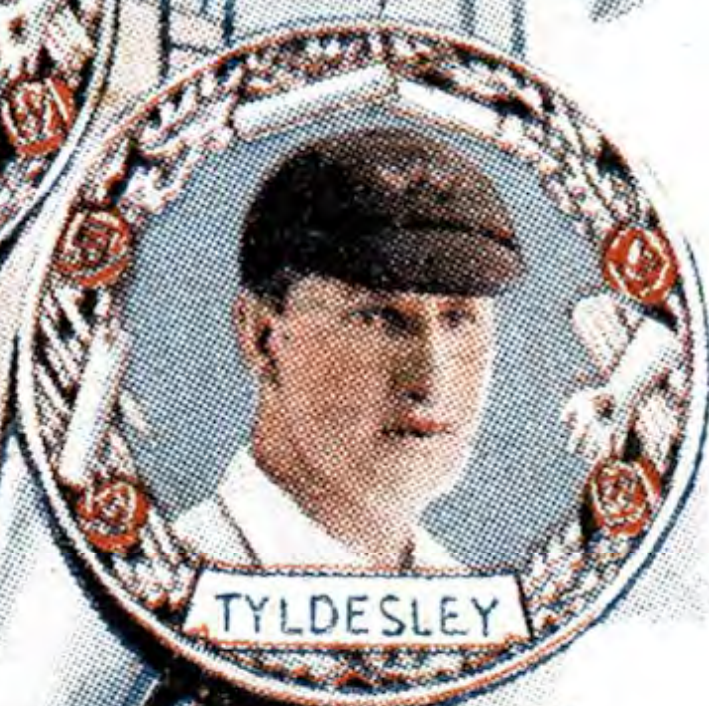
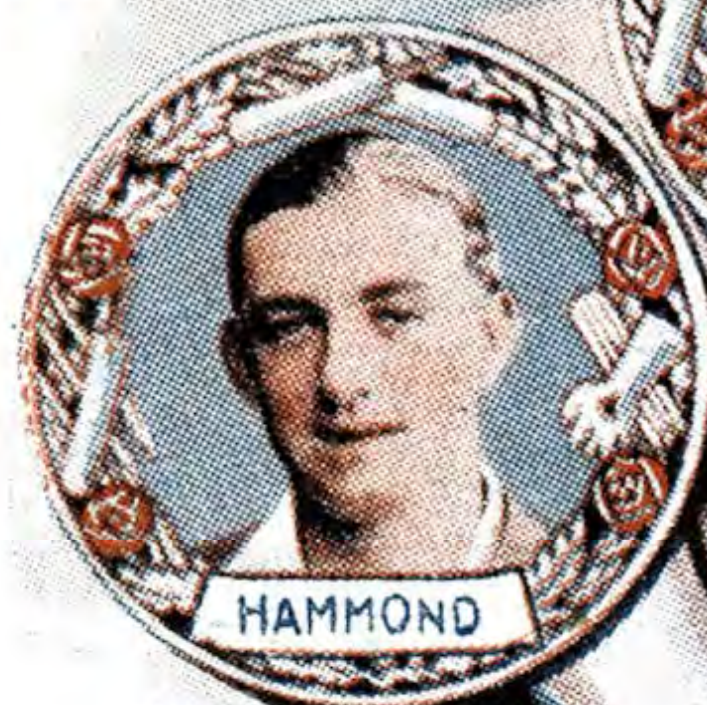


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CHAPTER 1.

Lord Dorrimore's Decision !

"**B**Y the Lord Harry! Something's got to be done about this!" Lord Dorrimore spoke emphatically, and he looked at his companion with a fierce light in his eyes. The two men were standing near the open window of their room in one of Sydney's greatest hotels. Outside, the capital city of New South Wales was sweltering in the sunshine of the February day. A hum of busy traffic came up from the street.

"It's serious, of course——" began Mr. Hobart Manners.

"Serious!" broke in Lord Dorrimore. "Man alive, all those boys may be dying of thirst at this very moment! I tell you, something has got to be done! What's more, it's got to be done quickly."

The famous millionaire sporting peer, lithe and active, paced up and down for a few moments. He was carelessly attired in flannel trousers, white shoes, and his shirt was open at the neck. Dorrie—as he was always called—did not believe in formalities.

Mr. Hobart Manners was dressed rather more rationally in a lounge suit, with a soft collar and brown shoes.

"Look at this newspaper," said Lord Dorrimore. "This is the second day, Manners—and out in the bush of Queensland infernally ugly things are liable to happen to a stranded party."

"But is this party stranded?" asked Mr. Manners cautiously. "We mustn't jump to conclusions, Dorrie."

"Well, anyhow, I'm going to jump off for Queensland to-day," said Dorrie briskly. "Leo is one of my best friends, and all those St. Frank's boys are pals of mine, too. If they're in trouble, I'm going to them."

Mr. Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"Dorrie, you're incorrigible," he said helplessly. "You get these crazy ideas into your head, and you want to push them into effect without a second's delay. You don't seem to realise that this trip you're speaking of is something like a thousand miles——"

"I realise it all right," interrupted his lordship. "And that doesn't worry me in the least. What's a thousand miles? In a plane, travelling at two hundred miles an hour, it's only a hop. It can be done in five or six hours, even allowing for a stop on the way."

Mr. Manners made no reply. He had picked up the newspaper, and he was reading the sensational headlines. "English Schoolboys Disappear in Bush"—"No Word From Brampton's Picnic Party." There were photographs, too—of Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous schoolmaster-detective, Sir Arthur Brampton, the Australian millionaire transport magnate, and snapshots of a few St. Frank's fellows, including Nipper and Handforth and Archie Glen thorpe.

"It seems," said Mr. Manners, "that the expedition has not been heard of since it left the Dodd Station."

"That's right," nodded Dorrie, turning round. "The party is overdue. It should have reached Cloncurry, in Queensland, two days ago. Yet there hasn't been a sign of all those great motor-coaches. For hundreds of miles round the stations and settlements have been on the look-out. Telegraphs have been working overtime. Yet there's no word. I tell you, Manners, it's serious."

"Possibly it is, but we're a thousand miles away——"

"Five or six hours' flight," broke in Dorrie, with a wave of his hand. "Why shouldn't we go to the Dodd Station, make it our headquarters, and then make a systematic search of the entire district? If the expedition has met with any trouble, we shall probably be able to locate it."

Lord Dorrimore was positively on edge. He could not keep still for a moment; he paced up and down, clenching and unclenching his fists. He was like a schoolboy in his excitement, and his eyes were burning with eagerness.

All Australia was discussing the startling disappearance of the great St. Frank's party.

It was known that Sir Arthur Brampton was financing the trip. He had provided a number of enormous motor-coaches—lavishly equipped super-coaches, some with six wheels, some with eight. They were like tremendous tractors, capable of travelling over the roughest ground in safety.

The St. Frank's party, with Nelson Lee at the head, consisted of half the school—all the occupants of the Ancient House and the Modern House. And, after the fellows had spent a very enjoyable time at Adelaide, in South Australia—where they had witnessed the fourth Test match—they had gone off on this inland trip. The general plan was to work round through Queensland, then back into New South Wales, and so through Victoria to Melbourne.

Sir Arthur, who was the head of the greatest transport organisation in the Commonwealth, had an eye to business in this enterprise. For these enormous coaches of his were destined for regular service over sections of the country where there were no roads. The millionaire had mapped out

many routes for these great coaches of his, and, once the services were in operation, a large number of isolated townships would be brought into ready communication with the larger centres.

The schoolboy party had started from Adelaide in high good humour. Reports had come to the effect that everything was going well. The great Dodd cattle-station—one of the largest and most important in Queensland, and owned by Jerry Dodd's father—had been reached in great style, and the "motor-coach train" had then set off for a little-known region, carrying an abundance of supplies. The general idea was to work round, and to get to Cloncurry after the schoolboys had been given a glimpse of sub-tropical Australia.

But news came from Cloncurry that the coaches had not arrived.

They were two days overdue now, and nothing had been seen or heard of them. Since leaving the Dodd Station, the party of English schoolboys, with Sir Arthur Brampton, Mr. Nelson Lee, and a number of other men, had completely and utterly vanished. A few isolated stations west and south of Cloncurry had been on the look-out, too, but they had no news to report.

"It's not necessarily alarming—this news," said Mr. Manners, as he put the newspaper aside. "After all, Dorrie, two or three days won't make much difference. All those coaches are splendidly equipped. The party has a big supply of food and water—and fuel. There's not one chance in a thousand that they have come to any harm. Perhaps they have made a longer detour than they intended—a deeper penetration into Northern Territory?"

"That's all very well," said Lord Dorrimore, frowning. "I don't believe it, Manners. Lee is a cautious old stick, and with all those boys under his care he wouldn't take any chances. The very fact that the expedition hasn't reached Cloncurry is significant, to my mind. It indicates that something has gone wrong. And although this something may not be serious, I want to be on the safe side. There's an aeroplane I can use, so why shouldn't I use it? I'm starting straight off for the Dodd Station."

And his lordship's tone was final.

It was natural that he should be interested in the affairs of the St. Frank's schoolboys. For it was Lord Dorrimore who had brought Lee and a party of the juniors from South Africa—flying in the wonderful Manners aeroplane. This was an enormous craft—a veritable liner of the skies. It had accomplished the amazing trip from South Africa to Australia in one hop, and with perfect ease, too.

It was Mr. Hobart Manners' latest invention—although it was a thoroughly-tested machine, and was already being constructed in large numbers. The type was a great, multi-engined monoplane, with cabins in the wings, and with dining-saloons and lounges and other marvels too numerous to mention.

Nipper and Handforth and a crowd of other Remove fellows would always remem-

(Continued on page 6.)

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(Continued from page 4.)

ber that wonderful trip from South Africa. After they had landed at Adelaide, Dorrie and Mr. Manners had flown on—demonstrating the great machine in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and other important cities. Australia was a land with vast possibilities in regard to aeroplanes, and Mr. Manners, although he had not originally intended flying to the Commonwealth, was taking advantage of the situation.

"I can borrow one of the Army machines," said Dorrie thoughtfully. "One of the fighter scouts—that can do over two hundred miles an hour. You will follow in the big 'bus, Manners."

"What on earth——"

"It may be necessary," continued Dorrie. "And, by glory! What about those other machines of yours?"

"Other machines?"

"Haven't six of your giant 'planes arrived in the harbour on one of the liners?"

"Yes," said Mr. Manners. "They were dispatched from England many weeks ago. I did not think that I should be here to superintend their removal and their assembly. They have been conveyed to the aerodrome already——"

"Then you'd better hustle round and get them all ready for the air," said Dorrie briskly. "You can easily find sufficient pilots for them—these Australians are keen. Hold yourselves ready, and if you get a telegram or a wireless from me, rush out without a minute's delay."

"But I don't see——"

"It may be necessary to rescue that party of schoolboys from the bush," said Dorrie. "You can never tell. If they're stranded somewhere, there's more than a chance that the only method of saving them will be to rush a number of aeroplanes to the spot. Anyhow, it's just as well to be on the safe side. I'll go first, and do some scouting."

Mr. Manners made a helpless gesture.

"But, my dear good man, have you thought of the cost?" he asked, aghast. "And it may be all unnecessary. These machines of mine are here for ordinary transport purposes, and——"

"Hang the cost!" broke in Dorrie gruffly. "Do you think I care? I'm a millionaire—and if those youngsters are in danger, no amount of money will be ill-spent if we can be of any service. They've all disappeared in the bush, and we have the means at hand to rescue them."

"Upon my word, Dorrie, there's no stopping you once you get the bit between your

teeth," said Mr. Manners, with a chuckle. "What an extraordinary fellow you are!"

"Extraordinary isn't the word for it!" grinned his lordship. "I'm a terror!"



CHAPTER 2

In the Dark!

E

DWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, the famous leader of Study D in the Remove at St.

Frank's, inhaled a deep, deep breath.

"By George! It's a lovely morning!" he declared. "I feel so fit that I could push somebody over!"

Church and McClure, his chums, cautiously moved out of reach. They knew, from past experience, that if anybody was pushed over, it would be one of them.

"Let's go out for a walk," suggested Church. "Let's go through the town and have a good look at everything."

"Just what I was going to propose," said Handforth, nodding.

They were standing on the veranda of a picturesque thatched bungalow—a wooden dwelling of ambitious size and design. The building itself, however, was crudely constructed, and there was no glass in the windows. There was, indeed, something primitive about all the buildings in this township—although, from a distance, they seemed quite conventional. It was only upon close examination that the crudity of the constructional work was actually seen.

For a party of schoolboys which was stranded in the bush, lost to the world, these juniors did not look particularly unhappy. They were airily attired in soiled and crumpled pyjamas, and it was really impossible for them to look smart in such togs. Archie Glenthorne, the dandy of the Remove, was in such a stew about it that he was afraid to venture forth, indeed.

But the majority of the other fellows, seniors and juniors alike, gave very little thought to their clothing in such a hot climate as this. Pyjamas, in their opinion, were just the very things to wear; and as for their being soiled and crumpled, what did it matter about a trifle like that?

It was early morning, and St. Frank's had had a good sound sleep—the first undisturbed sleep, in fact, since the disaster had happened. And it seemed to them that all their troubles were now over.

For days they had been tortured by uncertainties. They vividly remembered the treacherous act by which the great coach-train had been destroyed. In the heart of the bush, scores and scores of miles from any township or settlement, the terrible thing had happened.

The chief mechanic of the outfit, a brilliantly clever man, but an excitable, vindictive half-breed, had nursed a grudge against Sir Arthur Brampton; and one night this man had allowed all the petrol-tanks of the great coaches to empty themselves.

He had then attempted to escape, driving off in the great tender which contained the spare petrol supplies. But retribution had quickly overtaken this madman; he had driven his vehicle to disaster, and in the resultant explosion he had been killed.

This had only been the beginning of the trouble, however, for the flames from the explosion, streaking along the course of the leaking petrol, had enveloped the whole camp. Every one of those coaches had been involved in the conflagration. Every one of them had been destroyed—leaving the schoolboy party stranded in the bush.

Nobody had even thought of such a disastrous happening as this—nobody had prepared for such treachery.

For some little time it had seemed that the party would perish from hunger; then unexpectedly some food had been salvaged from the burnt-out wreckage. Everybody had believed that the entire stores had been consumed in the flames, but a certain proportion had been spared. Then, on the top of that discovery, a

small party of aborigines had appeared, and these men had acted as guides. And now everything was apparently all right.

For the St. Frank's fellows found themselves in a truly wonderful valley—a valley that was unsuspected by any living soul. Swampy ground surrounded it, and but for the guidance of the aborigines, Nelson Lee and Sir Arthur Brampton and the boys would never have got through in safety.

Within the valley, to their amazement, they had found cultivated fields, small and irregular, with hedges surrounding them—in very much the same style as the English countryside. They had found a flourishing township, peopled entirely by aborigines, with the sole exception of the man who called himself the white master. His was the controlling brain—his was the will which had made this township and his valley possible. And the blacks worshipped him and obeyed him, deeming his word to be law.

He had placed several of the bungalow houses at the disposal of the St. Frank's party, and now, after a night's rest, the boys were all feeling fit and brisk. And as they looked down the main street of that township, they could not help marvelling. It was all so peaceful—so rural. It was totally different from any other Australian township they had ever seen. It reminded them irre-

sistibly of England, in spite of the aborigines, who were everywhere to be seen.

These blacks were neatly and simply clothed in gaily-coloured garments. Some of the men were setting off with tools for the fields—and some of the women, too. Children were playing about, and a more peaceful scene could not have been imagined.

"Well, I suppose we shall be making a start later on in the day?" said Bob Christine, of the Fourth, as he joined Handforth & Co. "I understand it's a pretty long march to the nearest settlement."

"It'll take us days—perhaps a week or two," said Church. "This township isn't on any map, you know—it's unknown. In a way, we've discovered it."

"I dare say it pleases the old boy to live here in exile," said Handforth. "It's queer, you know, what some people do! Here's this Englishman, utterly alone amongst hundreds and hundreds of aborigines! He's taught

most of them to speak English, and to wear proper clothes. And he's turned this valley into a thriving agricultural community."

"Yes, it's pretty marvellous," said Nipper, the Remove captain, who had joined them. "Practically everything is produced here—vegetables, fruit, wheat, and even tobacco.

Cotton or flax is grown, and there are special looms for the manufacture of clothing. The whole valley is self-supporting, and nothing from the outside world has ever come into it. Nothing manufactured, I mean."

"This white master must be a bit of a genius at organisation," said Boots, of the Fourth.

"He's a marvellous man!" declared Clapson.

"Yes, the old man knows what he's doing," said Handforth, nodding. "It's rather a pity that he should waste his brains in an isolated valley like this. He'd be tremendously valuable in a big community."

"Yes, rather," said Clapson, nodding.

"Not that there's much hope for him now," added Handforth. "Being an old man—"

"Rot!" said Clapson indignantly.

"Eh?"

"He's not old," went on Clapson. "I had a good look at him last night, and—and— Somehow, I felt that I could see right into him. A rummy sort of sensation. And I know he's not old—not more than forty-five, anyhow."

"But he's as white as Methuselah!"

"I think Clapson's right," said Nipper. "Perhaps this hot climate has turned his hair white—or perhaps he has had some dreadful shock in his earlier life. If he had

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his beard shaved off, and his hair trimmed, he would look positively young."

They continued discussing the extraordinary man who was, in a way, their host. Little did they dream that their sojourn in this valley was intended by this host of theirs to be not temporary, but permanent!



CHAPTER 3

A Ticklish Situation!

"I THINK we shall get back in time for the last Test match?" asked Tommy Watson.

Nipper made a grimace.

"Not a chance of it!" he replied, shaking his head.

"What!" said Handforth, with a start. "Do you mean to say that we shan't get to Melbourne in time to see the beginning of the final Test match?"

"We shan't get to Melbourne in time to see the end of it!" replied Nipper.

"Then it's a swindle!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Great Scott! Did you hear that, you chaps? We're going to be diddled out of the big Test match!"

"No need to get excited, dear old fellow," said Vivian Travers languidly. "We're all disappointed about it, but there's no sense in making a fuss."

"Who's making a fuss?"

"Perhaps I'm mistaken," murmured Travers. "But it certainly seemed to me that you were on the point of beginning."

"We came to Australia especially to see the Test matches!" said Handforth warmly. "Why can't we get to Melbourne in time? We're out of our troubles now, aren't we?"

"We're in touch with civilisation, if that's what you mean," said Nipper. "At least, we're out of the wilds. There's bound to be a route from this valley to one of the recognised settlements or townships. But even if we start marching to-day, it will probably take us eight or ten days—and hard marching at that."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then we shall have to get from the next settlement to the railway—and that may be a hundred miles."

"What?"

"Or two hundred," said Nipper coolly. "Then we shall have to travel half across Australia—perhaps over a thousand miles. Reckon it up, Handy. What chance is there for us to get to Melbourne in under a fortnight?"

"To see the beginning of the match, we shall need to be in Melbourne in under ten days," said Jerry Dodd, the Australian junior, in a gloomy voice.

"My only hat! What a country!" said Handforth indignantly.

"There's nothing wrong with the country!" retorted Jerry.

"It's too big!" said Handforth in an accusing voice. "That's what's the matter with Australia! It's a darned lot too big! All these townships are too far apart."

"That's the worse of these Governments," said Jerry Dodd sarcastically. "They're always making blunders like this. As soon as we get back, Handy, you'd better lodge a complaint at Canberra."

