at all."

And he made off resolutely, amid the chuckles of the Removites and Fourth-Formers. Church and McClure, after exchanging a hasty glance, hurried after their impetuous leader.

"Exit the great man and his bodyguard," murmured Travers. "For the love of Samson! What would Handy do without his faithful henchmen? Their lives are simply made up of pulling him out of one hole after another. Well, well! What a life!"

"Hallo, hallo!" said Archie Glenthorne suddenly. "I mean to say, hallo! Nothing doing, what? Good gad! Are the Australians all out?"

"No; they're all in—having tea," said Fullwood.

"Tea—what?" murmured Archie dreamily. "Odds visions and allurements! How about hounding down a spot of the good old beverage? What about running it to earth, laddies? Kindly lead me to it."

"It's too hot for tea, Archie," said Jimmy Potts. "Now, a nice fizzy lime-juice, with plenty of ice—"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "Good gad! A ripe enough fluid, old kangaroo, but absolutely a non-starter when compared with the good old India-and-Ceylon. Kindly direct me to the tea department. Archie would imbibe. The good old tissues are not only wilting, but, dash it, the old tongue feels like a chunk of washleather!"

In the meantime, Edward Oswald Handforth was boldly approaching a private entrance, which led into the players' quarters. Really, he had absolutely no right there, but by dint of cool cheek he had penetrated to this forbidden spot; and Church and McClure, determined to drag their leader back, were well on his track.

Just as Handforth was going in, a big, bluff man, in light-grey flannels, came out. He was clean-shaven, and his face was literally covered with tiny wrinkles. It was rather difficult to judge his age, but he was probably between fifty and sixty. There was a very firm look about his mouth, although the crinkles round his eyes helped to relieve the severity of his countenance.

"Well, young man, what do you want here?" he asked, in a deep, booming voice.

"You're one of the St. Frank's boys, are you not?"

"Why, yes," said Handforth, as he prepared to brush past. "Sorry, sir, but I'm in a hurry——"

"Possibly you are; but I must point out that there is no admittance this way," said the other. "Unless you have a special appointment with somebody, you cannot pass through this doorway."

"Are you one of the officials, then?" asked Handforth.

"Not exactly, but——"

"If you're not an official, how do you know anything about it, sir?" demanded Handforth stubbornly.

"Well, my name happens to be Brampton, and although I am not exactly an official of this enclosure, I think I can call myself a privileged person," said the other cheerfully. "Take my advice, young man, and leave this mission of yours until after the close of play."

But Handforth was not inclined to accept this good advice. Church and McClure had come up by this time, and they had heard the stranger's words. Their horror was great, therefore, when Handforth gave one of his most defiant snorts.

"Rats!" he said gruffly. "No offence, sir, but I've made up mind to get those autographs, and I'm going to get 'em!"

"You hopeless ass!" hissed Church, grabbing at his leader's arm. "This gentleman is Sir Arthur Brampton."

"Is he?"

"Didn't he just tell you so?"

"Did he?" said Handforth. "Well, what about it? I've never heard of him!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Church, looking at the big man apologetically. "We're always having trouble with him like this. He's—he's a bit touched, sir."

"I'm what?" roared Handforth.

"He often has these spasms, sir," went on Church. "You—you howling idiot, Handy! Sir Arthur Brampton is a multi-millionaire! He's one of the most famous men in the whole of Australia."

"Eh?" said Handforth, momentarily startled. Then, with his usual obstinacy: "I can't help that! I'm here to get the players' autographs."

And Church and McClure were to be highly commended for not obeying their natural instincts and felling Handforth to the ground on the spot.



CHAPTER 3.

A Spot of Bother!

HOPELESS quests were Edward Oswald Handforth's favourite enterprises. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they fizzled out—as they deserved; but now and again his audacity would carry him through.

Handforth was one of the best, but his perversity was most exasperating at times. In the present instance, he was more perverse than usual. His own commonsense told him that this was the wrong time for seeking autographs; yet he would not admit that he had blundered. Therefore, the only thing was to carry on.

"You really mustn't do it, my young friend," said Sir Arthur Brampton smilingly. "There is a right time for everything and a wrong time. This is the wrong time."

Handforth squared his jaw. He looked at Sir Arthur Brampton obstinately.

"Are you the manager of this ground, sir?" he asked bluntly.

"Well, no."

"Have you any authority at all here,

sir?"

"No authority; but I want to prevent you from doing something rash."

"Then if you've no authority, sir, I'm going in," said Handforth triumphantly. Church and McClure groaned.

"Better let him go, sir," said Church hopelessly. "And if he gets chucked out of the enclosure, all the better."

But Sir Arthur Brampton had lost his smile, and his eyes had become grim.

"One moment, young man—one moment!" he said, his words becoming clipped and abrupt. "I am not accustomed to this defiance from schoolboys. Come back here!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, pausing. "Not likely. Sorry, sir, but——"

"Come back!" commanded Sir Arthur.

"I don't see why I should," argued Handforth. "I've got as much right here as you have——"

He broke off as Sir Arthur made a sudden move towards him. The next moment Handforth felt himself seized in a firm, iron grip. To his further stupefaction, he was whirled off his feet, swung round, and laid across one of Sir Arthur's knees.

A "JAMES" Bicycle and 12 Hobbs' CRICKET BATS

TO BE WON!

(See the fascinating competition on
page 19.)

"Hi!" he howled. "What the dickens! Here, stop it!"

Slap—slap—slap!

Sir Arthur's hand rose and fell, and Church and McClure watched, fascinated, as they saw their leader spanked—like any naughty infant.

"I hate doing this, by boy. It hurts me far more than it is hurting you; but I regard it as a duty!" panted Sir Arthur Brampton, as he vigorously continued his exercise. "Whether I have any official authority or not, makes no difference. You have scorned my advice, and—"

"Help!" hooted Handforth wildly. "Hi, Remove! Rescue, St. Frank's!"

A ripple of laughter was passing through the great crowd, and necks were being craned. The ripple of laughter changed into a roar of mirth, and passed round the enclosure, growing in volume. Nipper and Fullwood and Boots, and all the other St. Frank's juniors, heard the yells, and they were instantly on their feet.

A number of them, indeed, left their seats and went rushing off to the scene of action. Sir Arthur was in the midst of his brisk work when the crowd of fellows came charging up.

"Help!" howled Handforth. "Drag him off!"

And the excited juniors, knowing nothing of the circumstances, hurled themselves at the millionaire, seized him, and bowled him clean over.

"Look out!" gasped Church. "Mind what you're doing, you fatheads! This gentleman is Sir Arthur Brampton, the great Melbourne millionaire!"

"We don't care who he is!" said Fullwood. "What does he mean by attacking Handy?"

"You silly chump!" roared McClure. "I was Handy's own fault! He checked Sir Arthur, and he deserved a spanking."

"Oh, he checked him, did he?" said Fullwood, changing his tone. "That's different."

Sir Arthur picked himself up, dusty, hot and cross. He glared round at the boys with very real anger, and, in the circumstances, he could not be blamed for his attitude.

"You young scamps!" he said thickly. "I've a good mind to report you all to your schoolmaster! I had believed that you English schoolboys were well-behaved, but perhaps I was wrong in that impression?"

"We—we didn't know, sir!" panted De Valerie. "We thought you were having a lark with Handy—doing it on purpose to make him look silly!"

"Here, I say!" burst out Church. "Handy's gone! He's bunked in while we've been off our guard."

Sir Arthur grunted.

"I wash my hands of the entire affair!" he said curtly. "If your—er—impulsive young

friend grossly ignores good advice, he can suffer the consequences."

And Sir Arthur strode off, fuming, leaving the juniors feeling very uncomfortable and embarrassed.

"You hopeless idiots!" said Church fiercely. "Why didn't you inquire before you bowled him over? He'll probably make a complaint to Mr. Lee now, and we shall be forbidden to come to the Test Match tomorrow. Mr. Lee might gate the whole lot of us for this."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Fullwood blankly.

"As for Handy, we'll boil him in oil when we get hold of him again," said McClure, breathing hard. "The obstinate cuckoo! The stubborn idiot! The Australian players will probably complain about him, and that'll mean more trouble. We shall be barred from the enclosure after this!"

"We'd better make ourselves scarce!" said Harry Gresham, with a quick look round. "We're safe so far, and the sooner we get back to our places, the better. Come on, you fellows!"

And they all went scurrying off including Church and McClure. For these loyal youths felt that it would be pointless for them to remain. Handforth had penetrated the "holy of holies," and it would only make matters worse if his chums committed the same offence. Far better for them to get back to their seats. Handforth had asked for trouble, and by this time he was probably getting it—in quantities.

"What's all this bother?" asked Nipper tartly, as the juniors returned, stared at by everybody.

"It's Handy's fault!" grunted Church. "He *would* go into the Aussies' dressing-room, searching for autographs. We tried to stop him, and then we had a bit of bother with Sir Arthur Brampton, the millionaire!"

Nipper sniffed. He pretended to be stern.

"Well, when there's an inquiry—as there probably will be—I hope you chaps will accept the blame," he said. "There's no reason why the whole crowd of us should be prevented from seeing the rest of the Test Match."

"You needn't worry," said Harry Gresham. "We'll own up. But how were we to know who the man was?"

"Here they come!" went up a sudden yell.

Cheers broke out from all parts of the ground as the white figures of the players emerged into the sunlight.

And then a series of gasps went up from the Removites and Fourth-Formers.

For there, amid a smiling knot of Australian cricketers, Edward Oswald Handforth was marching in serene triumph, a grin on his rugged face. And at that very moment, moreover, Ryder was scribbling in Handforth's celebrated autograph-book!



Sir Arthur seized hold of Handforth, laid him across his knee, and then proceeded to spank him with considerable gusto. Edward Oswald hooted wildly. It was most humiliating for the mighty Handforth to be spanked like a naughty child!



CHAPTER 4.

Like Handforth's Cheek!

MY only sainted aunt!"
 "Look at Handy!"
 "We're looking!"
 "He's with the players—and they don't seem to mind!"

All the juniors were uttering similar comments, and they continued to stare in amazement and indignation. Handforth, who deserved pitching clean out of the enclosure, was calmly walking out with Ryder and Woodfull and Kippax and Oldfield, and the other Australian players. What was more to the point, they apparently had no objection to his company. Even at this moment they had paused, and Woodfull, the famous Victoria player, was writing something in the autograph book.

Having done so, he passed it on to Oldfield, the New South Wales' player.

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

"They're sportsmen!" said Church, in an admiring voice. "By jingo! They *are* sportsmen!"

"Rather!" said McClure. "Instead of chucking him out, as he deserves, they're indulging him. Well, I always knew these

Australians to be sports, but I never expected anything like this!"

"They're clapping him on the back now!" said Duncan breathlessly.

It was true enough. Kippax had one hand on Handforth's shoulder, and he was grinning widely.

"And I've heard it said that these English boys are slow!" he chuckled. "This youngster deserves something better than our autographs, for his cheek!"

"He's all right," said Ryder, with a smile. "He's made of the right stuff!"

"There's nothing wrong with old England!" declared Woodfull, with conviction.

Perhaps he was making a subtle reference to the M.C.C. players, and not merely to Handforth. The other Australians chuckled, and Oldfield handed the autograph book to Edward Oswald.

"Well, young 'un, you'd better slip off now," he suggested. "Good luck to you!"

"I've got your autographs, which is what I came after," grinned Handforth. "Thanks awfully, you chaps. You're true blue! By George! You're bricks!"

"That's enough of your leg-pulling, sonny," said one of the other Australian players. "Don't forget to give our kind regards to your pals."

Handforth, jubilant, ran off the field, and he was rather surprised when the multitudes gave him a rousing cheer; for Handforth

failed to realise that this cheer was more or less jocular. The "Aussie" crowds are ever ready to appreciate a humorous situation.

"Well, what about it now?" demanded Handforth, as he pushed his way past protesting Adelaide citizens in order to reach his schoolfellows. "Who said I couldn't get any autographs?"

It was just as well for Handforth that the aforesaid Adelaide citizens were good-natured and tolerant. Exactly how many toes Handforth trod on, nobody knew; but it was an undoubted fact that he knocked off at least half a dozen hats. However, he succeeded in getting back into his place at last, and he was totally unconscious of the fact that he had caused minor destruction all along his route.

"You bounder!" said Church accusingly.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I got the autographs, didn't I?"

"How did you do it?" asked McClure. "Why didn't those Australian players boot you out?"

"Because they're good chaps," replied Handforth, grinning. "As for Sir Arthur Brampton—"

"Shush!" hissed Church. "He'll hear you!"

Handforth looked round, and apparently Sir Arthur Brampton had heard him already. For that gentleman was sitting comparatively near by, and he was glaring at Handforth with no friendly spirit. The leader of Study D could not refrain from grinning and waving his hand.

"I got those autographs after all, sir," he said. "Perhaps I was a bit cheeky, and I apologise. But I reckon we're quits now."

"You haven't seen the last of me, young man!" said Sir Arthur grimly.

"Here, I say, sir, there's no need to keep it up!" protested Handforth.

"Then sit down and behave yourself!" urged Nipper. "You're not going to start another commotion here, Handy, are you? You ought to be bumped for your nerve!"

"Let me suggest, Brother Nipper, that Brother Handforth has earned well of his school," said William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth. "He has, no doubt, stolen a leaf out of my own book. You will all recall the incidents of last week, when I hoaxed this fair city, and earned the approbation of the multitude. A good example is always worth following—"

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Nipper. "Browne's going to start now!"

"He's trying to claim the credit for my enterprise!" said Handforth tartly. "You can go and boil yourself, Browne! It was my idea to get these autographs, and I didn't borrow it from you, either!"

Browne shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us not engage in an unseemly dispute, brother," he murmured. "I would point out, however, that I am well ahead of you. I have already obtained the autographs of these Australian stalwarts. I am merely tell-

ing you this, lest you should believe, in your innocence, that you are the first. But you must bear in mind that W.N.B. leads, and others follow."

It was fortunate, perhaps, that play recommenced at that moment, and it proved to be so engrossing that even Handforth had no time for arguing. He was thrilled by the batting; he was enthused by the brilliant fielding; he was enraptured by the masterly bowling. All the other spectators, too, were equally affected. The game was a sparkling one. There was no half-heartedness in the Australian batting, and never once did the England fieldsmen give away any chances. Every run that the Australians obtained was gained by sheer effort.

When play ended for the day, with the game still in a very interesting state, the St. Frank's fellows went back to the School Ship thoroughly satisfied—and full of eager discussions regarding the morrow's probabilities.

Of course, there would be lessons in the morning, but directly after lunch they would be free to come dashing back into Adelaide—and to watch the game. During these exceptional days, work in the class-room was generally beyond reproach. Seldom, indeed, had the Form-masters had things so satisfactory. Nobody ever thought of being inattentive; talking in the class-rooms was almost unknown; and lessons were accomplished briskly and effectively and efficiently.

The truth was, nobody wanted to be detained. The very thought of detention was appalling. And the only safe way to avoid any such disasters was to work—and to be constantly attentive.

Some of the seniors had shaken their heads dubiously when Nelson Lee had announced that during the course of the Test the school would be free during the afternoons. But it really seemed that Nelson Lee's policy was very, very wise!



CHAPTER 5.

Every Appearance of Trouble!

INDEED, there cannot be the slightest doubt that if Nelson Lee had ordained that lessons should be held as usual this week, practically no work would have been done.

For, disappointed because they couldn't see the Test Match, the fellows would have been careless and inattentive, in spite of impositions. Restless and disgruntled, they would have frittered their time away in the class-rooms, and the week would have passed uselessly.

As it was, the mornings were so fruitful that all the Form-masters were confidently saying that this week would beat the record for really hard work—for consistent, earnest attention to lessons.

After tea, on board, the Test Match was discussed in the Common-rooms, in the cabins, and on the decks. Groups of fellows gathered everywhere, and the one topic of conversation was the big match. Prep. would come later—and prep., of course, could not be skimmed these days. For carelessly-executed prep meant trouble in the morning—and trouble in the morning meant a possibility of detention. Yet very few of the fellows realised that Nelson Lee, in giving them free afternoons to see the Test Match, had set the school a much harder week's work than usual!

Handforth came in for a great deal of chipping. Fellows asked him if he was still sore; juniors came up and gravely inquired if he was yet able to sit down comfortably. But to all this banter Handforth grinned in triumph. Nothing could alter the fact that he had scored—and scored heavily.

"You needn't think that you can get my rag out—because you can't!" he said at length, as he leaned over the rail in the cool of the evening. "I said I was going to get those autographs, and I jolly well succeeded! And these Australian players are real coots."

"What do you mean—'coots'?" asked Church, staring. "In Australian slang a 'coot' is a person of no account!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "I mean, they're dinkie-die Aussies. By George, they're onkus—every one of 'em!"

"He's insulting them now!" said Nipper sadly.

"Insulting them?"

"Well, you just said that they're all drunk," said Nipper. "'Onkus' means tipsy, old man."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth. "I'm getting mixed up with this Australian slang!"

"You'd better leave it alone, dear old fellow," chuckled Travers. "If you don't, you're liable to commit a pretty hefty *faux pas*."

"I'm liable to do what?" asked Handforth, staring. "I suppose that's another bit of Australian slang?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, well!" sighed Travers. "He doesn't know Australian slang from French now! '*Faux pas*' means a false step, Handy—an error, or slip, especially in manners. It's a term you ought to know by heart!"

"Fathead!" said Handforth, turning red.

"There'll probably be some trouble with Sir Arthur Brampton yet," said Church, shaking his head. "After the way he was bowled over and—"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, with a gulp.

"What's the matter?"

"Look!" muttered Handy. "He's—he's just come on board!"

"What!"

Fullwood and De Valerie and a number of other juniors stared—startled. And it was only too true! The bulky, bluff figure of Sir Arthur Brampton had appeared on the promenade deck, and he was now preparing to walk forward towards a couple of the ship's officers who were chatting some little distance down the deck. Sir Arthur had just come up the gangway, and he seemed to hesitate as he caught sight of the juniors.

"He's come on board to complain—as he threatened!" said Handforth blankly. "Oh, great Scott! We shall all be detained to-morrow—just as the match is so interesting, too!"

"Let's go and apologise to him!" urged Fullwood.

They went up with a rush, and Sir Arthur Brampton, who was still near the gangway, found himself surrounded by a struggling, pushing, excited mob.

