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The Editor reserves the right to divide the value of the prizes, if necessary, in the event of ties, and his decision on all matters concerning this contest is final and binding. No alterations must be made on coupons, which must be filled up in ink. Employees of the proprietors of "Nelson Lee" may not compete.

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MEAD

SUTCLIFFE

TATE

TYLDESLEY

WHITE

I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

SIGNED

ADDRESS

N.L.

ANOTHER COUPON WILL APPEAR NEXT WEEK!

"HARD LINES, HANDY!"



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Edward Oswald Handforth revels in excitement and enjoys being in the limelight. This week he gets plenty of both—rather more than he bargains for, in fact! This is the kind of yarn all readers will like; a rollicking fun and adventure yarn written in Edwy Searles Brooks' best and brightest style.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Sydney, New South Wales!

"IT'S a fine city," said Handforth; "but it's hot!" The leader of Study D at St. Frank's gave this as his considered opinion, and he used a tone that brooked of no argument. Church and McClure, however, could not resist the temptation.

"What else do you expect Sydney to be in March?" asked Church. "The seasons out here are different, Handy. This is a hot period of the year, and you can't expect Sydney to be anything else but warm!"

The three Removites were airily attired in white flannels, with wide Panama hats, and they were strolling along York Street, in Sydney, New South Wales. There was a bustle of traffic, and the scene was a busy one.

Nipper and Tregellis-West and Vivian Travers and a number of other St. Frank's juniors were in sight, too. Quite a crowd of them was going through the city, looking at all the points of interest.

Now and again a group of seniors would be seen, and occasionally some of the Sydney people would indulge in some gentle chipping at the expense of the English schoolboys.

The travelling school had not spent many days in this great Australian city, situated on the picturesque shores of Port Jackson.

Sydney, the Mother City of the Island Continent, was a very splendid place, and most of the St. Frank's boys had been astonished at the magnificence of her streets, her shops, theatres, cinemas, and great public buildings.

The fellows were now having a last look round, as it were. For on the morrow they would travel down to Melbourne, where the School Ship was waiting. And, truth to tell, most of the boys would be glad enough to get back to the St. Francis—back into their own quarters, where they would feel more or less at home.

They had had many stirring adventures since they had left Adelaide, some weeks earlier. They had been stranded in the bush of Queensland—they had even penetrated into Northern Territory—and they had been rescued in a rather spectacular manner by the

redoubtable Lord Dorrimore. The latter had turned up with a fleet of great aeroplanes, and it was in these machines that the whole party had flown to Sydney. The planes would be used again to take everybody down to Melbourne.

They were the enormous Manners monoplanes—now purchased by Sir Arthur Brampton, the Australian transport magnate. Nelson Lee, who was in charge of the whole party had suggested that the boys should travel down to Melbourne by train; but Sir Arthur had insisted that the aeroplanes should be used until the party was once more aboard the School Ship.

There was an addition to the Remove now—in the person of Charlie Bangs, the son of a New South Wales cattle station foreman. Charlie Bangs—more familiarly known as Boomerang—was the leanest youth that any of the St. Frank's fellows had ever seen. He was extraordinarily thin, but he was as hard as nails, and as sinewy as whipcord. Incidentally, he was the most deadly bowler that the St. Frank's cricketers had ever come across. In fact, he was so amazingly good that Nipper had practically insisted that he should join St. Frank's as a pupil, and return to England with the party.

Boomerang Bang's father, fortunately, had agreed to the plan, and now Boomerang was a fully-fledged Removite. The Junior Eleven expected great things of him when the cricket season started in England. But that was rather looking ahead. There was plenty of cricket to be had in Australia—the Test match, at Melbourne, in particular.

Handforth & Co. found themselves in Bridge Street, a broad, imposing thoroughfare. They turned into Pitt Street, and reached the famous Circular Quay, with Sydney Cove in sight. Then they made their way round into the Botanical Gardens, and sat down on a seat, beneath the shade of the trees.

There had been many places of interest to see in Sydney, the fellows being particularly interested in the splendid University—a fine sandstone building in the Gothic style. Most of the fellows had been escorted over the cathedral, and they had been greatly impressed.

Enthusiastic Sydney citizens had taken them to the Mint, the Observatory, the Art Gallery, the Public Libraries and Museums. They had been shown the beauties of the many parks and the squares and the public gardens. Altogether, Sydney was voted to be a very fine place.

Handforth, of course, had expected to see a sort of glorified rural township—in spite of the fact that he had already marvelled over the splendours of Adelaide.

Actually, Sydney is one of the most up-to-date cities in the world, with electric tramways steam ferry systems, magnificent business buildings, and shops that are as good as many of the most famous establishments in the West End of London.

Then, too, there were the wonderful beaches, and the picturesque bays, with miles of wooded foreshores.

"Well, we'd better be getting back to the hotel, I suppose," said Handforth, after a brief rest. "What's the programme for the rest of the day? We're going to a cinema, aren't we? Or is it a theatre?"

"Far better go down to one of the beaches and have a bathe," said Church. "And what about some sport in the surf? Some of the fellows are getting up a party, I believe, and we might as well join it."

McClure grinned.

"I don't wonder that Mr. Lee is anxious for us to get back to the School Ship," he said. "All our lessons have gone to pot, and it's about time we got back to the proper routine."

Handforth glared.

"Why bring up that subject now?" he demanded. "We're enjoying ourselves here—and, if I had my way, we wouldn't leave for Melbourne until the very day of the Test match. As it is, we shall get there tomorrow, and I'll bet my boots that Mr. Lee will get us straight down to work."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," agreed Church. "Well, we've had a long spell of liberty, and it'll be up to us, on the voyage home, to make up for lost time. If we don't, the School Ship will be looked upon as a failure, and there'll be no more voyages for us."

There was a lot of sound common sense in Church's words. Indeed, Mr. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster-detective, was already beginning to have his doubts regarding the advisability of these ocean trips. They were highly educational in one sense—since they allowed the boys to see the world—but on many subjects the fellows were getting sadly in arrears.

However, there had been quite a number of unexpected set-backs, so the school had an excuse. But these adventures were now apparently over, and the rest of the sojourn in Australia would be more or less humdrum.

But, after all, one can never tell!



CHAPTER 2.

Ready for Departure!

"EVERYBODY here?" asked Fenton briskly.

The St. Frank's captain cast his eye over a crowd of Removites and Fourth-Formers, and he frowned upon a larking group of fags, led by Willy Handforth.

It was the following morning, and everybody had gathered in the aerodrome—where the great Manners' aeroplanes were standing ready. Sydney was about to be left behind, and the journey to Melbourne was on the point of being commenced.

(Continued on page 6.)

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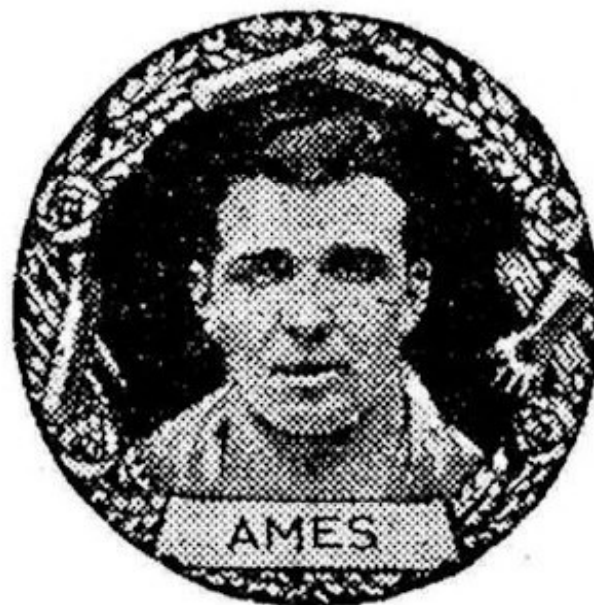
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"HARD LINES, HANDY!"



(Continued from page 4.)

"Keep your hair on, Fenton," said Bob Christine of the Fourth. "We're not going just yet, are we?"

"You juniors need looking after," replied the prefect. "There's bound to be a lot of confusion at the last minute unless we take a few precautions. Do you know your allotted 'planes?"

"Not yet," said Fullwood.

"Then you'd better find out," advised Fenton. "So many of you are going in one 'plane, so many in another, and so on. I shall be jolly glad when we're all back on the ship—and then, perhaps, we shall be able to get a little discipline!"

It was a scene of great activity. Mechanics were bustling about, and there were great crowds of spectators, too—having come along especially to give the party a good send-off. There were Press photographers, reporters, and all sorts of other people. Here and there a St. Frank's master would be standing, chatting with a group of seniors, or perhaps with some prominent citizen.

The great aeroplanes were very imposing.

They were all-metal machines of stupendous size—multi-engine monsters, with cabins, saloons, and with wonders too numerous to mention. They were monoplanes, the one wing being so enormous that it contained cabins and passages and so forth. The St. Frank's fellows were very familiar with this type of machine, and they felt quite at home aboard.

Lord Dorrimore was much in evidence, debonair, smiling and cheerful. He and Mr. Hobart Manners were going to travel in the leading 'plane—which would also contain several of the masters, and a number of the seniors.

"How goes it, Archie, old son?" said Nipper, as he came across Archie Glenthorne.

The genial ass of the Remove was looking somewhat bored, and he gazed at Nipper with a tired smile.

"Oh, rather!" he said. "I mean—what?"

"Heat too much for you, Archie?"

"Well, dear old lemon, I must admit that the heat is somewhat frightful," said Archie. "It's all very well for chappies who are accustomed to it, but I mean to say, we've been dashing hither and thither, seeing this, and seeing that, until the good old brain is positively addled."

"Yes, we've been doing a good bit of sight-seeing during the past day or two," admitted Nipper. "A quiet spell aboard the School Ship will be welcome."

"Good gad! Welcome?" said Archie dreamily. "Absolutely! I'm afraid I'm not much of a chappie for this sightseeing stuff. It's so dashed exhausting. I suppose you don't know of a nice soft couch anywhere, where I could rest the good old bones?"

"You'd better get aboard our 'plane," said Nipper, with a chuckle. "You'll find plenty of chairs, and you might as well indulge in forty winks before the start. I daresay it'll be an hour before we take off."

"What ho!" said Archie, brightening up. "A dashed brainy suggestion, laddie! Kindly lead me to our 'plane. I didn't know we were allowed aboard yet, or I would have been there epochs ago."

"You don't need any leading," said Nipper. "Just get aboard, and make yourself comfortable."

Archie wandered off, and finding one of the aeroplane doors invitingly open, he entered. Mechanics were tuning up the engines, but nobody seemed to be inside the great fuselage.

Archie walked in, and he was grateful for the shade, and the comparative coolness. He arrived in the saloon, sank down into an easy-chair, and sighed with contentment.

"This," he murmured, "is absolutely the stuff to give Archie!"

But it seemed he was not to be left in peace for long. For about ten minutes later Handforth was bustling about outside, with Church and McClure in attendance; and Handforth, apparently, was very anxious to find Archie.

"Anybody seen that lazy ass of a Glenthorne?" he asked, as he approached a group of fags. "Can't find him anywhere. He seems to have vanished."