"It's a good idea," said Nipper. "Handy, you'd better see the Prime Minister, and ask him what the dickens he means by having Australia made so big. Tell him that you don't like it, and that unless he reduces the size of the continent by next month you'll dot him on the nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fatheads!" said Handforth witheringly. They all continued chuckling, and Handforth realised that his leg had been pulled.

"You can cackle all you like!" he said gruffly. "But it's a bit rotten about that Test match! We were as keen as mustard on seeing the last big game between England and Australia."

"Be thankful that you're safely out of the bush—with a prospect of getting back to normal life within a few days," said Buster Boots. "And, if you're so keen on cricket, what about getting up a game against some of these aborigines?"

Handforth started.

"Why not?" he asked eagerly.

"I can give you two reasons why not," said Nipper. "Firstly, we haven't any bats or balls or stumps—and, secondly, the aborigines don't know how to play."

"Then we can teach 'em!" said Handforth. "As for bats and balls, we can soon make some. It'll get us into practice, too—"

"Just a minute, my sons!" said Fenton, of the Sixth.

The school captain strode amongst the juniors, and he was looking businesslike and brisk.

"You'll need a little practise with lessons, I'm thinking," he said. "After all this delay, you'll be absolutely rusty. Have you forgotten that we're supposed to do our ordinary school work on this trip?"

"Be reasonable, Fenton!" protested Nipper. "How could we do any school work in these circumstances?"

"I'll admit it's difficult—but you'll have to make up for lost time as soon as we get back to the School Ship," replied Fenton. "I don't suppose there'll be any real discipline until then. Breakfast's ready now, and there mustn't be any rushing. There's a kind of hall a little way down the street, and everything is fixed up in there. The blacks have done wonders, and there's room for everybody—and grub, too."

"Hurrah!"

"Good egg!"



'My name is Stanley Winton!' said the white master, and then walked out of the building. As Len Clapson heard the name, every trace of colour left his face. 'Stanley Winton!' he breathed hoarsely. What did Len Clapson, of the Fourth Form at St. Frank's, know about this amazing white master?

"Let's be off, you chaps."

Fenton had no difficulty in getting the juniors together, and then they went marching down that dusty main street, towards the low, thatched building which was now doing duty as a dining-hall.

As the fellows crowded past another of these picturesque bungalows, they saw Nelson Lee sitting on the veranda with Sir Arthur Brampton and Mr. Stockdale and Mr. Pycraft, and one or two of the other masters. And the St. Frank's boys rather wondered why those men were looking so grave and troubled. For it seemed to the juniors that everything was now "all serene."

"It is incredible—positively incredible," said Sir Arthur, a bluff, hearty, energetic man. "In fact, Mr. Lee, I absolutely refuse to accept this position seriously."

"It is very ticklish, nevertheless," said Nelson Lee.

"Ticklish?" said Mr. Pycraft excitedly. "Is that a correct word to use, Mr. Lee? It seems to me that the position is—is appalling! We are doomed to remain in this valley for the rest of our lives! Are you content to submit to that?"

"I am not," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "Furthermore, Mr. Pycraft, I have no intention of remaining in this valley for the rest of my life. That is why I said the position is ticklish. By some means, we must get out of this valley, taking all the boys with us. But exactly how this move is to be accomplished we have yet to determine."



CHAPTER 4

The White Master's Decree!

MR. STOCKDALE, of the Modern House, looked puzzled and troubled.

"I understand that you had a talk with this man—this white master, as he calls himself—yesterday, Mr. Lee?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lee. "Sir Arthur and I had a chat with him, and it was most enlightening."

"The man is mad!" put in Mr. Pycraft nervously. "We should do well, I think, to put him under restraint."

"That would be a poor return for his hospitality, Mr. Pycraft," said Lee.

"Hospitality?" repeated the Fourth Form-master. "What kind of hospitality is this? I understand that this man is determined to keep us here in this valley for the remainder of our lives! I tell you he is mad! He is dangerous——"

"Really, Mr. Pycraft, there is no necessity to get excited," protested Lee mildly.

"I am not excited, sir!" denied Mr. Pycraft. "I am—incensed."

He jumped suddenly to his feet, for at that moment an impressive figure had appeared near by. It was the figure of a tall man, attired completely in white. He pos-

sessed a long white beard, and his long hair was white, too. He was, in many ways, an extraordinary-looking man.

It was he who was the lord and master of this valley—the man who had created it in its present guise; he was the man who had collected these aborigines round him, and who had taught them the crafts and a smattering of the arts. Nelson Lee could easily understand the white master's consternation at finding his peaceful valley invaded by a horde of schoolboys and white men.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said the white master gravely.

"One moment, sir—one moment!" shouted Mr. Pycraft, prancing up. "What is this I hear? Have you the temerity to suggest that you intend to keep us here—virtually prisoners—in this valley of yours?"

The white-bearded man eyed Mr. Pycraft with composure.

"I think not, sir," he replied in a dignified tone. "I have not suggested that you are prisoners. You are at liberty to go where you please in this valley, and to make it your home. So long as you conform to the simple laws of this community, there will be no interference. In view of the fact, however, that idleness would set a bad example to my black people, I trust that you will find yourselves suitable tasks before many days have elapsed."

"Suitable tasks!" echoed two or three of those startled gentlemen.

"Nonsense!" shouted Mr. Pycraft, before the white master could continue. "We shall not remain here, my friend! And you dare not detain us, either!"

"Really, Mr. Pycraft, you are not helping matters by this display of temper," said Nelson Lee. "Mr. Winton is the owner of this valley, and we, at the moment, are his guests. It is hardly seemly——"

"Is this a time to be seemly?" broke in Mr. Pycraft hotly. "So your name is Winton, is it, sir?" he went on, turning to the white master. "Well, I, for one, refuse to be detained——"

"You are not detained," interrupted the other. "You are free to leave this valley whenever you please. Not a hand will be lifted against you. No attempt will be made to prevent your going."

"Oh!" said Mr. Pycraft, some of the wind taken out of his sails.

"However, I must warn you that any such move would be fatal," continued the white master, a gleam entering his eyes. "In every direction, beyond this valley, there are swamps to be crossed—and these swamps are treacherous. They are deadly. And should you chance to escape their perils, there are deserts, acrid and stifling. An expedition, fully equipped, could get through, if suitably guided by trackers. But, since it is not my intention to equip any such expedition, or to facilitate any of your plans, I doubt if you will ever see the outside world again!"

Mr. Horace Pycraft breathed hard.

"Did I not say that this man was mad?" he demanded, twirling round. "You heard what he said?"

"If I am mad, then my madness is of a harmless character," said the white master whimsically. "As I told some of you gentlemen yesterday, I resent your presence in this valley. Since you were in danger of perishing in the bush, however, I had no alternative but to admit you. There is, however, no reason why I should facilitate your departure. If you get back to your so-called civilisation you will speak of this valley, and then, in due course, my solitude and peace will be ruined. I do not want that to happen. So, gentlemen, I am afraid you must make the best of a bad job, and resign yourselves to remaining here."

And the white master turned on his heel, and walked away.

"There!" said Mr. Pycraft breathlessly. "I knew it! This man is a fiend—a scoundrel! He intends to keep us here as prisoners."

Nelson Lee was getting tired of the Fourth Form-master's fussiness—which was solely occasioned by fear.

"You are prone to exaggeration, Mr. Pycraft," said Lee curtly. "This man is no scoundrel. He has given us shelter, and he is providing us with food. But for him our position in the bush might have been very grave indeed."

"At least, we were free men," said Mr. Pycraft.

"With a freedom that was of little use to us," put in Sir Arthur gruffly. "Free to wander further into the bush—free to perish of thirst and hunger."

The Form-master fell silent.

"Mr. Winton is an eccentric," said Nelson Lee quietly. "He is the Stanley Winton who was, about fourteen years ago, sentenced to five years penal servitude for manslaughter. Perhaps you remember the case, Mr. Pycraft?"

"I do not!" said Mr. Pycraft.

"It was a somewhat sensational affair," said Lee. "At first the charge was one of murder, but it was reduced to manslaughter. Mr. Winton was convicted and served his sentence. Then, strangely enough, on the very day of his release from prison the actual criminal confessed, and Mr. Winton's innocence was established."

"He told you this?" asked Mr. Norton, the master of the Remove.

"He told me his name—and I remember all the details of the case," replied Nelson Lee. "It appears, however, that Mr. Winton received a terrible blow upon his release from prison. He found that his wife was dead—killed by the shock of the whole affair. His infant son had died, too."

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Stockdale compassionately.

"It altered his whole nature, I think," said Nelson Lee. "He became embittered towards civilisation. He vowed that he would come to the uttermost ends of the earth, and

bury himself amongst a primitive people. So he came to Australia, amongst the aborigines. He found this valley, settled here, and for nine years he has been moulding this community, perfecting the valley, and living his own simple life."

"But what is this to do with us?" asked Mr. Pycraft impatiently.

"Everything," replied Lee. "Mr. Winton fears that we shall carry this story abroad, and that he will soon be pestered by large numbers of settlers. No doubt Government officials will also descend upon him. Rather than take such risks, he prefers to keep us here."

"It's a problem," said Sir Arthur Brampton, stroking his chin. "By James, it is a problem!"



CHAPTER 5

Strange Behaviour of Len Clapson I

THE white master, after leaving Nelson Lee and the other men, made his way into that building where the schoolboys were at breakfast. He found the scene to be a lively one.

The building was large—very much like an old-fashioned English barn. The sides were of wood, and the roof was thatched. There were plenty of open windows. Inside, there were long tables—or, rather, trestles. Round these the boys were breakfasting, waited upon eagerly by an army of blackfellows.

The seniors occupied one side of the building, and the juniors the other. The prefects were doing their utmost to keep order.

There was no lack of food. Bread of a very good quality was plentiful—and there was butter and hard-boiled eggs and lettuce and tomatoes and cucumbers. Coffee was being served, too. The plates and dishes and cups were all of crude earthenware—a kind of sun-baked clay, unglazed and rough—yet these things were very serviceable.

The white master stood looking on, silent and sombre. One would have thought that after so many years of solitude he would have been cheered at the sight of these laughing, merry schoolboys. Actually, he was pained—troubled. They were a disturbing element, and he was thinking, perhaps, that their continued sojourn in this valley would provide him with a constant cause for irritation. He was a man of peace—of sober quietness.

"Not so much noise, you kids!" sang out Fenton of the Sixth. "Silence, there! Does anybody want a rap across the knuckles?"

"Cheese it, Fenton!" protested Handforth. "Can't we be free and easy if we like? We're not in the dining-hall at St. Frank's."

"Or on board the School Ship either!" said Buster Boots. "We're celebrating our escape from the bush. By this evening we shall be on the march again—and within a few days

we shall all be in a train, steaming towards Melbourne."

"Hurrah!" yelled a number of the other juniors.

"Hold!" said the white master sternly.

There was an immediate silence, and all heads were turned.

"My hat!" murmured Harry Oldfield, of the Fourth. "I didn't know he was here."

"I can't understand it," muttered Clapson, staring. "Oh, what does it mean?"

Bob Christine and Oldfield and a few of the other Fourth-Formers looked at Clapson in surprise. Generally, Len Clapson was a quiet, cheerful sort of boy. His Form-fellows could not understand why he should be so impressed—so affected—by the sight of this white-bearded man. Yet Clapson was staring at him fascinatedly, dazedly, as though drawn by some hypnotic power.

It was perfectly true that the white master was impressive, but none of the other juniors were so affected.

"It is apparent," said the white-haired exile, "that your seniors have not informed you of the full facts. I will repair the omission. You will not be on a train, bound for Melbourne, within a few days. You will not leave this valley."

There was a dead silence.

"Not—not leave the valley?" said Handforth, breaking the spell.

"You have come unbidden, and so you shall remain," replied the white master. "At first, no doubt, you will be restless and impatient. But time is a great healer; in due course you will be resigned, and I venture to predict that you will find amusement and industry in this valley of mine."

"But I don't understand, sir!" said Fenton. "You're not saying, are you, that we are to remain here—in this valley?"

"You are to remain here," replied the white master, nodding. "It will be idle for you to make any attempts to bribe the aborigines. They are faithful to me. They will not hear of anything that has not received my personal satisfaction. Indeed, it might even be dangerous if you attempt to coerce them. I am merely saying this as word of warning."

He nodded, and was about to take his departure when Len Clapson suddenly jumped up in his seat.

"Please, sir!" panted Clapson hoarsely.

The white master turned, and regarded him in wonder.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Do—do you mind telling me your name, sir?" asked Clapson, flushing crimson. "I—I'm sorry, sir—I don't mean to be impertinent, but—but—"

"My name can be of no interest to you, my boy," said the white master. "However, since many of your companions already know it, there is no reason why I should withhold it from you. My name is Stanley Winton—but it is a name that I have not used for nine years."

This time he turned on his heel, and walked out of the barn-like building.

Len Clapson, every trace of colour fleeing from his face, sat down heavily. One of those earthenware plates crashed to the floor, and shattered. And Clapson sat there, pale to the lips, trembling in every inch of him.

"Stanley Winton!" he breathed hoarsely. "Stanley Winton!"

Oldfield grasped his arm, and half swung him round.

"What's the matter with you, Clappy?" he asked, in amazement. "Have you gone mad, or what?"

Clapson looked at him unseeingly.

"Stanley Winton!" he repeated, like a fellow in a dream.

"Grab him!" said Bob Christine. "He knows something! We'll get it out of him, too!"

But just then Len Clapson leapt to his feet, pushed his way through the crowd, and ran helter skelter out into the open, while everybody stared after him in wonder and bewilderment!

CHAPTER 6

Handforth Scents a Mystery!



"AD!" said Bob Christine, shaking his head.

"Clean off his rocker!" agreed Old-

field.

"One mad action is not enough to prove a man mad," murmured Billy Nation, the proverb fiend.

"Never known him act like it before," said Harry Oldfield, with a worried expression. "What's come over the ass? Why should he be so startled when he hears that man's name?"

Oldfield and Nation shared Study 3 in the Modern House at St. Frank's with Len Clapson, and they were naturally more interested than the other fellows. Handforth, of course, came bustling forward, eager to present his valued opinion.

"There's a mystery here!" he said firmly.

"Go hon!"

"A mystery!" insisted Handforth. "Clapson has recognised this white-haired old Johnnie. I expect he knows him to be an ex-bushranger, or something like that!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Christine.

"It's as clear as daylight," continued Handforth enthusiastically. "This man, Winton, or whatever his name is, evidently fled into the bush to get away from the police. And when he got to this valley he settled down, and forced the aborigines to serve him—like slaves."

"Rot!" said Oldfield. "These aborigines are better off than any others we have seen in the whole of Australia. They're well clothed, well fed, and their lives seem to be contented and peaceful. The white master

is a kindly man—and a man of wonderful organising ability, too."

"I'll bet he's an ex-bushranger!" said Handforth stubbornly.

"Anyhow, we'd better find Clapson," said Harry Oldfield. "We'll make him tell us what's on his mind."

In the meantime, in that imposing bungalow which stood in the centre of this remarkable township, the white master was entertaining some of his grown-up guests. They were having breakfast in a large, cool, airy room. The party included Nelson Lee, Sir Arthur Brampton, Mr. Stockdale, and the other St. Frank's masters.

The host was polite and courteous—although he remained cold in his manner. While he fulfilled his duties as host, he made it apparent that he resented the presence of his visitors.

"We thoroughly appreciate your position, Mr. Winton, and we have no desire to interfere with your peaceful valley and your isolation," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Since it pleases you to live this secluded life, it is not for us to disturb it. If you will allow us to depart from this valley, we will respect your secret—"

"I do not doubt your word, Mr. Lee," said the white master. "Neither do I doubt the word of your companions. But you must remember that there is a number of irresponsible schoolboys in your party. Do you guarantee to keep their tongues silent?"

"Does it matter very much if their tongues are not silent?" retorted Lee. "Who will take notice of them? If they talk of this valley, nobody will give credence to the story—since it will sound utterly fantastic. You can safely provide us with an escort, and allow us to reach one of the nearest points of—"

"No!" interrupted the white master. "I cannot take the risk. Perhaps there would be no result for a month or two, but I should always be tortured by the thought that one day strangers would come—that settlers would sweep into this valley, and claim the right to remain. And I desire nothing but isolation. This is my sanctuary. I have cut myself off from the world, and it is only by accident that you have all discovered me here. I regret that I cannot depart from the decision that I have already made."

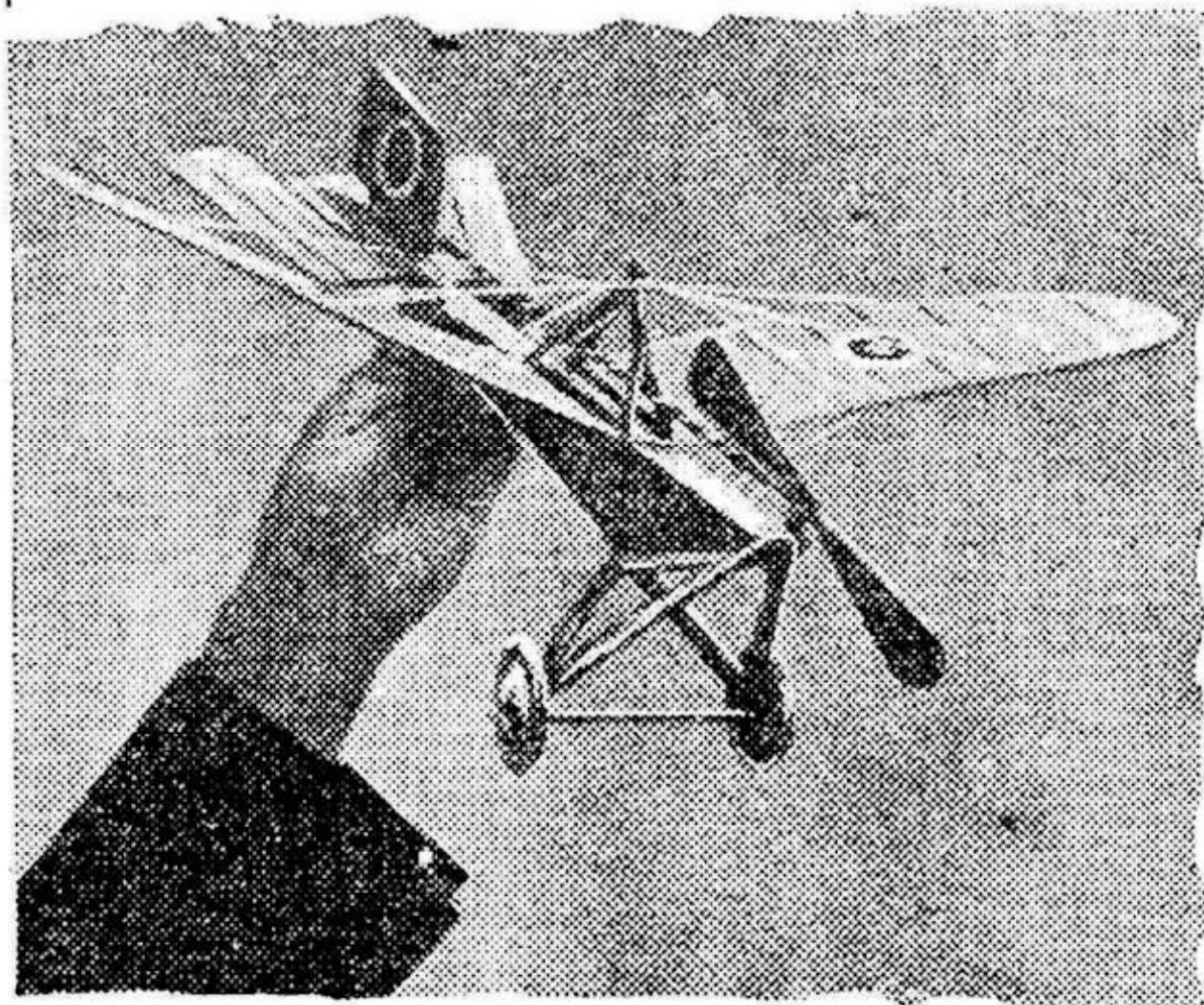
"But this is monstrous!" broke in Mr. Pycraft excitedly. "You cannot keep us here against our will! We are not your prisoners, sir! It is an outrageous position—"

"You are at liberty to take your departure, sir," said the white master coldly. "I am subjecting you to no restraint. You came here unbidden, and, if you choose, you may depart. I only warn you that any such attempt to get out of this valley will be fatal."