"Hallo, what's all this?" he asked, frowning. "Don't you think you youngsters did enough damage this afternoon?"

"And I apologised to you, sir!" replied Handforth quickly. "You're not going to complain to Mr. Lee,

are you, sir?"

"Please don't, sir!" urged De Valerie. "If you do, there'll be an inquiry, and a lot of us will be detained to-morrow afternoon."

Sir Arthur pursed his lips.

"And you deserve to be detained, don't you?" he asked. "After the way you treated me—"

"But we didn't know who you were then, sir," said Gresham. "And we didn't know the full circumstances of the case. I say, be a sport, sir! Don't make any complaint!"

The boys surged round with greater excitement than ever, but Sir Arthur Brampton squared his shoulders, and took up a firm attitude.

"No!" he said sternly. "I am not going to be influenced by your pleadings. Certainly not! I came on board this vessel with a set purpose—"

He broke off, for the juniors, filled with wild anxiety regarding the morrow, pressed round with greater persistency than ever. Sir Arthur took a hasty step backwards, and the weight of the juniors pressing on him caused him to lose his balance.

"Here, steady!" he shouted in alarm.

And then the thing happened—the disaster. For Sir Arthur, in attempting to regain his balance, just missed the gangway. He backed into a little gap, between the gangway and the ship's side.

"Look out, sir!" yelled Handforth.

ENGLAND'S SELECTED!

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3 more next week and **9** for the following 3 weeks!

But it was too late! Feeling himself going, Sir Arthur clutched madly, and tried to check himself. But he just failed to do so. His weight caused the gangway to move, widening the gap between that and the side of the ship. The next moment he went plunging downwards—and then there came a mighty splash.

"Oh, help!" groaned Nipper. "He's fallen overboard!"

"We shall be gated for a month—not for one afternoon!" said Handforth, frantic with anxiety. "He'll be as mad as a hatter about this! You careless asses! You pushed him in! Here, where's a life-belt? Quick!"

But it was unnecessary for Handforth to give any advice. The officers had come hurrying along, and some of the crew, too. Ropes were quickly thrown to the unfortunate millionaire, and within a minute he had been pulled safely to the deck—dripping with water and considerably out of breath.

Mr. Nelson Lee himself, having heard sounds of commotion, came hurrying along the deck, and his expression was grave as he saw the bedraggled figure of the millionaire and the startled, scared faces of the boys who hovered near by.

"What's happened?" asked Nelson Lee sharply. "Upon my word, Sir Arthur! What have these boys been doing?"

Sir Arthur Brampton waved a wet and dripping hand.

"Nothing," he replied promptly. "Nothing at all, Mr. Lee. It was most careless of me—most clumsy. I tripped, and fell overboard."

"I sincerely hope you're not hurt, sir?"

"Hurt? No!" replied Sir Arthur. "It's nothing! A mere accident. The boys were a little boisterous, but the fault was not theirs in any way. As I told you, I was clumsy. A most ridiculous incident, and the sooner we forget it, the better. May I beg the use of a cabin, Mr. Lee?"

He and Nelson Lee walked away, with one of the ship's officers. The group of juniors, hardly able to believe the evidence of their eyes and ears, looked at one another with relief and joy.

"He didn't give us away!" muttered Handforth breathlessly.

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Great Scott!"

"What a brick!" said Nipper admiringly. "By Jove! What a corker! And we thought he had come on board to complain, Handy!"

"Perhaps he has!" said Handforth, passing a hand over his brow.

"Rot!" said Nipper. "If he had intended to complain, he would have complained on the spot. But not likely! Sir Arthur is a sportsman to his finger-tips."

And everybody else said "Hear, hear," with considerable gusto.



CHAPTER 6.

The Big Surprise!

SIR ARTHUR BRAMPTON had established himself, once and for all, with the juniors.

They knew perfectly well that the fault had been theirs. In their excitement, they had hustled Sir Arthur in an unwarrantable way, and, as a consequence, he literally had been pushed overboard. Yet he accepted it as an accident, and he had gone out of his way to excuse the very fellows who had caused his discomfiture. Without question, Sir Arthur Brampton was a "corker"; and, what was more, he had obviously come on board for a purpose that was entirely dissociated from the incident of the afternoon.

It was at dinner-time that the school learned Sir Arthur's real object.

As a matter of fact, he had invited himself to dinner. Rather to Nelson Lee's astonishment, the Australian millionaire had made a most peculiar request. He had asked permission to dine with the school that evening—to sit with Nelson Lee in the big dining-hall. And Lee, of course, had at once complied, although he had been rather puzzled as to the reason for this request.

The juniors, at least, gave him a rousing cheer when they all congregated in the brilliantly-illuminated dining-saloon, with its spotless white tables, its soft carpets and its gliding stewards.

All the fellows knew Sir Arthur, if not by sight, by repute. He was one of the most famous men in Australia—a multi-millionaire, who had done a very great deal for the advancement of his great country. He was one of the men who mattered—a commercial genius—and a well-known figure in every great Australian city.

He reserved his thunderbolt until the meal was over.

Then, in response to a toast from Nelson Lee, he rose to his feet to make a speech.

"There's one thing that you St. Frank's boys may, or may not know," he said, after he had got well started. "My interest in your school is not the interest of a casual stranger. I am an Old Boy of St. Frank's myself."

"Hurrah!"

"By jingo! We didn't know that, you chaps!"

"Yes, I was educated at dear old St. Frank's," said Sir Arthur reminiscently. "It is many years since I was down in that little corner of Sussex, but I know it well. Bellton, eh? I wonder if it is still as quaint and as old-fashioned as ever?"

"It's just the same, sir," shouted somebody. "Bellton never changes."

"And Holt's Farm," went on Sir Arthur dreamily. "Bellton Wood, the old mill on

the moor, the grey old pile of St. Frank's, with its two Houses—"

"There are five Houses now, sir!" put in somebody else.

"Ah, there have been changes, then," said Sir Arthur, nodding. "Of course—of course! I remember, now. St. Frank's must be a wonderful school these days. Well, I mustn't waste your time with this sort of talk. I came here for a definite purpose, and I might as well tell you all, boys, that I have not yet even mooted it to your headmaster. Perhaps I should have discussed the matter with him in private first, but I am sure he will forgive me. It was a whim of mine to discuss it here, in front of the whole school."

Everybody wondered what was coming.

"The fact is, I want Mr. Lee, who is your acting headmaster, to grant a concession," continued Sir Arthur. "Although I was educated at St. Frank's, I am an Australian. I am proud of it. My parents were native-born Australians, and my grandparents, too. You see, I come of old stock. And I am only too well aware of the fact that a great many young people of the Old Country have many misconceptions regarding this wonderful land."

"We've had a few of them knocked out of us, sir," said Nipper, with a smile.

"I dare say," nodded Sir Arthur. "At the same time, you have only just seen a fringe of Australia. Some of you, I believe, have been up the Murray River. But, even so, you have not seen a hundredth part of the wonders that this island continent can reveal. I fear that if you remain on board the School Ship, you will only visit a few coastal towns—our great cities, such as Melbourne and Sydney and Brisbane. Now that you are over here—and it is, I realise, an exceptional occasion—I want you to see the Australian interior."

"I quite realise your point, Sir Arthur, but don't you see the impossibility of your suggestion?" asked Nelson Lee quietly. "These boys are not on holiday. They are doing their schoolwork, very much in the usual way, as at St. Frank's. It is essential that they should remain on the School Ship; and, of course, the School Ship cannot go into the interior."

"But is it essential?" asked Sir Arthur promptly. "I want to take all these boys—every one of them—on a long trip into New South Wales, into Queensland, into the far-

away spots, where they will see the real Australia. I want them to get acquainted with our tropics, with our deserts, our splendid inland scenery. And, in order to dispel this mystification that I am creating, I will say at once that I have built a fleet of twelve enormous motor-coaches, to say nothing of at least half a dozen tenders, on which water and food and baggage will be carried!"

"My dear sir!" protested Nelson Lee, startled. "What are you suggesting?"

"These motor-coaches are something quite new," said Sir Arthur, waxing enthusiastic. "They are equipped with sleeping accommodation, electric lighting, facilities for feeding. They are so enormous that I cannot give you any conception of them by

a mere verbal description. Each coach is fully treble the size of any motor-coach that you have ever set eyes on. They are like miniature yachts, and they have cost many, many thousands of pounds. They are eight-wheelers, and are capable of traversing any kind of rough country. Roads are by no means essential. Each day they are capable of covering a great many miles, and it is my hope that you, Mr. Lee, will give your permission that this trip should become a reality. Each day I want all these boys to go farther and farther inland—right

into Queensland, and perhaps beyond, into the Northern Territory!"

Everybody listened—fascinated, excited.

"Do I understand that these motor-coaches are actually built—and ready?" asked Nelson Lee.

"They have been ready for several weeks," replied Sir Arthur. "But I have said nothing about the matter, because I wanted to spring it as a surprise—a surprise during the Test Match, when I knew you would all be here. These coaches, let me tell you, are double-deckers, and they were built to my own designs. I will own, at once, that it is my desire to be financially responsible for the whole trip. And there is no reason why the ordinary school routine should not continue exactly the same as on board this ship. Tents will be carried, so that each class can do its work at certain hours of the day. The trip can occupy five or six weeks, and a very big slice of Australia can be seen, at first hand, during this period. And, naturally, I shall take it as a great privilege to go with the party."

Put 'em in your Album!

Trim your Badges with a pair of scissors, bend over the tab at the top of each badge and then push it through the space indicated in the Album. The complete set will make a Fine Show!

Sir Arthur paused, and he saw scores of flushed, excited faces, and gleaming, sparkling eyes.

He had flung his bombshell, and the floating school was startled!



CHAPTER 7.

An Amazing Scheme!

"HURRAH!"

It started in a kind of ripple at first, and then gradually grew

louder, swelling in volume, until it became a mighty cheer.

"Hurrah!"

Nelson Lee jumped to his feet, and held up a hand.

"Silence!" he said sharply. "I quite appreciate your desire to cheer Sir Arthur Brampton, but this matter is one that cannot be settled in a moment. I really feel, Sir Arthur, that you should have discussed this project with me in private."

The millionaire chuckled.

"Strictly speaking, that was my proper course," he admitted. "But I was half-afraid that you might turn my scheme down. And if the school knows about it from the very outset, you may be influenced to give my suggestion rather more consideration."

"I think not, Sir Arthur," said Lee quietly. "I am in full charge of the School Ship, and I am responsible for the safety of all these boys. In no circumstances can I sanction any project that might possibly result in danger."

There was a loud murmur of dissent from the school.

"I am prepared to accept your decision as final, Mr. Lee," said Sir Arthur. "And, naturally, I do not expect you to give your sanction until you have been thoroughly satisfied that all the arrangements are adequate."

"It is very sudden—very unexpected," said Nelson Lee, as he noticed the startled glances of the other masters. "There are many things to be considered."

"And I have considered them," put in the millionaire. "I do not think I have left a single stone unturned, and I have not spared a penny of expense. Indeed, I may as well tell you frankly that I have spent a small fortune on this whim of mine."

"Three cheers for Sir Arthur Brampton!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "By George! He's a regular sportsman, you chaps!"

"Rather!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors were particularly impressed.

Sir Arthur had every good reason to feel angry with some of the juniors, for they had treated him roughly, not to say disrespectfully, that day. But he took it all in good part.

Handforth went hot and cold all over as he thought of that affair of the afternoon. He had deliberately cheeked this great man, who was, even then, springing his wonderful surprise. The other juniors had actually bowled Sir Arthur over! And still he bore them no animosity.

"I have been preparing for several weeks," continued the millionaire complacently. "As soon as I definitely heard that the School Ship was coming to Adelaide, I made my preparations. I had these great motor-coaches built, according to my own specifications. It has been my little secret. For fully two weeks these vehicles have been ready, fully equipped, waiting in a special garage. My idea was to give the school a big surprise, and, I hoped, a pleasant surprise."

There was further cheering.

"I can well appreciate your excellent intentions, Sir Arthur, just as I can appreciate the school's enthusiasm," said Nelson Lee dryly. "However, as I have said, this matter must be gone into very thoroughly before I can give it my sanction."

"Oh, come off it, sir!"

"We can trust Sir Arthur, can't we?"

"Don't be a killjoy, sir!"

There were many comments, coming not only from the juniors, but from many of the seniors, too.

"I think you can rely upon me not to be a killjoy," said Nelson Lee, as he looked round. "I will go into all the details of this plan with Sir Arthur Brampton, and, if it is practicable, I shall certainly give my full consent. More than that, at the moment, I cannot say."

"Hurrah!"

"Everything's going to be all right, then!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's give Sir Arthur another cheer!"

"Hurrah!"

Everybody was wildly excited. Even the seniors so far forgot themselves as to leap to their feet, and to cheer noisily. The prospect of going on this wonderful trip, into the heart of Australia, was alluring, indeed. The School Ship was fine—it was wonderful—but a land trip, such as Sir Arthur outlined, was infinitely more promising.

Later, in the Common-rooms, and on the decks, the fellows gathered in groups, animatedly discussing the possibilities.

"You needn't worry, you chaps," said Nipper confidently, as he stood with a group of other Removites on the promenade-deck. "The gov'nor won't let us down."

"That's all very well," said Tommy Watson uneasily. "What guarantee have we got? Supposing Mr. Lee doesn't think that the arrangements are adequate? What then? The whole giddy plan will fall through!"

"All the same, Mr. Lee has done the right thing," said Travers. "He couldn't possibly

give his consent until he had examined these motor-coaches, and until he had gone into all the details. Not that I'm worrying much, dear old fellows. In my opinion, Sir Arthur wouldn't have mooted the project unless he was pretty sure that it would be O.K."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "That's my opinion, too. But, by Jove, it must be costing him a fortune to do all this."

"It may not be quite so philanthropic as you imagine," chuckled Travers.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, isn't it obvious?" asked Travers. "Sir Arthur Brampton is the great transport magnate."

"Oh!"

"He's the man who is putting 'bus services into operation all over the Australian continent," continued Travers, with a nod. "I believe he's interested in railways, too. Without wishing to belittle the magnificence of his scheme, I can't help thinking that he has also considered the publicity value of it."

"Well, we can't blame him for that," said Nipper. "Sir Arthur is a business man, and nothing can alter the fact that he has had these coaches especially built for our use."

"To begin with," nodded Travers. "But we shan't wear them out, shall we, in six or seven weeks? And, later on I dare say they will be utilised for regular services, between townships which are now more or less inaccessible. Don't forget that there are heaps of places in Australia that are not served by the railway. Sir Arthur has been going very deeply into these matters, and, although this wheeze of his seems to be purely generous to St. Frank's, it may also be a clever publicity stunt."

There was a great deal of sound common-sense in Vivian Travers' argument. It was perfectly true that Sir Arthur Brampton was a powerful transport magnate. Thus it was easier for him to build these great coaches than it would have been for a man in any other line of business. Travers, in fact, had hit the nail very accurately on the head.

Not that this really affected the school.

So far as the fellows were concerned, the project was all to their advantage. The school authorities would not be involved in a single penny of expense; the whole thing, from start to finish, would be financed by Sir Arthur. And if the arrangements were adequate and efficient, there could be little doubt that Nelson Lee would give it his sanction. For Lee was also anxious that all the boys should see as much of Australia as possible. The educational value of such an inland trip would be tremendous.

So, for the rest of that evening, the prospect of going into far Queensland—into the little-known interior—was the one topic of conversation on the School Ship. Even the Test Match itself was placed temporarily into the background.



CHAPTER 8.

Divided Interests!

ON the morrow, however, interest in the great Test Match was fully revived.

Morning lessons went on as usual, and after lunch everybody was anxious to rush off to Adelaide, in order to get into the ground in good time. Rumours had come to the School Ship, during the morning, that the Australian cricketers had been doing some big things. The game, it seemed, was now in a critical stage.

So even Sir Arthur Brampton's wonderful idea was shelved for the time being. Crowds of fellows went off to the big enclosure, eager to find out for themselves how the game was progressing.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee, in Sir Arthur's car, was speeding out towards Woodville—a suburb—where all the great motor-coaches were housed. During that morning Sir Arthur had been going into very close details, and he had impressed Nelson Lee with the completeness of his preparations.

"I don't want you to assume, Mr. Lee, that I am suggesting this trip purely out of good-nature," he said, as they drove along the sunny, picturesque roads. "Neither do I want you to believe that I am merely in quest of publicity. It is true to say that I desire a double result. I want to do the school a service, and I also want to advertise these new transport vehicles of mine. I thought that this scheme, perhaps, would be a happy way of achieving both objects."

"Yes, I quite understand," nodded Lee.

"It has been my dream, for some years, to inaugurate a regular transport system of this nature," continued Sir Arthur. "There are immense possibilities in Australia, Mr. Lee. Many townships, at present more or less insignificant, may become thriving cities if only the transport difficulties can be overcome. Building railways is a very costly proposition, and, in some cases, a prohibitive proposition."

"But you will need roads for your vehicles," said Nelson Lee.

"Roads?" replied Sir Arthur, with a laugh. "That's just where these great coaches of mine will score. A track—a mere wagon-trail—will suffice. Indeed, these vehicles have been so designed that no roads at all are necessary. They are capable of traversing the roughest country, penetrating into the wilds, into the trackless wastes. In this way, townships can be connected up directly; and in the course of time the very services of these coaches will make their own roads, without the cost of a single penny. Each track will be beaten down, and will, in time, become a recognised route."

"It is certainly an ambitious scheme."

"But you must not imagine that I am desirous of using your boys for experimental purposes," said Sir Arthur, smiling. "Two of these great coaches of mine have been in service for nearly a year—not in public service, but experimentally. They have been penetrating into the far corners of the bush, and not in one single instance have they failed. They have always 'got there,' Mr. Lee. This is one reason why I am so confident that this project will be completely successful."

He leaned forward, his eyes gleaming.

"We all know of the great caravans of the desert—hundreds of camels, perhaps, moving slowly and certainly across the great desert spaces," he continued. "Well, these great coaches of mine, with their tenders, will be like a modern caravan. They will travel in unison—a compact, self-contained party. Water, food, fuel—everything will be carried in abundance, so that there can be no possibility of getting stranded. Moreover, I have made the most complete arrangements in various townships, so that adequate supplies of petrol and oil will be available. But I will go into these details with you later—after you have seen the coaches."