"We haven't got him," said Chubby Heath. "What do you want him for, anyhow?"

"I don't want him," replied Handforth. "But some of the Press photographers are going to take photos of the whole Remove—a kind of group—and we want Archie in with us, although, if it comes to that, he'll probably ruin the picture."

"Impossible!" said Juicy Lemon. "If you're in it, Handy, the picture will be ruined, anyhow."

"You cheeky young fathead——"

"Easy, Ted!" said Willy, as he joined the other fags. "No head punching here, you know. Don't forget that we've got to be on our best behaviour. Did I hear you ask for Archie?"

"Yes, you did."

"You'll find him in one of the aeroplanes—that one in front," said Willy, pointing. "He wandered in about a quarter of an hour ago, and I expect you'll find him asleep in one of the cabins."

Handforth bristled.

"By George!" he said. "So that's where he's vanished to! Come on, you chaps! We'll soon yank him out!"

The chums of Study D reached the foremost 'plane—the leader of the fleet, as it were, which would be the first to take off. The mechanics had apparently finished their

work, and the great propellers were now ticking gently over, accompanied by a low, musical hum.

Handforth walked in, and, sure enough, Archie was soon found, fast asleep in one of the chairs.

"Grab him!" said Handforth briskly.

"Go easy," protested Church. "No need to be rough with the poor chap. And now that we're here, what's the matter with getting a drink of some kind? I'm parched."

"H'm! That's not a bad idea," admitted Handforth. "Where's a steward? There doesn't seem to be anybody aboard the giddy 'plane except Archie."

He went out of the saloon, and walked down one of the narrow passages, until he came to a little pantry. This was the stewards' quarters—for all these machines carried cooks and stewards, and regular meals were served during flight.

Handforth was about to call for somebody, when he noticed that the communicating door between the main body of the 'plane and the pilot's chamber was ajar. He could not resist the temptation to peep through.

For none of the juniors was allowed in that magic chamber—the navigating-room, in the very nose of the 'plane. It was a place of wonders—of imposing dials and wheels and levers. Handforth supposed that a mechanic was at work in there; or perhaps Lord Dorrimore himself, who was to pilot this machine, would be preparing for the departure.

But Handforth was rather surprised to find that the navigating chamber was empty.

"By George!" he murmured.

He passed through, and stood looking about him with eager eyes. He knew that he was liable to be pitched out if anybody in authority came along, but he didn't care. Handforth was always inclined to be reckless. Furthermore, he was inclined to be inquisitive.

"My hat! I'd love to be here during the trip!" murmured Handforth. "It must be ripping to see everything working!"

There was a rounded glass front to the navigating chamber—very much after the same style as that of a big airship. Handforth could see the ground below, and he leaned forward in order to get a clearer view.

Click!

He did not know what he had touched, but, somehow, he had undoubtedly switched something on, or he had pressed a lever, or moved some other gadget. At all events,

the great engines of the 'plane suddenly and abruptly sprang into tumultuous life. Instead of ticking over, they now revolved with a mighty, stupendous roar!

Handforth gave a gasp, looked round wildly, and tried to find some lever or switch that would rectify this startling occurrence. He touched one or two knobs and levers, but there was no effect.

Then, with a sensation that nearly paralysed him, he realised that the enormous 'plane was moving swiftly and smoothly over the aerodrome!

He had a momentary vision of figures running out of the way, of men waving their arms and shouting, but it was all a mere blur to Handforth. He only knew that the great 'plane was gathering speed at every second, and that it was beyond his power to stop it!

Edward Oswald Handforth was frantic. His reckless nature always demanded excitement, but this time he was getting more than he wanted! Handforth, too, was a supreme optimist at times, but even he realised that he could not hope to handle this huge 'plane.

A crash seemed inevitable; disaster loomed ahead!

THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

contains portrait badges of Leyland, Freeman, and Geary. Trim the badges with a pair of scissors and slip them in your album. Or here's another wheeze: if one of these cricketers is your favourite, why not wear his badge in your button-hole?



CHAPTER 3.

The Runaway 'Plane!

"HALLO!" said Church, in surprise. "We're off!"

"Off!" ejaculated McClure, looking round. "But—but— There's scarcely anybody aboard yet! We'd better get out!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Church. "I expect Dorrie, or Mr. Lee, or one of the other pilots, is going up for a bit of a test flight, or something like that. They don't know we're aboard. We came on without telling anybody, remember."

Mac nodded.

"Yes, I suppose that's it," he said. "We're getting a free sample ride, as it were. It's queer, all the same. They didn't even trouble to close that side door!"

As he spoke the door itself swung to and slammed shut. This was all to the good, for it would be a risky thing to go near that open doorway while the 'plane was gathering speed for the take-off.

Owing to the thunderous roar of the engines, the juniors heard nothing of the shouts that rang out on the ground from all sides. And they naturally took it for

granted that somebody in authority was in the navigating-room. Any other thought, indeed, would have been fantastic.

"Hallo! Off into the good old clouds, what?" murmured Archie, rousing himself, and sitting forward in his chair. "Good gad! What about the crowd? Where are the chappies?"

"We're not starting yet, Archie," said Church. "This is just a test flight. I expect we shall make a circuit of the aerodrome, and then come down again."

"Oh, I say, what rot!" protested Archie. "Just when I was indulging in forty of the best and brightest! Aeroplanes are frightfully handy things, but I must remark that they create a dashed din."

"Whoa! Look out!" gasped Mac.

The machine had given a tremendous lurch, and Church and McClure were sent reeling from one side of the saloon to the other. There was a crash of crockery from somewhere, and Archie went slithering off his chair, to bump violently to the floor.

"Here, I say, dash it!" he protested. "I mean, isn't this sort of thing a bit over-ripe?"

"We must have hit a lump in the ground," panted Church, as he looked round. "Anyhow, we shall be off in a minute. I've never known one of these 'planes take such a long time to get off before. What's the matter with it?"

"It's all right now," said McClure, with relief, as a sudden smoothness manifested itself. "She's off!"

He looked out of the window, and saw the ground slowly receding. Then the next moment the great 'plane seemed to dip slightly, and there came a jarring thud as the enormous landing wheels touched for a moment. She bounced, and again soared aloft.

"The pilot must be dotty!" said Church breathlessly. "Another bounce like that, and we might rip the landing-gear off. These heavy machines aren't made for bouncing!"

"Well, he ought to know his job best, I should think, laddie," said Archie mildly. "I mean, if it's a sort of test flight, I dare say we shall be in for all sorts of frightful—Whoa! That was a nasty one!"

The machine had given a kind of lurch, seeming to swerve sideways. But she was now well in the air, and beyond the limits of the aerodrome—flying across country, climbing higher and higher with every moment, her engines roaring to their full capacity.

"Where's Handy?" asked Church suddenly.

"He went somewhere for'ard," replied Mac. "Didn't he go for a drink? My only hat! I hope he didn't fall out when we started off! We went with a bit of a jerk."

Handforth's chums hurried forward, rather anxious about their leader. They noticed at once that the communicating door between the body of the machine and the navigating chamber was swinging open. This was most

unusual—for, during flight, that door was generally kept securely locked.

Church held the door steady and peeped through, curious to see who was in charge of the 'plane. Then, suddenly, he seemed to stiffen. He uttered a hoarse cry.

"What's the matter?" asked McClure, in alarm.

"Look!" gasped Church.

Mac pulled the door open and stood there, looking. They were both utterly and absolutely scared. Never in their lives before had they been so scared.

For there was nobody in that navigating chamber but Edward Oswald Handforth! Handforth was clutching at the control-wheel, his shoulders hunched, his muscles braced. He was like a fellow turned to stone. And there was nobody else here—no pilot—no mechanic!

The horrible, frightful truth hit Church and McClure like a solid blow. In a flash, they understood the meaning of those bumps—they realised the explanation of the shaky take-off.

Handforth was at the controls! Handforth had committed this act of sheer lunacy! He had started the machine, and had flown it off—and Church and McClure, even though they knew Handforth to be one of the most reckless fellows under the sun, had never dreamed that he would display such madness as this!

"Handy!" yelled Church, in horror.

"Help!" came a gurgling cry from Handforth. "Do something, you chaps! Oh, my hat! Thank goodness you've come!"

"But—but we can't do anything!" shrieked McClure. "You'll kill the lot of us! Oh, you maniac! What did you do this for?"

Handforth gave a kind of frantic gulp.

"I didn't do it!" he said hoarsely. "I—I touched something by accident, and she started! Then I couldn't stop her, and I just grabbed at this wheel and hung on."

"But—but you took her into the air!" yelled Church.

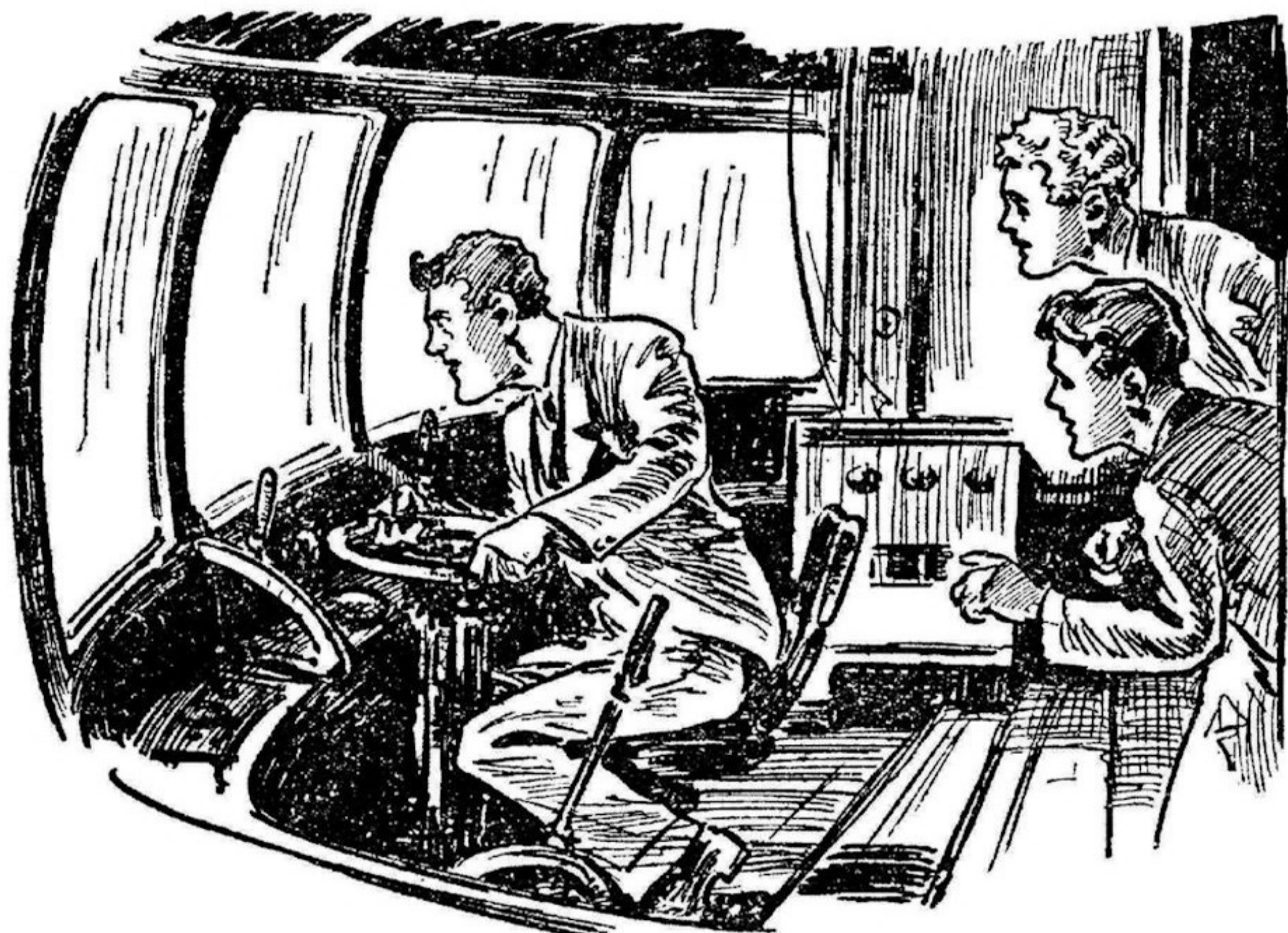
"I didn't!" roared Handforth. "She took herself! And she's taken us with her!"