"We will hold you prisoner, and force your blacks to guide us back to civilisation!" shouted Mr. Pycraft.

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The white master smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Already you begin to threaten me," he said quietly. "Am I not justified in my attitude? In return for my hospitality, you suggest violence. You hint that you will stir up trouble amongst my peaceful blacks—that you will turn them against me."

"I am very sorry, sir, that any such suggestion should have been made," said Nelson Lee. "Mr. Pycraft, you are not yourself!" he added, giving the Fourth Form-master a hard look. "It will be better, I think, if you get a grip on yourself."

Mr. Pycraft, abashed, muttered something under his breath.

"You need not fear, Mr. Winton, that we will abuse your hospitality," went on Nelson Lee. "But if we can, by any reasonable arguments, convince you that it would be unjust to keep us in this valley—"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Sir Arthur Brampton suddenly.

He interrupted without any thought of rudeness. He had seized one of the dishes on the table, and, amazed at its weight, he now noticed that the dish was yellow in colour, and gleaming with a rich mel'owness.

"This is made of gold!" he ejaculated, startled.

The white master nodded.

"I believe so," he agreed calmly.

Sir Arthur looked at the dish with greater interest. It was a crudely-made affair, but serviceable enough.

"Gold!" said Sir Arthur, with a whistle. "Why, this one dish must be worth a hundred pounds—if not more!"

"There are others," said the white master, indicating several more laden dishes on the table. "Ornaments, too. All this work has been executed by my own aboriginal craftsmen."

"But the gold!" said Mr. Stockdale. "Where did it come from?"

"This valley contains gold," said the host carelessly. "Plenty of gold."

"My dear sir, you don't seem to realise what this may mean!" said Sir Arthur, his eyes gleaming. "If there is such gold in this valley, you are a millionaire—a multi-millionaire! Exploited in the right way—"

"I do not desire this valley to be exploited," interrupted the white master. "As for the gold, I care nothing for it. I am not a man who desires wealth, or the worldly benefits that wealth can bring. I am content, as you see me. And since the gold of this valley is of no use, except for the manufacture of utensils, it is thus employed. I venture to say, gentlemen, that you would be astonished if you could examine the cooking-pans in my kitchen."

They were all startled. They had known that this valley was amazingly luxuriant—that

it was a gem set in the midst of much wild bushland—but, until now, they had not known that gold was to be found here.

"But it is preposterous!" said Sir Arthur. "With this wealth at your disposal, Mr. Winton, you should develop this valley. The railway will be brought here, a great city will spring up, and hundreds of miles of countryside will be populated, and——"

"That is my precise argument for keeping you all here, gentlemen," said the white master, nodding. "To me, this gold is practically valueless. I have done with the world. And if I allow you to depart, what will be the result? There will be a stampede. Hordes of gold-maddened men will come teeming into my sanctuary, and convert it into a place of hideous noise and bustle and activity."

Nelson Lee was silent. He could easily understand the white master's point of view. If any members of this party got back to the populated regions of Australia, the news of the verdant valley, with its gold, would spread; and then there would be a stampede—exactly as Mr. Winton prophesied.

And since he wanted nothing but peace and quietness, it was palpably against his own interests to allow these "guests" of his to depart. More than ever it seemed that there would be no escape from this strange valley!



CHAPTER 7

Clapson's Amazing Discovery!

HANDFORTH frowned in perplexity.

"Can't make it out," he said, scratching his head.

"Where can the beggar have got to? And why should he run off like that?"

He was referring to Len Clapson, of the Fourth. Lots of fellows had been searching, but so far Clapson had not been found. Since he had run out of that barn-like building he had vanished.

Everybody was more or less excited, and Nipper, in particular, was anxious to have a few words with Nelson Lee. It was too impossible to believe that none of them would ever get out of this valley. Why should they be kept here at the whim of this crazy recluse?

"It's a serious situation," Fenton was saying, as he stood under the shade of a tree with a number of other Sixth-Formers. "We thought we were in luck's way when we first got here—and now we find that we're in a worse fix than ever."

"But can't something be done?" asked Reynolds. "Never to see England again! It's—it's unthinkable!"

"There must be some way out of here," declared Biggleswade. "Anyhow, I'm not giving yet. Our worthy host will probably

change his mind after a few days. Wait until he's had a good sample of what Handforth and those other juniors can do! He'll be only too glad to get rid of the lot of us."

"Something in that," said Fenton, nodding. "At the same time, the whole position is uncertain. Supposing this white master, as he calls himself, remains stubborn? What are we going to do? It's all very well to talk about getting out of the valley, but what about the swamps? And the deserts? We're not equipped for any such march, and we can't force this man to provide us with supplies."

"Can't we?" demanded Reynolds. "Why not? He can lead this kind of life if he wants to, but why should he compel us to lead it? It's all rot! If he won't listen to reason, then we shall have to use force."

Handforth came bustling up, with Church and McClure in attendance.

"Seen Clapson anywhere about?" asked Handforth briskly.

"Clapson?" repeated Fenton.

"Fourth Form chap—Modern House," explained Handforth. "Don't you remember how he started up during breakfast?"

"Yes," nodded the school captain. "What's become of him? And why did he act so strangely?"

"If we knew that, we wouldn't be searching for him," said Handforth. "But he evidently knows something—and we've got to find out what it is. If we can only locate him——"

Some shouts from farther down that dusty street caused Handforth and the seniors to turn. Handy let out a yell when he recognised Len Clapson amongst a group of Fourth-Formers.

"Is that your man?" asked Biggleswade.

"Yes, rather!" shouted Handforth.

He ran off, and joined the others. They had all come to a halt in a grateful patch of shade. Clapson was looking pale and queer, and his eyes were burning with an intense light.

"We found him mooning behind one of the buildings," explained Bob Christine. "He won't explain, either. Says he wants to be alone—to think."

"Rats!" said Handforth, seizing Clapson by the shoulder. "Now then, Clappy, my son! Out with it! What's the matter with you? I'll give you just one minute to answer!"

"Go easy with him, Handy," urged Nipper. "Not so rough. The poor chap looks dazed."

"He'll be more dazed after I've punched him on the nose!" said Handforth threateningly. "If he doesn't explain things within the minute, I'll slaughter him!"

"You can go and mind your own business, you fatheaded Remove ass!" said Boots aggressively.

"Look here, you silly Fourth-Former——"

"Cheese it!" said Nipper. "Can't we leave House rows until we get back to St. Frank's?"

"I like that!" snorted Handforth. "According to this white-bearded old lunatic, we're going to remain in this valley for the rest of our lives!"

"He's not a lunatic!" said Clapson fiercely.

The vehemence of his statement was startling. He was looking at Handforth with burning, resentful eyes.

"Oh!" said Edward Oswald, staring. "If he isn't a lunatic, what is he?"

"He's—my father!"

"Wha-a-a-at!"

Many of the juniors uttered that startled ejaculation, and they stared at Leonard Clapson in sheer amazement. The Fourth-Former was obviously not joking. He had made that startling statement in all seriousness.

"We said he was mad, didn't we?" asked Bob Christine, looking round. "This proves it! It must be the heat. The poor old chap is absolutely off his rocker!"

"I'm not!" said Clapson. "This man who calls himself the white master is my father!"

"Great Scott!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Good gad!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

Other juniors were gathering round, and the excitement grew. There was something extraordinary convincing in Clapson's attitude. It was certainly difficult to believe that he was wandering in his mind. Yet this statement of his was so singular as to be practically fantastic.

"The white master is your father?" said Handforth incredulously.

"Yes."

"My dear chap, you must be dreaming," said the leader of Study D. "My poor old ass! You don't know what you're talking about!"

"I do—I do!" insisted Clapson. "Stanley Winton! Do you think I could be mistaken about a name like that?"

"Hold on!" said Oldfield. "If this man's name is Winton, why isn't yours Winton? Hang it, Clappy, you can't expect us to believe—"

"His real name is Clapson—it must be!" said the Fourth-Former. "Winton is the family name of my father's mother—my grandmother's name. Don't you understand? And my father's name is Stanley."

"But—but— Well, hang it, isn't this a bit steep?" asked Oldfield helplessly. "We come out here, into unknown Australia; we find a white-haired old man living amongst a lot of aborigines, and you calmly declare that he's your pater!"

"It's logical!" said Clapson. "It fits like a glove! I've always thought that my father was dead—and yet, at the same time, I was never allowed to know any details. You see,

I was brought up by my aunt, I've never known any father or mother. It was only a year or two ago that I learned from my aunt—quite by accident—that my father had died while I was a little tot. He had been in prison, and there was some sort of disgrace—although my aunt proudly told me that my father's innocence was established before he died. Isn't it clear? My father didn't die at all—he came out here—he's been living in this valley ever since!"

"For the love of Samson!" said Vivian Travers. "I believe he's right, after all, dear old fellows. The white master, when you come to look at him, is nothing like so old as he appears at first sight. Well, well! Fate plays some queer tricks!"

"But—but are you sure?" asked Handforth, bewildered. "Great Scott! What a rummy thing if this should prove to be right! Clapson's pater—here, in this unknown valley!"

Len Clapson smiled—a quiet, confident smile.

"There's no doubt about it," he said, his voice trembling. "He is my father—and I want you to take me to him. Or, better still, I'll go alone—"

"Not likely!" said Bob Christine. "We'll all go!"

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CHAPTER 8

Lord Dorrimore's Mission!

AD—dad!"

Mr. Jerrold Walter Dodd looked up from his newspaper as one of his daughters

came running up the veranda steps, her face flushed and excited.

"Well, well, what is it?" asked Mr. Dodd good-naturedly.

The Dodd Station was one of the largest in Queensland, and Mr. Dodd himself was a big, smiling Cornstalk. He was a native of New South Wales, and this Queensland station of his was a fairly new development.

"There's an aeroplane coming, dad!" cried Grace breathlessly.

"Nonsense!" said her father.

Grace was one of Mr. Dodd's seven daughters. She was just over sixteen—a pretty, laughing girl, with masses of fair hair. Now, with her face flushed and her eyes sparkling, she looked prettier than ever. Her father regarded her amusedly.

"We don't get aeroplanes over here," he said. "I expect you have heard one of the tractors—from a distance."

Grace looked at him scornfully.

"Do you think I don't know the difference between the sound of an old tractor and an aeroplane?" she asked, with disdain. "If you don't believe me, come and look! Listen! Can't you hear it?"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Dodd.

He not only heard the unfamiliar throbbing, but he noticed that a number of men, emerging from an outbuilding, was staring up at the sky, and pointing. At the same moment there was a number of girlish shouts as Cynthia and Elsie came running out of the house.

"Perhaps it's somebody with news about Jerry and all the other schoolboys!" said Grace breathlessly. "Oh, I do hope so!"

All the Dodd household was worried about Jerry. They had read the recent reports regarding the disappearance of the St. Frank's party in the bush, and Mr. and Mrs. Dodd, in particular, were gravely concerned—for Jerry was their only son.

Stepping out from the shade of the veranda, Mr. Dodd was just in time to see a small, wicked-looking single-seater aeroplane swoop down to earth. Her engine was cut off, and she was diving steeply.

"My hat!" ejaculated Grace. "It was miles away a minute ago! It must have been travelling at a tremendous rate!"

It was seldom that an aeroplane called at this isolated cattle station—tucked away in a remote part of Queensland. So it was not surprising that many of the station hands ran helter-skelter towards the 'plane after it had come to earth. There was plenty of flat grassland near at hand, where the machine could safely land.

This machine was a rakish, hornet-like creation, suggestive of speed and aggressiveness in its very lines. From the cockpit a tall, careless-looking individual stepped to the ground. He was Lord Dorrimore, dressed in flannel trousers and an open shirt. Moreover, he wore no jacket, and his shirt-sleeves were rolled up.

"Mr. Dodd anywhere about?" he asked, as a couple of horsemen galloped up and drew rein.

"Gosh!" said one of the men. "You've sort of dropped in, ain't you?"

"In a way, yes," admitted Dorrie.

"Brought any news about the motor-coach outfit?"

"Sorry, I haven't," said his lordship. "I was hoping that you might be able to tell me something here."

The old man shook his head.

"We don't know a thing," he said. "But here comes the boss, if you want to speak to him."

A motor-car was speeding up, containing not only Mr. Dodd, but two or three of his daughters. Lord Dorrimore strode forward to meet them.

"Mr. Dodd?" he said briskly. "Good! Excuse me dropping in like this, but I'm lookin' for those St. Frank's schoolboys. If there's no news here, I'll take to the air again, and do some scouting. My name's Dorrimore."

"Lord Dorrimore!" cried Grace, and one or two of the other girls.

"Pleased to meet you, sir!" said Mr. Dodd enthusiastically.

They had all heard of the famous sporting peer—the millionaire explorer. Lord Dorrimore's name, indeed, was famous throughout the world. He was renowned for his daring enterprise and for his phenomenal luck. No matter what dangers he braved, he generally came out on top. But this really wasn't so much a matter of luck, as of pluck. The two words have a similar sound, and they mean much the same thing. Lucky fellows are generally plucky fellows.

Mr. Dodd insisted that his lordship should go to the house, and ten minutes later Dorrie was seated on the veranda, partaking of an iced lemon squash. Round him were Mr. and Mrs. Dodd and most of the girls. They were very astonished when he informed them that he had flown from Sydney, over a thousand miles away, in a matter of five and a half hours.

"I didn't start until this morning," he admitted. "Had one stop—at Bourke—for petrol. And I've made arrangements there, too, for some big supplies to be sent up by rail."

"But it's incredible!" said Mr. Dodd. "Five hours! A thousand miles! Why, man, it takes us over a week to get from here to Sydney."

"Overland, yes," admitted Dorrie, grinning. "You have to go a considerable way by car—and over sections of country that are practically roadless. And then the rail journey is a bit of a detour, too. You see, this machine of mine can do over two hundred miles an hour, and I came direct."

"It's wonderful!" declared Cynthia. "Five hours to Sydney! And haven't you brought any news, Lord Dorrimore? About Jerry, I mean?"

"I know less than you do, Miss Dodd," said his lordship, shaking his head. "Nothing has been heard of that motor-coach outfit since it left this station. It went into the bush, and it should have reached Cloncurry two or three days ago."

"What do you think has happened?" asked Mr. Dodd.

"Goodness knows!" replied Dorrie. "And if you'll excuse me, I'll be pushing off now. I oughtn't to waste a moment. I've got extra tanks on my machine, and my plan is to do some scouting, using this place of yours as my headquarters. You don't mind, do you?"

"Mind!" said Mr. Dodd. "My dear sir, I cannot express my gratitude! You must remember that my own son is with that lost outfit. And with a machine like yours, that can cover so much ground, you should be able to—"

"Don't make any prophecies, please," interrupted Dorrie. "This is a difficult country for scouting work, sir. I might fly for hours and see nothing in the nature of a clue. On the other hand, there's just a chance that I shall discover something very soon. If the party is stranded in the bush, I may be able



Handforth's efforts to throw the boomerang were scarcely successful. He swung his arm round, and away went the curved piece of wood—to hit Mr. Horace Pycraft a nasty crack on the head! "Great pip!" gurgled Handforth in dismay.

to locate it. From the air, one can see for scores of miles."

"The Government should do something!" said Mrs. Dodd. "With so many boys missing, and with so many parents anxious, why couldn't the Government send a large number of aeroplanes?"

"While the Government's thinking about it, we're acting, Mrs. Dodd," said the sporting peer briskly. "I might tell you that a number of other machines is being prepared, and they'll come direct to this station if they get word from me. You're on the telegraph here, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Dodd. "But I had no idea that you had made such elaborate arrangements."

Dorrie rose to his feet.

"It's just as well to be prepared for any emergency," he said. "Too much time has been lost already, and now we must hope that we are not too late."



CHAPTER 9

A Grim Discovery!

MRS DODD was looking rather pale.

"I don't believe it," she said quietly.

"It cannot be too late, Lord Dorrimore! All those boys—including my own son—lost in the bush! It is too terrible to believe that they have come to any real harm."

"We wish you God-speed, sir, on your splendid mission," said Mr. Dodd.

His lordship would not wait for any further discussion. He had only landed at the Dodd Station so that he could tell the good folks there of his intentions—and on the off-chance that there might be some further news. As there was nothing more to be gained by remaining, Dorrie was now anxious to be up in the air again.

The whole Dodd family came out to see him off—and many of the station hands, too. He took to the air without any trouble, the powerful 'plane fairly leaping off the ground and climbing upwards with incredible steepness, her engine roaring with a deep-throated energy.

This machine was one that Dorrie had borrowed—it had, in fact, been lent by the Government—and he had already proved it to be a worthy friend. Without a trace of trouble, it had carried him over New South Wales and into Queensland.

Very soon the machine was several thousand feet up, and Lord Dorrimore turned her nose to the northward. It was known that the motor-coach outfit had travelled in this direction, although Sir Arthur Brampton's plans had been more or less general. He had selected no definite route, but had suggested that he might make various detours before ultimately reaching Cloncurry.

So Dorrie knew the difficulties of his task, and he knew, moreover, that he might make twenty trips from his base—and yet be unsuccessful.

The prospect of engine failure did not occur to his lordship at all—and yet, if that throb-

bing mass of metal failed him, he would inevitably come down in the bush.

Below him was spread a wonderful panorama; rolling grassland, with patches of forest here and there; desert spaces, and hills rising in the distance, with gleaming little creeks noticeable here and there.

Within a very few minutes the Dodd Station, with its buildings, its grazing-land, its thousands of cattle, had been left completely behind. Dorrie was soon flying over virgin country, which had not yet been developed by the white man.

Once his heart leapt, for he saw tiny figures below in a little clearing of the bush. Looking through his binoculars, however, he could see that he had only spotted an aboriginal encampment—and there were many such in this country.

Mile after mile was covered, and, as he was travelling at a good height, the landscape rolled beneath him in a slow-moving panorama. But it was ever-changing, and Lord Dorrimore's eyes were keenly on the look-out for any further sign of human life.

He felt that if he came within range of the St. Frank's party he would not be mistaken. For it was a very large party, and the motor-coaches, in themselves, would be extraordinarily good landmarks, as it were. And the party, if stranded, would undoubtedly signal frantically to him.

An hour sped by—two hours—three hours.

By now Dorrie was getting well to the north-west; he did not quite know whether he was still over Queensland or whether he had penetrated into Northern Territory. He kept his eye on the petrol-indicator, and every nerve was on the stretch, listening for any sign of irregularity in the working of the engine. But so far everything was satisfactory.

He had sufficient petrol for six or seven hours further flight, so he had ample reserve. And he carried on.