They soon arrived at Woodville, and Nelson Lee was deeply impressed when he was "introduced" to the enormous vehicles that Sir Arthur Brampton's genius had evolved.

In general appearance they were very similar to the splendidly-equipped saloon coaches that one sees in the rural districts of England; but they were at least four times the size of any ordinary coach.

Their size, indeed, was staggering. They were tremendously long, enormously wide, and they were double-deckers. Their engines were of great power, and instead of the ordinary wheels they were provided with caterpillar tractors.

"No matter how rough the ground, these vehicles will travel smoothly and evenly," said Sir Arthur, with enthusiasm. "Hills, of course, do not matter in the least; these coaches will be able to go anywhere."

Nelson Lee was more impressed than ever after he had seen the interiors.

Some of the coaches were fitted up as lounges, with luxurious seats and soft carpets underfoot. One or two of them were like caravans, containing miniature suites of apartments—these being especially equipped for the masters. There were wash-rooms, even bath-rooms, private compartments that could be used as studies, and similar wonders. And in each coach the upper deck was entirely given over to sleeping accommodation. They were very similar to dormitories, with neatly-arranged bunks.

Other coaches were actually equipped with desks, in rows, for Sir Arthur had not stinted expenses. These coaches could be used as class-rooms.

"You evidently took it for granted, Sir Arthur, that I should be agreeable to the trip," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Was I not justified?" retorted Sir Arthur, as he indicated the great fleet of coaches.

"I rather think you were," said Nelson Lee, nodding.

"To all intents and purposes, we shall have just as much comfort, just as much service, as though we were in a first-class hotel," said the millionaire. "Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to describe this fleet as a mobile hotel. There is ample accommodation for everybody, and I think you will agree that the margin of safety is very large."

"Safety, yes," agreed Nelson Lee. "We need not even consider the point, Sir Arthur. Even if we were contemplating the penetration of the wildest lands, this fleet would give us confidence. But the interior of Australia, although far-flung, is nevertheless settled and peaceful. I could not imagine a more delightful way of getting acquainted with rural Australia than this. No fatiguing train journeys, no wearisome marches—comfort all along the line. Perhaps there is rather too much comfort," he added dryly. "It isn't wise to give boys too much luxury."

"Oh, well, I dare say there will be plenty of methods by which the school can be given some healthy, strenuous exercise," chuckled Sir Arthur. "I propose, of course, to start as quickly as possible, and to so arrange the trip that Melbourne will be reached by the eighth of March. I've no doubt that the school will be interested in the final Test Match."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"The school will be very disappointed if it does not get acquainted with Melbourne on or before the eighth of next month," he replied. "Cricket is taken very seriously by most of the fellows, and even this projected trip of yours has not caused them to lose their interest in the present match."

The long and the short of it was that after Nelson Lee had been into figures and details with Sir Arthur Brampton, the whole thing was fixed and settled.

In due course the school would transfer to the motor-coach fleet—the vehicles coming on to the dockside at Port Adelaide so that the transfer should be simple. The great "caravan" would then move northwards, and make a semi-circular trip, finally ending at Melbourne—where the School Ship, in the meantime, would dock.

Thanks to the enterprise and generosity of this Australian millionaire, the St. Frank's fellows were apparently in for a rare treat!

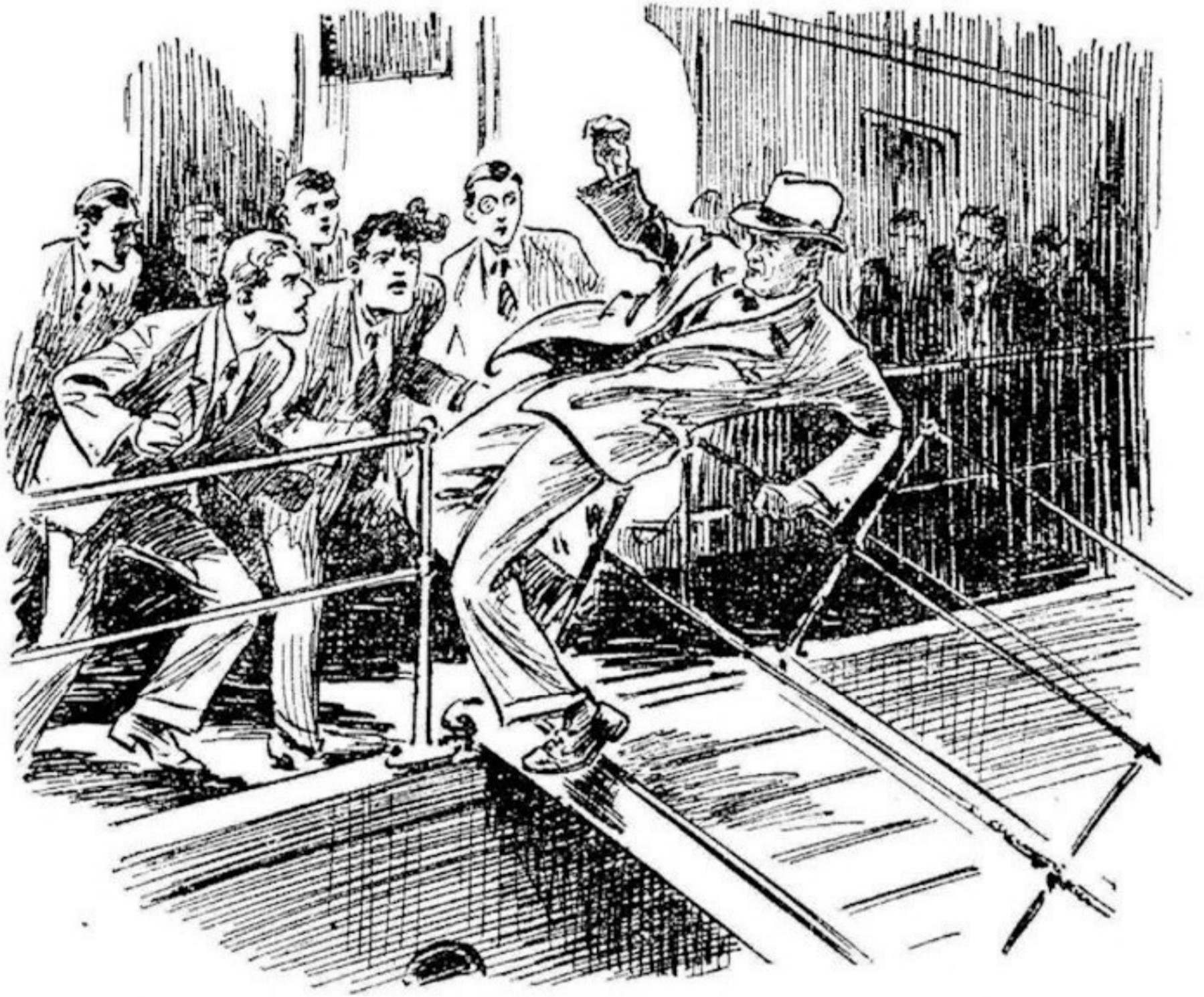


CHAPTER 9.

Off into the Bush!

"Only sainted aunt!"
"Great Scott!"
"Look, you fellows!"

A couple of days had elapsed, and the decks of the St. Francis



Sir Arthur stepped back hastily as the juniors pressed round him excitedly—and next moment he found himself falling through the gap between the ship's side and the gangway!

were crowded with excited, shouting juniors and seniors. The Test Match was over, but such was the excitement over the new project that even cricket had temporarily dropped into the background. In any case, the Fourth Test was now a thing of the past—and the immediate future held nothing for the St. Frank's crowd but the great trip into the heart of the Australian continent.

It had been known, for a couple of days now, that the journey was a certainty. But nobody had yet seen the great coaches that were to convey them into the wilds. Now, however, they had appeared and were moving slowly along the quay to where the School Ship was docked. The fellows had been expecting something wonderful; but they were amazed and startled by the actuality.

The great coaches, gleaming and glittering in the sunshine, rumbled alongside. And as each coach was capable of carrying between thirty and forty passengers in extreme comfort, and as there were twelve coaches, it will easily be understood that there was accommodation for all—and to spare.

Under ordinary transport conditions, and run on a commercial basis, each of these coaches would regularly carry from fifty to sixty passengers on the shorter journeys—and

only a few less on those longer journeys which necessitated feeding and sleeping for several days on end.

In addition to the passenger vehicles there was a number of tenders. These were constructed in exactly the same way as the coaches—but they were designed expressly for the carrying of petrol, water, oil, foodstuffs, and baggage generally.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth, as he gazed at the great fleet. "I thought we were going to see something pretty good, but this beats the band! By George! What a sight!"

"Look at those chaps in white coats!" said Church excitedly. "Attendants, I expect."

"Rather!" said Nipper, nodding. "I've been having a chat with the guv'nor, and he knows all the details. There'll be a tremendous crowd of us—including all the drivers, cooks, waiters, mechanics, and the other members of the staff. There's a special coach for all those men, by the way."

"It must have cost a fortune!" said Fullwood wonderingly.

"Sir Arthur's company will get it all back," said Nipper. "When these coaches are put into regular service, they'll be a huge success. But we've got the privilege of using

them first. It's jolly sporting of Sir Arthur to think of the wheeze!"

"And sporting of Mr. Lee, too, to agree to it," said Handforth promptly. "That's the best of having Mr. Lee as a Head; he doesn't allow himself to be bound round with red tape."

There was a great deal of bustle and activity during the remainder of that day—but no disorder. Nelson Lee, in full charge of the operations, saw that the transfer from the ship to the coaches was carried out effectively and efficiently.

All the Remove fellows were accommodated in one coach—and so with the other Forms. Each Form had a coach to itself. Then there was one for the masters, and others which would be used as class-rooms.

"A jolly good idea!" said Handforth, when he heard of the arrangements. "It'll be jolly good for us Removites to be alone. No prefects messing about, or no masters bossing it over us—"

"Don't you be too optimistic, my lad!" said Biggleswade, of the Sixth. "You juniors are going to have a prefect in charge of you—one for each Form."

"Oh!"

"And I've been unlucky enough to get shoved into your coach," said Biggleswade. "And if there's any larking about, you'll have to answer to me!"

The Removites were not particularly distressed at this piece of news. Biggleswade was the most easy-going prefect in the Sixth, and the juniors were not likely to have much trouble with him.

"What about grub?" asked Hubbard. "How are we going to feed while we're travelling?"

"They've got special arrangements for that," said Nipper. "In any case, I expect we shall come to a halt for meals, and two of the coaches are equipped as dining-saloons. They can be converted about in all sorts of ways, just to suit the needs of the moment."

"One of those tenders is a kind of travelling kitchen," said Handforth, nodding. "I've never seen anything so splendidly fitted up."

"I suppose we shall make a start in the morning?" asked Church.

"I believe we're starting within the hour," said Nipper. "No need to wait until tomorrow. Time's precious; we want to see as much of Australia as possible before the eighth of March."

Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts, just at this time, were standing near the front of the Remove coach. The great engine was revealed, for one of the side flaps had been removed. A mechanic was making some adjustments, and Travers and Potts were hugely interested in that powerful motor.

"They're of the ordinary, conventional pattern, you see," remarked Travers, who was something of an expert. "But, by Samson, I've never seen anything so big as this before!"

The engine was certainly stupendous; a vast, twelve-cylinder unit, of large bore and stroke.

"Two carburettors, you see," said Travers, as he leaned over and made a closer examination. "And just look at the electrical equipment."

"I'd like to see one of those on our roads at home," said Jimmy Potts.

"That's just it; they're not built for ordinary roads," replied Travers. "They're made expressly to go—"

"Now then, keep your noses out of that!"

The voice was sharp and impatient, and Travers and Potts turned in surprise. The mechanic had gone for a moment, and the two juniors happened to be alone, looking at the great engine. They now found a tall, thin man near them. He was clean-shaven, sallow, and his hair was black. Somehow, Travers and Potts took an instant dislike to him.

"What's the matter?" asked Travers. "We're not doing any harm!"

"I'll see that you do no harm!" retorted the man. "Get away from this engine. You boys are not allowed to touch anything."

"No?" said Travers easily. "We're not quite fools, you know. I happen to know a little bit about internal-combustion engines—"

"I don't care what you know!" interrupted the other. "All these engines are in my care, and I'm not going to have you schoolboys tinkering and interfering and meddling."

"Well, you needn't be so unpleasant about it," said Potts hotly. "We weren't doing any harm."

Both he and Travers glared at the fellow. They did not like his tone in the least. They could tell that he was a foreigner, for, although he spoke excellent English, there was, nevertheless, a slight trace of accent. They took him to be a Greek, or perhaps an Italian. They were wrong, for, actually, this man was a half-breed, with Sicilian blood in his veins.

Travers and Potts strolled away, and they ran into Fenton, of the Sixth.

"You juniors getting into trouble?" asked the captain of St. Frank's. "Mr. Verano wasn't looking particularly pleasant."

"Verano?" said Travers. "So that's his name, is it?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"That name's too good for him," said Travers. "The man's a beast!"

"You'd better not talk like that," said Fenton sharply. "Mr. Verano is the chief mechanic of the whole outfit. He's in entire charge of all the engines, and, in his own way, he's a big pot."

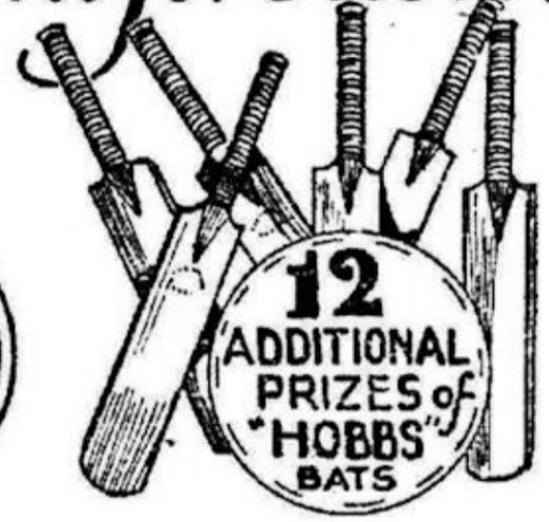
"Well, I don't like him," said Travers. "Big pot or not, he's a thoroughly unpleasant blighter!"

Fenton frowned.

"I am sorry you should make an enemy so quickly, Travers," he said. "Mr. Verano has a very high reputation; not many years

(Continued on page 20.)

You Can Win a "James" Bike for Easter



Who are the Twelve Most Popular Test Cricketers!

YOUR SIMPLE TASK

Here is a topping voting contest, and one in which you can all take part! As you know, we are giving away during the next few weeks, portraits of the sixteen members of the English Test Team in Australia, and we thought it would be interesting to find out our readers' opinions of the popularity of the various members of the side.

So, in the coupon here are given the names of the sixteen cricketers in alphabetical order. There are only two things for you to do. Firstly, write IN INK in the space at the top of the coupon (against the "X") the name of the cricketer who is your own personal favourite. Thus if SUTCLIFFE is your choice, write his name against the "X."

Next, number off IN INK in the other section of the coupon, twelve of the sixteen men in what you think will be their order of popularity as voted by our readers generally. For instance if you think that HENDREN is the most generally popular, put a figure "1" against his name; if WHITE is to come second, put "2" against his name, and so on. When you have filled in the twelve figures, put dashes in the remaining spaces, so that the coupon is completely filled up.

Then sign the coupon, cut it out and KEEP IT. A further coupon will appear in each of our next four issues—so, you see, you can have FIVE shots at winning the grand "bike"!—and when the final coupon is given we shall tell you where to send your efforts.

The First Prize of a "James" Cycle, listed at £7 15s. 0d. (as illustrated) will be awarded to the reader who correctly or most nearly correctly forecasts the popular vote, which vote will be determined from the "personal preference" votes of competitors generally and Twelve Hobbs' Bats will follow in order of merit.

The Editor reserves the right to divide the value of the prizes if necessary in the event of ties, and his decision on all matters concerning this contest is final and binding. No alterations must be made on coupons, which must be filled up in ink.

Employees of the proprietors of NELSON LEE may not compete.

"Nelson Lee" CRICKETERS

| | |
|--|--|
| MY PERSONAL FAVOURITE IS: X | |
| AMES | |
| CHAPMAN | |
| DUCKWORTH | |
| FREEMAN | |
| GEARY | |
| HAMMOND | |
| HENDREN | |
| HOBBS | |
| JARDINE | |
| LARWOOD | |
| LEYLAND | |
| MEAD | |
| SUTCLIFFE | |
| TATE | |
| TYLDESLEY | |
| WHITE | |
| SIGNED | |
| ADDRESS | |
| | |

ANOTHER COUPON WILL APPEAR NEXT WEEK!

ST FRANK'S AT THE TEST MATCH!



(Continued from page 18.)

ago he was one of the famous crack racing drivers on all the big European tracks, and what he doesn't know about petrol motors isn't worth learning. I believe that Sir Arthur Brampton is paying him an extraordinarily high salary for his services."

"It's a pity the fellow can't use a little common courtesy to go with his experience," said Travers tartly. "Still, I don't suppose we shall come in contact with him much—and that's one consolation."

And in this he was right. There was very little chance of the juniors having much to do with Mr. Pierre Verano, the chief mechanic.



CHAPTER 10.

In the Wilds!

TWO days later, civilisation, as the St. Frank's fellows knew it, had been left behind.

The motor-coach fleet, travelling smoothly and swiftly, had got well beyond the limit of the big townships and settlements. A route was being followed which would take the school across a portion of New South Wales, and then into Queensland.

Everybody had been amazed at the extraordinary rapidity of the coaches. They were capable of travelling at a very fast rate, and, when the country was level and favourable, the journey was continued right through the night. For all of these coaches were equipped with gigantic searchlights, and, on the first night, the whole school had been impressed and fascinated by the great spectacle of the fleet moving along the open scrub.

At one place there had been a halt, so that the water-tanks could be replenished; for, in this particular part of the country, there were many bores, and all through the open scrub ran the narrow silver ribbons of the bore-drains, each about three feet wide and perhaps ten inches deep.

These drains, from the Artesian bores, carried streams of water here, there and everywhere. Without them, this part of the country would be a barren waste in times of drought.

The surprising thing, to most of the fellows, was that the water in the particular bore-drain that was being used for replenishing the tanks was scalding hot.