"But—but—"

Church couldn't get any more words out. He seemed choked. The full horror of this thing was staggering. And it was all so simple, too. Handforth had turned the engines on by accident—not knowing how he had done so. Thus, it had been impossible for him to stop the engines—and the great machine, entirely unaided, had succeeded in getting off the ground, and now it was flying through the air, rising higher and higher! And Handforth, at the control-wheel, knew no more about flying than a kitten! As for attempting to bring the great craft to the ground, the very idea of it was unthinkable.

"Odds frightfulness and disasters!"

Archie Glenthorne, scenting that something was wrong, had joined the other two



"Look!" gasped Church, in horror. Edward Oswald Handforth was the only person in the navigating chamber of the big aeroplane, and he was clutching at the control-wheel. Handy—who didn't know a single thing about flying—was piloting the machine!

juniors, and he now stood looking at Handforth in the utmost alarm.

"It seems to me, laddies, that it's going to be another case of the Wreck of the Hesperus, what? Absolutely!"

"But can't you *do* something, Handy?" panted Church.

"What can I do?" gasped Handforth. "I daren't touch a thing! If I do, we might crash!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I daren't try to shut off the controls," went on Handforth, in horror. "How do you think we can land? She got off on her own—but she can't land on her own! I tell you, we're doomed!"

As he turned round to glance at his startled chums, he unconsciously moved the control-wheel, and the great 'plane banked slightly over, and came round in a wide, sweeping curve.

"Look out!" roared McClure.

Handforth jerked the wheel again, and the machine soared round in the other direction, dipped, and then started climbing again.

"You see?" gurgled Handforth. "At the slightest touch, she starts playing tricks! I'm scared, you chaps—I'm absolutely scared!"

And for Edward Oswald Handforth to make an admission like this was a sure indication of his frightened state of mind!



CHAPTER 4.

Too Awful for Words!

LORD DORRIMORE was looking bewildered.

"I can't understand it!" he said

blankly. "All the mechanics say that they had finished with the machine, and they don't know who took her up."

"But it is a very strange thing," said Nelson Lee, with concern. "Do you know anything about it, Manners?"

"I don't," said Mr. Hobart Manners, frowning. "The pilots we engaged are on the ground—and, as far as I know, that machine was empty. Who could have been fool enough to take her up like this? And look at the way she took off, too—erratic and bumpy. My heart was in my mouth. I thought she was going to crash into that fence, and she only cleared it by inches."

Dorrie and Nelson Lee and Mr. Manners and a group of other men were standing in the aerodrome, gazing up at the now distant 'plane. They had watched in wonder as the machine had mounted from the ground—knowing, at once, that the pilot in charge was not only incompetent, but criminally reckless. Several men had been

nearly knocked down as the machine had unexpectedly started, and they had only escaped by a hair's breadth.

Everybody was staring up into the sky—including all the St. Frank's fellows. The majority of these believed that one of the mechanics had taken the machine up. The newspaper men were as busy as hornets, buzzing about from group to group, making inquiries and trying to get to the bottom of this little mystery.

"Look! She's turning now," said Nelson Lee. "I would like to know by whose authority that machine was taken up. The aerodrome officials will have something to say, I imagine."

"Well, it's not our doing," protested Mr. Manners. "We didn't give any sanction—Good heavens! The man must be mad! Look at that!"

The big monoplane, having half-turned, was coming back in the direction of the aerodrome—but unless she veered more to the southward she would miss it. And now the machine dipped, rose again sharply, and gave a giddy, lurching roll.

"This is positively outrageous," said Mr. Manners angrily. "These great machines are not designed for trick flying. There must be a lunatic at the wheel!"

"When he comes down we'll give him a wiggling, anyhow," said Dorrie.

Just then two or three mechanics came up, breathless and excited.

"As far as we know, Mr. Manners, there was nobody in that machine at all!" said one of them. "We'd been tuning up the engines, and we left them ticking over."

"You shouldn't have left the machine," said Mr. Manners sharply.

"Perhaps not, sir," said the mechanic. "But how did we know that anybody would get in? I can't understand it. All the pilots are on the ground, and——"

"Guv'nor!" came a yell from Nipper, as he ran up with Willy Handforth and a number of other juniors. "Guv'nor! Willy says that his major is in that machine!"

"It's a fact, sir!" panted Willy. "And I believe that Ted has taken her up, too!"

"Nonsense!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "You must not get such ridiculous ideas into your head, Handforth minor!"

"I'm worried, sir," said Willy, his eyes turned on that machine. "My major came to me, and Church and McClure were with him. They were looking for Archie, and I told them that Archie was in that machine. I believe that my major went into the control-room, and——"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Lord Dorri-more. "I wonder!"

"It's terrible!" said Nelson Lee. "If this is really the case, Dorrie, those boys will be killed! They'll never be able to bring that machine safely to earth!"

Everybody was staggered. For there really seemed to be something in this suggestion of Willy's—impossible though it had seemed at first. All the pilots were

accounted for, and all the mechanics. Yet Handforth & Co. and Archie were missing. And that machine had been taken up into the air by some unauthorised person, and even now was being handled in such a way that it could only be controlled by an arrant novice.

If Edward Oswald Handforth had really taken that machine up, then disaster was inevitable.

"Look! She's coming down!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"She's going to crash!"

"Good heavens!"

"They'll be killed!"

Hundreds of shouts went up. Several miles away, and now a thousand feet high, the 'plane was seen to dip suddenly, and to dive steeply and crazily towards the earth. Nelson Lee's face went pale as he watched, and Dorrie, too, was haggard.

"Poor kids!" he muttered. "They don't stand an earthly chance!"

He believed in that moment—as everybody else believed—that the 'plane was diving straight towards the earth. She was out of control and would crash; and, diving at that angle, and at such speed, she would be reduced to scrap-iron, and any human beings within her would be killed on the instant!

Then at the last moment, when the tension was growing beyond endurance, the 'plane swooped round, banked, and started climbing again.

"The machine will be out of sight within three or four minutes," said Nelson Lee quickly. "Dorrie, we had better get in one of the other 'planes and follow it."

"I was thinking just the same thing," said his lordship, nodding. "We can't do anything, of course, to help her, but we can at least locate the spot where she comes to earth. And if a miracle happens those boys will escape death."

A minute later Nelson Lee, Dorrie, and Mr. Manners were climbing into one of the other machines; the engines were set going, and the chase commenced.



CHAPTER 5.

In Mid-Air!



RADUALLY Handforth & Co. and Archie Glenthorne were recovering their composure.

The expected disaster had not happened, and did not seem likely to happen just yet. The engines of the 'plane were running smoothly and powerfully, and the machine was behaving with remarkable steadiness. Handforth had made one or two attempts to operate the control-wheel, but he was now convinced that disaster would be in-

evitable if he "monkeyed" with it any longer.

"Better leave it alone, Handy!" urged Church.

"I'm going to!" said Handforth, relaxing his grip on the wheel. "I turned it just now, and we dived like the dickens. I thought it was all up until I let go, and then she righted herself, after swinging round. No more tricks for me!"

"But you can't let the machine fly herself!" protested McClure.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean, the good old 'plane knows more about flying than Handforth, what? He's liable to pile us up on the rocks. Good gad! What a frightful thing if we were to crash on the top of St. Andrew's Cathedral or the Town Hall! If it comes to that, it would be just as bad if we landed on the roof of the Joint Stock Bank in George Street."

"We shan't do that!" said Handforth breathlessly. "We're moving in the other direction—we're going across country. We're leaving Sydney miles behind."

Gingerly Handforth relaxed his grip completely and left the wheel to itself. They all expected the machine to jump or swerve or something like that; but she did nothing of the sort. She continued flying, and she was now going smoothly.

These four boys had now definitely realised that they were alone in the machine. The crash had not come, and they had had time to think. And the more they thought, the calmer they grew. Yet at the same time they felt that nothing could save them from a terrible disaster.

"Oh, how did you do it?" groaned Church.

"I don't know," said Handforth miserably.

"I didn't mean to interfere with anything. But I touched a lever, or something like that, by accident. Great Scott! You don't think I tried to fly this machine, do you?"

"You're capable of anything!" said McClure bitterly.

"But it's not true!" shouted Handforth.

"I tell you, I didn't know——"

"All right!" broke in Church. "We'll take your word, old man. But the position is pretty awful, all the same. Even if we find out how to stop the engines, we daren't stop them."

"Why not?"

"Because it would be fatal," said Mac.

"We should come to earth, and nothing could save us from crashing. As long as we're in the air we're all right. It's the landing that's going to finish us."

"Laddies, we can only hope for the best," said Archie calmly. "I mean to say, while there's life there's hope, what? And although the prospect is frightfully poisonous, there's no telling. The only thing to do is to let the 'plane carry on by herself. If we interfere we shall only hasten the good old catastrophe."

Handforth stared down, and he could see, far, far below, the panorama of the country-

side. Ordinarily, he would have taken great interest in that view; but just now it rather frightened him.

"We must be four or five thousand feet up!" he muttered. "We're climbing all the time. How's it going to end?"

"We shall fly until the petrol gives out, and then we shall come down," said Church. "Let's hope that we find a soft spot."

At such a height there was a great margin of safety, and Handforth's natural confidence was returning.

"After all, why shouldn't we have a shot at it?" he asked, his eyes gleaming. "Let's see what we can do with these controls. If we can throttle down the engines, and then go into a glide——"

"Hold him!" said Church. "Come on, you chaps—don't let him touch any of the controls! He's mad! Why, he might get the machine into a spin, and then there'd be no earthly chance for us!"

"Yes, for goodness sake, Handy, chuck it!" said McClure.

Handforth nodded.

"Perhaps you're right!" he admitted.

"There's always the chance that we might do something wrong, and then—— Hallo! What the—— Well, I'm jiggered! It's all misty outside!"

"We've got into a cloud!" said Church, staring through the observation windows.