He was a little intrigued by a curious collection of dots far away to the west, almost beyond his line of vision. They were black dots, on the edge of some thick bush, but no movement could be seen near them. Dorrie took these black dots to be boulders of some kind. He altered his direction, flying towards them, curious to discover their exact nature. He felt that he might just as well fly over there as in any other direction. Never for a moment did he believe that he was on the verge of a startling discovery.

He was about three thousand feet high, and as he grew rapidly nearer to that spot his curiosity increased. He could now tell that the black dots were not boulders. Yet it was impossible for him to determine their real character. He only knew that they seemed incongruous. For some little time he had been passing over a sunbaked desertland, and now, below him, was stretched a vast amount of country thickly choked with prickly pear—that curse of the Queensland settler.

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Dorrie abruptly.

The black dots were now quite near, and they were no longer dots. They had resolved themselves into definite shapes. And it seemed to Dorrie that he recognised a grotesque, distorted caricature of a motor-coach—blackened, incredibly mis-shapen—but a motor-coach nevertheless.

He shut off his engine and planed down, making straight for that fateful spot. As he did so his heart beat more rapidly, and an unnamed horror was taking possession of him.

He tried to make himself believe that he was mistaken, that his imagination was getting the better of him. And yet—yet—

"By glory!" he muttered hoarsely. "They are! They are! The motor-coaches! Burnt to cinders—nothing left of them but charred, twisted remains! What awful tragedy is this?"

He wondered if he could land, but he feared that the prickly pear bushes would cause his machine to overturn; and even if this disaster did not happen he doubted if he would ever be able to get into the air again. So, with his engine just ticking over, he went gliding in a wide sweeping circle over that deserted encampment. Not a sign of life was visible. Nothing but those grim, silent, blackened remains.

Yes, there they were—all those once-splendid coaches!

The horror of it was so great that Dorrie overlooked the almost incredible luck of his discovery. He might have searched for weeks without coming across this blackened camp; and yet, on his very first flight from the Dodd Station, he had stumbled upon it.

And what was he to think? What could he think—but the obvious? For it seemed to his lordship that there could be only one explanation of this grim scene.

Somehow, the coaches had caught fire—and apparently at night, whilst all the members of the party were sleeping. They had been trapped—they had perished amid the flames! And now nothing was left but these charred, pitiful relics!

His only course, it seemed, was to fly back to the Dodd Station, and report this appalling discovery!



CHAPTER 10

After Fourteen Years!

IN the meantime, not very many miles away from that tragic spot, an interesting little drama was developing.

Nelson Lee, sitting on the veranda of the white master's bungalow, was annoyed to see a noisy crowd of juniors approaching. Sir Arthur Brampton and Mr. Stockdale and the other St. Frank's masters were on the veranda, too—and all of them were looking mightily worried. For the white master was firm in his decision. He had cut himself off from the world, and he had no desire to

return to the world. What was more to the point, he did not want these unwelcome visitors of his to return to the world, either. For if they did so they would inevitably spread stories of this wonderful valley, with its verdure, its industrious aborigines, and its—gold.

That was the whole secret.

Gold!

A mere whisper, and hordes of excited men would brave the dangers of the blazing desert, and they would come up country to this new "strike." The lure of the precious metal would be irresistible.

To this exile, the gold had no value. He had no use for money in this secluded valley of his. There was no currency here—no barter of any kind. The valley was self-supporting, and the black community was happy and contented. A sudden inflow of a white population, bringing with it all the evils of civilisation, would utterly destroy this exile's peace and security. He had cursed the day

that the gold had been discovered; and he had been thankful that the aborigines were so primitive that they did not seem to understand the value of the metal. They were of a tribe which had scarcely ever come into contact with white men, and the white master had succeeded in convincing their simple minds that the gold was of no use except for making cooking utensils and dishes and ornaments.

Another man, perhaps, would have been fired by the wealth that lay within his grasp. But Stanley Winton had finished with worldly matters, and for him gold was of no appeal.

Nelson Lee did not delude himself—as some of the other men did. They felt that they could get away from this place, and return to their normal lives. But Lee was not so optimistic; and he was a man who seldom looked on the blacker side, and who never admitted defeat. Yet what could be done in this situation?

The white master had hospitably received them; therefore it was impossible to commit any base act of treachery, and overpower him. It was equally beyond the laws of decency to attempt to influence simple aborigines, who accepted the white master's word as law. To coerce them would be to turn them against the man who had founded this peaceful community.

And without the help of the aborigines, how would it be possible to get away from this valley? Undoubtedly, the problem was a knotty one. The only solution, indeed, was to convince the exile that he was making a grave and terrible mistake. Nelson Lee's policy was to concentrate upon the white master, and to make him see the light of

reason. Any other course would be an act of treachery against this embittered, peace-loving recluse.

Lee, who was talking quietly and earnestly with the white master, was displeased when the crowd of boys came noisily up to the veranda. He rose to his feet, frowning impatiently.

"What do you boys want here?" he asked. "Fenton, why do you allow this? I suggested to you that you should keep these junior boys busily engaged——"

"I am sorry, sir," said Fenton, of the Sixth, who was on the outskirts of the crowd. "They won't take any notice of me. They're excited about something——"

"It's important, guv'nor," said Nipper, pushing forward. "It's a matter that must be settled at once. Clapson, here, says that——"

"Clapson!" shouted the white master, leaping to his feet.

"Great Scott!" muttered Handforth, struck by the significance of that action.

Len Clapson was on the veranda now, and he was standing face to face with the white master. Lee, sensing that something was in the wind, held his peace. Sir Arthur and the other men stood by, bewildered; and all round the juniors crowded, eager, excited, tense.

Clapson was looking at the white-haired man with eyes that burned with intensity; and the white master, for his part, looked at Clapson in a strange, dreamy kind of way.

"Clapson!" said the exile hoarsely. "Who spoke that name just now?"

"It's your name, sir, isn't it?" asked Clapson, his voice sounding forced and tremulous. "Please, sir! Tell me! You said that your name is Stanley Winton. But it isn't, is it? It's Stanley Clapson!"

"Upon my word!" muttered Nelson Lee, aghast.

The amazing nature of this thing left him breathless—and Nelson Lee was by no means unacquainted with startling situations.

"What is this to you, my boy?" asked the white master fiercely. "How do you know that my name is Stanley Clapson?"

"Then it is!" shouted Clapson. "You've admitted it, sir! I'm your son!"

The white master stood stock still, as though suddenly stricken.

"What madness is this?" he muttered. "My son? No, no! It is impossible! My son is dead!"

"You are my father, sir!" said Clapson. "You must be! My name is Clapson—Leonard Clapson! I was brought up by my aunt——"

"Leonard Clapson!" shouted the white master, his voice rising to a high pitch.

Still They Come—

these ripping metal portrait badges of The Men Who Won The "Ashes"! Next week's Nelson Lee will contain three more—Leyland, Freeman and Geary.

—Don't Miss Them!

"That is the name of my son—my baby boy who was taken from me fourteen years ago! He was only twelve months old then."

"I was one year old, sir, when my father went to prison," said Clapson. "Oh, there can't be any mistake! You *are* my father! And until to-day I always thought that you were dead!"

The white master held out both his hands, and seized Len Clapson by the shoulders. He drew him nearer, and gazed searchingly into the boy's eyes.

"My son!" he whispered. "Yes! Have I been blind, not to see this before? You have your mother's eyes, boy! Heavens! Now that I look at you, I can see her in your very features, too! You are my son—my own boy! Heaven be praised!"

He drew Clapson to him, and everybody else fell silent. There was something extraordinarily touching in this little scene—enacted there, in the broiling, blistering heat of the semi-tropical day.

Nelson Lee glanced significantly at Sir Arthur Brampton, and the latter took it to mean that it would be advisable for them all to steal silently away.

But Nelson Lee did not mean this at all. His glance was intended as a signal of hope. For this providential coming together of father and son might well mean that the great problem had been solved!



CHAPTER 11

The Transformation!

THE white master seemed to come to himself, and now there was a new light in his eyes—the light of happiness.

"My son!" he said tensely. "Even now I can scarcely believe it! It seems too incredible—too marvellous! My little baby!"

"Not exactly a baby, sir!" protested Clapson.

"When I saw you last, you were a tiny tot, only a year old!" said his father. "That was before—before——"

"Before you were put in prison, father," said Clapson quietly.

"You knew, then?"

"I didn't know until a year ago," said the junior. "My aunt——"

"Your aunt—yes!" said the white master. "Tell me your aunt's name."

"Miss Clapson, sir—Aunt Hilda."

"My own sister!" nodded the white master. "Yes, there can be no shadow of doubt. So it was Hilda who played this terrible trick upon me. Shame on her! She was always a scheming, headstrong woman! But I am appalled that she could have been so cruel—so heartless—so utterly inhuman as to rob me of my own child!"

Len Clapson was silent.

"Tell me, my boy, did she treat you well?" asked the white master.

"Pretty well, sir," said Clapson. "I don't think I've ever really loved her. It was only by accident that I heard that my father had been a convict. She told me, too, that you were innocent, and that you went away from England immediately after you came out of prison. And she made me understand that you had died abroad somewhere."

"Perhaps Hilda was not guilty of lying to you there," said Stanley Clapson. "I have no doubt that she really believed me to be dead."

He turned to Nelson Lee and the others.

"When I was charged with that crime, I gave my name as Stanley Winton," he explained. "No doubt the authorities knew my real name, and perhaps the newspapers knew it, too—but I believe my family exerted some influence. They did not want my own name to be made so dreadfully public. In the Colne Valley, of course, everybody knew who I actually was, and at the time, I believe, there were some comments. But what does all this matter? I have not used any name for years. The one thing that *does* matter above all else is that my son is alive—and that he has come to me. Fate brought him into this valley—Fate led your expedition to disaster, so that this reunion could come about."

"Well, it is certainly an extraordinary piece of luck," said Sir Arthur.

"Luck!" repeated the white master scornfully. "No, sir—it was the working of Fate! I can well understand my sister's duplicity. At the time of my trial she believed that I was really guilty, and I know that she cared for my wife during her fatal illness. And when my wife died she doubtless took the baby away, resolving that he should be brought up to believe his father dead. She felt, perhaps, that the boy would have a stigma on him for the remainder of his life if he should grow up to know that his father was an ex-convict."

"Your sister acted wrongly, of course," commented Nelson Lee.

"When I came out of prison, and when my innocence was established, she no doubt felt that she had burned her boats," continued the white master. "And, after all, nothing could alter the fact that I had spent five years in prison. I was told that my wife was dead—and that my little baby was dead. It wasn't until after this that the real criminal confessed, thus exonerating me, and then, of course, it was too late for my sister to restore my baby to me without admitting her own cruel deception. No doubt she would have relented if I had remained in England. But I came straight to Australia, and lost myself to the world. Fool that I was—headstrong, wilful fool!"

"You musn't say that—father," muttered Clapson.

"And you are a boy at St. Frank's College!" said the white master dreamily. "My son! A strong, strapping boy of fifteen! By Heaven! There is something for me to live for now!"

"You won't continue to stay here, will you, sir?" asked Clapson eagerly. "You won't keep us all here——"

"I want to live now!" shouted the exile. "To live—to live! I want to come back to England with you, my boy—to see your school, to plan your future! I am rich—tremendously rich! But with all my gold I considered myself poor until I had found my son!"

Nelson Lee shot another glance at Sir Arthur, and it was a triumphant one. It was quite unnecessary for the men to urge the white master to reconsider his earlier decision. He had reconsidered it already—and, great as his determination had been to stay in this valley, it was now just as great to leave it.

"But wait—wait!" shouted Clapson's father. "Stay out here, my boy. I am a wild, fantastic creature. There shall be a change at once. Olem—Olem!"

"Master, I am here!" said Olem, one of the aborigines.

"Hot water, Olem!" shouted the exile. "Soap—scissors!"

"No savee!" said Olem blankly.

"No longer need I look like Methuselah!" exclaimed his master. "I am thankful that I have a razor—although I have not used it for many years. Quick, Olem—quick!"

He hurried into the bungalow, and Clapson was immediately surrounded by Handforth and Nipper and a crowd of other juniors. They congratulated him, they slapped him on the back, and Clapson hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

Nelson Lee and the other men drew aside, and they were all looking flushed and animated.

"This means salvation for us," declared Sir Arthur Brampton. "What do you say, Mr. Lee?"

"Undoubtedly," said Nelson Lee, "I am almost prepared to believe that Fate has, indeed, taken a hand in this game. For if Clapson had not been included in our party this man would never have consented to leave his exile—and he would have seen to it that we were kept here, too. Now it is quite the opposite. With his son alive, he desires to return to England—to his own estates, and to a rational mode of life. He has something to live for now, as he has said. In this one short hour his entire outlook upon life has changed; and so, automatically, our own situation has become one of hope."

"And not twenty minutes ago it seemed hopeless," said Mr. Stockdale wonderingly. "Really and truly, the ways of Chance are beyond human understanding!"



CHAPTER 12

Another Surprise!

THE white master came out on to the veranda, and for some moments the St. Frank's fellows did not recognise him. They thought that they were looking upon a stranger—a newcomer who had not hitherto revealed himself.

They saw a tall man, well set-up, and dressed all in white. He was clean-shaven, and under his bronze he was seen to be a youngish-looking man of about forty-five. His white hair, neatly brushed and trimmed, was nearly concealed beneath a wide hat. It was scarcely credible that this tall, distinguished-looking man was none other than the white master. Gone was the long, straggling beard, the masses of long, white hair.

"Well, Mr. Clapson, this is a welcome change," smiled Nelson Lee. "You don't object, do you, to my addressing you as 'Mr. Clapson'?"

"It is my name—my real name," said the other, smiling. "Why should I object? You like me better this way?"

"Much better," said Lee frankly. "It is an indication, Mr. Clapson, that your views on life have altered."

"They have altered so materially—so overwhelmingly—that I shall not lose a single minute in giving forth my orders," said Mr. Clapson. "Food shall be prepared, my blacks shall get ready for the long march. Tomorrow we will set out across the swamps and the deserts—back to the civilisation that I left behind me nine years ago."

"Hurrah!"

"We're all going back, you chaps!"

"Bravo!"

"And old Clapson has done it!" yelled Harry Oldfield. "Let's have a cheer for Len Clapson! He's solved our difficulties!"

"Rot!" said Clapson uncomfortably. "I've done nothing!"

They cheered him, nevertheless, and the scene outside that big central bungalow was an animated one. All the St. Frank's fellows, seniors and juniors alike, were crowding round. Farther off, large numbers of the blacks were gathering, scenting that something was in the wind.

And then Nipper, who happened to look down the street, started perceptibly. His eyes opened wider, and a strange, incredulous expression came into them. He closed them, opened them again, and stared harder than ever.

"I'm going mad!" he muttered dazedly.

"Speakin' to me, dear old boy?" asked Tregellis-West, who was next to him.

"Look Montie—look!" panted Nipper. "Can you see what I can see? Oh, but it's impossible!"

Sir Montie turned, and then he jumped.

Shouts of excitement and wonder went up from the St. Frank's juniors when they saw the gleaming monoplanes overhead.



"Begad!" he gasped. "Really, I—I——"

"What's all the noise about, you fellows?" sang out a cheery voice.

For a moment everybody looked bewildered, then they turned. There, in that dusty street, grinning at them, was Lord Dorrimore!

A tense, breathless silence for a few seconds, and then a mighty yell went up.

"Dorrie!"

"I just dropped in," nodded Lord Dorrimore coolly.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Nelson Lee, leaping down from the veranda and running up to his lordship. "Dorrie! How in the world did you get here?"

Dorrie grinned.

"It takes a good deal to surprise you, old man, but I've done it this time," he chuckled. "Somehow, I thought I'd give you a bit of a shock. Well, thank Heaven you're all safe! At least, you seem to be, by the general look of things. Nobody lost in the fire?"

"Nobody," replied Lee. "But how did you know?"

Seniors and juniors were swarming round, and Clapson and his newly-found father were forgotten. Lord Dorrimore's dramatic appearance in this queer town had taken everybody by surprise. If an explosion had occurred it would not have startled the St. Frank's fellows more than the quiet, unassuming appearance of Lord Dorrimore in that dusty street.

"But—but it's like magic!" protested Handforth. "How did he get here? Where did he come from? By George! A rescue expedition must have arrived——"

"An expedition of one, young 'un," interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "In case you get any wild ideas into your heads, I'd better tell you that I'm here alone. I came by 'plane."

"But we didn't hear your machine!" said Nelson Lee.

"I'm not surprised—considering all the din," said his lordship. "I found the charred remains of your outfit, and I thought you had all been killed. Then, before flying back to the Dodd Ranch, I decided to have a general look round—just in case some of you had escaped the fire. I spotted this valley, and I was quite interested."

"But it's a tremendous way from that camp," said Handforth.

"About five minutes' flight," grinned Dorrie. "As soon as I saw all these houses, I stopped my engine, and planed down a bit. Then I had a squint through my glasses, and saw a number of you kids—but you were so intent upon something else that you didn't even look up and see. So I dropped down in a handy meadow, about half a mile away. Then I strolled into town. Nothing very magical in that, is there?"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

Here was a fresh piece of excitement. It only took Lord Dorrimore a few minutes to



explain the situation, and Nelson Lee, for his part, quickly told Dorrie of that disaster in the bush. Then the white master was introduced, and Dorrie learned all the amazing details.

"It never rains but it pours," he commented at length. "Mr. Clapson had already decided to show you the way out of this valley—and then I blew in. So you would have been all right in any case."

"But how?" asked Nipper. "You couldn't have carried us away in a single-seater 'plane."

Shouts of excitement and wonder went up from the St. Frank's juniors when they saw the gleaming monoplanes overhead.



"Perhaps not," admitted his lordship. "But I've only got to fly back to the Dodd Station and get the telegraphs going, and by mid-day to-morrow there'll be a number of the giant Manners' 'planes on the spot. They're ready to start at a moment's notice if they're needed. And I rather think they *are* needed."

"Dorrie, old man, you're a magician right enough," said Nelson Lee, smiling. "You must have been putting in some extraordinarily good organisation work."

"I don't know about it being good," said Dorrie, "but we wanted to lend you a hand in case of trouble. How long did you reckon it would take to get to any decent-sized township?"

"Well, it's a very difficult march," said Mr. Clapson. "There is a large swampy region to negotiate, to say nothing of sixty or seventy miles of desert. A week's hard, gruelling march before we could even touch the fringe of the settled country—and then another week, at least, to get south."

"Oh, I can do better than that!" said Dorrie calmly. "I can have you all in Sydney—the whole crowd of you—within a couple of days, if you like."

"Great Scott!"

"My only hat!"

"Sydney—in a couple of days!"

"It seems too good to be true!"

"Yes, rather!"

Everybody was talking at once, and everybody was wildly excited.

"There's nothing wonderful about it," said Dorrie. "With reliable fast-moving aeroplanes, the thing will be A.B.C. You can go to Melbourne if you like. I don't care. It doesn't make any difference to me."

"Melbourne!" said Handforth dizzily. "Melbourne—within two days! By George! That means that we shall get there in heaps of time to see the big Test match!"

CHAPTER 13

Back at The Dodd Station!



THIS sudden change in their fortunes left the juniors breathless and bewildered. Their minds failed to grasp

the wonder of it.

Yet, actually, Lord Dorrimore was quite right. There was nothing wonderful in the programme. The big aeroplanes were ready, and they were capable of carrying off the entire party; and they were machines of such proved merit that the programme could be carried out with clockwork precision.