"But what causes it?" asked Handforth, in surprise. "Surely the heat of the sun can't do it?"

"Of course not," said Sir Arthur, who happened to be near. "The water rises from this particular bore at almost boiling point. The Artesian water is very varied in this country. It differs in quality, and also in degrees of temperature, according to the district. I dare say you've noticed, too, the peculiar form of coarse grass which grows along the borders of these bore-drains. It is found nowhere else in Australia, and the strange thing is that nothing of the kind in the district was seen before the bore-drains were opened."

"It's something like the grass that is found along the banks of the Nile," remarked Nipper.

Everybody was enjoying himself immensely. There was something new to see every hour of the day. Just at present, the fleet was passing along the open plains; the country stretched for miles on either hand, and in the distance, perhaps, there would be a belt of tall trees. No doubt there was a watercourse just there. In other places there would be patches of scrub.

That evening, just before sundown, many kangaroos were seen, for kangaroos generally feed between dawn and sunrise, or at sunset. But they are rather difficult to see in the twilight hours, and only their movements betray them.

"Sometimes," said Sir Arthur, "only the twitchings of a kangaroo's ears will betray its presence. They are elusive creatures."

There was a halt that evening, for there was some rough country ahead, and it was considered that it would be unwise to travel through the night.

So the fleet of motor-coaches formed themselves into a kind of ring, and the big campfires were lit. Overhead, the sky was wonderfully clear, with a promise of a starlit night.

"I say, why not capture a kangaroo?" suggested Handforth eagerly, as he and a number of other Removites wandered away from the camp. "We could make a pet of it."

"You'd better steer clear of kangaroos, Ted, old man," said his minor. "They're not such amiable animals as you seem to think."

Handforth stared at Willy in disdain.

"Kangaroos are tame enough!" he retorted. "They're as gentle as kittens!"

"Don't you believe it," said Willy. "Kangaroos are pretty dangerous beasts when they're cornered. I've been having a talk with some of these men about kangaroos and dingoes—"

"About which?" said Handforth, staring.

"Dingoes—a sort of native dog. In the big sheep-breeding districts, they'll give quids and quids for every dingo killed. They're a pretty hard job to trap, too, because they're more cunning than a fox."

Church and McClure kept a sharp watch on their leader, in case he should take it

into his head to roam off on his own, on the chance of capturing a kangaroo. Handforth seemed to imagine that all kangaroos—even in their wild state—were just as harmless as those creatures which one sometimes sees in a side-show, wearing boxing-gloves.

But Handforth had evidently given up the project, for he was squatting down under a tree, contemplating the view. Most of the trees just here were of the eucalyptus family—coolibans, ironbarks, bloodwood. Everywhere the gum trees were to be seen.

"It's raining!" said Handforth suddenly.

"Rot!" said Church, glancing upwards.

"The stars are all coming out."

"Then what's that queer rustling noise?"

Both Church and McClure heard it, too, and a number of other fellows, who had strolled up, were aware of the curious sound. They stood looking up into the tree.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Fullwood. "It's this tree, you chaps! There's no wind, and no rain, and yet it's rustling. It's—it's sort of alive!"

"I've never heard such eerie noises," said Church, amazed. "We'd better get out into the open."

Jerry Dodd, the Australian junior, chuckled amusedly as he came up.

"No need to worry," he said. "It's a wilga tree."

"Which?"

"In some districts, there are superstitions about this particular species of tree," explained Jerry. "You'll hear these queer rustlings going on, and some people say that you'll never get any rest under a wilga tree. It's impossible to sleep, owing to the weird noises."

The juniors stood there, watching and listening. Without doubt, there was something very strange and unusual about that tree. Not that there was any need for alarm. The wilga tree was not capable of exerting any evil influence over those who stood beneath it. All the same, the experience was rather unusual.

Bells were sounding, and the juniors reluctantly made their way to the great circle of stationary motor-coaches. Although discipline was now necessarily lax, there were certain rules and regulations that had to be strictly adhered to.

Prep. every evening was undertaken as usual, just in the same way as at St. Frank's. Morning lessons were always held, and unless the fellows attended carefully to work they received punishment. As Nelson Lee had repeatedly pointed out to the school, this was not holiday time. Work had to go on, and if there were any signs of general slackness, then orders would be given for the outfit to make straight for Melbourne by the shortest possible route, so that the whole school could be transferred back to the ship.

Generally, therefore, there was no slacking. All the fellows were so interested in the trip that they did their utmost to make it a success. And it was certainly novel, for while the work of the school was carried on,

the school itself was travelling further and further into the heart of the Australian wilds!



CHAPTER 11.

Trouble with Mr. Verano!

TOWARDS noon of the next day the heat became tremendous, for by now the outfit had reached a tropical zone. Nobody quite knew whether Queensland had yet been reached, but it was the general impression that the border of New South Wales had been crossed. Here and there a small township would be encountered, or perhaps a distant station. But since noon of the previous day no habitations of any kind had been seen.

And now the country was inclined to be a bit rough. There were many hills, sharp and steep, and they had to be negotiated with great care.

Going down one of these hills, where the surface was treacherous and loose, the Remove coach got partially out of hand, and the driver had an anxious minute. The juniors themselves knew nothing about it until later, when Pierre Verano came on the scene, and made an inspection. The coach had been brought to a halt, whilst the rest of the outfit continued on its way.

"You are a fool!" said Verano, after he had made his inspection. "The fault was yours—not of the brakes. Everything is in perfect order."

"All right. You seem to know best," said the driver, who was a very pleasant, genial sort of man, and a native of Adelaide. "But I know well enough that these brakes need adjusting. I was going to put them right myself, but you wouldn't let me."

Verano nodded.

"I am in charge of these coaches," he replied. "There is nothing the matter with these brakes."

"I told you only yesterday——"

"You tried to tell me my own business, and that is a thing I will not suffer!" snapped the chief mechanic. "Come! I will go into the driving-box with you. Let us see what you mean."

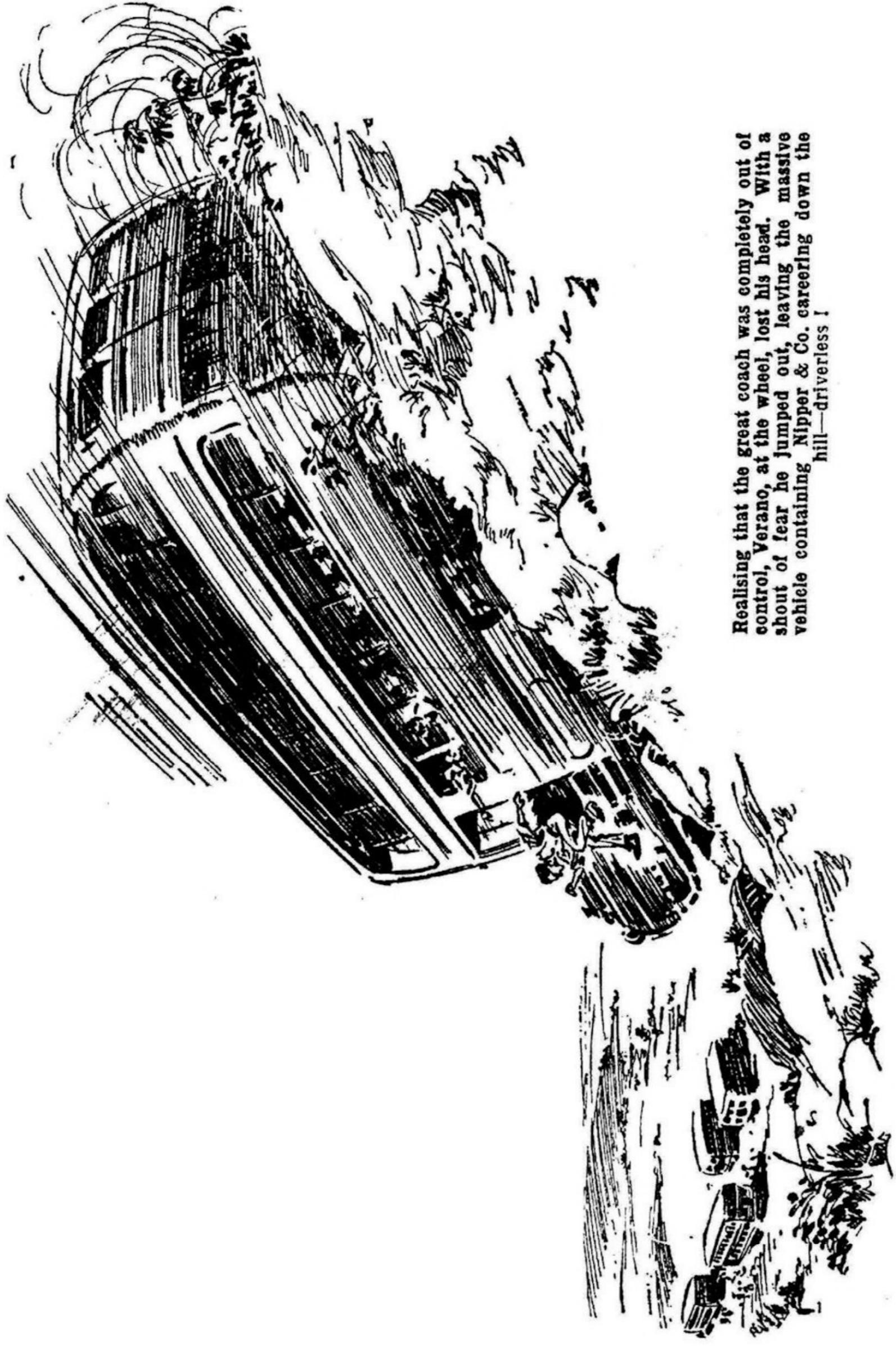
The driver breathed hard.

"You don't believe me, eh?" he said angrily. "I'm not a fool! I've been driving cars for fifteen years——"

"Enough!" shouted Verano, with a sudden show of passion. "I am not in the habit of arguing with subordinates!"

"Too right, you're not!" retorted the driver. "I'm not going to argue with you, anyhow. Five minutes at that wheel will be enough to open your eyes."

"You will travel in the coach," said Verano coldly. "I will take sole charge of the wheel. I do not want you with me."



Realising that the great coach was completely out of control, Verano, at the wheel, lost his head. With a shout of fear he jumped out, leaving the massive vehicle containing Nipper & Co. careering down the hill—driverless!

"Pouf! Do you think I do not know my own business? It was I who inspected these vehicles, and my inspections are not faulty."

He climbed into the big, roomy driving-box—a sort of forward compartment, and separated from the rest of the enormous vehicle.

"There'll be trouble with that dago before this trip is over," said the driver darkly. "The other drivers are fed up with him, too. Thinks he knows everything. Thinks we're all a set of duffers. He's a darned sight too clever!"

"Are the brakes really defective?" asked Nipper.

"Not defective—only badly adjusted," replied the driver. "There's no danger; but, at the same time, it's just as well that the brakes on a heavy 'bus like this should be in proper order."

The great coach gave a lurch as Verano started it off. He was evidently a man of very quick temper, and now he was inclined to be rash. Perhaps he wanted to show the driver that he—Verano—was a very clever man. At all events, he had no justification whatever for acting as he did.

For as soon as the coach had climbed to the top of a steep rise, he sent it plunging down the opposite declivity. The surface was loose, rough, and treacherous. Verano's idea, no doubt, was to triumph over the driver—to show him that the brakes were in tip-top condition, and that nothing was wrong except the driver's ability.

However, Pierre Verano made a very serious blunder.

By allowing his temper to get the better of him, he very nearly caused a terrible disaster.

It was utterly reckless to allow the coach to plunge down that hillside, for the track was unfamiliar, and there was no telling what lay ahead. The chief mechanic evidently took it for granted that there were no pitfalls farther on; but the way was hidden by a great mass of rock, which jutted up just ahead.

In the coach the Removites were feeling a trifle uneasy. Hitherto, the great vehicles had taken such descents very easily, very gingerly. All the coaches in front had done this. But Verano was out to show how clever he was—to prove that this great mass of metal was completely under his supreme control.

And over-confidence is fatal.

Just before reaching that jutting mass of rock, Verano applied the brakes, and he was genuinely startled when he found that they failed to answer to their full effect. He had been so certain that the driver was at fault, and that his own earlier inspection had been perfect, that he left the application of the brakes until too late. Cold beads of perspiration broke out upon his brow. He

tried the brakes again, and again they did not function properly.

The great coach slithered sideways, almost crab-fashion, nearly out of control. And just round that mass of rocks Verano saw, to his horror, that the descent became more steep, more rugged.

Taken slowly, this great caterpillar vehicle could have negotiated the hillside in perfect safety. But with such a speed on her, and with the brakes out of adjustment, the consequences were serious.

For Verano now found that the driver had been perfectly justified in his complaint!

The great coach refused to answer. She plunged on, reeling from side to side, swaying, pitching, and threatening to overturn at any moment!

And then, to make matters a thousand times worse, the half-breed lost his head.

With a shout of fear, knowing that the great coach was out of control, he jumped madly for safety, making a frantic leap out of the driving-box, and rolling over and over on the loose surface of the hillside.

In the coach, the boys caught a brief glimpse of him as he picked himself up. And they knew the worst.

"Great Scott!" shouted Nipper. "It's Verano! He's jumped out!"

"Then Heaven help us!" panted the driver. "She's out of control. She's running without anybody at the wheel!"



The fool—the cur!"

"He's a coward!" shouted Handforth. "Oh, my hat! What's going to happen now?"

Before the driver could take any action, Nipper dashed to the front of the coach. He was nearest, and the driver, at the moment, was hemmed in by other juniors. Otherwise, perhaps, he would have acted as Nipper now acted.

The Remove skipper, realising in a flash that a dreadful accident would happen unless something drastic was done, swung himself out of the open doorway, clawed at the coachwork, and just managed to grab at the entrance of the driving-box. In order to accomplish this feat, he took a terrible risk, but it was all over in a flash.

Nipper was in the driving-box, and he clutched at the wheel, doing his utmost to steady the pitching, careering monster!

Shouts of alarm were sounding from further down the hillside—where the other

was impossible to pull her up—to stay her headlong progress. But by clinging to the wheel, he could, at least, partially steer her.

It was a magnificent effort.

Using all his strength, Nipper forced the wheel round, and by a superhuman effort he managed to bring his charge out of a deadly broadside skid. In that position the coach would have crashed with fearful force into three of the other vehicles.

With remarkable skill, Nipper corrected that skid, and the next moment the Remove coach plunged on, shaving the others by a mere inch or so. There was just one gap through which Nipper could steer—and, as he afterwards admitted, it was more luck than judgment that guided him through.

But he got through—and that was all that really mattered.

It was certainly a wonderful performance on Nipper's part. Many a man would have been unequal to the occasion; many a man's nerve would have failed at the critical moment.

But then Nipper had always been renowned for his resourcefulness and pluck in the time of danger, and these had stood him in good stead now!



CHAPTER 12.

Knocking the Conceit Out of Him!

PHEW! That was pretty close!"

Nipper fanned himself, breathing hard.

At last the cumber-

some vehicle had come to a standstill. The hillside was not so steep here, and the brakes were effective. And not an inch of paintwork had been harmed—the great coach had not suffered a single scratch.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Bravo!"

The Removites, crowding out, their hearts thumping heavily, gathered round the front of the coach, cheering frantically. They knew well enough that Nipper had saved them. But for the Remove skipper's swift presence of mind, but for his valiant effort, there would have been a terrible catastrophe.

"Cheese it!" said Nipper, as he jumped down. "I was the only fellow who could do the thing—I was nearest to the driving-box. Don't make a fuss over nothing."

"Young feller, you're bosker!" declared the coach driver, his rugged face flushed, and his eyes sparkling. "Gosh! You saved most of us from being killed—or my name's Mud!"

By this time Sir Arthur Brampton and Nelson Lee, and practically the whole school, had come running down the hillside, from the other coaches. They were all collecting

ising that the great coach was completely out of control, Verano, at the wheel, lost his head. With a bit of fear he jumped out, leaving the massive machine containing Nipper & Co. careering down the hill—driverless!

coaches had come to a halt. For it could be seen that the Remove coach was hurtling down on the top of them—and there was no time to get them shifted out of the way. Indeed, left alone, this charging mass of metal would have created tremendous havoc amongst the other coaches.

Nipper, wrenching fiercely at the wheel, and remaining as cool as ice, just managed to prevent the coach from overturning. It

"I thank you sir," said the other. "In future you will not complain of my conduct. I admit my fault, and I am regretful. I crave your pardon, sir."

He turned on his heel and walked away. The incident was over. But from that minute onwards Pierre Verano was avoided by one and all.



CHAPTER 13.

Welcome, Strangers!

THAT evening, the outfit arrived at a lonely Queensland cattle station. The homestead was one of the finest that they had yet encountered—a really

beautiful house, set in the midst of picturesque scenery. Some of the homesteads were mere shacks, but this one, owned by a wealthy man, was almost palatial.

Pierre Verano had been very subdued during the remainder of that day—particularly after a private interview with Sir Arthur. The quarrel was patched up, but everybody believed that the millionaire would get rid of the chief mechanic at the earliest possible moment.

In a way it was unfortunate, for he was a very capable mechanic—a man of world-wide experience. But for his temper and conceit, he would have been an invaluable asset to the expedition.

Everybody praised Nipper for his valiant part in that affair, and Nipper was quite embarrassed by the congratulations that were showered upon him. However, there was a welcome diversion when the great train of coaches swept towards the homestead, which stood out in the clear evening air, white and picturesque and friendly.

Two or three horsemen came riding up while the outfit was still a mile or two away from the great house.

"How did the Test Match go, boys?" shouted one of the horsemen. "Good old Australia!"

"Good old England!" roared the juniors.

The juniors were leaning out of the windows of their great coach, waving and shouting and laughing. Jerry Dodd was prominent, and his eyes were gleaming with a strange excitement.

"Hallo, Bill!" he yelled, as another horseman rode up—a grizzled, sunburned old veteran.

"Gosh! It's Jerry!" roared the old man, pulling his hat from his head and sending it high into the air. "I knew you wuz in this outfit, Jerry, old kid! It's good to see you again. But, darn it, you've growed!"

"How's mother and dad?" yelled Jerry. "How are the girls?"

"Bonzer!" replied Bill, grinning.