The sky and the landscape below had been suddenly obliterated. The machine was plunging through heavy clouds, and somehow the sound of the engines seemed to be more muffled. Perhaps it was imagination, but there was something strange about the situation now. The juniors could not tell where they were flying, or how much longer this nightmare was going to last.

It was made infinitely worse by the cloud, for outside there was nothing but a dull, whitish mist to be seen. If they had felt helpless before, they felt doubly helpless now. They were flying blindly, and it seemed that they had entered a great cloud-band, for there was no end to it.

The minutes sped by, and still they roared on, with that whiteness outside. Then after about six minutes had elapsed the machine suddenly broke free, and there, far below, the juniors caught a glimpse of—the sea!

"Great corks!" gurgled Handforth. "We're flying out to sea, you chaps!"

"That's done it!" said Church, in a dull voice. "There's no hope for us now! Sydney is right on the coast, you know, and we're probably flying straight out into the Pacific Ocean—and the nearest land is New Zealand, thousands of miles away!"

"Look!" said Archie. "What-ho! The coastline, laddies! It seems to me that we'd better grab that giddy control-wheel and do all we can to bring the old bus back over *terra firma*! I mean, there are times when a chappie really must do something!"

Handforth resolutely seized the control-wheel. He moved it this way and that, and after the machine had banked over steeply he seemed to get the hang of it. Quite suddenly, unexpectedly, he found that he could control the direction of the 'plane. With a fresh light of hope in his eyes Handforth found himself steering the machine away from the ocean—back over the land!

And hope once again began to throb in Edward Oswald Handforth's breast. But then, he had always been a super-optimist!



CHAPTER 6.

In Full Pursuit!

"It's hopeless—absolutely hopeless!" said Nipper. "There's nothing we can do! That's the

whole trouble!"

"Anyhow, we're in the chase," said Tommy Watson breathlessly.

"Yes, but what's the good?" put in Vivian Travers. "For the love of Samson! What a mess! For once, Handforth has blundered so badly that even *his* luck won't pull him through!"

"But I can't believe it!" said Nipper, frowning. "Reckless as Handy is, I can't believe that he would do such a mad thing! The machine must have started accidentally. Handy couldn't have deliberately done a thing like that!"

"What difference does it make, dear old fellow?" asked Travers. "He did it—and he and the others are in the soup!"

There were half a dozen juniors in the saloon of the big 'plane—Nipper, Tregellis-West and Watson, Travers and Potts, and Fullwood. They had managed to scramble in at the last moment, just before the door had been closed. They had half expected Nelson Lee to order them out again; but Lee had had no thoughts for these juniors. He and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Hobart Manners were in the control-room of the big 'plane, concentrating on the one task of overtaking the runaway machine.

Indeed, by this time they had practically forgotten that half a dozen juniors were accompanying them on the trip. And Nipper & Co., in the saloon, made no attempt to bother their elders with unnecessary questions.

Mr. Manners himself was at the controls, and he gave his whole attention to this task. Mounting higher and higher, the great monoplane went soaring off to the southward, but those three men all held the opinion that the trip would not be a long one.

"There's only one hope," Lord Dorrimore was saying. "These machines are all-metal, and they're pretty sturdy. In the crash, the poor youngsters might possibly escape with

serious injuries. There's no need to anticipate the worst."

"We must remember, Dorrie, that those boys will be in the nose of the machine," said Lee quietly. "In the control-room, which will naturally suffer the most severe shock."

"H'm! I hadn't thought of that," admitted Dorrie. "You're a cheery soul, aren't you?"

"I wish I could find something to be cheery about," retorted Nelson Lee. "As it is, Dorrie, the outlook is absolutely black. Even now the machine may be spinning to earth, out of control—"

"But it isn't!" interrupted Dorrie eagerly. "By the Lord Harry look! There she goes—cruising along under perfect control!"

He pointed through the tough glass of the control-chamber. In the distance, some miles ahead, and at a slightly higher altitude, the fugitive 'plane could be seen; and there was nothing in her flight to suggest that she was being handled by a novice.

"No doubt the boys are allowing the 'plane to fly herself," said Mr. Manners tensely. "They tried one or two tricks to begin with, and possibly they were scared. It is far wiser to let her fly alone. At least, she is keeping on a level keel and maintaining a true course."

"She's climbing, too," said Dorrie.

"All the better," nodded Nelson Lee.

They stood behind Mr. Manners, watching—their thoughts a little calmer. It was reassuring to see the runaway 'plane flying so sedately. But Lee, for one, did not fail to observe that the other machine was slowly but surely edging towards the coastline. The sea was visible, away to the left—whilst to the right lay an expanse of fair country, with hazy mountains in the distance.

"Hallo, she's gone into a cloud!" said Dorrie abruptly.

Mr. Manners altered his direction slightly, and he was climbing all the time. It would be much better if they could get several thousand feet above the runaway; her movements could then be observed more clearly and more accurately.

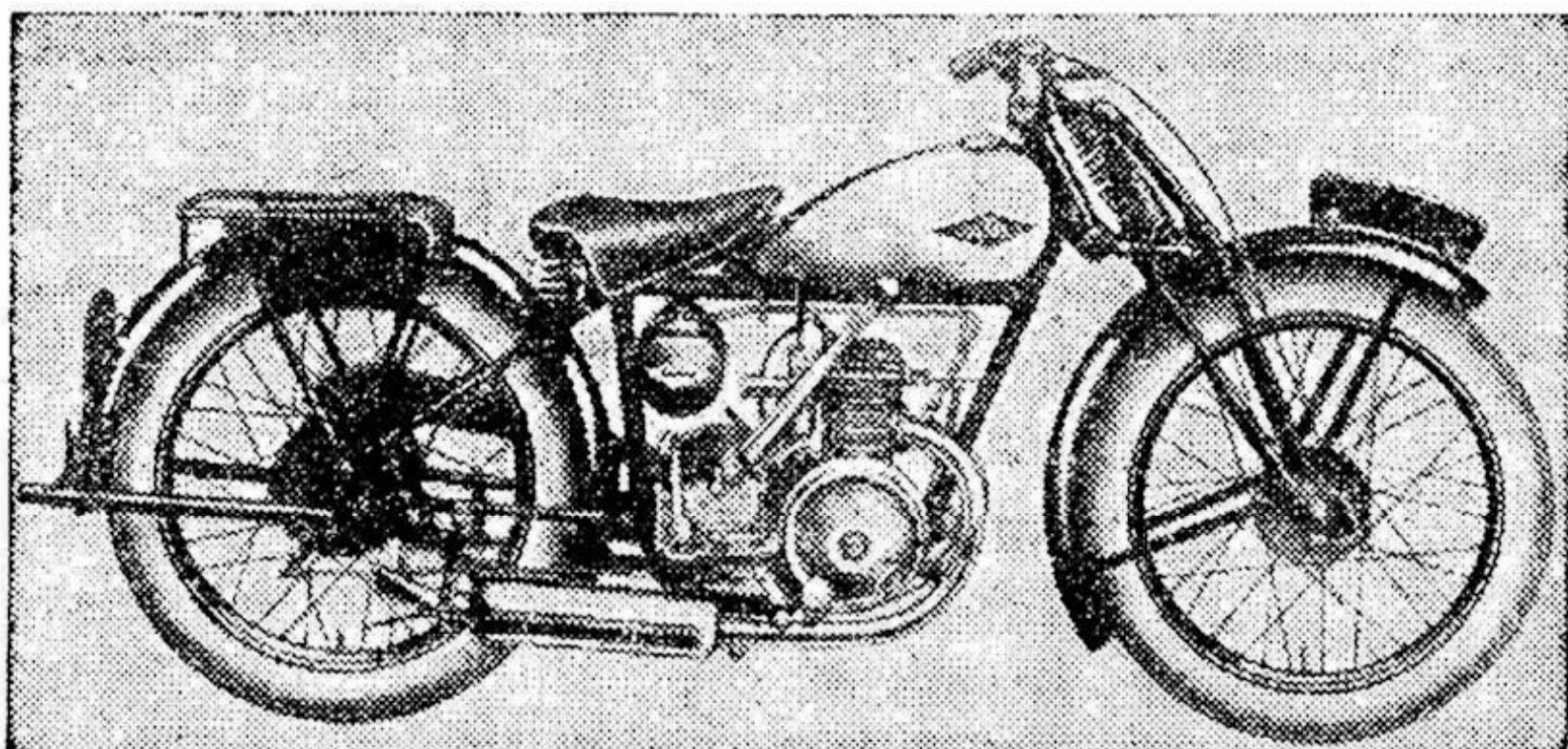
"Can't we go faster?" asked Dorrie impatiently. "We've been in the air for nearly ten minutes, and we haven't lessened the distance by a yard, by the look of it."

"That's the whole trouble, Dorrie," said Mr. Manners. "Both these machines are of the same type—of the same engine capacity. We're running all out—and the other machine is also running all out. Her engines are working at their highest power, so you can see the difficulty."

"By jingo, yes!" said Dorrie. "I hadn't thought of that."

"When those boys started off, they must have switched the engines on to the full," said Nelson Lee. "Then later, perhaps, they did not know how to turn off the power—or it is far more likely that they were reluctant to turn off the power, since such a move would have meant stalling, and then a death-dive."

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"While they're flying they're safe," said Mr. Manners, glancing round. "That's the only consolation—at the moment. But what's going to happen when the petrol gives out?"

"That's looking a long way ahead, isn't it?" asked his lordship. "The tanks were pretty full up, weren't they?"

"About half-full, I think."

"That means they can go on flying for several thousand miles," said his lordship, with a grimace. "Ye gods and little fishes! This chase is going to last half-way across Australia!"

"Or across the Pacific!" said Nelson Lee grimly.

They had risen above the clouds now, and they could see the fugitive 'plane in the distance ahead, just on the outskirts of the cloudbank. Now she was flying over the coastline—out to sea. But before Dorrie could make any comment, the runaway made a sweeping move, swung round, and headed inland again.

"Upon my word!" muttered Lee. "The boys seem to have some sort of control, anyhow. They know the dangers of flying over sea, and they are bringing the machine back—Splendid, Manners!"

Nelson Lee made this comment as Mr. Manners brought his own machine round in a sudden swerve. There was a chance here of cutting off a "corner," and thus reducing the distance between the two 'planes. In

deed, before five minutes had elapsed, the distance between the pair was not more than a couple of miles—and the pursuing machine was several thousand feet higher.

By this time Nipper and the other juniors had got up into the observation-room—a kind of enclosed deck, at the top of the main central plane. It was entirely protected by unsplinterable glass, and from this point of vantage a clear view could be obtained of everything ahead.

"We're well on the track—but what's the good?" asked Nipper, for the twentieth time. "What can we do, even if we succeed in overtaking the machine?"

"Well, anyway, we can see where she crashes—and be on the spot to render first aid," said Travers philosophically. "That's about the best way we can look at it, dear old fellow."

"The trouble is, we don't know who's on board that machine," said Fullwood. "We assume that Handforth and Church and McClure and Archie are the only ones—but there might be somebody else."

"There's not much chance of that," said Nipper. "Everybody else was accounted for."