"In these days of swift aerial transport—and in such a country as this—there's nothing to be startled about," said Dorrie. "Of course, it couldn't be done if we hadn't got the machines already tuned up and prepared

for the flight. But I needn't bother Manners at all if you don't think it's necessary, Lee. If you would prefer to march——"

"No, no!" yelled dozens of frantic voices.

"I thought, somehow, you would turn that wheeze down!" chuckled Dorrie. "I rather think I'd better include a special paragraph in that wire to Manners, asking him to bring out some new outfits for you fellows. You look positively disgraceful!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorpe. "I mean to say, these dashed pyjamas are frightfully airy, and all that sort of thing, but a chappie feels somewhat off his stroke."

"I thought you imagined that you were on the Lido, or somethin' like that," said Dorrie. "Well, as there are some hours of daylight left, I think I had better get back straight away. You can expect me back to-morrow—and I shan't come alone."

His lordship was overwhelmed with joy at his second discovery. Heavy-hearted, he had left that spot where he had seen the burnt remains of the coaches. Then he had discovered this valley, and he had been filled with happiness. He had suspected a terrible tragedy, and the real truth lifted an enormous load from his mind.

When he took off, about half an hour later, he was given a tremendous cheer. The white master watched fascinatedly, for he had been out of the world for so long that these ultra-modern speed machines were new to him. Moreover, he was thrilled by the knowledge that he would soon be back amidst the busy throb of modern civilisation. The finding of his son had revolutionised Mr. Clapson's outlook.

As soon as Dorrie's 'plane had vanished as a speck in the sky, Sir Arthur Brampton seized Mr. Clapson's arm and drew him aside.

"I want to talk business with you, sir," said the Australian millionaire. "This valley will soon become one of the most famous spots in the whole of this territory. There's gold here—and the valley itself is full of amazing possibilities in other directions. You have first claim on it, but I want to organise the transport facilities."

"It is for you to do as you please, Sir Arthur."

"I don't look at it in that way," said Sir Arthur. "I'm the head of the largest transport organisation in Australia. Railways—motor-coaches—acoplanes—I don't care what it is. My concern has got millions behind it, and this proposition is an absolute cer-

tainty. Before a year has elapsed, this township will be a great and thriving city—and the transport route, all along, will be scattered with smaller townships. Development will be miraculously quick. Mr. Clapson, you may not know it, but you're destined to make a considerable difference to the map of Australia. A new railway will have to be drawn in—new roads—new aerial routes. And, by James, vast new areas of industry and agriculture."

Now that the troubles of the St. Frank's party were over, all the fellows gave themselves up to enjoyment. That night there was a tremendous open-air feast, and the white master called all his community together, and spoke to them. The aborigines understood, but perhaps they hardly knew whether to be pleased or displeased at the prospect of their fair valley becoming the Mecca for thousands upon thousands of white men. At all events, Mr. Clapson promised them that they would be well cared for.

Considering that Sydney was over a thousand miles away, and that the Manners giant 'planes had not yet started, it seemed impossible that anything further could develop on the morrow. Even at this minute, Lord Dorrimore had probably only been back at the Dodd Station for an hour or so—and this was assuming that his return journey had been a safe one.

Yet, in spite of these misgivings, noon of the following day brought shouts of wonder and excitement from the St. Frank's fellows. For, in the sky, they beheld a formation of enormous monoplanes.

"They're here—they're here!"

"Hurrah!"

"By George! Don't they look ripping!"

"Rather!"

The seemingly impossible had happened. The rescue 'planes had arrived. Yet, actually, there had been no undue haste. Lord Dorrimore had reached the Dodd Station just as dusk was falling on the previous evening. Within an hour his telegram had been received, in Sydney, by Mr. Hobart Manners.

That same night the giant monoplanes had set off, whirring their way northwards. Mr. Manners had seen no reason why he should wait until daylight. His aeroplanes were great multi-engined monsters, capable of flying many thousands of miles without refuelling; and night flying, for such craft, was as safe as daylight flying.

Thus it came about that the huge machines arrived at the Dodd Station in the early morning, soon after daylight. And there, after picking up Lord Dorrimore, they proceeded on their way.

Dorrie acted as guide, and by noon the air fleet had arrived in the valley. Everything had been done with machine-like precision, but with no haste or flurry. It was just an example of the wonderful things that can be accomplished in these days of rapid air transit.

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Those gleaming all-metal monoplanes glided to earth, landing in various meadows all round the quaint township. Then came further rejoicing, for Mr. Manners had brought complete new outfits for all the St. Frank's fellows and all the men. He did not guarantee the quality or the fit of these outfits, since they had been procured almost at an hour's notice—but nobody was inclined to grumble.

They were glad enough to don clean linen, and smart white flannels and shoes. Since the disaster they had worn nothing but pyjamas, and they had begun to feel conspicuous.

Now they were themselves again—smart, comfortable and happy.

"This is perfectly priceless!" said Archie. "I mean to say, the good old personage looks slightly more presentable. Of course, the jolly old trouser crease is a bit wonky in parts, and the shirt's a bit ruffled. However, cheers, and all that sort of thing!"

The others agreed.

And since the weather was cloudless and favourable, and since there was nothing to be gained by delay, a start was made that very afternoon.

The secret valley was left behind—for good!



CHAPTER 14

The Return!

SIR ARTHUR BRAMPTON was a man of business—a hard-headed man of business, too. That flight from the valley to the Dodd Station had not been in progress an hour before the transport magnate was convinced of one thing.

These Manners aeroplanes were the most amazing aircraft that he had ever seen. He had heard of them, of course—and he had been determined to meet Mr. Hobart Manners, with a view to business, before the latter should leave Australia.

Now the meeting had been brought about by chance.

And Sir Arthur, having seen these great 'planes, having flown in one of them, having had their super-qualities demonstrated to him, was keen on a deal.

"Mr. Manners," he said briskly, as he sat in the saloon of the leading 'plane, "I want these ships of yours."

"You mean you want to buy them?" asked Mr. Hobart Manners.

"I do. They're for sale, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes, they're for sale," smiled Mr. Manners. "It was for that reason that they were shipped to Australia. My idea was to demonstrate them in your various great cities. Owing to this unforeseen affair, however, they were unpacked, assembled, and flown straight off here—"

"All the better!" broke in Sir Arthur. "None of my rivals has had a chance of seeing them in the air. I want to handle the Manners aeroplane in Australasia, Mr. Manners. I want the sole rights—and, to begin with, I'll buy this fleet as it stands, and pay spot cash."

"We'll talk business, Sir Arthur!" said Mr. Manners briskly.

"Good man!" chuckled Sir Arthur. "That's what I like—promptitude! I can see an enormous future for these giant 'planes in

Australia—and in Tasmania and New Zealand, too. They'll revolutionise transport in many districts. They'll boost trade, and they're revitalize industry."

While these men of business were going into figures, the St. Frank's fellows were discussing a much more important subject.

Handforth & Co. and the majority of

the Removites, in one of the 'planes, were breathlessly talking about the coming Test Match at Melbourne.

Everybody had got over the shock of the many surprises by now. Things had happened with tremendous speed—one surprise tumbling on the top of the other. Now the fellows were experiencing a period of glorious indolence. No more tramps through the unknown bush—no more wondering what the next day would bring.

Respectably clothed again, with the knowledge that they would soon be in Sydney, they automatically resumed their plans at the point they had abandoned them.

"We've seen enough of the interior of Australia," Handforth was saying. "It's a wonderful country—particularly to get lost in—and now we're going to see something of New South Wales. And after that we'll see a bit of Victoria, too."

"Rather!" said Church and McClure in one voice.

"We haven't done so bad, on the whole," said Nipper. "We've seen a bit of Western Australia, we've been up the Murray River, we've seen some of South Australia and Queensland and the Northern Territory. Considering everything, we're lucky."

"Lucky isn't the word," said Handforth. "Particularly when you come to realise that we shall be in time for the big Melbourne

Test match. Of course, the game won't be so interesting now that we know that England has definitely kept the Ashes—but, all the same, I'm as keen as mustard on seeing the game."

"Rather!" said Travers. "We shall probably see Bradman playing this time."

"And Kippax and Richardson and Hendry, and all the others," said Harry Gresham eagerly. "I'll bet Hobbs will turn out for England, too. What rot, saying that Hobbs wouldn't play in the last two Tests, after England had secured the Ashes! We heard that rumour before we came out into the wilds. But if Hobbs doesn't play in this fifth Test, I shall be jolly surprised."

"No matter how good they play, I don't suppose they'll equal their marvellous performance in that fourth innings of the third Test at Melbourne," said Nipper. "By Jove! That was a performance, if you like! We saw some good play at Adelaide, but that first partnership by Hobbs and Sutcliffe in the fourth innings will go down in history."

For days the fellows had refrained from making any reference to cricket—because they felt, perhaps, that they would never get back to Melbourne in time to see the final game. Now, however, it was different. Cricket was the one subject under discussion. It had come right into the fore again—since it was the topic of the hour. And now that the St. Frank's fellows would rejoin the

School Ship within a very few days—for she was now lying at Melbourne—they felt supremely happy. Len Clapson, of the Fourth, was perhaps the happiest fellow of all for, owing to that disastrous trip into the Queensland bush, he had found his father; and "the white master" was the happiest of the men, since he had found his son. And it had all come about so unexpectedly, too—as such things generally do.

The daylight was beginning to fade when the aeroplane fleet arrived over the Dodd Station. Everybody had turned out to give the rescued party a welcome, and after the 'planes had landed there was a great demonstration. Mr. and Mrs. Dodd and their daughters were there—and about ninety per cent of the station personnel.

The masters and seniors and the juniors came piling out of the big machines—all of them neatly attired in their new clothing, and looking as though they had never been lost in the bush. It seemed incredible, indeed, that these spruce fellows could have just come direct from their great adventure.

Jerry Dodd, of course, was simply pounced upon by his mother and his sisters, and incidentally Handforth absolutely chirruped with delight when he found that Grace Dodd was still at the station. For during their earlier visit Handforth had been hopelessly smitten by Grace's charms—and he had feared that she would have returned to school by now. It hardly seemed possible that that



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earlier visit had only been made a few days before. Such a lot had happened that it seemed weeks.

It was decided that the whole party should remain at the station for that night, at least. They would embark again on the morrow and make a non-stop flight to Bourke, in Cowper County, New South Wales. Here fresh fuel would be taken aboard, prior to undertaking the last lap of five hundred miles for Sydney.

The telegraphs were already at work, flashing the news to the world that the St. Frank's party had been rescued, that everybody was safe and happy, and that the flight for Sydney could be started on the morrow.

And Sydney, receiving this news, immediately started preparations for the reception that it would give to the famous schoolboy party.



CHAPTER 15

Jerry's Old Cobber!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was remarkably energetic the next morning.

He turned out, much to the disgust of Church and McClure, very shortly after dawn. They were disgusted because he insisted upon them turning out with him, but when they protested he scornfully accused them of laziness. In vain, they pointed out that they needed a good sound sleep in respectable beds. They hadn't had a really good sleep for many nights.

"Oh, well, perhaps you're right," said Handforth suddenly. "If you don't want to turn out, you needn't."

"Now we're getting dressed, we might as well make a job of it," said Church gruffly.

"In fact, you'd better get back into bed," said Handforth. "I insist."

"Then you can jolly well keep on insisting!" snorted McClure. "You can't play fast and loose with us like this, Handy! I suppose you've suddenly thought of Grace?"

"Eh?"

"You have!" nodded Mac, grinning. "And you want her all to yourself—in case she turns out early?"

This was exactly what was in Handforth's mind, and he coloured. It had occurred to him that Church and McClure might be in the way. Not that their presence really made any difference, for when the chums of Study D sallied out, there was no sign of the fair Grace. Which was not very surprising, considering the early nature of the hour.

Jerry Dodd, however, was already up. He was outside, in the early sunshine, talking to the most extraordinary-looking youth that Handforth & Co. had ever set eyes on.

Jerry and this remarkable specimen were some distance from the house, and Jerry was watching his companion doing some amazing tricks with a long rope.

"What is it?" asked Handforth. "A human being, or an animated lamp-post?"

Edward Oswald was justified in asking this question. For Jerry's companion was truly the most astoundingly thin human figure that Church and McClure had ever seen. He was a youth of about Jerry's own age. He was nearly a head taller than Jerry, however, and he was so remarkably thin that he looked like a streak. He was dressed in breeches and a check shirt. His legs and arms were hardly any thicker than broomsticks, and his neck, projecting from his bony shoulders, was so long and scraggy that it seemed incredible that his head could be sufficiently supported. His face was long and lean, and a straw was sticking out of one corner of his mouth. And this face of his, although so elongated, was astonishingly humorous. There was a laugh in his mouth, and a permanent twinkle in his merry eyes.

"It's alive!" said Handforth loudly, as he came up with his chums.

Jerry Dodd turned.

"Hallo, you chaps," he said. "You're out early, aren't you? Hard lines, Handy! Grace isn't up yet."

Handforth glared.

"What's this funny thing?" he asked, thinking it advisable to change the subject, and nodding towards the lanky one. "I can see it's alive, but what is it?"

"This is my cobber, Charlie Bangs."

"Charlie Bangs?" repeated Handforth. "What does he bang?"

"Well, he'll probably bang your head if you chip him too much," grinned Jerry. "I've known him since I was a little kid. He used to be on the old station, near Bathurst. I don't call him Charlie, though. His nickname is Boomerang."

"What for?"

"Because he's hot stuff with the boomerang, of course," said Jerry. "Shake hands, and get the introduction over. Boomerang, these other fellows are Church and McClure. This one, with the face like an Alpine landscape, is Handforth."

"Put it there!" said Boomerang Bangs, extending his bony hand. "If you're cobbers of Jerry's, you're cobbers of mine. And that's dinkum oil."

"I suppose you work here?" asked Handforth.

"Too right, I do," agreed Boomerang Bangs. "I'm a cattle hand. A jackeroo."

"A which?"

"Not that I like work," went on Charlie Bangs, shaking his head. "I don't. Never did like work. Cricket's my mark."

Handforth & Co. grinned.

"Cricket!" echoed Handforth. "You?"

"Why not?"

"The bowlers would mistake you for the wicket," said Edward Oswald. "Or they might hold up the game, thinking that the next batsman hadn't come in."

"Cricket has always been my dream," said Bangs. "Bourke is my native town. I was pretty hot stuff when I was a member of my school team. Not particularly good at

batting, but a terror with the ball. There weren't many batsmen who could stand up against my bowling."

"You think a good bit of yourself, don't you?"

"He's not boasting," put in Jerry Dodd. "Honestly, Handy, he's a demon with the ball. I've never actually seen him playing, but I've heard enough about him. His cricketing days didn't start until I'd gone to England, to St. Frank's."

The thin one heaved a sigh.

"England—St. Frank's!" he said dreamily. "I feel real crook when I think that I shall never be able to go there. But I'm nobody. Just a coot."

"Rot!" said Jerry uncomfortably. "You're my cobber."

"Too right, I am—but that won't get me to St. Frank's, will it?" asked Boomerang. "I'd give my last deener, too, to see the Test match at Melbourne."

"Why not come with us?" suggested Church.

"Me?" said Bangs. "The boss wouldn't let me go. Besides, what about *your* boss?"

"Well, it's worth trying," said Handforth. "We'll take you with us if you like. Why not ask Mr. Dodd? If he gives you permission, I'm pretty certain that Mr. Lee will allow it—and old Dorrie won't care a toss."

Jerry Dodd's eyes were sparkling.

"Good-o!" he said enthusiastically. "Boomerang, I'll take you to my father directly after breakfast—and we'll see what he says."

"He won't let me go," said Bangs, shaking his head.

"Well, you never know," went on Jerry. "Where's that boomerang of yours? You were going to show me a few stunts, weren't you?"

Charlie Bangs produced his boomerang—a thin curved piece of hard wood, about thirty inches long. It was flat on one side, and rounded on the other.

"By George!" said Handforth eagerly. "I've wanted to see one of these giddy things. You can throw it in the air, and make it come back to you, can't you?"

"Watch!" said Bangs. "You've only got to give it a bit of a twist while you're throwing it."

He swung the queer-looking thing round, and it went shooting out of his hand. It flew away, dipped in a curve, but did not touch the ground. Instead, it swung off into a wider curve, whirling round amazingly—and then, with tremendous speed, it came right round once more and shot through the air, to fall at the thrower's feet.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth.

"That's nothing!" grinned Jerry. "He can do better stunts than that. I'm going to get him to teach me some, too."

Bangs threw the boomerang again, and this time it went low near the ground, rising at a considerable distance away, to fall in a graceful flight. Handforth & Co. thought it was going to drop at Bang's feet, but it didn't. Instead, it took on another curve, rose in the air, formed a kind of "S," and then dropped

steeply, and Bangs deftly caught it. It was really an extraordinary exhibition of skill.

And Handforth decided, then and there, that boomerang throwing was a very useful art, and one that he must learn without any further delay!



CHAPTER 16

Nothing Doing!

"WATCH this one!" said Charlie Bangs.

The boomerang sped from his hand, struck the ground nearly twenty yards from his feet, bounced into the air, struck the ground again, bounced once more, struck the ground a third time, and then rose steeply and sharply, high into the air—to swing round and come winging its way back to the thrower.

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Church. "You might think that the giddy thing was alive!"

"It all depends upon the twist you give it," said Jerry.

"Let's have a shot!" said Handforth eagerly. "You don't mind, Bangs, do you?"

"Go ahead," grinned Boomerang Bangs.

Handforth took the curious instrument, and whirled it round. He hurled it with all his strength, and it went sailing erratically into the air, swooping, diving, and swerving. Finally it bumped to the earth fifty or sixty yards away.

"It's a swindle!" said Handforth indignantly. "It didn't come back!"

"Ass!" said Church. "You can't expect the thing to come back unless you throw it properly."

Bangs ran off, and retrieved his boomerang—and the rapidity of his loping progress was remarkable. By the time he returned, a number of other St. Frank's fellows had come out, and Nipper was looking particularly pleased.

"Some schoolboys in Bourke have asked us to stop and play a game there, when the 'planes land for more petrol," he said. "I've asked Dorrie about it, and he says we can do as we like."

"But there won't be time for a game!" protested Handforth.

"I think there will," said Nipper. "Bourke wants us to stay in the town overnight, and as Sir Arthur is anxious to spend some hours there, so that the Manners' aeroplanes can be demonstrated, the arrangement is to get to Bourke about midday, and then leave for Sydney to-morrow morning. This will leave us the afternoon clear, so why not have a bit of cricket?"

"Why not?" echoed Jerry Dodd. "By jingo! We shall all be glad to get into practice again."

"Yes, but you can't play," said Handforth. "You're an Australian—and you're disqualified from playing for St. Frank's."

"What's this thing?" asked Tommy Watson, indicating the boomerang.



Boomerang Bangs seemed to hurl himself forward. The ball left his bony grip with a velocity that was quite startling. Vivian Travers played it confidently—at least, he intended to, but somehow the leather eluded his bat, and his middle stump was knocked out of the ground.

"This?" said Handforth. "It's a boomerang. Watch me throw it. It's easy enough—I've seen this thin chap doing it. Watch it come straight back to me, after performing all sorts of somersaults."

"Look out!" yelled Church.

Handforth was swinging the boomerang round, and the other juniors only just cleared out of the way in time. Away went the curved piece of wood. It seemed to go all right for the first twenty or thirty yards, then it dipped crazily, swerved acutely, and caught Mr. Horace Pycraft a nasty crack on the head. The unfortunate Form-master had come out for a breath of fresh air, and he had arrived at the fateful spot in the nick of time.