Handforth plucked at Jerry Dodd's sleeve. "What do you mean—'mother and dad and the girls?'" he asked, staring.

"Didn't you know?" asked Jerry Dodd, coolly. "This is my father's cattle station."

"What!"

It was a general yell from the other Removites.

"Of course it is!" grinned Jerry. "Sir Arthur told me that we were calling here"

"But I thought that your people lived in New South Wales?" asked Nipper.

"So they did; but a couple of years ago my father shifted to this station because it's bigger," replied Jerry. "Of course, our home is really in New South Wales, and the old homestead is there, just the same. But, at the moment, all my people are here, and I'm jolly glad of it."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "That's fine! We didn't know that we were going to meet your folks, Jerry!"

The Australian

juniors' eyes were gleaming.

"And you can bet they'll give us a royal welcome," he said happily. "I've been looking forward to this day ever since we started."

"You secretive bounder!" said Nipper. "You didn't tell us a word about it!"

"I kept it as a little surprise," chuckled Jerry.

A surprise it was, too; not a little one, but a big one. Mr. Jerrold Walter Dodd proved to be a big, smiling, good-natured gentleman, and Mrs. Dodd was a motherly soul.

There were lots of other Dodds, too.

In fact, the St. Frank's fellows were quite bewildered as they were introduced. For they proved to be all girls. There were seven of them, altogether—Jerry's sisters.

Alice, the eldest, was about twenty, and she was a dark, slim, capable-looking girl. And Cynthia, just a year younger, curly-haired and roguish-eyed, and Elsie and Grace and Mary and Joan, down to little Pam, aged six.

Alice and Grace were the two prettiest—Grace, a lively, laughing girl of about six-

COLLECT THEM ALL!

You have got souvenirs of Chapman, Hobbs, Sutcliffe and Larwood with this issue, so you mustn't miss the others which are coming along. Look out for badges of Tate, Hendren and Duckworth

NEXT WEEK!

teen, with masses of fair hair, being the prettiest of all.

"You boulder, Jerry!" said Nipper, after the introductions were over. "Why didn't you tell us that you had all these ripping sisters?"

The Australian Removeite grinned.

"Oh they're only sisters!" he replied. "I hardly thought it worth while!"

"We've heard him mention one or two," remarked Harry Gresham, "but we never knew that he had seven!"

"As a matter of fact, I hardly liked mentioning it," said Jerry. "I mean, seven of them—"

It was a red-letter day for Jerry, for he had hardly expected to have this treat. He had not hoped that he would be able to visit his people while on this trip. The other fellows, too, were equally excited.

Naturally, the Dodd girls were excited and animated. Never before had there been so many visitors at the station. It was very seldom, indeed, that visitors of any kind came. For this was an isolated homestead, many miles from any township.

At intervals, of course, Jerry's sisters went into Brisbane or perhaps Sydney. All the same, it was distinctly a great occasion for any of them to have such an influx of visitors at the homestead.

And Mr. Dodd, in true Australian fashion, was the very embodiment of hospitality. He

had gone to very great lengths in order to prepare things for his guests.

Since the house was not large enough to accommodate the crowds, it was necessary for the St. Frank's boys to sleep in their coaches, as usual. But as for feeding—well, Mr. Dodd insisted upon doing the honours as host. A wonderful alfresco meal had been prepared in the semi-tropical garden, amid the shady trees and palms.

And, after the sun had gone down, thousands of coloured electric lights gleamed out—there was a big electrical plant attached to the station, for it was one of the most up-to-date in the whole of Queensland—and there was dancing on the smooth lawns. The Remove fellows, in particular, felt more at home than they had felt ever since they had arrived in Australia.

For they were tasting of the true delights of the native hospitality, and Jerry Dodd, being one of their own Form-fellows, made them feel closer, too. Their host was not a stranger—he was Jerry's father.

And there were Jerry's sisters, too, to add to the delights of the evening with their merry laughter, their gay dancing and their whole-hearted enjoyment in life.

It may have been true that the St. Frank's fellows were continuing their schoolwork; but they were inclined to regard this whole trip as a glorious holiday.



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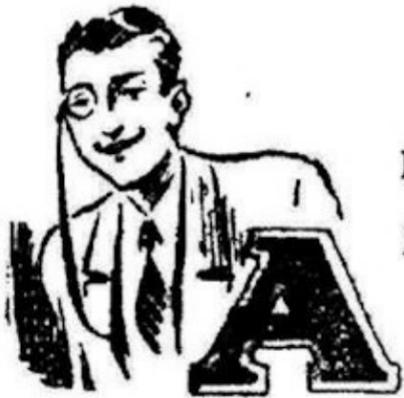
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CHAPTER 14.

Not at all Surprising!

ARCHIE GLEN-
THORNE, with a
dreamy, happy look
in his eyes, stood
at the edge of the

great lawn in a quiet, secluded spot. And he had so far forgotten himself as to stand with his hands thrust deeply into his trousers-pockets.

"What-ho!" he murmured blithely. "I mean to say, absolutely!"

"Talking to me, brother?" said Browne, of the Fifth, as he happened to be passing.

"Eh? Talking to you?" said Archie, with a start. "Oh, I see what you mean! Was I talking to you? Absolutely not, old wombat!"

His gaze strayed across the lawn, and his eyes sparkled afresh as he beheld two of the dancers. It was very charming there, in that calm, warm air, with the glowing fairy-lights and the general air of gaiety. The fellows had expected to have a good time at the Dodd homestead, but they had never dreamed of anything so wonderful as this.

"Good gad!" murmured Archie. "What priceless grace, what absolute charm! I mean to say, she's absolutely a ripper!"

"Seldom," said Browne firmly, "have I met such a charming girl. Her eyes, Brother Archibald, without the slightest exaggeration, are as blue as the sapphires. Indeed, to compare them with the sapphires is but an insult. In this whole world there are no sapphires with such lustre, such sparkle, such——"

"Sapphires?" repeated Archie, with a start. "You priceless chump! You elongated lamp-post! You frightful fright! Her eyes are as violet as—as thigummies, and as sparkling as——"

"Violet!" interrupted Handforth, joining them. "What rot! Her eyes aren't violet! They're brown!"

"Without wishing directly to contradict you, Brother Handy, I would like to point out that brown sapphires are unknown," said the skipper of the Fifth. "I have gazed into these orbs. I am one who knows. I have seen into their limpid, crystal depths. And her name, brothers! Did you ever hear such a wonderful, musical, alluring name? Cynthia!"

Handforth started, and Archie jumped.

"Good gad!" said Archie. "Absolutely not! Her name is Elsie, dear old fathead!"

"You mean Grace!" said Handforth coldly.

Browne chuckled.

"Apparently, brothers, there is to be no three-cornered duel this evening," he said. "We are at cross-purposes. I am extolling the charms of the fair Cynthia——"

"Blow Cynthia!" said Handforth bluntly. "Now, if you talk about Grace——"

"A fair enough damsel, old chappie, but when you think of Elsie, you think of bliss!" said Archie gallantly. "Absolutely! What-ho! The good old fox-trot has finished. Kindly excuse me, laddies, while I stagger into the middle distance and claim Elsie for the next round trip."

"And I," said Browne, "must lose no time in claiming Sister Cynthia, for I see that Brothers Fenton and Wilson are hovering perilously close to the maiden."

Handforth was about to dash off when Church and McClure seized him.

"No need to hurry, old man," said Church. "By Jingo! Aren't we having a ripping time?"

"Let me go!" said Handforth thickly.

"We've hardly had a word with you all the evening!" said Church, in a complaining voice. "You've been hovering round Jerry's sisters like a wasp round a lot of peaches!"

"Are you calling me a wasp?" demanded Handforth, with a start.

"Not exactly——"

"Because, if you are, I'll jolly well sting!" said Edward Oswald. "You—you silly cuckoos! Look what you've done now!"

"What have we done?" asked McClure.

"The next dance has started!" roared Handforth.

"We didn't do that," said Church. "It started without us!"

"You—you lopsided dummy!" snorted Handforth. "Grace has been collared by Nipper! He's dancing with her! And I was going to have this fox-trot!"

"Grace?" said Mae. "Oh, you mean one of Jerry's sisters? Isn't she the one with fuzzy hair?"

Handforth looked at him coldly.

"No, she isn't!" he replied. "Her hair is as soft as silken strands! Her eyes are as brown as—as——"

"Mother Hake's special gingerbread?" suggested Mae helpfully.

"No!" thundered Handforth, turning red. "You—you rotter! Fancy comparing Grace's lovely eyes with a rotten piece of gingerbread!"

"Well, you said they were brown," grinned Mae.

"Look at her!" said Handforth dreamily. "By George! I didn't know that these Australian girls could be so wonderful!"

Without question, Edward Oswald Handforth had a real eye for feminine beauty. A landscape of rare charm would escape his notice altogether. But when he declared that Grace was the prettiest of all Jerry's sisters, he had made no blunder.

As she danced now, slim, graceful and light, she looked the very embodiment of youth and health. She was a slim girl, and she looked all the slimmer because of her flimsy silken dress, just knee-high, with her dainty legs moving gracefully to the rhythm of the tune.

"Cheese it, Handy!" said Church. "Jerry's sisters are all right, but you needn't go dotty over one of them! We shall be leaving

here to-morrow, in any case, and I don't suppose you'll ever see her again."

Handforth looked troubled.

"Leaving to-morrow!" he muttered. "Oh, my hat! Why doesn't Mr. Dodd send his daughters to England? Why can't one or two of them—including Grace—come to the Moor View School?"

"I think their mother wants to keep them at home," said Church, with a grin. "In any case, Handy, Grace wouldn't be sent to England now—she's practically left school. Of course, there's Mary. She's only about twelve—"

"Mary?" repeated Handforth, with scorn. "She's a kid!"

"Well, you seem anxious about Jerry's sisters' education—"

"Don't be an ass!" said Handforth firmly. "I expect that Mr. and Mrs. Dodd know what's best for their daughters."

He paced up and down for a moment or two, and then he suddenly came to a halt in front of his two amused chums.

"Well, you chaps," he said abruptly. "I shall be sorry to part with you to-morrow, but I dare say we shall meet again some time."

Church and McClure stared.

"Part with us?" repeated Church. "What do you mean, you chump?"

"I've decided to stay here—on the ranch!" said Handforth coolly. "No, you needn't argue. It's settled. My mind is made up!"



CHAPTER 15.

Handforth's Decision!

UNNOTICED by Handforth, a number of other juniors had strolled up over the lawn, and they were now standing round, listening with interest. Handforth, in his present mood, was blind to everything. At least, he was blind to everything and everybody except Grace Dodd. And as she was still dancing, he could not very well go to her.

"Oh, so you're going to stay here, are you?" asked Church, with a wink at the others. "You're not coming with the school, Handy?"

"I'm going to learn ranching," said Handforth calmly. "I've been thinking it over, and my mind is made up."

"Splendid!" said McClure, luring him on.

"I'm going to be a success in the cattle business—I've just decided it!" said Handforth cheerfully. "And where can I learn the business better than on this great ranch?"

"Don't keep calling it a ranch," said Church.

"Eh?"

"It's not a ranch—it's a station."

"Rot! I know what a ranch is, and this is one!" said Handforth obstinately. "It's

a dotty idea to call it a station. There's no railway here!"

"Well, we won't argue about that," said McClure. "It's rather a pity you're going to stay behind, Handy. How about the last Test Match, at Melbourne?"

"Bother the Test Match!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Fullwood. "Did you hear that, you chaps? Handy has lost his interest in cricket!"

"Impossible!" said De Valerie.

"There are more important things in life than cricket!" said Handforth, with an airy wave of his hand. "There is the business of life! And I'm so enchanted with Australia—so enchanted with—"

"Grace?" murmured Church.

"So enchanted with the whole country that I've decided to stay!" continued Handforth hastily. "I shall go to Mr. Dodd later on this evening, and I shall put it to him plainly. Of course, I don't mind starting at the bottom to begin with. I'll become a jimeroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you mean a jackeroo?" grinned Fullwood.

Handforth started.

"I knew it was Jim or Jack," he said gruffly. "What's the difference? Why quibble over a trifle? I'll start as a jackeroo, then. And in case you don't know it, a jackeroo is a cattle station hand."

"But what about your people?" asked Gresham. "They might not approve."

"Roughly, they're about fifteen thousand miles away," said Handforth complacently. "So they can do a fat lot, can't they?"

"But Mr. Lee can."

"Eh?"

"Mr. Lee will probably have something to say," remarked Church. "You're in his care, Handy, and—"

"By George! I hadn't thought of that!" said Handforth, looking worried. "But I'll tell you what!" he added brightly. "Just before the outfit starts off to-morrow, I'll steal out and smuggle myself into one of the outbuildings, and I won't show myself until the next day. Then it'll be too late for Mr. Dodd to send me after you."

Church shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, if you've made up your mind, there's nothing more to be said," he remarked. "But it'll be pretty rotten for Mac and me without you, Handy. And how about the cricket at St. Frank's? And the footer? How do you suppose we can get on without you? Who's going to keep goal for the Junior Eleven? Who's going to score the centuries this summer, in cricket?"

Handforth frowned in a worried way.

"Of course, I hate letting the school down like this, but I feel that I'm old enough to make my own way in life," he said firmly. "Why should I bother to go into the Senior school? Why should I waste my time at the 'Varsity? Here, in Australia, out on these wide open spaces, I can live the life of a man! It's the only life!"



It was lucky for Edward Oswald Handforth that the Adelaide citizens were good-natured and tolerant. In his efforts to get back to his school-fellows he trod on numerous people's feet, knocked off umpteen hats, and caused minor destruction all along his route.

At that moment the dance came to an end, and Handforth dashed off to claim the fair Grace. He was quite unaware of the many chuckles that followed him.

"Poor old Ted!" said Willy, shaking his head. "He's smitten again! Don't these attacks come over him suddenly?"

"We're going to have some trouble with him," said Church, becoming serious.

"Trouble?" grinned Willy. "Don't you believe it! Where's Jerry? A couple of words with him will soon put things right."

About half an hour later, when Grace had been claimed by Bob Christine for a waltz, Handforth was approached by Jerry Dodd and a number of other juniors. Edward Oswald was standing on the edge of the lawn again, watching the dainty Grace with enraptured eyes.

"Hallo, Handy, old son!" said Jerry Dodd, slapping Handforth on the back. "What's this I hear about you?"

"Don't bother me!" said Handforth coldly. "I'm making up a bit of poetry—— I mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They tell me that you've decided to stay at the station, here?" went on Jerry. "Good luck, old man!"

"Thanks!" said Handforth awkwardly.

"It's a fine life—and I almost wish that I could stay, too," said Jerry. "But my father insists that I shall complete my education at St. Frank's. And as I'm not on holiday now, I can't even stay on here for another single day. The pater is a bit strict, you see. He knows that this is the middle of the school term, and——"

"What does it matter, anyhow?" broke in Handforth. "I'm staying—not you!"

"Going into the cattle business, eh?"

"Yes."

"You ought to do well," said Jerry, nodding. "You're just the right stamp. And you can rely upon my sisters to keep you entertained."

"By George, rather!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath.

"Not all of them, of course," went on Jerry carelessly. "Alice is going to get married within a few months. Cynthia is going to visit some of our relatives in Melbourne; and Elsie and Grace are going back to their school, in Sydney, next week. Still, you'll have the kiddies to keep you company."

"Elsie and Grace!" ejaculated Handforth, with a violent start. "Going back to school. In Sydney!"

"Next week!" nodded Jerry.

"But—but—but——"

"There'll be plenty of life here without the girls, though," continued Jerry. "And once you get right down into the cattle business you'll find it fascinating, and——"

"I've changed my mind," said Handforth hurriedly. "I—I think I'll settle in Sydney, instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sydney's a fine city—so I've heard," said Handy. "Perhaps I can get a job——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

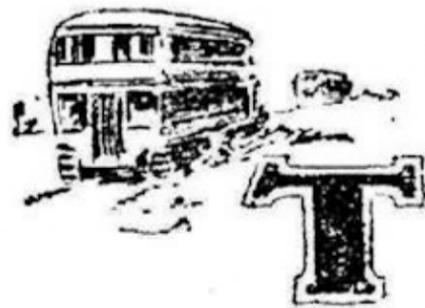
"It won't do, Handy, old man!" grinned Church. "Even if you do get a job in Sydney, you can't be constantly hanging round Jerry's sister, Grace."

"Why, you—you——"

"And there's Irene to think about," said McClure. "Surely you haven't forgotten Irene Manners, at the Moor View School!" And Handforth was chipped so unmercifully, and the fellows roared with such hearty laughter, that he fled. Curiously enough, he did not utter another word about learning the cattle business, or getting a job in Sydney!

CHAPTER 16.

Into Unexplored Australia!



THE next day, bright and early, the great coach-train took its leave from the Dodd homestead. The stay had been brief, and Mr. and Mrs. Dodd urged Nelson Lee to let the school remain longer. But Lee was compelled to point out that this was an educational, rather than a pleasure, trip. Moreover, there was a certain schedule to be kept. Mr. Dodd accepted these explanations, and he wished the party God-speed and the best of luck.

All the station hands turned out to give the party a rousing send-off. Incidentally, Handforth lingered long over his farewell handshake with the dainty Grace.

But by the evening, when the great outfit had travelled many scores of miles, Handforth was rapidly recovering from his gloom of the morning. There were so many fresh wonders to see, so many new things to marvel at, that he even forgot his latest love.

The travelling school was now penetrating into the heart of a region that never before had been explored. At least, there were no roads or tracks; no homesteads, no stations. It was a vast land of scrub, of plains, with here and there a belt of forest, and, occasionally, a lake or a stream, and sometimes a swamp.

It was practically tropical in this part of Queensland, and the heat was terrific.

The general plan, so the rumour went, was to penetrate into a section of the Northern Territory, and then to veer round and make for Cloncurry, in Queensland, afterwards making south through Longreach and Charleville, then going down into New South Wales, and possibly to Sydney, and then through Canberra, and so on to Melbourne.

But it would be some weeks—two or three, at least—before they got down into Lower Queensland again. The first part of their journey was to be into the wilder, more remote country.