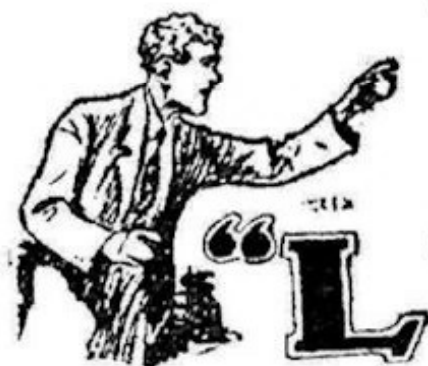
"But haven't they got a wireless set aboard?" asked Jimmy Potts eagerly.

"Yes, and I believe that Mr. Lee had tried to get into communication," said Nipper. "But there were no replies."

This was true enough. One of the first

moves had been to attempt wireless communication. All these Manners' planes were equipped with the very latest radio, and chatty conversations could be maintained between the pilots as the aeroplanes were flying, even if they were scores of miles apart. In just the same way, the pilots could be in constant communication with aerodromes.

But all Nelson Lee's efforts had been useless—no replies had come from the fugitive plane. Which, in itself, was an indication of the confusion and alarm that reigned aboard the craft!



CHAPTER 7.

Dorries' Daring Idea!

"LOOK!" said Church breathlessly.

He and McClure had gone up on to the observation deck,

and Archie, feeling that life was going to be all too short, was making the best of things on one of the saloon lounges. As he truly remarked, he might as well spend his last minutes in ease and comfort. There was no sense in standing about, waiting for the worse. Handforth remained in the control-cabin, fascinated, overwhelmed by the enormity of the blunder that he had committed.

Church and McClure, up on the observation deck, had now caught sight of the pursuing plane, a mile or two in the rear, and at a higher altitude.

"It must be Dorrie—or Mr. Lee, perhaps!" said McClure excitedly. "By Jove! Perhaps—perhaps—"

He broke off, nearly choking.

"Perhaps what?" asked Church.

"Oh, nothing" said Mac. "I was thinking, for a moment, that there might be some hope for us. But what hope can there be? They can't do anything to rescue us!"

Indeed, there seemed nothing to alleviate the growing horror of this situation. Church and McClure were beginning to feel that it would have been better if the machine had crashed at once. As it was, it was getting higher and higher—and thus, when the inevitable dive came, it would be all the more deadly.

"Hadn't we better go back to the control-room and see what Handy's doing?" asked Church suddenly. "There's no sense in leaving him by himself. You know what a lunatic he is. He might start some more tricks."

"I don't think so," said McClure, shaking his head. "For once, Handy is subdued. I've never seen him so scared."

But when they went down into the control-room they found that Handforth was indeed "monkeying." But not with any of the controls of the machine. He was fitting head-

phones to his ears, and he was trying the various switches of the radio.

"Handy!" yelled Church. "What are you doing?"

"Keep your hair on!" said Handforth, glancing round. "I don't know much about aeroplanes, but I'm keen on wireless. We might be able to get into communication with the aerodrome at Sydney—"

"By jingo! Or with the machine that's following us!" said Church.

"Eh? Machine following us?"

"Yes!"

"Where?" demanded Handforth eagerly.

"About a couple of miles behind, and three or four thousand feet higher up!" said Church. "We've just been looking at her. I expect Dorrie is aboard and Mr. Lee and—"

"By George! We'll try to speak to them," said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "I'll admit there's practically no hope for us, but if we can only get into wireless communication we can at least say 'Good-bye'!"

In the meantime, on the other machine, Nelson Lee and Dorrie were anxiously watching the gap that divided them from the runaway. It seemed to grow no less, yet actually, by forcing his engines to work to their uttermost capacity, Mr. Manners was gradually creeping up.

"Thank Heaven they're keeping clear of the mountains!" said Nelson Lee fervently. "That has been the fear in my mind ever since we started, Dorrie."

"The mountains?"

"Yes," replied Lee. "They are a terrible menace. These machines, efficiently controlled, can easily mount higher than any of the mountains in New South Wales or Victoria; but the runaway is not controlled. She is merely climbing steadily, automatically. It is now fairly obvious that those boys are not daring to interfere with the controls. Can't you picture what will happen if the machine heads straight for a mountain range?"

"It looks ugly!" commented Dorrie.

"Very ugly indeed," said Lee, nodding. "When the boys see the danger they may possibly attempt to alter the course of the machine, and that may save them for the time being. But if they make any efforts to mount higher it is quite possible that they will cause the plane to stall and then go into a nosedive."

"But these machines can't nosedive!" said Dorrie. "Manners was tellin' me—"

"If they are properly controlled they are almost fool-proof," said Lee. "But can Manners guarantee that no disaster will result if some inexperienced schoolboys start wrenching at the controls? No, Dorrie, you mustn't fool yourself like that. Frankly, I can see no possible hope. We are completely baffled. Even if the runaway doesn't crash on a mountain-side, she must necessarily come to earth sooner or later, and then—"

"Well, it's no good meeting trouble half-way—" began Dorrie; and then he suddenly broke off. "Hallo! What's this?" he added. "There seems to be something—"

Before he could complete his sentence, Nelson Lee hurried to the wireless instruments. There had been some slight indications of activity—a tiny spark had made its appearance in a kind of signal-lamp. This was a special contrivance, peculiar to these installations.

In a flash Lee clapped the headphones to his ears and he turned a switch or two.

"Hallo, hallo!" he said sharply, speaking into the microphone. "Handforth! Is that you, Handforth?"

"By glory!" muttered Dorrie.

Over the ether came a clear, unmistakable voice.

"It's me, sir—Handforth!" it said. "That's Mr. Lee, isn't it?"

"Yes!" said Lee.

"I am in a following machine, Handforth."

"Yes, sir, I know!" came Handforth's reply, after some little delay. "I don't suppose you can do much to help us, but it's good to hear your voice, sir."

This conversation was not, of course, conducted like a telephone chat. It was necessary for Nelson Lee to use the transmitter, and then to switch off and receive the reply. It was gratifying to know that Handforth, in the runaway machine, had at least grasped the workings of the radio set. As a matter of fact, Church and McClure were there, too, helping.

"Tell me, Handforth, how many of you are there in that machine?" asked Nelson Lee.

The reply came:

"Only four of us, sir—Church and McClure and Archie and myself," said Handforth. "She started off by accident. I was leaning over something, and I must have touched a lever. We were scared out of our wits."

"Do not interfere with the controls, Handforth," warned Nelson Lee into the microphone. "Whatever you do, make no attempt to get the machine to earth or to make her climb. If you do, the result may be disastrous."

A sudden shout came from Lord Dorrimore.

"An idea!" he ejaculated, clapping Nelson Lee by the shoulder. "Listen, Lee!"

The schoolmaster-detective turned and looked round.

"They do such stunts on films, so why shouldn't I attempt one?" demanded Dorrie tensely. "We're gaining, and before very long we shall be fairly over the top of the runaway."

"But what are you suggesting?" asked Lee.

"I'll swing down on a rope!" replied Dorrie grimly. "Ye gods! Why didn't I think of it before? Not that we've lost any time, because we can't do anything until we overtake the other 'plane. I'll go down on a rope, get on the runaway, and then everything will be all serene!"



CHAPTER 8.

Hope!

NELSON LEE was so startled by Lord Dorrimore's suggestion that he removed the earphones and stared at his lordship very steadily.

"Do you think it can be done, Dorrie?" he asked.

"I can try, anyway."

"But is it worth risking your life—"

"Yes!" broke in his lordship promptly.

"Think well, old man!" warned Lee.

"If nothing is done a crash is inevitable.

Do you think there

is an earthly chance of your dropping from this machine to the runaway? Man alive, it's an appalling risk!"

"I don't care about that—I'm going to take it!"

"I don't agree with you," said Nelson Lee. "These boys are in my care, Dorrie, and I am responsible. If any man should undertake this chance it is me. So I propose—"

"Oh, so that's the game, is it?" interrupted Dorrie gruffly. "It's an infernal risk for me, but you can take it without turning a hair? Well, Lee, I'm awfully sorry to be rude, but you can boil your head! This is my stunt, and I'm going to work it!"

"But the responsibility is mine—"

"Rubbish!" snapped his lordship. "Why talk about responsibility at all? You're no more to blame than I am."

"If it's anybody's fault, it's mine," put in Mr. Manners. "It was careless of me to—"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Dorrie. "Here's another one starting now! To end all this argument, I'm the fellow who's going to do the famous rope trick. And that's settled. Understand?"

And there was something in Lord Dorrimore's tone which did indeed put "finis" to the discussion.

On the other 'plane, the juniors, who kept a constant look-out, could not help noticing that the chasing machine was growing

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closer and closer. It was a very slow, gradual business, but the runaway was unmistakably being overtaken.

Both machines, of course, were travelling at great speed, and they were soaring over a hilly, rugged section of New South Wales and heading towards the Victoria border. Once or twice the mountain tops had come perilously near—the runaway, in fact, only being four or five hundred feet clear. If it should chance to head straight towards a high peak—and there was quite a number of high peaks in this region of Australia—the results would be terrible.

Church and McClure at first at had been imbued with a new hope. Then as the minutes passed despair once more took possession of them. What was the good of hoping? There was a little temporary comfort in the knowledge that another machine was near at hand, and that its occupants were even able to speak with them; but how could they render any real help?

Their only course was to follow, and to watch developments. The runaway machine was pilotless—she was simply running with engines all out, maintaining her balance by reason of her excellent design and constructional stability. But for the fact that the day was practically windless, tragedy might even now have overtaken the boys.

"They've only come along to pick up our pieces—after the smash," said McClure gloomily. "What else can they do? This machine can't be controlled by wireless!"

"They might tell Handy what to do," suggested Church. "Not that that would be much good. It requires a skilled hand to bring any aeroplane to earth—and a machine of this size will crumple to fragments, by reason of its very bulk, unless it is landed with perfect judgment."

"And these mountains, too, laddies," put in Archie Glenthorne, who had left the saloon and joined them. "I mean to say, they're getting poisonously near, what? There's a whacking great chunk of rock and snow and so forth sticking up right in front of us! Looks most frightfully unhealthy to me, if you know what I mean."

"Where?" ejaculated Church, staring round.

Looking through the observation windows, he saw the peril. Several miles ahead—but seeming remarkably near—was a rugged mountain peak. Its summit was probably five or six thousand feet high, and as the aeroplane was flying at no greater height than four thousand feet, and was heading straight for the mountain, the consequences were liable to be unpleasant.

"What are we going to do?" asked Church huskily. "Handy! Something's got to be done!"

Handforth, with the earphones on his head, glanced round.

"Don't interrupt!" he said tensely. "I'm talking with— By George! What the— You mean that mountain?"

"Yes!" shouted the others.

Handforth compressed his lips.

"Well, we can't do much with this 'bus, but we can, at least, steer her a bit," he said. "If we veer off towards the right, we shall be over that valley, and I daresay we shall get round the mountain in safety. Anyhow, it's worth trying."

"Go easy!" panted Church, as Handforth made for the control-wheel.