"Great pip!" gurgled Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Pycraft!"

Mr. Pycraft, holding his head, glared at the boomerang, and then he glared at the juniors.

"You—you young rascals!" he ejaculated. "How dare you? Somebody has deliberately assaulted me!"

It was some little time before Mr. Pycraft could be convinced that he had been hit by accident; and Handforth was persuaded that it would be advisable for him to indulge in further practice about a mile from the nearest living thing.

After breakfast there was a lot of bustle and commotion. Mr. Dodd did not press the party to remain; for he knew that very careful arrangements had been made, and that, moreover, Nelson Lee was anxious to get the school back to the ship as quickly as possible. There had been enough disorganisation of the school routine already.

"I want to speak to you, dad," said Jerry, a little later, as he brought Boomerang

Bangs with him to his father. "It's about Charlie Bangs."

Mr. Dodd regarded the lean one with a frown.

"Charlie's all right," he said. "Works well, and the climate up here suits him. He's a good boy."

"He was wondering if you would allow him to come with us—to Bourke?" said Jerry carelessly. "We're having a kind of impromptu cricket match there, and he's keen on going along to Melbourne with us, too. There's the Test match—"

"Stop!" interrupted Mr. Dodd. "Sorry, young 'un, but there's nothing doing."

"I knew it!" muttered Boomerang sadly.

"I'm glad you did!" said Mr. Dodd. "Jerry, you mustn't put these ideas into Charlie's head. His father is foreman of my Bourke station, and he's a good man. He particularly asked me to bring the boy up here, into Queensland, so that he could be taken away from cricket."

"Oh!" said Jerry.

"You know it's true, Charlie," went on Mr. Dodd, looking at the thin one. "You're not merely keen on cricket—you're mad on it. On this station you've got very little chance of indulging your fancies. There's plenty of hard work here—and hard work is good for you. Later on, perhaps, you will forget this madness for cricket. You're not in a position to devote your time to the game. You've got to work for your living and you've got to think of your future, too. If I allow you to go to Bourke, and play in this game—and then go on to Melbourne to watch the Test match—there'll be no holding you."

"I suppose you're right, sir," admitted Bangs reluctantly. "I told Jerry it would be Buckley's."

By this he meant that this mission was a forlorn hope.

"I reckon that yakker is the only thing for me," he went on. "Cricket's a disease—it gets hold of a fellow and burns him up."

"Yes, yakker—hard work!" said Mr. Dodd, nodding. "I'm glad you realise it, Charlie. I promised your father to keep you here, and I can't break that promise. While you were at home, at Bourke, you neglected everything for cricket. If you go back on this trip, you'll only get the same old craving for the game."

"But it's a special occasion, dad——" said Jerry.

"No, I promised his father, and there's an end of it," interrupted Mr. Dodd. "Sorry, Charlie. There's no cricket for you—only yakker, as you call it."

"I knew it!" groaned Boomerang Bangs later on, when he and Jerry joined a group of waiting Remove fellows. "The boss would be all right, only he gave that promise to my father. I wonder why they think that cricket is such a crime?"

"They don't," said Nipper. "Cricket is the finest sport in the world, but you can't live on it, old man."

"I could become a professional," said Boomerang.

"You're too young for that," said Jerry Dodd. "Wait a few years, and——"

"And by then I shall be stale," said Bangs. "I've done me luck! And if I played against you fellows I'd get you all out, too."

"You'd get us all out?" said Handforth, staring.

"Too right, I would!" nodded Boomerang. "I've invented a special googly of my own. Maybe I've developed it from my boomerang throwing. Anyhow, not one of you fellows would stand a chance against my bowling."

He walked away, sadly shaking his head.

"I'm disappointed!" said Handforth. "I didn't think he was a boasting sort of chap. So he'd get us all out, would he? Like his nerve!"

"Yes, it did sound a bit swanky," admitted Church.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth abruptly. "I say, you chaps! I've got an idea!"

"Now, look here, Handy——"

"It's a stunner!" panted Handforth. "The most gorgeous idea of the century!"

"Who's boasting now?" murmured Mac.

"I tell you it's a corker!" insisted Handforth. "This chap, Bangs, says that he can bowl out the whole St. Frank's team. Well, why not smuggle him along with us, in one of the 'planes? He hasn't got permission to go, but what does that matter? If we kidnap him, he can't help himself. And when we get to Bourke, we'll make him prove his giddy words!"



CHAPTER 17

A Little Case of Kid-napping!

"H" E'S mad!" said Church impatiently.

"Mad as a hatter!" agreed McClure.

They were referring to Edward Oswald Handforth, and they addressed Nipper and Jerry Dodd and a few other Removites, having told them of Handforth's suggestion.

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"I'm not so sure about it," said Nipper slowly. "So Handy suggests that we should smuggle Boomerang Bangs on one of the 'planes, and take him along to Bourke? My sons, it's a wheeze!"

"Eh?" gasped Church.

"For once, Handy has hit upon a brain-wave," said Nipper calmly. "I rather like this chap, Boomerang—he's a novelty. And he's so thundering keen on cricket that it seems a shame to leave him behind. Why shouldn't we give him a chance to have a treat? And if he can clean bowl the whole St. Frank's Eleven, good luck to him! But the chances are that he'll be compelled to eat his words. I'd like to show him that the St. Frank's Eleven is not such a soft crowd!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You're right!" said Jerry Dodd eagerly. "My father has refused, but that won't make any difference. If we take Boomerang along as a sort of prisoner, he'll be pretty helpless. But how are we going to wangle it?"

"Oh, it'll be easy enough," said Nipper. "Nobody will be on the look-out for stow-aways."

It was remarkable how all the St. Frank's fellows, seniors and juniors alike, had automatically dropped back into their old ways of thinking. Cricket was now the order of the day. The recent adventure in the bush was a thing of the past—a kind of nightmare. And although they were still in Queensland, those enormous aeroplanes were

St. Frank's fellows, and all the men, had no baggage to bother about. It was simply a question of climbing into the 'planes, after saying good-bye.

Len Clapson, perhaps, was the happiest fellow of the whole crowd—although, so far, he could scarcely help regarding his newly-found father as a bit of a stranger. Mr. Stanley Clapson was a changed man, too. His days of exile were over; his only thoughts, now, were for the future of his son. He was filled with a great desire to return to England, and to resume his proper place in society. Incidentally, the newspapers—in Australia and in England—were already making a sensational story out of Mr. Clapson and his amazing valley. It even eclipsed the story of the St. Frank's crowd's rescue.

Sir Arthur Brampton considered that he had never done a better month's work. All those motor-coaches had been lost, it was true—but when he considered what had developed out of that disaster he deemed himself lucky. He had entered into a very fair business arrangement with Mr. Clapson, and he had also fixed things up with Mr. Hobart Manners. Sir Arthur had started on that trip for pleasure, but he had done more business during the past few days than he had done during the course of many months.

Smuggling Boomerang Bangs into one of the aeroplanes was, as Nipper had said, a very simple task. The lanky one was invited by Jerry and Nipper and Handforth to go over one of the 'planes, and he was eager enough to comply.

Bangs was a simple sort of youth—a modest, unassuming fellow, really, in spite of his apparent boasting about cricket. Until recently, cricket had been his only thought in life, and as a result his father had become anxious regarding him. He wanted his son to grow up to be a hard worker—not a slacker. And cricket, in Bangs senior's view, was a sport, and not hard work.

Boomerang was amazed after he had been shown through that wonderful 'plane—with its saloon, its sleeping cabins, its kitchen, its hundred-and-one marvels.

"Now look here, old clobber," said Jerry gently. "There's something else that we want to tell you. You're kidnapped."

"Eh?" said Bangs.

"Kidnapped!" repeated Jerry. "Are you going to take it calmly, or shall we use force? We're going to lock you in one of the cabins and leave you there until we're in the air."

"That's the ideal!" said Handforth, with a grin. "You've said that you can do some marvellous things on the cricket field, and we're going to make you prove your words—in Bourke."

"But—but it can't be done!" protested Boomerang. "The boss says that—"

"Never mind what my father says," interrupted Jerry. "We've decided that you shall go with us. It's nothing to do with you at all. Once you're in Bourke, you can't very well help yourself, can you?"

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like a sort of magic carpet, which would whisk them to Sydney, and then to Melbourne. The Test match, which had seemed so remote—and so unattainable—was now being referred to in quite a leisurely way. There was not even any necessity for hurry. The party could take things quite easily, even staying in Sydney for a day or two before moving on to Melbourne.

The intervention of Lord Dorrimore had made all the difference!

Without his lordship's wonderful aid, the party would have been compelled to attempt a long, wearisome march across the burning hot desert, and it might have taken them weeks to reach a railhead.

There was no loss of time in getting off. At the giant 'planes were ready, and the

A slow smile overspread Bangs' lean features.

"Good-o!" he said, with a chuckle. "I'm on! Gosh! This is bosker!"

"It's which?" asked Handforth, staring.

"He means it's ripping!" grinned Jerry.

"Good man! He's going to be a willing prisoner. Somehow, I thought he would be!"

Boomerang Bangs was solemnly led to one of the little cabins; he was forthwith locked in it, and Nipper himself took the key. Mr. Dodd might take a serious view of these matters, but the St. Frank's juniors were not quite so particular.

And when, shortly afterwards, the aeroplane fleet took to the air, nobody thought of looking through any of the cabins in case there were stowaways on board. The party had a great send-off, and, having climbed to a decent height, the great 'planes started winging their way southward.

Lord Dorrimore, in the single-seater scout machine, was the leader, and before long Windorah was sighted, and then, later, Hungerford, on the Queensland border. At length Bourke, the sheep-farming town on the south bank of the Darling River, in Cowper County, New South Wales, was reached.

Bourke was on the railway, and in direct communication with Sydney—it was, in fact, a very important township.

Practically the entire population turned out to greet the "flying school," and there was a big demonstration after the landing. Nelson Lee and Sir Arthur Brampton and all the men were carried off by the enthusiastic townspeople, and many of the St. Frank's seniors went, too.

The juniors were more interested in cricket—for this impromptu match at Bourke was to be a junior affair. Fenton and the other seniors considered that it was beneath their dignity to take part in it.

While the township was making merry over its distinguished visitors, Nipper & Co. prepared for their match against a chosen team of Bourke schoolboys. There would be plenty of time for them to join in the celebrations after dusk had fallen. Now, in the heat of the afternoon, cricket was calling to them—and, after their recent experiences in the wilds, cricket seemed almost too good to be true.



CHAPTER 18

Playing the Game!

THE most astonishing thing, perhaps, of the whole adventure was the remarkable way in which great distances had been covered in so short a time.

From the Dodd Station to Bourke the distance was certainly nothing under six hundred and fifty miles—and yet this "hop" had

been accomplished in just over four hours. The Manners monoplanes were capable of very high speed, sustained over great distances; and the weather to-day had been all in favour of the flying party, since they had had a following wind.

Yet, in pre-aeroplane days, that journey from the distant Queensland cattle station to Bourke, in New South Wales—country where there were scarcely any railways—would have occupied perhaps weeks of arduous travel. The aeroplane, in Australia, is undoubtedly the transport of the future.

The St. Frank's juniors found that the cricket match had been arranged in every detail. They were carried off to the grounds of a fairly big school, and the pitch proved to be in excellent condition. Nearly all the schoolboys of Bourke had turned out for the occasion.

The team itself looked a business-like one. All the Australian boys were in white flannels, and it was evident, from the very first, that they knew a great deal about cricket. The captain was a short, thick-set youngster named Gleeson.

"We've brought a fellow along from Queensland with us," said Nipper, after the ground had been reached. "His people live here—he's a New South Wales chap. Bangs is his name——"

"Boomerang!" interrupted Gleeson excitedly.

"Good-o! Are you suggesting that we should play Boomerang against your team?"

"Yes."

"You don't know what you're doing!" said Gleeson frankly. "Boomerang is a terror."

"You know him all right, then?"

"He used to go to the same school with me!" said Gleeson. "He's the hottest bowler under the sun. We were terribly cut up when his father sent him away to Queensland. Where is he? I want to grab his hand!"

Boomerang Bangs was found with Handforth and Jerry Dodd and a number of others, and Gleeson greeted him joyously. It certainly did seem that there was something exceptional about Bangs, when it came to cricket.

No time was now lost. The afternoon was swelteringly hot, with a glaring sun beating down upon the tinder-dry field. The main body of the St. Frank's fellows distributed themselves round the ground, seeking every available shady spot.

"These Australian chaps are hot on cricket, but wait until they see our fellows," remarked Church, with a grin. "Wait until they see Harry Gresham and Travers and Nipper. Yes, and old Handy, too! I rather think that St. Frank's is going to spring a surprise on these Cornstalks!"

"You bet!" said McClure, with confidence.

Nipper, of course, was skipper, and he tossed. He called "heads," and "tails" came down. So the Bourke schoolboys elected to bat first. The St. Frank's juniors went into the field.

"Well, it doesn't make much difference," said Tommy Watson. "It's only a single innings match, and we'll soon get these chaps out."

"Wait until Gresham starts bowling!" said Oldfield. "These Australian chaps don't know that Gresham is the son of 'Hat Trick Gresham,' one of the most famous England cricketers."

"Don't they?" said Church. "Gresham's pater was a popular man in Australia when he used to play in the Tests, and all these Cornstalks know that they're up against his son this afternoon."

The bowling was opened by Vivian Travers, and the leader of Study H soon found that he was dealing with a regular batsman's wicket. In that first over the Australian boys scored seven runs.

Then, when the field changed, Harry Gresham bowled — as everybody had expected. And Gresham was a bit of a terror. He secured a wicket with the second ball of the over. It seemed quite a simple delivery, and Gleeson, who was batting at that end, fell into the trap. He lifted the leather just sufficiently for Nipper to dive forward and make a grab for it at cover point.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Good old Gresham!"

Boomerang Bangs was the next fellow in, and many chuckles went up as he stalked towards the crease. Bangs had been provided with white flannels, and he seemed to be even thinner in this attire, for his trousers flapped about round his bony legs, and his arms looked like twigs.

He faced Gresham. The latter took a run, and sent down the third ball of the over. Bangs lifted his bat, the ball curled under it, and neatly removed the off stump.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Boomerang!"

"Out, by George!"

Bangs, the wonder cricketer—according to his own estimation—was out for a duck! He grinned feebly, tucked his bat under his arm, and walked away.

"Well, it really serves him right," said Church. "He shouldn't boast so much about his play."

"He didn't boast about his batting," said McClure. "He's supposed to be hot stuff at bowling."

"Well, he'll have his chance when our chaps are at the wicket," said Church, nodding. "But I'll bet he won't do anything

particularly great. These Cornstalks had an idea that we were duffers."

If there was any truth in this statement—which was doubtful—the Cornstalks were soon disillusioned. For they had to fight hard for runs against the keen St. Frank's bowling, and the wickets continued to fall with relentless regularity.

Gresham's bowling was deadly, in spite of his long period of inactivity. Nipper kept changing the bowlers cleverly—Boots and Christine and Fullwood and Jimmy Potts taking their turns. Nipper himself bowled an occasional over, too.

The match had been in progress exactly an hour and forty minutes when the Australian schoolboy eleven was all out—having scored only 87 runs. It was by no means a brilliant innings, and Gleeson and his men now had a wholesome respect for these English public schoolboys.

"Well, you're going to whack us, by the look of things," said Gleeson cheerfully, as he stood with a group of the St. Frank's cricketers. "It ought to be easy for you to beat our score of 87."

"Oh, rather," said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I've made up my mind to get a century on my own."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!" grinned

Travers. "Never satisfied with anything less than a century!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

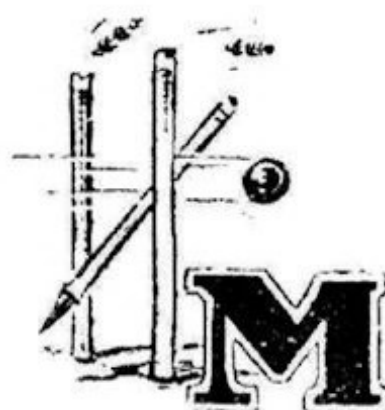
"I suppose I shall open the innings with you, Nipper?" asked Handforth casually, as he turned to the junior skipper.

"Sorry, old man, but Travers and Gresham are the opening pair," said Nipper. "You're fifth man in."

"What rot!" said Handforth indignantly. "That means that I shan't get a knock at all! Travers and Gresham are two of our best men, and they'll soon pile up 87 runs between them."

"Will they?" said Nipper. "I hope so! But in this game, Handy, it's never wise to count your chickens before they're hatched."

And Nipper had never spoken a truer word!



CHAPTER 19

Bangs, the Deadly!

MOST of the Australian schoolboys were looking somewhat subdued. They had expected to put up a

much better performance, and they now realised, to the full, that these St. Frank's junior cricketers were as keen as mustard on cricket. If they couldn't beat a score of 87 between them, it would be rather a pity. The Bourke schoolboys came to the conclusion that their goose was cooked.

Boomerang Bangs was the only confident one. He had secured the leather, and he was lovingly tossing it from hand to hand.

"Look out for squalls," grinned Handforth. "Bangs is going to bowl!"

But when the St. Frank's innings opened, another New South Wales boy took the ball. He proved to be a slow bowler, and Travers, who was facing him, played cautiously.

The first two balls were treated with great respect, and then Travers drove the next ball almost to the boundary. It was a good stroke, and three runs were made. Gresham now had the bowling.

He scored two at once, and then late-cut the ball for a boundary which nobody could possibly save.

"Bravo, Gresham!"

"Keep it up, you chaps!"

The last ball of the over came, and Gresham treated this with the same cool assurance. He placed it neatly between two of the fieldsmen, and it was obvious that he was complete master of the bowling.

"Looks like a certain win for us," remarked Bob Christine cheerfully.

"Rather!" said Oldfield. "We shall probably win by five or six wickets!"

A chuckle went round when it was seen that Gleeson had tossed the ball to Boomerang Bangs. So Bangs was to bowl from the other end. Nobody quite took him seriously, and most of the St. Frank's fellows were eagerly looking forward to the "rise" being taken out of this lanky Cornstalk. Gresham would soon show him what could be done with his bowling!

But it was Vivian Travers who now faced the bowling, and he did so confidently. Bangs took a curious run, a kind of a hop and a skip, and then he seemed to hurl himself bodily forward, the ball leaving his bony grip with a velocity that was quite startling.

It was a glorious delivery, pitched perfectly. But Travers, who was accustomed to fast bowling, felt that it would be easy to play. Yet it seemed to him that he lost sight of the leather for a fraction of a second. He swiped, but the ball eluded him, and the next second his middle stump was out.

"How's that?" yelled the Australians.

"Out!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, staring.

"Rummiest thing I've ever known!" said Travers, as he came in. "You next, Boots? Go easy with Boomerang! He's clever!"

Boots faced Boomerang Bangs; again the thin one took his curious run, and again the ball came down with great velocity. John Busterfield Boots was taking no chances, however; he did not attempt to lash out. He stonewalled—and although Boots was absolutely sure his bat was covering the ball, it

curled round his bat, and the bails went flying.

"Great Scott!"

"Another of 'em!"

"Make it the hat trick, Boomerang!" yelled Gleeson gleefully.