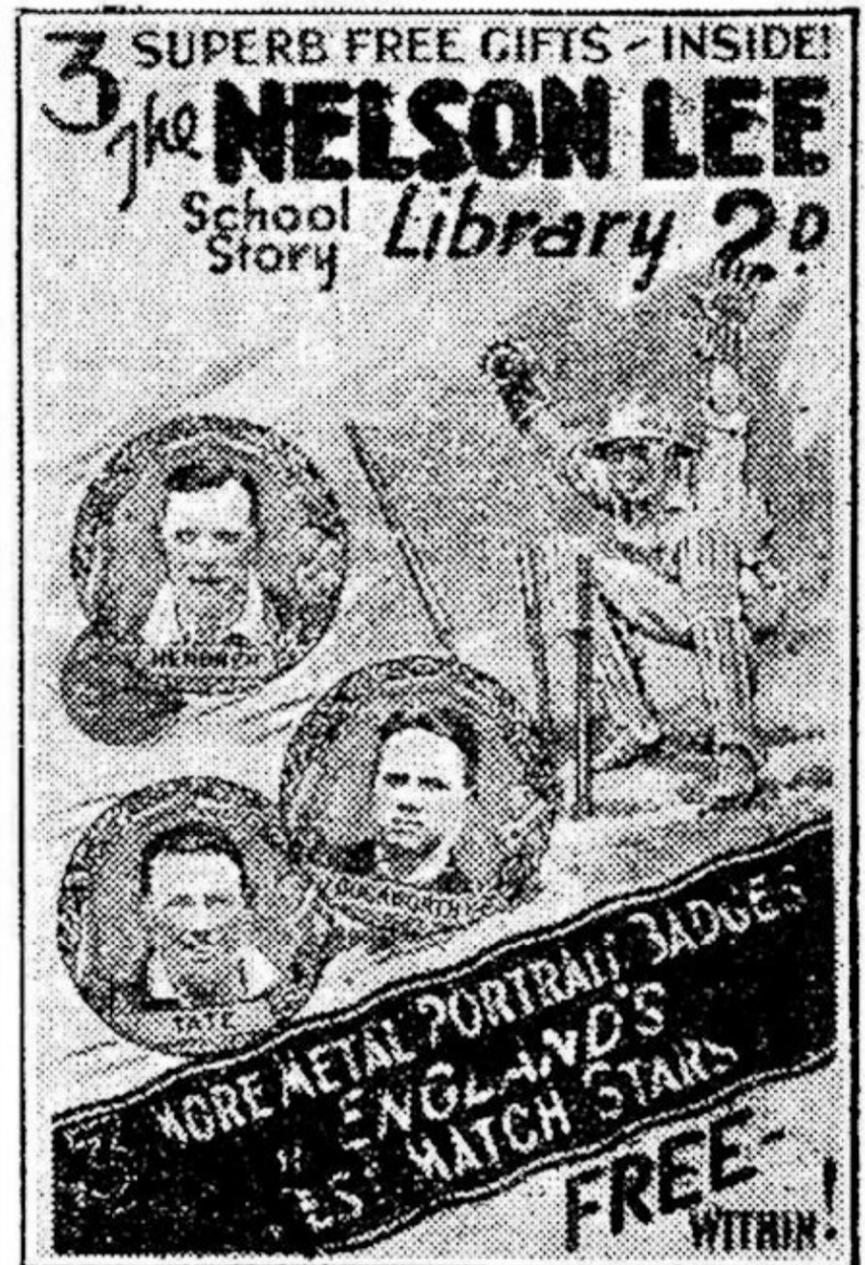
Three days after leaving the Dodd station the outfit was well off the beaten track, hundreds of miles from the nearest township of any size. Most of the fellows believed that they had already crossed the border, and that they were in the Northern Territory.

There had been no more trouble of any kind. Verano, the chief mechanic, was a model of politeness and industry. Daily he made his inspections of the coaches, and never once had Sir Arthur had cause to complain. Verano, it seemed, was doing his very utmost to atone for that slip of his.

Perhaps some of the conceit had been knocked out of him—at all events, it was noted by everybody that he was a great deal more self-effacing, and, incidentally, a great deal more efficient.

"I think I'll change my mind about that fellow," said Sir Arthur, as he sat chatting

NEXT WEEK'S COVER!



with Nelson Lee, after dusk had fallen. "He is doing his work splendidly now. It only shows you, Mr. Lee, that it is necessary to be firm."

"If I were you, I would get rid of him at the first opportunity," said Lee quietly.

"But why? He is all that could be desired now," said the millionaire. "Besides, he is a man of extremely wide experience. He is brilliantly clever—"

"Nevertheless, I don't quite trust him," said Nelson Lee. "It is, of course, for you to decide, Sir Arthur. But I am not comfortable about the man."

Sir Arthur laughed.

"Forgive me for being sceptical, Mr. Lee, but for the life of me I cannot see your point," he said. "What can the fellow do, anyway? He ought to be thankful that he is allowed to keep his job—he has only kept

it because I had no other man available."

"Well, keep your eye on him, that's all," said the schoolmaster-detective. "Don't trust him too much, Sir Arthur, or you may regret it."

The millionaire was inclined to smile broadly at this warning. He had every faith in Pierre Verano's abilities, for the man had been in his employment for many years, and had proved himself to be a master mechanic of extraordinary brilliance. It was for that very reason that he had been brought on this important trip. He was one of the most highly-paid experts in

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Sir Arthur's organisation. Until that unfortunate incident, some days ago, Sir Arthur had never had any trouble with the man; and Sir Arthur could not forget that Verano was a hot-blooded Latin. Now that he had had his lesson, he would probably be more efficient than ever.

In the light of what was destined to happen that very night, this brief conversation between Sir Arthur and Nelson Lee was somewhat significant.

There was to be no travelling through the night, for the country ahead was unknown and wooded. It was far better to wait until the morning, when a start would be made soon after dawn.

As usual, the great coaches were all grouped in a wide circle; but no camp-fires were allowed, owing to the tinder-dryness of the grass. A warm northerly wind was

blowing, too, and there was very little relief from the heat of the day.

Many of the fellows found it difficult to sleep at first, owing to the uncomfortable heat, although soon after midnight the temperature dropped considerably, bringing sleep to the majority.

Everything was very quiet except for the rustling of the breeze, and as the sky was rather clouded the night was very black.

Nipper, turning over in his bunk, noticed a vague odour in the air, but he was now half-asleep, and he took no notice of it. Some minutes later, however, a strong waft of the odour came to his nostrils, blowing in from the open window of the coach's upper-deck, near-by.

"That's funny!" he muttered, sitting up.

He recognised the smell now. It was petrol. There was nothing particularly startling in this, considering that all these great coaches were run on petrol. Yet Nipper had never smelt the spirit so strongly before. He leaned out of the window, and was more startled than ever to discover that the smell of petrol was nearly stupefying outside. It filled the air like a drug, and it came up to him in overpowering wafts!



CHAPTER 17.

Treachery!

NIPPER slipped out of his bunk, and softly awakened Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and Travers.

"What's wrong?" asked Travers, sitting up. "Hallo! There's a rummy niff! For the love of Samson! Petrol, isn't it?"

"Yes," muttered Nipper. "Don't make any noise, you fellows. I think our coach must have sprung a leak. The tank has busted, or something. Anyhow, there's a lot of petrol escaping. Let's pop down and see if we can locate the trouble."

Handforth sat up with a grunt.

"What the dickens are you chaps doing?" he asked, putting his legs over the side of bunk. "Phew! Isn't it warm? They told us it would be hot up in this territory—My only hat! Who's using paraffin?"

"It's not paraffin—it's petrol," said Nipper. "I think our tank must have sprung a leak."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth, in dismay. "What the dickens are we going to do? If we run out of petrol, we shan't be able to reach the next township! It's hundreds and hundreds of miles away—"

"Cheese it!" interrupted Travers. "No need to get the wind up, dear old fellow. This outfit is fully equipped; there's tons of petrol, and to spare. Water and food, too. We're all right for a couple of weeks, if necessary. Sir Arthur made sure of that before we started out."

"Yes, but we can't afford to lose any—particularly at this rate, judging by the sniff," said Handforth. "Our tank was filled up last night, and it holds about a hundred gallons."

"Handy's right," said Nipper. "Although the outfit is well supplied with spirit, it might be serious if we lose a lot. The sooner we can find out the source of this leak, the better."

They crept down from the upper deck without arousing any of the others, and Nipper caught his breath in sharply when he put his foot to the ground. For he stepped into a puddle—and it was a puddle of petrol!

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "It must be leaking at a terrific rate!"

They hurried round to the rear of the coach, but there was no sign of anything wrong. They thought they heard a sound of dripping, but it ceased almost at once.

"Perhaps it seems more than it actually is?" murmured Tommy Watson. "The ground is as dry as a rock, you know, and instead of soaking in it has formed into a pool—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Travers, in a startled voice. "The smell of petrol is stronger than ever here."

"Well, we're right against the coach," said Sir Montie.

"But the wind is blowing strongly," said Travers. "And the air is laden with the smell of petrol! It's coming from those two coaches standing over there—the Sixth Form coach and one of the dining-cars! They can't be leaking, too!"

"Impossible!" said Handforth.

All the same, they hurried across to the other coaches. When they arrived, they were nearly stupefied with alarm and consternation. For the ground here was soaking—soaking with petrol!

"Treachery!" said Nipper hoarsely.

"What!"

"It's treachery, I tell you!" snapped Nipper. "It can't be anything else!"

"Great Scott!"

"There couldn't be two or three leaks all at the same time!" said Nipper. "Somebody has been emptying the tanks deliberately—maliciously!"

"My only sainted aunt!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "But—but that's serious!"

"Serious!" ejaculated Nipper. "It might be tragic! We're scores and scores of miles from any settlement—perhaps hundreds of miles from any place where we can obtain petrol. And, if all our supply of petrol is gone, we shan't be able to move a yard! These great coaches will be just about as useful as so many haystacks!"

"But—but it's impossible—it's unthinkable!" said Tommy Watson. "You must be wrong, Nipper! There's probably some other explanation. I dare say the heat has caused the tanks to swell and crack, and one or two of them have started leaking at the same time—"

"Look!" interrupted Handforth. "Who's that over there?"

In the gloom, he had caught sight of a figure, crouching low, running swiftly. The other fellows saw the figure at the same time, and, with one accord, they rushed after it.

"Stop!" commanded a sharp voice. "What are you boys doing out here?"

"The gov'nor!" said Nipper, swerving.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Nelson Lee. "Have you boys been foolish enough to interfere with any of the petrol?"

"Cheese it, sir!" protested Nipper. "I woke up about five minutes ago, smelling petrol in the air. We came out to investigate. And we've found that two or three of the coaches are leaking!"

"Good heavens!"

"And we just caught sight of a figure, too, sir!" said Handforth excitedly. "There's treachery afoot!"

"Treachery!" muttered Nelson Lee.

He, himself, had come out because he had fancied that he smelt petrol. But his own coach—the one that all the masters used—happened to be on the other side of the circle, so that the wind had not carried the odour of the leaking spirit with it. Lee had caught the merest whiff, and he had at once come out. He, like the juniors, was wearing nothing but his pyjamas.

Treachery!

Nelson Lee was a cool, collected man, but he could not help giving a start of consternation as a thought crossed his mind. Sir Arthur Brampton had prepared for every kind of contingency; he had equipped this outfit with such lavishness that there seemed to be no possibility of mishap. But neither Sir Arthur nor Nelson Lee had prepared against treachery! That was the one factor which they had not even thought of.

And immediately the name of Pierre Verano seared into Nelson Lee's brain.

More than once he had caught Verano looking sullen and venomous; he had warned Sir Arthur of the man; but even Lee himself had never dreamed that Verano would think of taking such a terrible step as this!

At the most, Lee had merely suspected that the half-breed might vent his personal spite on Sir Arthur. But, if it was true that he had been deliberately emptying the petrol-tanks, he was placing the whole expedition in the utmost peril. For out here, in these wilds, hundreds of miles from civilisation, the situation would be grave in the extreme if there was no fuel to drive these monster coaches.

All these thoughts passed through Lee's mind in a flash. He was already running, the juniors beside him, in the direction that that fleeing figure had taken. And the air was now so thoroughly saturated with petrol fumes that there could be no longer any doubt that all the tanks had been tampered with.

Nelson Lee was shouting at the top of his voice; the juniors were yelling. Other

figures were coming out from the coaches, electric lights were being switched on. The whole camp was aroused.

Then came the sudden roar of a starting motor. The next moment, headlights were switched on, and everybody could see that one of the tenders was moving.

"The petrol!" yelled Nipper frantically.

It was true. This was an enormous tender which was nothing more nor less than a tank on wheels. It contained thousands of gallons of petrol—the spare supply for the whole outfit.

The juniors halted and swerved as the great vehicle came thundering down upon them, its headlights gleaming brilliantly.

"So!" shouted a wild, shrill voice. "Pierre Verano has his revenge! Fools—fools! Did you think that I would forgive your insults? It is now my turn to laugh!"

The startled juniors caught a glimpse of the chief mechanic at the wheel of that lumbering tender, and it was the figure of a man who was driven nearly crazy with the intensity of his hatred and fury!



CHAPTER 18.

The Disaster!

"STOP him!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Men—men! Stop him at all costs!"

Drivers, waiters, cooks and other men of the outfit were running madly after the swiftly-moving vehicle. Nelson Lee was in the forefront, and never before had the great detective raced so hard.

He was barefooted, although he took no notice of this. He felt that his feet were being torn and lacerated, but this was no time to bother with such trifles. That madman had to be stopped at all costs, for obviously he had emptied all the petrol-tanks of the fleet, and was now making off with the spare supplies.

Seniors and juniors were running, too, and Mr. Pycraft and Mr. Norton and the other masters were hurrying about, flustered and flurried, and filled with acute consternation. Everything had happened so suddenly that most of the men and boys were still too bewildered to realise what all this commotion meant.

Nelson Lee abruptly came to a halt, breathing hard, his eyes aglow with alarm.

"It's no good, men—it's no good!" he said. "We cannot hope to overtake that tender now!"

The other men halted, and Nipper and Handforth and some of the other juniors came up, breathless. They all stood there, watching the gleaming headlights of the escaping tender as it vanished into the distance. There came the sound of crashing scrub and bushes as the monster plunged on, with that vengeful maniac at the wheel.

"We're done, gov'nor—we're done!" panted Nipper hoarsely.

"So it seems, young 'un," said Lee. "Let us pray that there is still some petrol left in the tanks of the coaches. Men! Run back as fast as you can—examine the tanks—"

"What does this mean, Mr. Lee?" gasped Sir Arthur, as he came hurrying up. "What has happened? I am told that there has been treachery—"

"Verano!" said Lee, pointing. "Either he has gone insane, or he has done this dreadful thing maliciously."

"The hound! The scoundrel!" shouted the millionaire. "And you warned me against him, too, Mr. Lee! I was a fool not to heed your advice! But what could I do? It was impossible to put the man in handcuffs and to carry him as a prisoner!"

"Do not blame yourself, Sir Arthur," said Nelson Lee. "You were not to imagine that the man would commit such—"

Lee broke off, for at that moment there came a dull, thudding crash. At the same second the gleaming headlights of the distant tender were extinguished.

"He's crashed!" shouted Nipper.

"Quick!" said Lee. "There is a chance that the vehicle is only disabled, and that the petrol will remain intact. Even now we might retrieve this disastrous situation. But if that vindictive brute—"

"Look, sir!" gasped Handforth. "Flames! The thing has caught fire!"

"Great heavens!" panted Sir Arthur.

And then, before anybody else could make any comment, there came a terrific, blinding, lurid burst of flame, to be followed instantly by a tremendous detonation.

"The petrol has exploded!" said Lee sombrely. "I was half-afraid of it. And Verano, without the slightest doubt, has paid the penalty for his crime!"

"And the petrol has gone!" said Sir Arthur, passing a hand over his brow in a dazed fashion. "What shall we do? Our spare supplies!"

Everybody stared, fascinated, horrified. Over in the distance the flames were leaping up to a tremendous height, and a great roar could be heard. Then something else was noticed. Nipper was the first to see it, and his heart seemed to give a leap.

"The flames!" he panted, pointing. "Great Scott! Look, you chaps!"

"They're coming this way—they're leaping across the ground at lightning speed!"

Nelson Lee saw them at the same moment, and he spun round, with fresh alarm on his features.

"Get back—everybody!" he thundered. "Get clear of the coaches—get right away!"

The order was taken up, and others were shouting it. There was a regular stampede. Fortunately, none of the coaches was now occupied—everybody had come out into the open.

"The flames!" said Handforth dazedly. "Look! They're nearly on us! What does it mean?"

"Stand clear, you boys!" said Lee, his voice positively agonised. "That tank must have been leaking, and it left a trail of petrol behind."

"Oh, great Scott!" said Nipper, as he understood. "It's like a trail of gunpowder—it's like a fuse!"

There was something positively frightful in this situation. Everything was happening with such staggering speed that practically nothing could be done to avert the disaster. In Verano's frenzy, he had probably opened the taps of the great petrol-tender, and thus, as he had driven away, the spirit had poured over the ground, leaving a deadly trail behind it—like a miniature river; and the spirit, of course, had not had time to soak completely into the ground.

"The flames will be on us in ten seconds, sir!" shouted Nipper. "And once they get to the coaches, nothing on earth can save them from destruction! Can't we do something? Can't we cut this petrol trail?"

But, even as he spoke, he realised the impossibility of any such move. If they had had five minutes at their disposal, they might have done something. But there was not even a matter of five seconds!

For, with incredible speed and overpowering fury, the flames were leaping over the ground—rushing onwards like some monstrous thing of life!

"Back—back!" shouted Lee.

Many of the men, and some of the juniors, too, were only just in the nick of time. They leapt back, and the flames rushed past them, between them, setting up a wall of fire. But, mercifully, none of the boys was touched by those flames.

Then came an overpowering roar—it was a miniature explosion—as the ground beneath and around the stationary coaches flamed up. For there were hundreds of gallons of petrol soaked there, and it flared up with a ferocity that was dreadful to witness.

Nobody could do anything.

Nine-tenths of those men and boys, to tell the truth, were stunned into utter helplessness by the swiftness of this tragic happening; they could only stand there, dumb and bewildered, watching. Soon they were compelled to back away, for the heat from those leaping flames was terrific.

Ten minutes earlier, the camp had been peaceful and quiet, and everything seemed normal.

Now, Pierre Verano was dead, killed by his own demoniac hatred and fury—blown to atoms in the explosion of that plunging tank, which had evidently struck against some obstruction, or, perhaps, had fallen into a narrow gully.