Edward Oswald did go easy, and when the giant 'plane altered her direction, she did so with a gentle swing which gave Handforth a positive thrill. It was marvellous how she answered so perfectly to the controls—how she banked over automatically and obediently. But Handforth, for once in his life, knew his limitations. He did not attempt to go beyond this one simple manoeuvre.

"That's got it!" he said, with satisfaction. "We shall be over the valley now—and after we've got past this mountain we shall have to keep our eyes open for the next one."

He got into touch with Nelson Lee again.

"Bravo!" came Lee's voice over the ether. "We were fearing that you would not be able to manage it, Handforth. Keep the machine clear of the mountains if you possibly can—but do not attempt to bring her to earth. Now, listen! Dorrie is going to attempt a very risky thing. He is preparing a rope, and when we overtake you, this machine will drop until she is only just over yours. Dorrie will try to land on the big main 'plane of your machine."

Handforth's eyes burned.

"Tell him not to do it, sir!" he urged, in reply. "It's too dangerous! There's not one chance in a thousand that he will succeed. We'll take our chance. There's no need for Dorrie to risk his life!"

But when Nelson Lee answered it was to assure Handforth that Lord Dorrimore was determined. Handforth was told to send one of his companions up into the observation chamber. There, at the rear, in the roof, he would find a hermetically-sealed door. This was to be unfastened and propped open. Thus, if Dorrie should succeed in his enterprise, he would have a way of getting into the runaway machine.

Church and McClure were dispatched on this mission without delay, and they had no difficulty in locating the door and in opening it. Then, after that, a period of anxious waiting ensued.

It seemed that the other machine would never overtake the leader. Mile after mile was eaten up, and still the pursuers were in the rear—although they were creeping up yard by yard, and dropping lower.

And there, already preparing to lower himself from the great undercarriage, Lord Dorrimore was ready with his rope.

"There's a chance for us!" panted Church, as he watched. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! Will it come off, Mac? Will it come off?"



By the time Wangaratta was reached Edward Oswald Handforth already had twenty guests. And here, again, another shock awaited Handy. For standing on the platform were at least another twenty guests. "Oh, my only sainted aunt!" gurgled Handforth, and promptly collapsed into McClure's arms.



CHAPTER 9.

Touch and Go!

ALTHOUGH the juniors did not know it, they had already left New South Wales behind, and now they were flying over Victoria. Directly ahead of them lay the famous Mount Buffalo Plateau. Nearly six thousand feet in height, this majestic mass reared itself as a barrier before the path of the runaway aeroplane.

Church and McClure saw it, and their faces turned pale. The plateau stretched on all sides as far as the eye could see. If Lord Dorrimore did not bring off his daring scheme almost immediately and gain control of the runaway machine, it would inevitably crash against this mountainous obstacle!

By now the chasing 'plane was practically overhead, and the great chance was to be taken by Dorrie.

It must not be supposed that this "stunt" was comparable with the feats that are sometimes performed for the benefit of sensational films. In such cases, the machines employed are of special construction, and the man who

does the work is generally an experienced acrobat. Furthermore, the machines are small and light, easily manœuvred, and capable of instant manipulation.

But in the present instance the circumstances were very different.

Both these machines were enormous passenger-carrying 'planes, heavy and cumbersome for such delicate work; and Mr. Manners, piloting the upper machine, would be more or less in the dark regarding Dorrie's activities. Nipper and Travers and the other juniors had been brought in now, and they were acting as helpers. Nipper, for example, kept a sharp eye on Dorrie, as he prepared to swing away from the under-carriage on his rope. Nipper was ready to shout directions to the next junior, who would pass them on—and thus Mr. Manners would stand a chance of rectifying an error, should it occur.

But, in spite of all this, there was a dreadful element of danger in the whole procedure.

As for Handforth & Co. and Archie, on the lower machine, they were in a fever of hope—and then of despair. During one moment they would believe that Dorrie would succeed; then they would be overwhelmed by the thought that he must inevitably fail. A tiny error of judgment and his lordship, instead of dropping on the lower machine, would go hurtling to his death.

Or he might even be battered against the metalwork of the 'plane, and killed in that way. There were so many dangers.

And, too, there were the mountains—getting horribly nearer and nearer.

"Look! He's coming—he's dropping!" panted Church feverishly.

They were all on the observation deck now, even including Handforth. They had left the machine entirely to her own devices. Even though the mountains were so near, it would be madness to interfere with the controls now. The moment was a crucial one. Any deviation of course might easily lead to Dorrie's death.

If the thing had to be done, now was the moment.

The upper machine was just overhead, dropping gently. From the undercarriage Lord Dorrimore dangled, looking like a mere insect on a cotton. Lower came that vast mass of metal, and for one horrible second Handforth & Co. thought that there was to be a collision in mid-air.

They held their breaths, and their hearts almost ceased to beat.

Dorrie suddenly relaxed his grip; he fell. The next moment he was sprawling full length on the upper plane of the runaway machine, and was lost to view by Handforth & Co.

"He's gone!" croaked Edward Oswald. "Oh, my hat! Poor old Dorrie! He's gone! He failed——"

"Wait!" gasped Church. "He may be all right—there's just a chance——"

He broke off, unable to complete his sentence. At the same instant the upper 'plane swooped away rising and banking round. Nipper had given the word, and Mr. Manners, knowing the dire peril of being in such close proximity to the other machine, was getting out of the way.

Nipper, crouching near a kind of trap-door, through which he could see below, made out the figure of Lord Dorrimore, spreadeagled on the metalwork of the other machine. It had seemed that his lordship would be swept off, that he would slither down that smooth plane to drop into eternity. But he didn't. Somehow, he managed to clutch at a projection, and then, inch by inch, he worked his way towards that open door, in the main body of the machine.

Dorrie, too, was fully aware of the deadly nearness of the mountains. They loomed up just ahead, and within a very few moments now a crash would come—unless some sort of action was taken.

Then, at last, the intrepid peer reached that open doorway. A gasp of relief went out from him as he felt his fingers clutching at the fateful edge. Only Dorrie knew how close to death he had been; only he knew how desperate had been his efforts to keep a hold whilst swarming over the seemingly never-ending expanse of that metal plane, with the rush of wind tearing at his grip and threatening to sweep him to certain death.

But now, gripping the edge of that doorway, his confidence returned. He pulled himself up, he swung himself in and dropped.

"Dorrie!" went up a combined roar from Handforth & Co. and Archie. "Hurrah!"

"All right, kids—no time now!" gasped Lord Dorrimore.

He fairly fell down the stairs from the observation deck. He dashed into the control-room, and now his nerves were as steady as steel. Ahead of him, through the windows, he could see the mountain top—the rugged grandeur of the Buffalo Plateau. It was very close—horribly close!

And even Dorrie, for all his optimism, felt his heart give a great leap. Could he avert the disaster? Had he got into this machine in time? Certainly, Fate had worked up an extraordinarily thrilling climax.

With steady fingers, Dorrie manipulated the controls. He attempted to get another ounce of power out of the engines; he caused the machine to soar upwards, swinging round in a glorious turn. She banked over with amazing velocity, and it might have seemed that Dorrie was reckless.

But events proved that he had been wise.

For even as it was the machine just failed to clear a projection of rock. Had Dorrimore been less drastic in his methods, one wing of the great 'plane would have crashed with terrible force into that rock, and then disaster would have been inevitable, since the wrecked aircraft would have gone tumbling right down into the great Buffalo Gorge.

As it was, the wing-tip only just scraped, and for a moment the equilibrium of the machine was upset. She swung round, Dorrie clutching at the controls, and by a piece of brilliant airmanship he succeeded in swinging the 'plane round again, and in sending her diving down towards a level patch of ground on the top of the plateau.

Her wheels touched, she bounced, heeled over, swung round, and then assumed an even keel again.

Two or three more bumps, a mighty jerk, and then the great 'plane came to rest—safe, practically unharmed, and with those precious lives saved.

Lord Dorrimore had done the trick!

CHAPTER 10.

All Serene!



"HANK Heaven!" said Nelson Lee.

From the other machine, cruising overhead with throttled-down engines he and the others had seen what had happened. At the moment they could take no interest in the glorious beauty of the surrounding country; they could only look at that stationary machine, and their hearts were filled with

thankfulness that Lord Dorrimore's daring activities had been crowned with success.

"They're safe, guv'nor!" panted Nipper. "Oh, my hat! I didn't think it was possible!"

"Neither did I, young 'un—neither did I," said Lee. "But Dorrie is an extraordinary man. He must have acted like lightning."

"One of the luckiest things I've ever seen, sir," said Tommy Watson.

"No, Watson—there was no element of luck in the saving of that 'plane," replied Lee. "It was done by sheer courage—sheer cleverness. No matter what great deeds Dorrie has performed in the past, this hour's work has surpassed all. He risked his life to save those four boys, and there didn't seem one chance in a thousand that he would be successful. Bravo, Dorrie!"

"Rather, sir!" chorused the juniors. "Bravo, Dorrie!"

They cheered excitedly, and then somebody noticed that the 'plane was dipping downwards, and heading for the plateau.

"Are you going to land, Manners?" asked Lee.

"Why not?" said Mr. Manners coolly.

"There's plenty of room here—and I want to congratulate Dorrie at once. I can't wait until later on. Besides, Dorrie is every bit as reckless as Handforth himself. If we leave them on their own, it's quite likely that they'll attempt to fly off this plateau, and that, I believe, would be dangerous. It's easy enough to land, but a very different matter to take off."

"Then we shan't be able to take off again!" ejaculated Nipper.

"Well, that won't matter much," replied Nelson Lee. "If Mr. Manners can make a safe landing, I think it will be the better course."

In the meantime Lord Dorrimore and the four boys had got out of the other 'plane, and they, too, had no eyes for the scenic beauty of the spot.

Dorrie, for once, was rather pale, and Handforth & Co. were positively shaky. Archie Glenthorne seemed more or less dazed. Even now they could scarcely realise that they were not only saved, but unscratched.

"Well, we did it, young 'uns," said his lordship, as he glanced up at the giant monoplane. "Not much damage, either. A bit of a dent in that wing, but who cares?"

"It's a wonder we didn't crash, sir," said McClure hoarsely. "When we touched like that, I thought we should go tumbling down—"

"You've done quite enough thinking about tumbling down," interrupted his lordship. "Forget it, my lad! We're safe, and by the look of things we've dropped into a

fairly comfortable spot. I'm hanged if there isn't a whacking great house in sight!"

"Up here—on the top of this mountain!" ejaculated Handforth, staring round.

"It's rummy, but it's true," said Dorrie. "And, by the Lord Harry, the other machine is going to land, too!"

Mr. Manners came down and made a perfect landing, although the available space was remarkably small for such a huge machine. However, the Manners 'plane was noted for its handiness, and in the care of a skilled pilot it could easily be landed in a small space. There were powerful brakes fitted to the great wheels, and within a few yards of touching the earth, the monstrous machine came to a standstill.

Nelson Lee, even at that moment, was at the wireless—getting in touch with Sydney. He flashed the splendid news to the rest of the party that both machines were safe, and that nobody had come to any harm. Incidentally, Nelson Lee advised that all the

other machines should fly direct to Melbourne, according to plan, and that all the boys should rejoin the School Ship without any loss of time. He would personally bring the few others later on—probably by train.