Nipper went in next, and, sure enough, Boomerang Bangs *did* make it the hat trick. Nipper, knowing full well that Bangs was something exceptional in the way of bowlers, was as keen as mustard. Yet, just like Travers, he lost sight of the ball for a split second. In some uncanny way, Boomerang managed to get a twist on the leather which was absolutely new to Nipper. He had never faced any bowling like it. His off stump was lifted clean out of the ground!

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Boomerang!"

"The hat trick, by gosh!"

"Oh, my only giddy aunt!" breathed Handforth. "I'm next, aren't I? Three of our chaps—clean bowled! It's up to me to stop the rot!"

But Handforth, sadly enough, failed to stop it.

He suffered exactly the same fate as the others. There was something positively uncanny about Bangs' bowling. It was new—novel—revolutionary. Perhaps it was true that he had developed a twist, owing to his prowess with the boomerang. At all events, Handforth swiped with his usual recklessness, and he was startled to hear a clatter, and to see his bails flying into the air.

"This is a procession!" said Travers ruefully. "Four wickets—and no runs! I've never seen such bowling in my life!"

"The chap's going to take six wickets in this over!" said Nipper. "I'm not a pessimist—but you wait and see!"

"I'm going to apologise to Bangs!" said Handforth grimly. "We called him a boaster, didn't we? By George! He knew what he was talking about! If he can get *my* wicket he can get anything!"

"Ahem!" coughed Nipper.

It struck him that Handforth was the fellow who was doing most of the boasting—but Handforth did it unconsciously. And, sure enough, Bangs performed the seemingly impossible. He took six wickets in that one over—a kind of double hat trick.

Then the field changed, and Gresham got the bowling again. He put on twelve runs with the first three balls—scoring a boundary each time. With the next ball he scored three, and then Jimmy Potts was taking the bowling. He scored nothing at first, but then hit the leather to the boundary for four runs. So when the field changed again, Gresham was facing the redoubtable Boomerang Bangs.

"If any fellow can stop this rot, Gresham's the man," said Nipper. "By Jove, this is going to be interesting!"

Everybody was silent as Boomerang took his run. Over went his arm, down sped the leather, and Gresham's bat swung upwards. But his bails went flying, and the off-stump sagged drunkenly.

"Out!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"Bangs has done it again!"

Harry Gresham was looking utterly dumb-founded.

"The fellow is unplayable!" he said blankly. "The ball's got a twist on it that simply can't be dealt with!"

The St. Frank's fellows watched in a sort of agony as another procession took place. The rest of the wickets fell like nine-pins—and, extraordinarily enough, Boomerang Bangs took them all right off the reel! His analysis was the most staggering thing that the St. Frank's fellows had ever known. Two overs—no runs—ten wickets!

And the St. Frank's juniors were all out for 32!

Of course, they were out of practice, and they were at a disadvantage on this unfamiliar ground—but nothing could alter the fact that Bangs was a cricket phenomenon. The St. Frank's fellows had scored fairly easily off the other bowler. After getting accustomed to Bangs' peculiar delivery, perhaps, they would be able to save their wickets—but as for scoring off him, they felt that it was an impossibility.

Bangs' earlier successes, too, had probably had the effect of reducing the St. Frank's morale—and so this extraordinary procession had resulted.

Anyhow, Bourke, New South Wales, had beaten St. Frank's to a frazzle!



CHAPTER 20

Nothing Else For It!

BOOMERANG BANGS, now that he had substantiated his words, was singularly modest.

"I expect I was feeling in the mood for it," he said, grinning. "I haven't played for weeks, although I've always kept up my practice. Up at the Queensland station I've bowled for hours, sometimes, getting that patent twist of mine into proper shape."

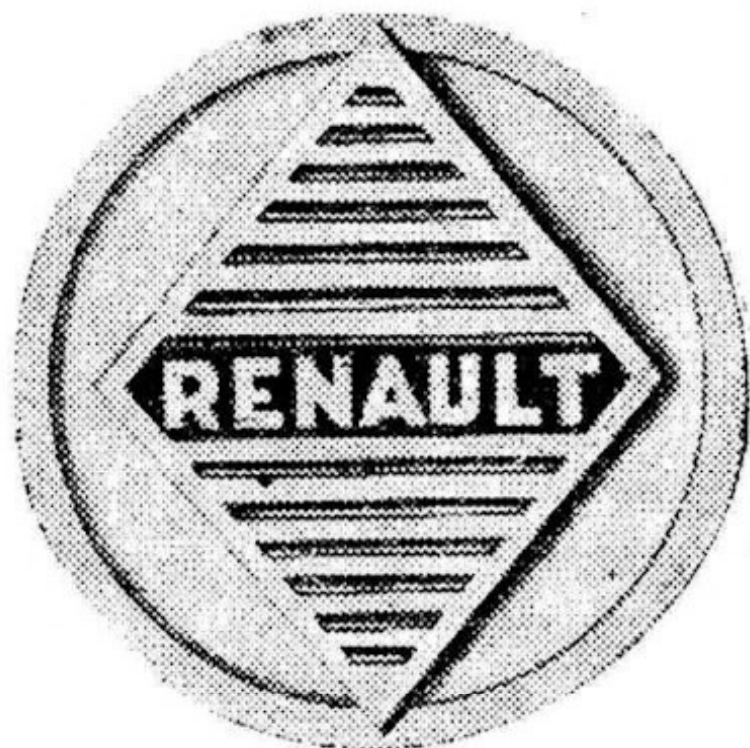
"There's no question about its proper shape!" said Nipper, with conviction. "By Jove! You're a marvel, Bangs! No other bowler has ever done a thing like that to the St. Frank's Junior Eleven!"

"It wasn't cricket at all!" said Handforth. "It was a new kind of skittles! And we don't mind losing, either—because we couldn't do anything else. We're not magicians, and we can't see round corners."

"What do you mean—see round corners?" asked Jerry Dodd.

"Why, I believe this chap bowls in just

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the same way as he chucks that giddy boomerang of his!" said Handforth.

"It's a fact!" said Edward Oswald. "I believe the ball goes right round the wicket and hits it from the back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing else to think!" insisted Handforth. "I know jolly well that my bat was between the ball and the wicket—and yet my balls went flying!"

"It's all a matter of twist," said Boomerang gently. "I've invented a new kind of bowling, and when you're not used to it you're pretty well flummoxed. But I've only got to bowl to you fellows for a bit, and you'll soon get the hang of it—and I dare say you'll be able to punish me pretty heavily, too."

"You don't need punishing—you need praising!" said Harry Gresham. "And when I think of you going back to that Queensland cattle station, I get a pain. It's wicked. You weren't born to look after cattle. You're a cricketer—and you ought to concentrate on the game."

Bangs sighed.

"My father's all against it," he said sorrowfully. "Besides, I've got to work."

Nipper was looking cool and calm.

"Just a minute, you fellows," he said smoothly. "Of course, there's only one thing to be done. It's as obvious as daylight, and if we don't do it we shall be mugs."

"What do you mean?" asked Handforth.

"Isn't it simple?" said Nipper. "We've got to take Bangs back to St. Frank's with us!"

"What?"

"Of course," said Nipper, nodding. "Bangs is a discovery. Think of our coming cricket season. When we get back to St. Frank's it'll be April—and cricket will be nearly upon us. We want Bangs for our Junior Eleven. With him in the team, we shall be able to pulverise any eleven we're up against."

"That's settled, then!" said Travers. "Bangs has got to come back to St. Frank's with us."

Jerry Dodd looked excited.

"But how can it be worked?" he asked. "His father won't allow it. Besides, he can't afford such a thing."

"You'd best forget it," said Boomerang. "I'd love to go to England—it's one of the things I've dreamed of—but my father isn't rich, and he's got to work, just the same as I've got to work."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Nipper's right—for once! I don't think much of him as a Junior captain, but now and again he gets a real brain-wave. You're needed for the St. Frank's Junior Eleven, Bangs—and you've got to come. If you can't come as a schoolboy, what's the matter with you coming as groundsman, or coach, or something like that? You say you've got to work—well, why shouldn't you work at something connected with cricket? And if you get good pay, and a free trip to England, what's the matter with the wheeze?"

Boomerang's eyes began to glisten.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "I wonder if it would be possible?"

"From this minute, old man, you're joining the St. Frank's party!" said Nipper firmly. "You've left the cattle station, and you're with us. If you won't come willingly, or if your father cuts up rusty, we'll take you by force. We simply can't do without you."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Boomerang!"

"Bravo, lamp-post!"

The fellows found an unexpected ally in Sir Arthur Brampton. When he heard all about it, some little time later, he was quite enthusiastic. Being a true-born Australian, he was naturally anxious for Boomerang Bangs to have every chance. And Sir Arthur himself undertook the task of going to see Mr. Bangs on the subject—this latter gentleman being some miles away, on one of Mr. Dodd's cattle stations.

Mr. Bangs came back with Sir Arthur, and nobody ever knew quite what had taken place between the pair. But Boomerang was startled and overjoyed when his father told him that he had reconsidered his decision, and that he wouldn't have to go back to the Queensland station.

"I've decided that you shall finish your education in England," said Bangs senior. "You'll go to St. Frank's College with these other boys. I've already spoken to Mr. Lee about it, and he's taken you on as a pupil."

And so it came about that Charlie Bangs, better known as Boomerang, was now a fully fledged member of the St. Frank's Remove. Either Sir Arthur Brampton had promised to pay his expenses, or Sir Arthur had convinced Mr. Bangs that a year or two at St. Frank's would do his son a world of good. And perhaps Mr. Bangs—who probably had a very neat nest-egg in the bank—decided that there was something in the idea. At all events, the thing was a reality—and when the party left Bourke, on the following morning, for Sydney, Boomerang went with it. Moreover, he wore a St. Frank's cap, and it was already definitely settled that he should share Study F, in the Ancient House, with Jerry Dodd and Jarrow.

And now the St. Frank's touring school had another alluring prospect ahead of it. A visit to Sydney, the great teeming city of New South Wales—and then a journey southward, into Victoria—to Melbourne.

Nobody could say that this trip to Australia was not providing the fellows with plenty of entertainment and excitement.

THE END.

(Next week they certainly get their fill, especially E. O. Handforth, who finds himself involved in an adventure with a runaway aeroplane, and again, later on, when his generosity lands him in for a whole heap of trouble. Look out for this yarn, entitled "Hard Lines, Handy!" in next Wednesday's Free Gift Issue.)



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 SEABLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



TOM BRYAN

YOU are quite right—Tom Bryan (Chingford)—when you say that the photo of Rita McEnteggart, which appeared in the December 29th issue, came out remarkably well in the print. Yet it was only a small snap. The snap you sent me isn't much larger, and it appears this week above, and I hope it will come out as good as Miss McEnteggart's—although, naturally, the page won't look half so good! Small snapshots are quite excellent for reproduction purposes—but they *must* be clear-cut likenesses. Smudgy photos are practically useless. Even expensive cabinet portraits, which are sometimes far from well defined, are not so good as a small, realistic snapshot.

Your comments about Handforth—John Sorrel (Glasgow)—are not quite fair. With delightful frankness, you tell me that I have written piffle by making Handforth chase a tiger, and with equal frankness you tell me that I have perpetrated utter rot by causing him to punch a gorilla in the eye. You say that this kind of stuff is spoiling my "otherwise good yarns." Now, here's a point that I can take up. Your statements, taken crudely, *do* seem justified. But if you will read through those stories again you will find that the circumstances, in each case, were perfectly in accord with Handforth's conduct. He is reckless, he is a blunderer, and it has always been one of his habits to do rash things without thinking of the consequences. I don't think you will ever find an instance of Handforth doing these hare-brained actions unless he is excited. Therefore, I consider that they are quite characteristic of him; and to select such incidents out of my stories, and speak of them as examples of piffing writing, is most unfair to me. The full circumstances should always be borne in mind. In answer to your query about John Willard, he is no longer at St. Frank's. There was no interest attached to his departure, so it wasn't mentioned in the stories.

And now, after having been told that Handforth is impossible, I learn from you—Ada Sadler (St. Helens, Lancs.)—that Nipper is too utterly perfect. But when you tell me that "never once" have you known him

to make a mistake, I feel that I must contradict you. If you really want me to, I can give you many instances—and some fairly recent, too—where Nipper has not only blundered, but acknowledged his blunders, and kicked himself for them. But you must remember that Nipper is the Remove captain, and he only occupies that position because he is less liable to blunder than anybody else. That's why he became skipper. I don't agree for a moment that he is too utterly perfect. He is capable and self-possessed, and is aware of the responsibilities that he carries on his shoulders. With regard to your autograph book, if you will send it along I will be quite pleased to spoil one of its pages, as you desire.

I would be breaking my rule—Julia S. Morley (Kennington)—if I sent you my autographed photo without first having yours. As you know, any reader is welcome to my photograph providing he, or she, first adds to my own collection.

No—Neville Kirkman (Pietermaritzburg)—you haven't scored a bull's eye. The "E. S. Brooks" you saw in the Correspondents Wanted column is not my son, but myself. I suppose I can want some back numbers of the Old Paper, can't I? The fact is, I've been too liberal with my spare copies of the old issues. Readers have written to me, asking if I can oblige them with this number, or that number, and like a chump I've now left myself short of copies for binding. So I shall be awfully bucked if some of you readers can hunt me up the following numbers (all Old Series): 23, "The League of the Green Triangle"; 25, "The Specialist's Last Case"; 27, "The Gold Cavern"; 35, "The Mummy Mystery"; 66, "The Mystery of the 10-20 Express"; 70, "The House in the Hollow"; 234, "The Siege of the West Wing"; and 326, "The Traitors of Caribou Pass."

Thrills Galore in This Fine New Dirt-Track Racing Serial!

RIVALS OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



by
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.**



Shall he remain a professional footballer, or become a "star" dirt-track rider? That is the problem which confronts popular Rex Carrington, of the Blue Crusaders! What does he do—this week's grand instalment tells you!

A Sensational Race

"I CAN'T understand it," said Corky, frowning. "I didn't know that a novice could get into a big race like this without any notice."

"He's doing it out of pure devilment," said Tich. "Just like him, of course! I suppose he wants to show Mr. Piccombe that he's his own boss in his spare time. We'd better try to persuade him—"

"It's too late, old man," put in Corcoran. "The race is just starting."

They watched, fascinated—thrilled. There was indeed something alluring in this new sport. There was Rex Carrington, a grim-looking figure—helmeted, goggled, leather-covered—tense over the handlebars of his machine. It seemed incredible that this was his very first evening on any speedway, and it was even more incredible that the authorities had allowed him to enter.

"Go it, Rex!"

"Let's have a goal, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowds were shouting. They had recognised Rex Carrington as their own favourite—for, without question, Rex was the most popular Blue of all. Fatty Fowkes was popular, too, but it is generally the centre-forward who is the star of any big League team, especially if he happens to be in goal-scoring form; and just at present Rex was at the pinnacle of his prowess, having scored brilliant goals in match after match. The crowds, largely consisting of football enthusiasts, were quick to recognise their

favourite, and they were delighted to see him here, ready to give them another treat.

Then came the signal, and the machines went rushing and tearing and thundering over the track.

It was a flying start, and the four competitors roared into the straight, neck and neck. Then came the first bend, and the spectators held their breath startled, rather scared. There was something awe-inspiring in these modern juggernauts hurtling forward at high speed, broadsiding on that loose, treacherous surface.

Gold Helmet Kemp was in the lead, and the manner in which he controlled his machine was masterly. But, extraordinarily enough, Rex Carrington was only just in his rear. For Rex, with that recklessness which was a part of him, had seized his opportunity, and had swung in with unerring precision and judgment.

He almost scraped the ground as he skidded round the bend, his shielded left knee nearly touching. Then into the straight again, going all out.

"Rex—Rex!" went up a mighty roar.

Rex and Kemp were the only two in it. Neck and neck they were shooting along the straight again, and it was seen that Rex was leading by about a foot. He took the bend with a confidence and a certainty that caused the watching mechanics to marvel. Round he went, skidding, his back wheel bucking madly and sending up showers of dust. It was one of the most spectacular broadsides that those old-timers had ever

seen. Even Gold Helmet Kemp, with all his experience, did not display such abandoned daring. It was because of Rex's inexperience, perhaps, that he was so successful. He just let himself go, although he was complete master of his mount during every second of the race.

Into the straight again—round the next bend in the last lap. And now Rex was definitely leading, with Gold Helmet Kemp two or three lengths behind, troubled by Rex's dust.

"Hurrah!"

A pistol cracked, signalling the end of the race. And a mighty roar went up. Slithering and bucking, Rex Carrington had won—he had won the race by a mere split second. In this, his first entry in any speedway contest, he had beaten the celebrated Gold Helmet Kemp!

A fluke, perhaps—a mere piece of good luck—but it was to lead to startling and sensational developments!

The Temptation!

MR. PETER BURKE turned a flushed, excited face to his employer.

"What did I tell you, Mr. Harding?" he said tensely. "That boy is a marvel! There was no chance work about that display of his! He's a novice on the track—and yet he's beaten Kemp! I tell you he's a born rider!"

"It certainly looks like it," agreed Mr. Harding, stroking his chin.

"We need him—and, if I'm any good as a manager, we'll have him!" went on Burke. "He's Carrington—the Blue Crusaders' centre-forward. Don't you understand, sir? In Bannington, he's the most popular—"

"But can it be done, Burke?" interrupted the owner. "What about Carrington's contract? We don't want to do anything that will upset the Crusaders. We're rivals, I know, and we may not be able to keep on friendly terms, but, at the same time, we must be careful."

"Leave it to me, sir," said Mr. Burke grimly.

In the meantime, Rex Carrington found himself surrounded by a crowd of greasy, grimy mechanics, who were all enthusiastic over his remarkable win. Smiling Billy Ross and Dick Somers, and the other champion riders, were equally lavish in their congratulations.

"Never saw anything like it!" declared Billy Ross. "It seems to me, Carrington, that you're a bit of a spoofer. It can't be true that you've never ridden on a dirt track before this evening."

"The funny thing about it, it is true," replied Rex.

Gold Helmet Kemp, a rugged, leathery-faced individual, was looking at Rex with twinkling eyes.

"Well, you've done me out of fifty quid—and good luck to you!" he said heartily. "You beat me fairly—and cleverly. I thought the race was mine, but I made a little mistake. You were born for this sort of thing, Carrington."

"And he's a professional footballer!" said Billy Ross, shaking his head sadly.

"Then he'd better change his profession," said Kemp. "He'll make a lot more money on the track. And we're needing expert Englishmen, too. The Australians and the Americans showed us how to play this game, and it's up to the Old Country to produce her own champions."

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF.

ULYSSES PIECOMBE—more commonly known as *Piecan*—manager of that famous Second Division Football Club, *The Blue Crusaders*, is worried; very worried. Not because the Blues are doing badly—indeed, at the moment they are playing splendid football—but because they've got rivals—dirt-track racing rivals. A dirt-track has just been opened near the Stronghold, the Blues' enclosure, and *Piecan* fears that the club's "gates" will suffer as a result. The players, however, seem unperturbed. Especially

REX CARRINGTON, the Blues' brilliant centre-forward. Rex is of a reckless nature, and he declares that if he gets the chance he's going to have a "go" at this new sport.

LIONEL CORCORAN, sole owner of the Crusaders—Lionel, of course, belongs to the Fourth Form at St. Frank's—is also enthusiastic. In Rex's case, however, *Piecan* puts his foot down. "I absolutely forbid you to go riding round a dirt-track on one of those dangerous machines!" he says. "I can't run the risk of you being crocked. Corcoran is not a player, and I have no jurisdiction over him, but I do forbid any members of the team to indulge in this sport!" Rex, however, defies these orders, and, borrowing a machine, goes for a trial run round the track.