And Sir Arthur Brampton's magnificent coaches—the pride of his transport organisation—were burning like so many torches!



CHAPTER 19.

The Roll Call!

"IT'S impossible!" said Handforth, in a husky voice. "We shall wake up soon, you chaps! We must be dreaming all this! It's too awful to be true!"

"I'm wondering if everybody is safe!" said Nipper. "If they weren't out of the coaches, there was no earthly chance for them! Even if they tried to escape, they could never get through those flames! Oh, it's too horrible—too ghastly!"

"They all got out—they're all safe!" said Travers. "The alarm was given before the flames got here, and everybody turned out."

"What about Archie?" put in Fullwood hoarsely. "You know what a lazy beggar Archie is! He might have stopped in bed. Oh, isn't it awful?"

Nelson Lee and Mr. Stockdale and one or two of the other masters and prefects were hurrying round, giving orders, telling everybody to get further and further back, well out of the zone of danger.

Although everybody moved, they could not take their eyes off that terrible, yet magnificent sight. For the fire was one of the most spectacular that any of the fellows had ever seen. It was stupendous in its enormity—staggering in its impressiveness.

The flames were leaping up to a height of fifty or sixty feet, and the black night had been changed into a brilliance that was nearly as dazzling as sunlight. But it was a yellowish, lurid light, flickering and awe-inspiring.

Not one of the coaches or tenders had escaped.

Verano, evidently, had started his fiendish work early, and he had practically finished when Nipper had awakened, and when the alarm had been given. The man had gone from coach to coach, opening the petrol-taps and allowing the spirit to escape. Thus, when that fire swept up, it embraced the whole outfit in one flaring, flaming rush. Every coach and every tender was involved; and now those magnificent vehicles, superb in construction, masterpieces of engineering skill, were no better than red-hot scrap-iron, with everything they had contained destroyed.

Petrol, water, food, baggage—everything gone!

The catastrophe was incredibly awful, yet hardly anybody realised the seriousness of it. But Nipper, who was standing close to Vivian Travers, had very quickly grasped the appalling possibilities.

"We're finished, Travers—we're absolutely done!" he said, shaking his head violently,

as though to convince himself that he was really awake. "Think of it!"

"I'm thinking, dear old fellow," said Travers soberly. "Well, well! Shipwreck at sea could not be so bad as this."

"Out here, in this wild, practically unexplored region!" said Nipper. "And everything has gone—our means of transport, our food, our water, our complete supplies!"

"We haven't even got shoes to our feet, or coats to our backs!" said Travers coolly. "For the love of Samson! Did you ever know of such a situation? We're in pyjamas—every manjack of us! Just pyjamas, and all our clothing has gone west in the fire! Shoes, shirts, suits, hats! Upon my word, Nipper, it's so frightfully bad that it's no good getting into a panic over it. They say that worse disasters happen at sea, but I can't imagine anything much worse than this!"

Nipper was silent. He was watching the flames. They were dying down somewhat now, for the petrol had been consumed; only the coaches were burning, and these were just masses of red-hot, twisted metal.

Sir Arthur Brampton stood apart, like a statue. He seemed to be stunned.

And now Nelson Lee was going round, giving orders, and the prefects were shouting to the juniors, collecting the Forms together. The men were being mustered, too.

"It's the roll call, you fellows," said Fenton, of the Sixth, as he came up. "Mr. Lee wants to find out if there is anybody missing."

"What do you think, Fenton?" asked Nipper.

"Personally, I think we're all safe," said the school captain. "Safe?" he added bitterly. "Safe for the hour, perhaps. But what's going to happen to us to-morrow?"

Then came the roll-call.

When all the Forms were collected and formed up into lines, Nelson Lee himself went round. In spite of the recent commotion and panic, everything was now orderly. Nelson Lee started with the fags, and he was enormously relieved when he found that all the Third-Formers were present—and, moreover, all unharmed.

It was the same with the Fourth—and again the same with the Remove.

Archie Glenthorpe, much to the satisfaction of the other juniors, was out there. It turned out that he had only just escaped in the nick of time. He had remained in the Remove coach—right until the flames had burst out on the other side of the circle. Then he had given a mad leap, and had just escaped with his life.

The Fifth Form and the Sixth Form were also intact—and the masters were all present.

And when the roll-call was taken among the men a sigh of general relief went up.

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In spite of the awful nature of the disaster, there had, at least, been no lives lost; only Pierre Verano's. He, without question, was dead. It was impossible that he could have escaped from that terrific explosion.

"Well, while there's life there's hope," said Travers philosophically. "Thank goodness we're all saved. That's one consolation, dear old fellows."

"Something always seems to happen to us!" said Gore-Pearce sourly. "Whenever we come on some sort of expedition, there's a disaster. Here we are, stranded in the Australian bush! It's a rotten shame! Mr. Lee oughtn't to have permitted the trip!"

"You rotter!" said Nipper, turning hotly on Gore-Pearce. "Is this a time to grumble. You know as well as I do that Mr. Lee is not to blame."

"He is!" insisted Gore-Pearce. "We're all in a dreadful hole—and if Mr. Lee hadn't given his consent——"

"Better stop, Gore-Pearce!" advised Travers. "Nipper's looking dangerous—and, believe me, if he hits out, he'll hit hard!"

"Yes, it's a filthy trick to blame anybody," said Boots, of the Fourth. "Every precaution was taken—every possibility was allowed for. Why, the very thought of danger was laughable an hour ago!"

"We're alive, anyhow," said Christine thankfully.

"And how could anybody be prepared for such treachery?" asked Nipper. "On second thoughts, though, I don't believe it was treachery."

"What do you mean?" asked Travers, staring.

"But it couldn't have been," protested Nipper. "Verano, in his right senses, couldn't have been so fiendish as to leave us stranded here, in the middle of the bush. No; it's my belief that the man went mad."

"That's about the size of it," said Handforth. "Look at the way he jumped out of that coach, when it got away, the other day. He was mad, then. A clever chap—a genius at mechanics—but he was probably on the border-line of sanity. And this tremendous heat of the last day or two has probably done the trick. It turned his head—and, with a grudge against Sir Arthur, his madness took a definite form. He must have believed, in some crazy sort of way, that he had to be revenged on all of us."

"He was sane enough to try to escape," said Gore-Pearce pointedly.

"But not sane enough to keep the petrol in the very vehicle on which he was escaping," said Nipper. "The fact that he opened the taps of that tank proves, to my mind, that he must have been as mad as a hatter. So what's the good of grumbling at Mr. Lee, or at Sir Arthur? How could they prepare themselves against madness, and a crazy desire for revenge? And what's the good of talking now, anyhow? The damage has been done—and we must thank Heaven that we're still alive!"



CHAPTER 20.

Stranded in the Bush!

NELSON LEE was grave and haggard.

"We must bear this blow as bravely as we can, Sir Arthur," he

was saying "By a merciful Providence, we are all alive, and in that we have much to be thankful for."

"But our position?" asked the millionaire. "What can we do? How can we get into communication with a township or settlement? How can help be brought to us? Our plight is too terrible to contemplate! We are without clothes, without food——"

"And without any kind of instruments," said Nelson Lee. "There is not even a compass amongst the lot of us—not even a pocket-knife. Without exception, we are devoid of every stitch of clothing except pyjamas. One or two of us, I believe, have slippers, but the majority are bare-footed."

"Not a cooking utensil—not a knife or fork," said Sir Arthur huskily. "Upon my word, Mr. Lee, it's—it's so tragic that it almost becomes humorous. Stranded! Without food, or water, or—— But I can't realise it—I can't picture it in my mind. It's unbelievable!"

To Sir Arthur it seemed unthinkable. The equipment had been so complete, so lavish. Magnificent dining-saloon, with superb cutlery, plate, glassware, crockery. Elaborate kitchens, and perfectly equipped dormitories and bed-rooms.

And now—nothing!

At least, nothing but a few twisted, red-hot scraps of metal. There were those once-perfect coaches, some on an even keel, others tilting over, and all of them shrunken and warped and distorted. There was nothing left except useless metal.

"Which is the nearest township?" asked Nelson Lee suddenly.

The millionaire started.

"Township?" he repeated. "I don't know! I have been carefree—indifferent as to our exact position. I only know that we are in a region that is practically uninhabited. Possibly there may be some blacks, but even this I doubt. I am not sure whether we are in Queensland, or in Northern Territory. It was our intention, as you may remember, to take out exact bearings tomorrow, and to settle on a definite course. We just wandered into this region carelessly, almost aimlessly, for the purpose of giving the school a glimpse of Australia in its wildest form."

Nelson Lee left Sir Arthur's side, and walked forward. He mounted a little hillock, and all eyes were turned upon him.

"Gather round, everybody!" he said, his voice carrying to one and all. "Come, boys—yes, you, too, men. There is something I want to say to you."

(Concluded on page 41.)

THE MEN WHO WON THE "ASHES!"

Interesting facts about the four players who are the subjects of this week's Free Gifts.



Percy Chapman.
TO be captain of an England cricket team at the age of 26—what a dream! This was realised by Percy Chapman, for he it was who skippered the England side when the "Ashes" were

taken from the Australians in 1926. But in some respects this smiling boy, who was born at Reading in 1900, was lucky, there is none to deny that he deserves his luck.

A member of a sporting family, it was obvious when Chapman went to Uppingham that he would be a great cricketer. The hopes were strengthened when he gained his Blue at Cambridge as a Freshman in 1920, and two years later he scored a century in the "battle of the Blues."

Qualified for Kent by residence, he has played some wonderful innings for the county since he left school, but it is rather strange that he should be skipper of England and not the regular skipper of his county side.

John Berry Hobbs.

Is there really anything new which can be said about Jack Hobbs? I doubt it. The books of cricket are simply plastered with the name of the Surrey crack. He is associated with practically every record set up in the batting side of the game. He has scored more centuries than any other cricketer, not even excluding W. G. Grace, and during the present Australian tour he passed the 3,000 aggregate in Test match cricket between England and Australia only.

Hobbs is now 46 years of age, and he first began to play for Surrey 23 years ago, coming to London to take up cricket seriously from his native Cambridge. Many of us may have forgotten an interesting feature

concerning his youth. He had trials for Essex, and was turned down! What a tragedy for Essex.

As a batsman we like him because he goes for the bowling—can play all the known strokes in the game with equal facility.



Herbert Sutcliffe.

We often talk about a player having the big match temperament, and we never wonder what that means if we think of Herbert Sutcliffe. Here is a batsman who rises to his very best when the occasion is a

specially big one. It was Sutcliffe's century on a difficult wicket which did so much to win the "Ashes" for England in the memorable Test matches of 1926.

In Australia previously he had done wonders, having a Test match average "down under" of over 80, and scoring a greater number of runs—734—than any other man had ever made in one series of Tests between England and Australia.

Born at Pudsey 34 years ago, he did not find a regular place in the Yorkshire team until the war was over, and it can be said of him that the determination and the patience which he shows at the wicket did most to make him a cricketer.

Harold Larwood.

It is scarcely going too far to say that Harold Larwood has achieved the seemingly impossible. When you think of a fast bowler you think of a big fellow, something approaching a giant in stature or physique. But here is a boyish-looking player of less than average height—five feet seven—who has come to be acknowledged as the finest fast bowler of the present day.

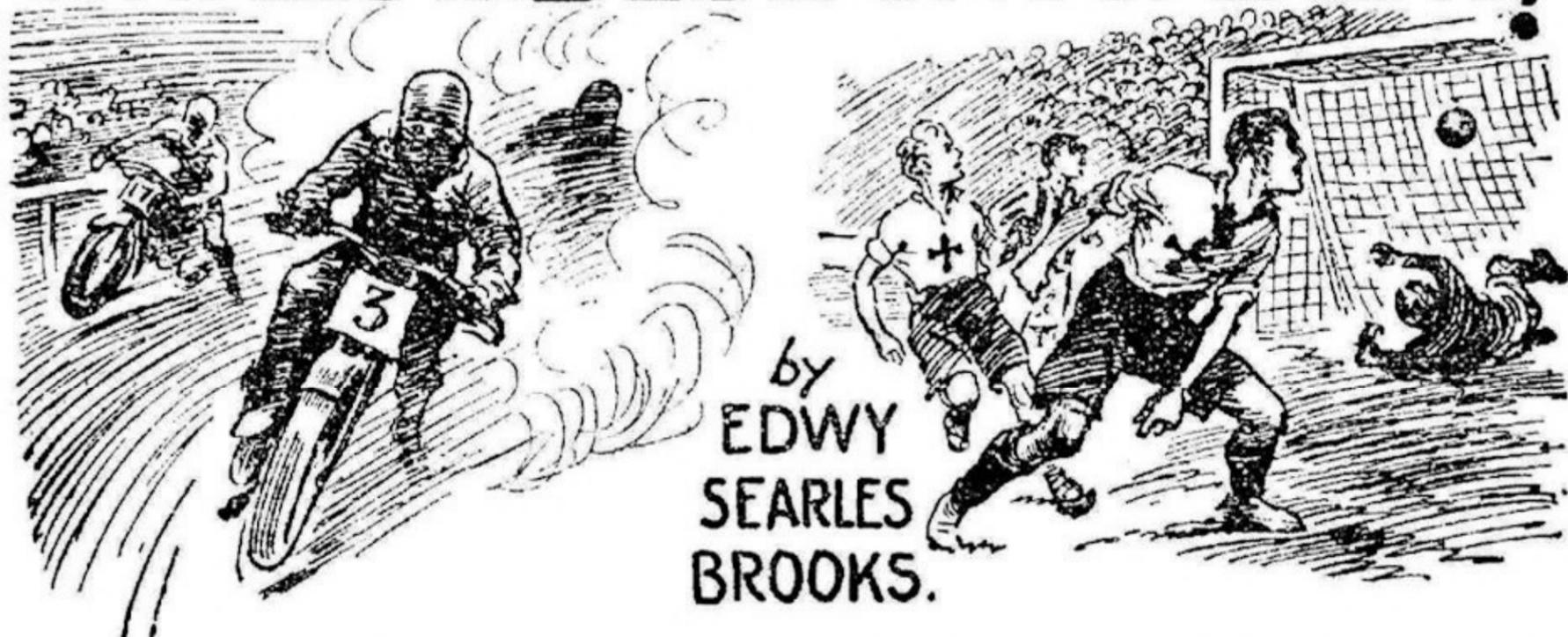
He was born at Nuncargate, which is in Nottinghamshire, on the fourth of November, 1904. When he was 16 Joe Hardstaff, on the look-out for likely talent, saw him bowl, and Joe said to the Notts officials: "Pick up this lad; he will be good."

The lad was then working in a coal-mine, out of which he was glad to get, because his heart was in cricket. Within a year of getting into the county side of Notts he played for England. His pace is remarkable for a player so small. More power to his elbow!



OPENING INSTALMENT OF OUR MAGNIFICENT NEW SERIAL!

RIVALRY OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



by
EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.

The Winning Goal!

WILL FOWKES, the celebrated sixteen-stone goalie of the Blue Crusaders, leapt upwards with amazing agility, and met the leather with both fists.

Thud!

The shot, true from the foot of the Alexandra United's centre-forward, was a beauty; but Fatty Fowkes' save was even better. The ball went soaring into mid-field, to be instantly trapped by Dave Moran, the Blues' skipper and centre-half.

"Well saved, Fatty!"

"Go it, the Blues!"

Dave Moran passed swiftly and accurately to the right wing, and Tich Harborough, of St. Frank's, took the ball in his stride, and the next moment he was streaking away up the touchline.

"Pass, Tich, pass!"

But the Hon. Tom took his own time, and when he centred it was a perfect piece of judgment. Rex Carrington, the sharpshooter of the Blues, accepted the pass like lightning, and he sent in a grand first-time shot, but by a supreme effort the goalie flung himself down, and just managed to turn the leather round the post.

"Corner!"

A mighty yell went up from thousands of excited spectators. It was a Saturday afternoon, and the Stronghold, in Bannington, was packed. The Blue Crusaders were at home to Alexandra United, the well-known Second Division London team. It was the closing stages of the game, and the score was one-all. For once, the Blues had been having a stiff fight. The London team was active and

aggressive, and had been forcing the pace all through the game.

But the Blues were adepts at forcing the pace, too, and, consequently, the match had been packed with thrills from the very first moment of the kick-off. Mr. Ulysses Piecombe, the manager, who was sitting in the grand stand, was wearing a worried frown. The "gate" was not as big as it ought to have been. There were many thin places on the terraces—and in the grand stand, too. On such a fine afternoon as this, with a

League game on the programme, the ground should have been packed to capacity. Yet the crowd was many thousands short of the average.

Of course, there were large numbers of St. Frank's juniors present—including Lionel Corcoran, of the East House Fourth, who was, incidentally, the sole owner of the Blue Crusaders Football

Club. Armstrong and Griffith, Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, Dick Goodwin and Singleton and Doyle—quite a number of fellows were watching.

But such stalwarts as Nipper, the Remove captain, and Handforth, and Archie Glen-thorne, and Boots, and Christine, were absent. These fellows, of course, were away from St. Frank's just now—on their world tour, aboard the School Ship. At the moment, indeed, they were in Australia.

"Goal!"

Tich, the Blues' brilliant winger, had taken the corner-kick, and as the ball dropped right in front of goal, Rex Carrington's head shot up, and the next second the ball had gone over the goalkeeper's shoulder into the net.

Thrills are what the public always wants, and that's where dirt track racing has a big pull. One of these tracks opens next to the Blue Crusaders' football ground and the question now is: Will it affect the fortunes of the famous Blues? All readers will revel in the first chapters of this splendid serial.

That was really the end of the game, for, although the visitors tried hard to get the equaliser during the closing minutes, Fatty Fowkes baulked them every time. And once again the famous Blues had been victorious. They were well in the upper half of the League table, and it was their ambition to finish at the top—to win promotion into the First Division.

Indeed, but for some recent set-backs, in no way connected with the actual play, they would have been at the top now. But enemies had been working against them, and they had had a hard fight.

Now, however, all that was over, and the future looked bright.

"Well done, boys—well done!" boomed Mr. Piccombe, as the players came in. "A hard game, and a good win."

"We should have done better, sir, if all our forwards had been in tip-top form," said Fatty Fowkes boisterously. "But Rex was the only fellow who had his shooting-boots on."