The school rejoiced. It was good to know

that there had been no fatality, and all anxiety was at an end.

When Nelson Lee came out, he found Mr. Manners and Dorrie talking leisurely together, and Nipper and Travers and the other juniors were having an excited discussion with Handforth & Co.

At present, none of them knew the exact location; they did not know that this was the Mount Buffalo Plateau, one of the most famous holiday resorts in Victoria. The building they could see, peeping through the trees, was the celebrated Chalet—really an up-to-date residential hotel, which was controlled by the Victorian Railway Department; really a Government establishment.

The Buffalo Plateau is in the north-eastern part of Victoria, and is a well-defined tableland, its altitude being about four thousand six hundred feet above sea level, and it entirely dominates the foothills and mountain ranges of that picturesque district.

It was more by luck than anything else that the 'plane had come to earth in such a convenient location. It might just as easily have landed in some barren, isolated mountain spot, miles and miles from any human habitation. For this was one of the most rugged and out-of-the-way regions in the whole of Victoria.

By now people were appearing—visitors from the Chalet, having seen the descending aeroplanes, were hurrying along to give them a closer inspection, and to inquire what they were, and why they had landed. An official

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from the Chalet, too, was quickly on the scene.

He was startled when he heard the story, and, at the same time, he was gratified. He had hardly expected to obtain more visitors to the Chalet in this strange fashion.

"It takes the better part of ten or eleven hours to get from here to Melbourne," said Nelson Lee, after he had had a chat with the official. "That means that we can't make any move to-day. We'll leave it until to-morrow. In the meantime, there's no reason why you boys shouldn't take advantage of the situation, and have a good look at the surrounding scenery."

"I'd rather have a look at a good meal, sir!" said Handforth.

"A meal will naturally come first," chuckled Nelson Lee. "We're going straight to the Chalet now, and we shall make ourselves comfortable in our rooms, and then go down to a square meal in the restaurant, or dining-hall, or whatever they have here."

"I've got an appetite like a horse, sir," said Handforth. "All this excitement, I suppose—and the anxiety. Anyhow, I know I'm jolly hungry!"

Before long, the party found itself being escorted towards that fine residential hotel, perched nearly five thousand feet above sea level—amidst truly glorious scenery.

The aeroplane was left in the charge of guards, and the other Chalet visitors were greatly interested in the gigantic all-metal machines. The St. Frank's fellows were far more interested in a feed.

They had arrived in Victoria in a most unexpected manner, but it could not be said that they had failed to select one of the most interesting spots. Or, if they hadn't selected it themselves, Fate had done it for them.

Judging by this first glimpse, at any rate, the St. Frank's fellows were of the opinion that Victoria was "the goods"!

It was pleasantly warm, but by no means hot. The sun was shining with a crystal clearness, and the air was a joy to breathe. At first they had been quite startled by the up-to-date character of the Chalet. It was really a splendid hotel, with all the conveniences of a city establishment—with hot and cold water services, ample bath-rooms, electric light, billiard-rooms, and with accommodation for over two hundred people.

Having partaken of an excellent meal, the schoolboys had ventured out upon the ample veranda—which was, indeed, a sort of regular rendezvous for the guests. Going down the terraced steps, they had, after two minutes' walk on the flat surface of an enormous granite boulder, found themselves at Bent's Lookout.

And from this point of vantage they could overlook the stupendous chasm of the Buffalo Gorge.

Far in the distance—in fact, about eighty-five miles away—was the faint outline of Mount Kosciusko, with an altitude of seven thousand three hundred and twenty-eight feet—the highest peak in Australia. In the clear atmosphere it could be seen fairly distinctly.

And in the middle distance stood Mount Bogong, and to the right, Mounts Fainter, Feather-top, and Hotham—all of them with an altitude of over six thousand feet. Immediately below—far, far below—were the cultivated fields of the Buckland Valley. The juniors could see, too, the Eurobin Falls, and the winding ribbon of the road down in the valley.

The Gorge itself consisted of two stupendous cliffs of solid granite—over which thundered in a sheer leap of seventeen hundred feet the waters of the famous Buffalo Falls.

"In the winter-time, of course, this place is snow-bound," remarked Nipper. "There are winter sports up here—skating, tobogganing, skiing."

"Snow!" echoed Handforth, staring. "Snow in Australia!"

"Of course."

"Rot!" said Edward Oswald. "Everybody knows that there's no snow in Australia."

"My dear ass, up in these mountains there's snow in tons," said Nipper. "This Chalet is one of the most famous winter resorts in the whole of Australia. And it's pretty popular in the summer-time, too."

"Well, I suppose you're right," said Handforth, although his tone implied that he didn't believe it.

They wandered about, marvelling at the beauties of the scenery. It was different from anything else they had yet seen in Australia—so different, indeed, that they seemed to be in a new world. The majority of those boys had never dreamed that Australia could provide them with such scenery as this. In a way, this was a justification for the School Governors' decision in sending all the boys abroad. They were learning things that they could never possibly learn through school books.

CHAPTER 11.

On the Mount Buffalo Plateau!



"M! It's not bad," said Handforth, grudgingly.

"Not bad!" echoed Church. "Why, you

hulking great lump of clay, you've no more imagination than a chimney pot!"

"Look here, my lad—"

"He's right!" grinned Nipper. "You look at this scene, Handy, and then you say 'Not bad!' My dear old ass, you've no eye for scenic beauty! It's simply gorgeous!"

The meal was over, and it seemed to the juniors that the recent peril was like a nightmare. They hardly realised that it had actually happened to them. Now they were out in the open, under the clear sky, revelling in the glories of the Buffalo Plateau.

It was really a most enjoyable afternoon, and the fellows covered quite a lot of ground before they returned to the Chalet. They were fascinated by the awe-inspiring gorges, and by the music of the waterfalls; they could hear the faint murmur of the wind in the forests beneath.

In the valleys below, where they had glimpsed a railway train, looking like some tiny toy, they could see the road, twisting and turning in tortuous windings.

Most of the fellows were anxious to go along this road—down into the valley. It was over eighteen miles long. It was understood that the party would motor down the mountains to Porepunkah, where they could board a train for Melbourne. Once on the train they would reach Wangaratta, and there they would change on to the main line. After all their air travelling, the fellows were keen enough to get on a train.

They returned to the Chalet, enthusiastic and comfortably tired—and hungry again. It seemed to them that this splendid hotel had been transported to the mountain top by magicians—for there it stood, almost on the edge of the precipice, a comfortable, home-like structure. Moreover, it was a wonder of comfort and convenience.

The juniors wandered from the lounge to the drawing-room, to the library, and to the indoor-sports rooms. In this mountain home there was amusement for all.

"Well, we couldn't have dropped in at a better spot—that's one consolation," remarked Handforth, as he sprawled in an easy-chair. "By George, it's pretty wonderful, when you come to think of it! Only this morning we were expecting to be dashed to death—"

"Cheese it, Handy!" interrupted Travers. "We want to forget that affair altogether. No sense in harping on it, dear old fellow. We're safe, and by this time to-morrow evening I expect we shall be aboard the School Ship."

Handforth made a grimace.

"I'll promise not to mention this morning's affair again if you'll promise not to mention the School Ship," he retorted. "Why bring up unpleasant subjects?"

"But the School Ship isn't unpleasant, is it?"

"It means—work."

"Well, if it comes to that, it's high time that we started some work again," smiled Nipper. "We've been slacking about dreadfully of late, and unless we bustle and make up for lost time, we shall be backward in all subjects."

"Who cares?" sighed Handforth contentedly. "Our geography is pretty good, anyhow."

By this time it had been learned that the main party had already reached Melbourne without incident, and that the school was now once more aboard the St. Francis. Nelson Lee turned a deaf ear to the suggestions, made by one or two of the fellows, that a stay of two or three days should be

made on the Buffalo Plateau. Nelson Lee was anxious to get the boys back to the main party. There had been quite enough delays.

It was found, after all, that both the great monoplanes could be safely flown off from the plateau—but it was necessary for them to be light. So no alteration was made in the programme. Nelson Lee and Dorrie would take the boys to Melbourne by train, whilst Mr. Manners remained in charge of the aeroplanes—until another skilled pilot could come to join him. Dorrie had wanted to remain, but there was really no necessity for it, since a delay was essential whilst some mechanics reached the plateau to do the minor repairs that were necessary.

However, all this did not interest the St. Frank's juniors—for they were going by train, and there was every promise that that railway journey would be full of fascinating interest!

CHAPTER 12.

The Woes of Ben, the Buttons!



"O - HUM!" yawned Handforth, as he stretched himself. "By George, it must be the air, you know! I'm feeling as sleepy as the dickens!"

It wasn't very late in the evening, and the St. Frank's fellows were comfortably taking their ease in the lounge. Music was playing somewhere, and the voices of the other guests could be heard, laughing and light-hearted. In this Chalet there was an atmosphere of jollity and good-humour.

"Yes, we're all pretty well tired," said Nipper. "It would be a good idea to get to bed and then be up early, so that we can see a bit more of the Plateau before we have to start off for Melbourne."

"I second the proposal, dear old fellow," said Travers languidly.

"Carried unanimously!" grinned Fullwood.

Jimmy Potts and Tregellis-West and Watson and the others nodded their agreement. There were ten juniors altogether in this party, and, incidentally, they counted themselves very lucky. Solely owing to Handforth's mishap, they were now spending this enjoyable time in one of Victoria's most famous beauty spots. The rest of the school had had to be content with a mere glimpse of it from the air, since they had flown to Melbourne by a more direct course.

Handforth & Co., it turned out, were to share a bed-room; Nelson Lee and the manager, after a consultation, considered that three boys could easily sleep in one bed. Church and McClure, when they heard this verdict, were not particularly enthusiastic. They had had some experience of sleeping with Handforth before, and they knew that they were in for a busy night.

For Handforth was not only violent in his waking moments, but he was violent in his



Handforth & Co. watched breathlessly. The machine above was dropping lower and lower. From the under-carriage, on the end of a rope, cangled Lord Dorrimore. Suddenly he relaxed his grip ; he fell—

sleep. He had a habit of suddenly swinging round, kicking the bedclothes at random, and hitting anything that happened to be within range. This was all very well so long as he slept by himself, but if others shared the bed with him, these others were liable to suffer considerably.

"We'd better make the best of it, I suppose," murmured Church into Mac's ear. "No sense in making a fuss. And perhaps Handy is so tired that he won't indulge in any of his usual gymnastics."

"Well, we can only hope for the best," said McClure.

The chums of Study D were the first to go upstairs—Handforth having an idea, perhaps, that they would thus be able to seize the best bed-room. They were escorted by a cheery-faced youngster in uniform. In true Australian style, he was refreshingly familiar.

"Well, I must say that you fellows are lucky," he commented, after he had shown Handforth & Co. into their bed-room.

"Lucky?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Too right, you are!" said the youngster in uniform. "Well, good-bye!"

"Just a minute, Buttons," said Handforth imperiously.

"Buttons yourself!" retorted the other. "My name's Ben Martin."

"Then we'll call you Ben the Buttons," nodded Handforth. "You are a Buttons, aren't you? A bell-boy or a page, or whatever you chaps are called in these Australian hotels?"