PETER BURKE, manager of the Speedway, sees him, and is very impressed with Rex's clever riding. "Like to enter in the next race?" he asks Rex. The footballer eagerly assents, and takes his place among the competitors. The Blue Crusaders' footballers, who are watching, see him. "Better go and stop him," says *Fatty Fowkes*. "He's doing this in direct defiance of *Piecan's* orders, and there'll be trouble!"

(Now read on.)

Then, before anything else could be said, Fatty Fowkes and Corcoran, and a number of Blues and St. Frank's schoolboys, came crowding up. Somehow, they had managed to get out of the public enclosure, and they surrounded Rex in an enthusiastic mob.

"You were wonderful, Rex!" declared Tich Harborough. "You rode like a master!"

"Luck—that's all," said Rex, grinning. "There wasn't any skill about it, anyhow."

"Then it was instinct," said Corcoran. "You've got just the right temperament for the dirt track, Rex, old man. But don't forget that you're a footballer——"

"I shan't forget it," said Rex.

"I should hope not!" growled Fatty Fowkes. "What are the Blues going to do if you break away? Besides, it's so risky. You might come a fearful cropper at any minute. By glory! My heart was in my mouth while you were skidding round those bends, Rex! You ought to be more careful!"

A man in uniform pushed through the throng.

"When you're ready, Mr. Carrington, the manager would like to have a few words with you," he said, addressing Rex. "I'm to wait here, and take you to Mr. Burke's office."

"What's the idea?" asked Rex in surprise.

"Mr. Burke did not confide in me, sir," said the attendant with quiet irony.

When Rex Carrington arrived at the office, he found Mr. Peter Burke talking earnestly with the burly owner.

"Sit down, Carrington," said Burke. "This is Mr. Julius Harding, the owner of this Speedway."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said Rex, shaking hands.

"You won that race very cleverly," nodded Mr. Harding.

"It was probably a fluke, sir," smiled Rex.

"It was no fluke," put in Mr. Burke. "I know a born rider when I see one. Now, Carrington, I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. There's no flattery intended, and I'm a business man. Your riding in that race was masterly—it was incredibly good. And I am convinced that you would soon make a big name for yourself if you embraced track-riding as a serious profession."

"But I'm a footballer, sir——"

"Never mind that," said Mr. Burke. "Here, in this Speedway, you will have every opportunity of advancing yourself. I see no reason why you should not become our star attraction. And then, later on, when all the other speedways are in full swing, over the length and breadth of the country, you will have your pick. There is more than a possibility that you will become Britain's champion. But if you care to consider a contract with us, to appear regularly on this track for the present season——"

"I'm very sorry, sir, but it can't be done," interrupted Rex firmly. "I think you know, don't you, that I'm a Blue Crusader?"

"I know that, but——"

"Then is it quite fair of you, sir, to suggest this?" asked Rex, looking Mr. Burke straight in the eye. "I'm the Blues' centre-forward, and, without wishing to be vain, I rather think that my services are of some value to the club. Just at present I'm in good form, and I'm scoring goals regularly. I don't think the club would release me."

"Have you no say in the matter?" asked Mr. Burke. "If you suddenly ceased scoring goals for the club, the management might not be so keen upon keeping you——"

"Hold on, sir!" interrupted Rex coldly. "I'm not that sort of chap. I don't play dirty tricks."

The manager frowned.

"Don't misunderstand me," he said. "I'm merely putting this to you as a business proposition. Do you realise, Carrington, that there is big money to be made at this game?"

"I've heard so, sir."

"Then you've heard correctly," said Mr. Burke. "Do you know that the famous Jim Kempster, even at the start of his career, averaged nearly a hundred pounds a week in prize money? Do you know that the equally famous Vic Huxley won over one thousand two hundred pounds for ninety-five minutes' actual riding? These are real figures—not fantastic estimates! Do you know that Gold Helmet Kemp, in less than a year on the track, has received no less than four thousand pounds? And when he started he knew even less of motor-cycling than you do! Man alive, you're a born track rider! How can you possibly hope to make as much money by remaining a professional footballer?"

Rex Carrington, listening to these temptations, remained as cool as ice. He was as fond of money as anybody else—but he was no traitor. He smiled calmly, and shook his head.

"In the summer-time, sir, it's very likely that I might change my profession," he said coolly. "But until the end of this season I'm a Blue Crusader—and I'm going to put all my efforts, and all my energies, into helping the Blues to win promotion."

"But you can do both!" said the manager eagerly. "You can play for the Blues, and you can ride——"

"I'm afraid it's rather difficult, sir," interrupted Rex. "If I divide my interests, I shall be a duffer at both football and track-riding. No, sir—I'm a footballer until the beginning of May. I'm sticking to the Blues. And, as you've been speaking frankly, I'll speak frankly, too. I think it's rather low-down of you to make these suggestions to me. Good-evening!"

And Rex, without another word, turned on his heel and strode out of the office.

"Wait!" shouted Mr. Burke harshly.

But Rex did not wait. He went out and slammed the door. Inwardly he was boiling. His loyalty to the Blue Crusaders was very strong, and he resented this underhand attempt to entice him away. It would have

been a very different matter if Mr. Burke had approached the Blues' management in an honest, straightforward way.

Mr. Julius Harding gave an expressive grunt.

"I told you what would happen, Burke!" he said angrily. "You've done far more harm than good. Hang the fellow!"

"We're going to have him!" said Mr. Burke fiercely. "He's Rex Carrington, the star player of the Blue Crusaders! With him as the chief attraction at the Speedway, we can draw all Bannington—and take big money. Leave this to me, sir! Carrington is going to be our star rider. He's worth hundreds of pounds a week to us—and we're going to have him!"

You're obliterating it with your hulking great carcass."

"There's no need to be personal!" said Fatty Fowkes coldly, as he shifted slightly aside.

Rex leaned against the mantelpiece and stared meditatively into the fire.

Outside there was a blustery wind, and it was good to be indoors in the warmth. It was Monday evening, and the Blues had put in some hard practice during the day. This smoking-room was really the Senior day-room of the Ancient House at St. Frank's; but the Crusaders were allowed to do very much as they liked during their sojourn in the old school, and they were comfortable enough in these quarters.



There were only two left in the race that mattered—Rex Carrington and famous Gold Helmet Kemp. Rex broadsided madly as he came to the bend, and a great cheer went up as he skidded round. This was the kind of thrill the spectators liked!

And there was an evil, wicked gleam in Mr. Peter Burke's eyes.

Rex thought that the matter was over and done with—but Rex was very much mistaken!

Mr. Piccombe is Tactless!

REX CARRINGTON strolled into the smoking-room with a thoughtful expression on his handsome face. He found Fatty Fowkes standing on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire. Some of the other players were also present.

"Glad you've come in, Rex," said Fatty briskly. "About next Wednesday's game against Stratton Rovers——"

"Never mind about next Wednesday's game," interrupted Rex. "What about letting somebody else have a bit of the fire?"

"Anything on your mind, Rex, old son?" asked Fatty after a while.

"Nothing in particular," grunted Rex.

"Thinking about that track-racing affair on Saturday?"

"Perhaps."

"You'd better forget it," put in Dave Moran, coming across to the fireplace. "The team can't do without you nowadays, Rex. You've been scoring some wonderful goals of late, and your form is exceptionally good. We're out for promotion, and——"

"No need to remind me of that," interrupted Rex, with an air of truculence. "Don't I know we're out for promotion? Don't I know that I'm in good form? You're not going to lecture me, are you?"

"Hang it, man, you needn't be so touchy!" protested the skipper.

The door opened and Lionel Corcoran came in, smiling and cheerful.

"Just popped over from the East House," he observed. "Hallo! Anything wrong?"

"Oh, for goodness sake don't make a fuss!" said Rex. "Can't I be thoughtful without everybody jumping on me? Piecan started on me this morning, but I walked away."

"You would do!" grunted Fatty. "And that's a silly thing to do with Piecan!"

"But what does he want to rag you about?" asked Corky curiously. "You're doing wonders for the team, Rex."

"Oh, Piecan's got the wind up," said Rex Carrington. "Thinks I'm going to take up dirt-track racing, and all that sort of rot. Just as if I would leave the Blues in the lurch! I hope I'm made of better stuff than that!"

Corcoran coughed.

"Well, you know, you did enter one of the races on Saturday evening," he said gently. "That was strictly against Piecan's orders, and I understand you won fifty quid?"

"Yes," said Rex.

"Well, Piecan is probably worried about you," put in Fatty Fowkes. "By glory! Fancy winning fifty quid for jazzing round a cinder track on a motor-bike! Some chaps have all the luck!"

"Why don't you try it, Fatty?" asked Ben Gillingham, the bow-legged right-back. "Of course, you'd need a traction-engine instead of a motor-bike, but—"

"Idiot!" interrupted Fatty.

A tap sounded on the door. The handle turned, and Mr. Ulysses Piecombe appeared. A silence fell. Mr. Piecombe entered, adjusted his glasses, looked round, and fixed his gaze upon Rex.

"I am glad, Carrington, that you are here," he said with gravity. "I would like to have a word with you on the subject of this—er—ridiculous dirt-track racing."

Rex stiffened.

"I thought that affair was over and forgotten, sir," he grunted.

"Unfortunately, Carrington, it is not forgotten," said the manager. "I tried to speak to you this morning, but you refused to listen to me. In strict defiance of my orders you entered a race on Saturday evening, and I believe that you won a—er—prize of fifty pounds?"

"Is that a crime?" asked Rex.

"Don't be absurd, Carrington. Of course it's not a crime," said Mr. Piecombe. "At the same time, I wish to remind you of your obligations to this club."

"No need to remind me of them, sir—I know my contract," said Rex Carrington. "And you needn't worry yourself about me, either. I am not going to let the Blues down. There's big money in this Speedway racing, and I'm as keen as mustard on it—but you can rely upon me to keep faith with the club."

"Good man!" murmured Dave Moran.

If Mr. Piecombe had been wise, he would

have left the matter there. But he could seldom resist the temptation to impose a little lecture, and now he cleared his throat, and regarded Rex with an owl-like solemnity.

"I am—er—glad, Carrington, that you have a full realisation of your responsibility," he said. "The Crusaders are near the top of the Second Division table. We are winning in splendid style, and there is every prospect that we shall go right ahead. We want promotion this season. Do not forget our slogan, 'First Division next season.' And if you take your interests away from the club, it might have a very serious effect upon our games. I merely wish to warn you—"

"Look here, sir, I don't need any warnings," broke in Rex hotly.

"Really, Carrington—"

"I was made a big offer on Saturday night—but I refused it," continued Rex, his eyes blazing. "I don't like your insinuations, sir! I'm loyal to the club, and I'll remain loyal."

"It is totally unnecessary, Carrington, for you to get into these tempers," said Mr. Piecombe coldly. "I am not aware that I have made any—er—insinuations, and I must protest against that term—"

"You did make an insinuation, sir," interrupted Rex. "You insinuated that I am capable of letting the club down, and I don't think it's fair. We're all pulling together in this struggle, and we've all got the will to win. But there's a breaking-point, sir—and if you keep on nagging me like this I might get fed-up."

"Nagging you!" ejaculated Mr. Piecombe.

"Yes, sir; that's what it amounts to."

"Upon my word!" said the manager. "How dare you, Carrington? Have you forgotten that I am your manager? It is my privilege to speak sharply to you if I consider the occasion demands such sharpness. As for—er—nagging, I dislike the term. You will please remember that the Bannington Speedway is out of bounds!"

"What?" shouted Rex, startled.

"Out of bounds!" snapped Mr. Piecombe. "That is what I said, Carrington."

"Do you take us for a crowd of junior schoolboys, sir?" asked the centre-forward angrily. "Isn't our word good enough? I suppose we can go to the Speedway for pleasure, can't we—just to watch the racing?"

"You cannot go to the Speedway at all!" said Mr. Ulysses Piecombe. "That is my decision—and I expect you all to adhere to it. You in particular, Carrington!"

And Mr. Piecombe, having completed his exhibition of astonishing tactlessness, turned on his heel and strode out of the smoking-room!

(The Speedway is out of bounds! Can you imagine Rex Carrington obeying an order like that, chums? You can't? And you're right, for Rex goes there in next week's instalment! Don't miss reading these stirring chapters, and don't miss your three Free Gifts, either!)

THE MEN WHO WON THE "ASHES"!

All readers should read this article, which tells you some interesting facts about the three famous cricketers who form the subjects of this week's Free Gifts.

"WALLY" HAMMOND

WHEN people say—and they often do—that cricketers of the old-time standard are no longer produced, there is surely an effective reply. And the reply can be given in these words: "What about Walter Reginald Hammond?" Here is surely a cricketer who has done as much as any of the players of old ever did, and in some respects he has beaten the old-time players.

W. G. Grace scored a thousand runs in May. Wally Hammond has done the same thing. But no player has ever scored a double century in successive Test matches. That's why it should be a case of hats-off to Hammond, the man who, perhaps above all others, has made the difference in the present series of Tests.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Hammond, who is now only twenty-five years of age, is that he is almost entirely a self-made cricketer. His father was a soldier, and as a young lad Wally travelled much. He began to play cricket at the Cirencester Grammar School, and showed exceptional ability there. Later, however, he was sent to an agricultural school with a view to taking up farming. On receiving an invitation to play trial games for Gloucester, however, he went—in a hurry. It was only in 1923 that he first played for the county regularly, however, yet to-day he is at the very top of the tree.

He can not only bat. He is one of the greatest fielders in the game, and he can bowl more than a bit, too—a medium-fast delivery with a nip off the pitch.



HAMMOND

during the present season this Lancashire man would make a lot of runs in Test matches. But as it happened the England side was so strong in batting that no place could be found for Tyldesley in the opening Test games. And as those games were won—well, it was not deemed advisable to make changes.

Yet it is a moral certainty that if Tyldesley had been in the side he would have done his county credit. This is not the first occasion when Tyldesley's Test luck has been dead out. He appeared against the Australians at Trent Bridge in 1921.

In the second innings of that match, when he was batting well, Ernest was hit on the head by a ball from Gregory, and he went down to the ground unconscious. When he "came to" he discovered that the ball which had hit him on the head had also knocked a bail off his wicket, and he was "out."

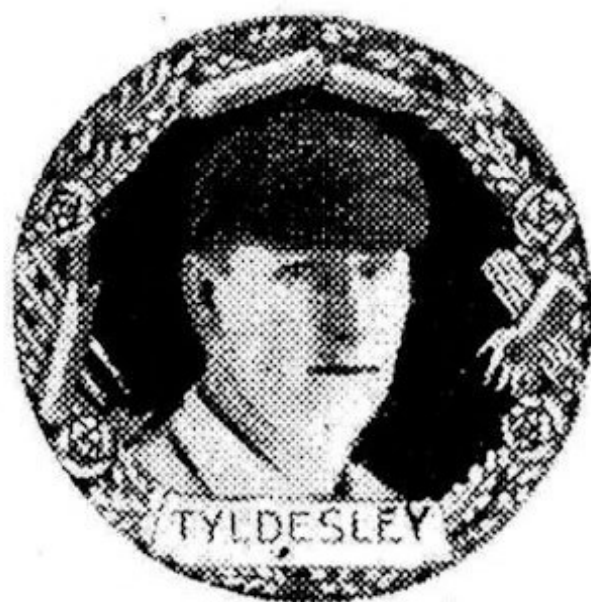
Ernest is the younger brother of J. T. Tyldesley, who often played for England, and he was first given his chance in the Lancashire side at the age of twenty. Getting a regular position as the man to go in first-wicket down in 1923 he has never since scored less than a thousand in a season. He had a great run in the summer of 1926 when in seven successive county matches he scored seven centuries—a feat which stands as a record. Right-handed, Tyldesley is one of the soundest of batsmen: entirely orthodox, but he can lay on the wood when in the mood and the occasion permits him to take a risk.

D. R. JARDINE

Another of the men new to Australian cricket conditions who has done much to win England this series of Tests is Douglas Robert Jardine, one of the three amateurs of the touring party.

When he

(Continued
overleaf.)



TYLDESLEY

ERNEST TYLDESLEY.

In some respects Ernest Tyldesley can be said to be one of the unluckiest of great batsmen. It was fully expected that in Australia



JARDINE

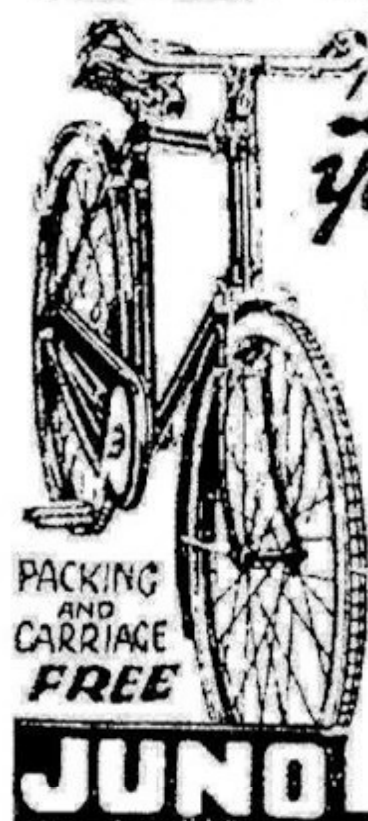
went out there was a doubt as to whether he would get a place in the side for Test matches, but he soon made his choice well-nigh inevitable. He scored a century in each of his first three games out in Australia, which was something unprecedented in the history of the game.

In the Test games in which he has played his rôle has been that of consolidating England's position. When things have threatened to go badly Jardine has been sent in to hold the fort, and there is no player in cricket to-day who can fill that rôle more completely and with greater success.

Yet actually the fact that he has played "patience" so well is a great compliment to him, because he loves to play the care-free game. He is a great stylist, and is particularly strong on the leg side. He has even bowled in Test matches, as a stop-gap, and is a fine fielder close to the wicket.

Born in Bombay in 1900, he started playing cricket at Winchester, and going to Oxford got his blue as a Freshman, and played three times against Cambridge. He is the vice-captain of the Surrey eleven, but having worked up a practice as a solicitor, he has not played regularly in county cricket.

(Interesting, aren't they, these nutshell biographies? Three more, written by the N. L.'s special cricket expert, will appear next week about Freeman, Geary and Leyland, who form the subjects of our next Free Gifts.)



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A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR!

IT must necessarily be brief, unfortunately, but something is better than nothing, and I think I've just got enough space in which to say a few brief words about next Wednesday's issue of the Old Paper.

Only ten of our superb Free Gifts have been given away so far, and there are still six more to come. Three of these will appear next week—coloured portrait badges of Leyland, Freeman and Geary, who have been doing such wonderful things in Australia during the present tour. These badges, clipped in your "Album" with those which have already been given away, will present an imposing array of England's most famous cricketers. Only readers of the Old Paper will have this wonderful opportunity of collecting souvenirs of ALL the English cricketers now touring in Australia, and so you want to make sure you don't miss any of them. If you want to do your chums a good turn, too, you can't do better than tell them all about the NELSON LEE's remarkable offer.

The fourth coupon in our "Popular Test Cricketers" competition will also appear next week. I want all readers to enter for this. It's not a difficult competition, and the prizes are well worth winning—a fully-equipped "James" bicycle, listed at £7 15s., and twelve Hobbs' cricket bats. Look out for coupon No. 4—and don't lose those which have already appeared.

Above all, chums—**ORDER NEXT WEEK'S "NELSON LEE" NOW!**

THE EDITOR.

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