"You hulking great idiot!" snorted Andy Tait, the inside-left. "What about you? We should have won by two clear goals if you hadn't made a mess of things in the first half."

"Don't argue, boys," said Mr. Piccombe, holding up a lean hand. "Let us be—er—satisfied that we have won. You all played splendidly, and I need say no more than that."

The players crowded into the dressing-room, noisy and lively. After the plunge-bath they were feeling fit and brisk, with healthy appetites for tea.

Outside, their famous blue and white motor-coach was waiting to convey them to St. Frank's College. Many St. Frank's boys were waiting, too, on their bicycles—ready to accompany the players home.

For at present the Blue Crusaders were located at St. Frank's. As half the school was away, the headmaster had been kind enough to allow the footballers to occupy the Ancient House. In the meantime, many changes were taking place at the Stronghold.

A great new stadium was being built—a splendid grand stand, with offices, club-house, and every luxury imaginable. Lionel Corcoran, the schoolboy owner, was very rich, and he was lavishing a large amount of money on the club.

When the players got outside they found Corcoran standing just beyond the gates, looking thoughtfully up the road. Mr. Ulysses Piccombe was there, too, talking with John Smart, the trainer.

"Ready, Corky?" asked the Hon. Tom Silward Harborough, running up, and clapping Corcoran on the back.

"Eh? Yes, rather," said Corky, with a start. "Got your motor-bike? Good! Mine's here, ready, too."

"What's happened?" asked Tich, staring. "You were looking pretty serious when I came up."

Corcoran frowned as he glanced up the road again.

"I'm afraid we're going to have some trouble very soon," he said. "Until now, the Blues haven't had any rivals in Bannington. But the opening up of the Speedway will probably make a big difference."

"Think so?" asked Fatty Fowkes, as he joined them. "You're not going to tell me that the Bannington people are going to forsake football for motor-cycling!"

"It's the latest craze, Fatty," said Lionel Corcoran. "And the public is always ready to patronise something new and novel. Besides, this Speedway is something extra special—all the enclosures are covered in, and even the track itself is protected. No matter how bad the weather, the races will be held."

"But it won't interfere with us, will it?" asked Dave Moran. "I understand that the Speedway is only opening in the evenings."

He glanced up the road, too, and he could see the blaze of electric lights over the entrance of the new Bannington Speedway. Some months earlier, that particular enclosure had been known as the Arena—a greyhound-racing track—but it had been a failure as such, and for many weeks the place had been empty.

Now, however, it had been bought by somebody who was planning to run it as a dirt track. There was evidently plenty of money behind the venture, too, for no expense had been spared in preparing for the opening.

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The first meeting was advertised to take place that very evening, and already Bannington was beginning to evince a great interest in the place. Several crack riders were advertised to appear, and there were some big prizes to be competed for. The prices of admission were moderate, and it was evident that the place was to be run on sound, clean lines. No bookmakers were allowed, no betting was permitted, and the sport was to be healthy and clean and honest.

"Why worry?" asked Rex Carrington. "The Speedway can't make any difference to the Blues."

"I am afraid you are wrong, Carrington," said Mr. Piccombe, looking round. "Bannington is not like London; there is only a certain number of people. And if a great many of them decide to spend their money in the Speedway, then they cannot spend it in the Stronghold. You will have noticed that our gate, this afternoon, was by no means a good one."

"Why, I thought the enclosure was packed, sir," said Rex.

"It appeared to be packed—but, actually, there were many thin spots," said the manager, frowning. "Even before the Speedway has been officially opened, we are beginning to feel a—er—draught. It is most disturbing—most unfortunate!"

At the New Speedway!

THERE was really something in Mr. Piccombe's fears.

Much as the Bannington people were attracted by League football, it was more than likely that a very large number of people would "fall" for the new sport. Dirt track racing was new to Bannington, and there was every possibility that the public would wax enthusiastic over the thrills and breathless excitement of this new form of entertainment.

If Bannington had been a big industrial city, with hundreds of thousands of people to draw upon, everything might have been all right. But Bannington, after all, was limited in its population. Only the great enthusiasm of the inhabitants had permitted the Stronghold to be filled at every home match.

Rivalry, in the form of this Speedway, might have a very serious effect upon the gates. Providing the Blue Crusaders maintained their winning form and gave sparkling displays, all might be well; but if they struck a bad patch, and lost one or two home games, then the public would desert them in droves. Mr. Piccombe was convinced of this, and his anxiety was understandable.

"Look here, boys, I've got an idea," said Lionel Corcoran cheerfully. "It's a Saturday, and we St. Frank's fellows are all free. Why go home to tea? I suggest that we invade the Japanese Café, have a feed, and then attend the opening of the Speedway."

"Hear, hear!" said Tich Harborough. And Reggie Pitt and Armstrong, and many of the other St. Frank's juniors, heartily agreed with this proposal.

But Fatty Fowkes was dubious. "Motor-cycling!" he said, with a sniff. "Who wants to see a lot of silly chumps buzzing round a cinder track on motor-bikes?"

"Have you ever seen a dirt track race?" asked Corcoran.

"Well, no," admitted Fatty. "Then wait until you see one before you judge the Speedway," replied Corky. "Anyhow, I'm interested. This dirt track looks like being a big rival for the Blues, and I'm rather anxious to find out how things are going."

"Are you going to have a shot on the track yourself?" asked Rex Carrington, with a grin.

"I might." "Good man! If you'll lend me your jigger afterwards, I'll have a go myself," said Rex. "I've always been keen on dirt track racing, and I believe I should be a success as a speed demon."

"Oh, do you?" said John Smart, striding

up, and speaking aggressively. "The sooner you forget that rubbish, the better!"

"What's the matter, Grouser?" asked Rex. "You'll not do any dirt track racing—that's what's the matter!" retorted Grouser grimly. "Did you hear him, boss?"

Mr. Piccombe nodded. "I did!" he said curtly. "Carrington, I absolutely forbid you to indulge in this—er—perilous enterprise!"

"But there'll be no harm in having a bit of fun, sir."

"Fun!" echoed the manager. "Would you call it fun if you had a spill and broke a limb? No, Carrington, we cannot afford to take any such risks. At the present moment you are in tip-top form, and without your services the team would be—er—crippled."

"Thanks awfully for the compliment, sir," said Rex, grinning, and giving a sidelong look at Grouser. "I understood from Grouser this morning that I was just about as useful as a wooden log."

"You're not so bad," admitted the trainer grudgingly.

But Rex, however, knew that he was the mainstay of the Eleven. Fatty Fowkes, of course, was simply marvellous in goal, but no team can win matches by defence alone. And Rex Carrington, in his position of centre-forward, had been scoring goals with extraordinary regularity and precision. Many of the famous First Division clubs had their eyes on him, and they would be willing enough to pay a huge transfer fee in order to obtain his services.

"You will understand, Carrington, that I positively forbid you to ride a motor-cycle over this—er—ridiculous cinder track," said Mr. Piccombe sternly. "I am the manager, and I expect to be obeyed. If Corcoran chooses to risk his limbs, it is no concern of mine. He is not a player, and therefore I have no jurisdiction over him."

"What about me, sir?" asked Tich. "I thought about having a go—"

"Then you had better forget it, young man!" interrupted Mr. Piccombe.

"But it's safe enough, sir," protested Tich. "Besides, I'm a St. Frank's chap—"

"I absolutely forbid you to ride a motor-cycle on one of these tracks, Harborough—you or any other player of the Blue Crusaders!" snapped the manager curtly.

And Mr. Ulysses Piccombe, having thus delivered himself, strode off. Rex made a grimace and shrugged his shoulders.

"That's the worst of old Piecan," he said. "He takes things for granted. He's made up his mind that dirt track racing is dangerous, and he thinks that if I have a shot round the course I shall break my neck."

"We'd better humour him, though," said Corcoran. "After all, he's the manager—"

"And you're the owner," said Rex. "If you give me permission—"

"But I don't!" said Corky coolly. "I'm not going to take the reins out of Mr. Piccombe's hands. Sorry, Rex, old man, but after what Piecan has said I can't lend you my bike."

Rex was in no way upset. He realised that Corky was right. Perhaps it really was foolish to risk injury just for the sake of having a bit of a thrill; and, as everybody knew, dirt track racing was not exactly a safe sport. Serious injuries are not common, but even a minor hurt might easily incapacitate Rex for a week or two, and that would be a serious matter.

A great crowd of Blues and St. Frank's fellows invaded the Japanese Café, in the picturesque old High Street, and later they made their way to the brilliant, electrically-lit Speedway. They paid their money, and swarmed into the enclosure.

Bannington, however, was not coming forward as enthusiastically as the Speedway promoters had hoped. Even when it was close upon time for the first race, the enclosure was not more than half filled.

A rider came roaring past, evidently testing his machine—a begoggled, helmeted demon, spraying up the dirt in a dusty, choking cloud. He went bucking dizzily round the curve, skidding in the most alarming fashion.

"Looks promising," said Rex, with a grin.

His nostrils were filled with the smell of burning petrol and oil. A dull, continuous roar came from the pits.

It was all new to Bannington, and the people were finding it very fascinating. Presently, when the first race was run, the crowds were breathless with excitement, awed by the daring of it all.

There came the staccato crackle of exhausts and the shouting of the crowds. There was the judge, with his draughtboard flag. A pistol cracked, and the next moment the riders were off—four of them.

"Gosh!" said Ben Gillingham, the burly, bow-legged right-back of the Blues. "They'll never get round, boys!"

The helmeted, begoggled figures came tearing over the track, at forty miles an hour or more. The riders crouched over their handlebars as though they were parts of their very machines. They came thundering, tearing, roaring along, veritable Juggernauts.

And then round the first curve, broadsiding breathlessly, skidding and bucking until it seemed impossible that they could ever recover their equilibrium.

"Yo gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Tich. "It's—it's wonderful! I'd love to have a go at this, Corky!"

"You're a Blue—and it can't be done," said Corcoran calmly. "But I'm different, and before long I'm going to have a run round this track. It looks like the real thing to me!"

(That's the end of the first instalment, chums. What do you think of our new serial? But perhaps you haven't read enough to be able to form a definite opinion yet? Wait until you've seen next week's instalment, and then you'll say without hesitation that it's one of the very best serials you've read for a long time.)

ST. FRANK'S AT THE TEST MATCH!

(Continued from page 36.)

They all came round, silent and wondering. "There is no need for me to tell you that we are in a tight corner," said Nelson Lee, hardly raising his voice above an ordinary conversational tone. "We have met with a disaster which none could have foreseen. We are without food and water, and practically without clothing. We are stranded in the bush—in the far interior, scores of miles away from the nearest township. Perhaps more than a hundred miles. We must face this situation bravely, and we must do everything we can to combat the difficulties.

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Before to-day, men have been stranded on desert islands—stranded without so much as a rag to their back," said Nelson Lee. "Yet they have survived—they have risen above the disasters that overtook them. We have lost everything that we had, and we are thrown entirely upon our own resources. But human ingenuity has achieved much in the past, and if we are all determined, all courageous, there is no reason why we should not win through to safety."

"It is impossible for us to commence any march through this bush as we now stand," added Nelson Lee. "The majority of us are barefooted, and, moreover, we cannot march without food or without water. So our first task must be to provide ourselves with the necessities of life—and then, perhaps, we can fashion some manner of clothing and foot-gear for ourselves. As I have said, it will demand all our ingenuity—and all our patience and inventiveness. We must look upon it that we have been cast on a desert island, and we must act in exactly the same way."

And Nelson Lee was gratified to see that the majority of the schoolboys and men were looking eager and hopeful. As long as they could keep their spirits up there might be definite hope.

It was the spirit that mattered—the spirit to rise above these appalling difficulties, and to win through!

Yet nothing could alter the fact that the party's plight was one of the utmost gravity. Here they were, lost in the Australian bush, and nobody in the outside world knew precisely where they were!

They were thrown entirely upon their own resources, and the immediate future was full of the most startling possibilities!

THE END.

("In Unknown Australia" is the title of next week's gripping yarn. The St. Frank's fellows are in a tight hole, but with Nelson Lee at their head you can bet they won't stand still doing nothing, and they meet with all sorts of amazing adventures. Don't forget that three more Free Gifts are also coming next Wednesday.)



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.



ELSIE SATCHWELL

NO—Tom Bryan (Chingford)—I did not write "What's Wrong With the Rovers?", but I am writing our new serial, "Rivals of the Blue Crusaders." The "Boys' Realm" has now ceased to be one of the companion papers, and, in consequence, I am no longer writing for it. So the adventures of Fatty Fowkes and his fellow-footballers will now be carried on in our new serial.

* * *

There have been about fifty Remove fellows mentioned in the stories—Donald Bigley (Wellingborough)—half in the Ancient House and half in the West House. Study A is occupied by Gore-Pearce, Gulliver, and Bell; B by Hubbard and Long; E by Archie Glen-thorne and Brent—all these in the Ancient House.

* * *

If you want your full name and address put in the Old Paper—Ivy Dean (Fulham)—you can have this done by joining the League, and getting in the Correspondents Wanted column. Or, if you want to have your photograph published above, just tell me so, and I'll include your full name and address at the same time. But I shall not do this unless I get your full permission.

* * *

This page—W. E. Swonnell (Brighton)—is certainly not a myth. Neither is it any trouble for me to reply to any of my readers—although sometimes I am very much pressed for time, and am compelled to keep readers waiting. I never ignore any of you deliberately. You mustn't think it mean of me to keep you waiting. At this very moment I have a whole mountain of correspondence waiting to be dealt with, in order of receipt. You seem to imagine that if you send me a stamped and addressed envelope it will guarantee a personal reply. But, really, I don't want you, or any other readers, to place any trust in this imaginary guarantee. Sending me a stamp does NOT impel me to reply. In most cases, indeed, I send personal answers to letters which have not included a stamp; for I am guided by the quality of the letters themselves. But all readers must try to be patient, and, in due course, they will hear from me. A certain number

of weeks must necessarily elapse before a printed reply can appear on this page. In future, however, I will send a personal reply by return to all readers who enclose stamped, addressed envelopes, just to assure them that I am not pinching their stamps! But this reply will probably be a mere acknowledgment, over my signature, a fuller reply following at my leisure if the letter needs it. But, as I have said, a stamp doesn't influence me in the least, and any particular letter that deserves an answer will get it. I never mind using a stamp to write to a reader if he or she has sent me such a letter that I *must* deal with it personally. And I get quite a number of such letters which I am unable to deal with in these columns.

* * *

This week all readers will have the pleasure of seeing your charming photograph—Elsie Satchwell (Walsall). It ought to be charming, anyhow, if I'm to judge by the original, but I'm afraid that sometimes readers' photos have a nasty habit of altering almost beyond recognition by the time they appear on this page. However, we'll hope for the best, eh, Elsie? By the way, I shall always be pleased to hear from you—even if it's only a grouse about something you don't like in one of my yarns! And you'll carry on the good work of introducing the Old Paper to your friends, won't you? You will? That's the stuff to give 'em!

* * *

The term "Remove" is merely another name for a Form at a Public School—James Sims (Toronto). It is a class, or division, and in the case of St. Frank's it means really a part of the Fourth Form, which is so big that it could not be conducted by one Form-master.

OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!
By THE EDITOR

Tell Your Pals!

WELL, chums, you've got the first five of our stunning Free Gifts in this issue, and now I'm fully convinced you're eagerly awaiting next week's set of badges.

These embossed portrait badges are undoubtedly the "goods," and when you have collected the whole sixteen and put them in your attractive album, you'll have something which will be the envy of all your pals who are unfortunate enough to be non-readers of the Old Paper.

These non-readers will certainly want to know why you didn't tell them anything about the NELSON LEE'S wonderful offer; so the best thing for you to do, to avoid trouble with them, is to bring to their notice the magnificent Free Gifts which are being given away in the NELSON LEE every week, and then you'll be quite safe!

Popular "Patsy" Hendren, Maurice Tate, who has been compared with Sidney Barnes, and George Duckworth, England's best wicket-keeper, are the subjects of next week's three coloured metal portrait badges. Placed in the album alongside Chapman, Hobbs, Sutcliffe and Larwood, they'll look jolly "posh," I can tell you!

"Buck up, next Wednesday!" can I hear some of you saying. Well, don't forget to ask your newsagent to save you a copy of the NELSON LEE, or you might find that when next Wednesday does come, the Old Paper will be sold out.

A Bike for Easter!

Have you tried your hand at the competition on page 19 yet? Jolly interesting,

isn't it? There's another coupon coming next Wednesday, you know, so don't go and lose this week's one. A "James" Go-Anywhere Bicycle, listed at £7 15s., is awaiting the lucky winner, and it's going to be delivered before Easter, so that he can have a ripping time a-wheel during the holiday. Then there are twelve Hobbs' cricket bats to be won. If the owners of these can't knock up their centuries during the coming cricket season—well, it won't be because of the bats!

Opinions, Please!

The St. Frank's Touring School is in a nasty predicament, eh? Stranded in the wilds of Australia, with no food, no clothes, no conveyances—nothing! What are they going to do? Edwy Searles Brooks tells you all about it in next week's stirring yarn entitled, "In Unknown Australia!" so prepare yourself for some staggering developments!

I want all readers to write and tell me their opinion of our new football and dirt-track racing serial, "Rivals of the Blue Crusaders!" which started this week. Look out for another exciting instalment next Wednesday, chums! And, forgive me for rubbing it in, order next week's bumper Free Gift Number of the NELSON LEE now!

THE EDITOR.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

R. T. Wood, 26, Beaufort Road, Kingston-on-Thames, wants N.L. new series before No. 34.

Enslie R. T. Bryan, Wood View, New Road, Chingford, Essex, would like to hear from readers in England, France and Australia; also from E. L. Parmenter of London, E.6.

J. H. Sullivan, Cemetery House, Lime Road, Stretford, Lancs., wants a correspondent in Ireland.

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All applications for Advertisement spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee School Story Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

BOYS WANTED (14-19) for opportunities in CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND. The Salvation Army grants generous assistance towards training and outfit, exercises efficient commonsense aftercare, guarantees work and gives preliminary farm training. Make immediate application. The Branch Manager, 3, Upper Thames Street, London, E.C.4.; 12 Pembroke Place, Liverpool; 203, Hope Street, Glasgow; 5, Garfield Chambers, 44, Royal Avenue Belfast.

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