"All right, have it your own way," smiled Ben the Buttons. "If there's anything you want, ring the bell, and if I feel like it I'll come along and look you up."

In any English hotel this sort of thing would have been regarded as impudence—but in Australia it was nothing of the kind. Handforth & Co. by this time were accustomed to it, and they only grinned.

"Before you go, my lad, what do you mean by saying that we're lucky?" asked Handforth.

"Well, so you are," replied Buttons. "You're going to see the big Test match in Melbourne, aren't you?"

"What of it?"

"Don't you call that being lucky?" said Ben Martin, his smile vanishing—and a gloomy expression overspreading his face. "Wish I had half the luck. I'm keen on cricket—so keen that I spent my last deener a week ago on a new bat. Well, see you some more," he added casually, as he turned towards the door.

"Haven't you ever seen a Test match?" asked Church.

"Never!" replied Ben Martin. "Gosh! It's the one thing I've always longed for. But it costs a bit of money to get to Melbourne, and then there's more money needed to spend on the game, and it'll take about a week, and a fellow must live somewhere. It's more than I can manage."

Handforth shook his head.



Handforth & Co. watched breathlessly. The machine above rope, cangled Lord Dorrin

"Well, it's no good being gloomy about it," he said. "You've your job to consider. How can you go off to Melbourne and see the Test match, anyhow? You're one of the Buttons in this hotel, and—"

"I've got a week's holiday, starting tomorrow," interrupted Ben sadly.

"Oh!"

"I'd rather be working," went on the page.

"Then I shouldn't be so worried about the match."

"Do you live here?" asked Handforth.

"No; my home is in Porepunkah."

"Poor which?"

"Porepunkah."



er and lower. From the under-carriage, on the end of a relaxed his grip; he felt—

"Oh, somewhere in India?" asked Handforth. "My hat! Fancy you living in India!"

"Oh, stop your guyver!" said Ben. "Porepunkah is down at the bottom of the mountain, where the railway station is. My father's an engine-driver."

"Oh, I see!" said Handforth. "And you've got a week's holiday, starting to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Then why can't you go and see the Test match?"

"Because it would cost too much, of course," said the Buttons. "Melbourne's a long way off—over two hundred miles. And haven't I already told you that I can't afford the money for hotel expenses and the game, either. Gosh! Wouldn't I just love to see that match, too! You're a lucky crowd!"

He heaved a sigh and moved towards the door.

"If your father's an engine-driver, why can't you get a free ride to Melbourne?" asked McClure.

"He only works on the line as far as Wangaratta," replied Ben. "Besides, an engine-driver isn't general manager of the line. No. I reckon I'll have to be satisfied with a bit of cricket near my own home."

There was such a world of wistfulness in the youngster's tone that Handforth was instantly touched. It was obvious that Ben Martin was absolutely sincere; it was equally obvious that he had no idea of gaining anything by telling these juniors of his troubles. Therefore, Handforth's next words came to him as a complete surprise.

"I'll tell you what!" said Edward Oswald boisterously. "You come along to Melbourne with us. I'll pay your fare, Ben, old son."

Buttons looked up, his eyes agleam.

"Cut out the back chat!" he said incredulously. "You're just trying to fool me."

"No, I'm not!" said Handforth. "Honest injun, old man! It's my treat, see? You come along to Melbourne with us, and I'll pay your exes for the game. You can come on board the School Ship, and so you won't have any hotel expenses. How's that?"

"Do you mean it?" asked Ben Martin huskily. "You mean that I can come along and see the Test match? You mean that—Gosh!"

He broke off, breathless, excited, and he stared at Handforth in a fascinated kind of way.

"Of course I mean it!" grinned Edward Oswald. "Honour bright, Ben—it's a promise!"

Handforth felt fully rewarded for his generous offer. The delight in Ben's eyes

was obvious, the excitement which well nigh overwhelmed him was good to see.

"And if you've got any brothers and sisters they can come along, too!" added Handforth recklessly. "And so can your cousins. The more the merrier! I haven't spent any money since I've been in Australia, and here's a chance to splash a bit."

"Is that honest injun, too?" gasped Ben Martin.

"Honest injun!" roared Handforth. "We're going to see the Test match, so why shouldn't you see it, too!"

Ben leapt forward and clasped Handforth's fist.

"You're a sport!" he said fervently. "Good-o! I shall be going down to Pore-punkah by one of the first cars in the morning, and you'll come later. I'll meet you at the station. Gosh, you're a sport!"



CHAPTER 13.

Somewhat Rash!

YOU hulking great idiot!" said Church excitedly.

"Eh?"

"You hopeless duffer!"

"Look here——"

"You—you babbling lunatic!" roared Church. "I always knew that you were off your rocker, Handy, but you've never proved it so clearly before!"

Ben Martin had gone, and Handforth & Co. were alone in the bed-room. Handforth was staring in amazement at Church and McClure, both of whom were flushed with excitement.

"What are you talking about, you fat-head?" demanded Handforth wrathfully. "Are you ticking me off because I invited Ben to the match? I thought better of you, Churchy. I didn't think you were so mean. Here's this poor chap, keen to see the Test match, and——"

"That's not the point!" interrupted Church. "Mac and I thought it was good of you to invite Buttons alone. That was all right, as far as it went. But why invite the whole family?"

"Eh?"

"That's where you made a blunder, Handy!" put in McClure. "You told Buttons that he could bring his brothers and

sisters, and his cousins, too. You don't seem to realise what you might have let yourself in for!"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Handforth, with relief. "Is that all you're worried about? I don't suppose Buttons has got more than a couple of brothers, and perhaps there aren't any cousins at all——"

"You don't suppose!" broke in Church. "And perhaps! What's the good of supposing and perhaps-ing? Buttons may have half a dozen brothers, and a dozen cousins. What are you going to do then? You've given him your word—honest injun—that he can bring them all. And do you think you'll be able to take them on board the School Ship——"

"Hallo, hallo! What's the argument?" asked Dorrie, from the doorway. "Just looked in to say good-night, and I find——"

"Just a minute, Dorrie!" said Church. "Listen to what Handy has done!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Handforth. "No need to make a song about the thing. I wasn't going to tell anybody."

But Lord Dorrimore heard all about it, and he grinned joyously.

"Just like Handy, of course," he commented at length. "Handy, my poor old sportsman, I'm afraid you've let yourself in for a bit of trouble."

Handforth's jaw dropped.

"Trouble?" he said. "Oh, rot! I—I mean—— Sorry, sir. But I don't care!" he added obstinately. "I don't care if Buttons has a dozen brothers and two dozen cousins. I gave him my word, and I'll keep it!"

"Good man!" said Dorrie approvingly.

He chuckled again and took his departure, just as Nipper and Travers and Archie and the rest of the juniors came in.

"This bed is for three—not for ten!" said Handforth tartly. "What do you fellows want?"

"Only came to say good-night," said Nipper.

"Listen to this, you chaps!" said Church eagerly. "Handforth's done a fine thing for himself!"

"Shut up!" hooted Handforth, turning red.

But it was useless. His chums told the story again—just as they had told it to Lord Dorrimore—and when they had finished, Nipper and Travers and the others were not only looking alarmed, but positively anxious.

"Crazy!" commented Tommy Watson.

"Off his rocker!" said Fullwood.

"Mad as a hatter!" remarked Jimmy Potts.

Handforth bristled.

"You—you silly idiots——" he began.

"Go easy, you fellows," interrupted Nipper. "You can't blame Handy for giving way to a generous impulse. It was jolly decent of him to invite the Buttons to the Test match—and in his enthusiasm he included Buttons' brothers and sisters and cousins. That's where Handy went wrong—but you can't possibly accuse him of idiocy."

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He was simply over-generous. Good old Handy!"

"Trying to be funny?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"Not at all," smiled Nipper. "I mean it. At the same time, old man, I'm seriously afraid that you've bitten off more than you can chew."

"Oh, have I?"

"Of course you have," said the Remove skipper. "Supposing, for example, that Buttons meets us at Porepunkah station with a dozen brothers and sisters and cousins? What are you going to do, Handy?"

"Take them along, of course—and keep my promise."

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "The never-say-die spirit!"

"Ass!"

"And what about the expense?" asked Nipper.

"Expense?" said Handforth, with a start.

"I've got plenty of money! I haven't used any of my pocket-money ever since we left Adelaide. There hasn't been a chance. I've got quids and quids —"

"Exactly how much?" insisted Nipper.

"Just over eight pounds."

"My poor, deluded simpleton!" said Nipper pityingly. "And how far do you think eight pounds will go? Why, it's hardly enough to pay Buttons' exes, let alone his family's! You seem to forget that these Test matches carry on for about a week. You have to pay for admission every day, you know, and the hotels in Melbourne aren't particularly cheap—especially during Test match week."

Handforth began to look serious.

"I wasn't thinking about hotels," he growled. "My idea was to take Buttons aboard the School Ship. There's plenty of room—"

"Plenty of room for Buttons by himself—but not for a dozen of his brothers and sisters and cousins," put in Fullwood. "That's where you'll find the snag, Handy."

"If it's a question of cash, dear old boy, allow me to dash into the breach," said Archie Glenthorne gracefully. "A fiver, Handy? A tenner? Just mention the good old figure, and—"

"Thanks all the same, Archie, but I'm not borrowing anything!" said Handforth, with an obstinate gleam in his eye. "I invited Buttons for this trip, and I'm going to pay the exes! It wouldn't be fair to drop on you."

"But, really, old cheese, I'm only too glad to relieve the old wallet—"

"No!" said Handforth firmly. "I won't borrow any money until it's absolutely necessary."

"And it will be necessary, young man!" said Lord Dorrimore, reappearing. "Your precious friend, Ben Martin—a fine young fellow, by the way—has already spread the news that he's going to Melbourne to see the Test match with two brothers and a sister."

"There you are!" said Church.

Handforth looked relieved.

"Two brothers and a sister?" he repeated. "That only makes four of them! By George! I was expecting that it would be worse than that!"

"Perhaps I've got it wrong," said Dorrie warningly. "There may be more of these brothers and sisters knocking about."

"Well, they're all welcome, sir!" said Handforth promptly. "I'm sticking to my word."

"Splendid fellow!" said Dorrie heartily.

"That's the way, Handy—always stick to your word! But, remember, you'll have to go through with this thing."

His lordship's voice had become very solemn, and Handforth looked at him squarely.

"I told Ben, honest injun, that he and his brothers and sisters and cousins could come, and I'm not going to back out of it!" he said quietly.

"You mustn't back out of it—you mustn't even think of it!" said Dorrie. "The honour of St. Frank's is at stake."

"Eh?"

"Of course it is," said his lordship. "By glory! Don't you realise what will happen if you fail? You, a St. Frank's fellow, offered this Australian boy a treat. If you don't keep your word, you will be scorned and belittled—and the whole school will be included in the condemnation. Handforth, my boy, you *must* see this thing through."

Edward Oswald squared his shoulders.

"And I shall see it through, sir," he said steadily. "I am not going to let St. Frank's down—or my own word, either!"



CHAPTER 14.

At Porepunkah!

BEFORE the other juniors went to bed they chipped Handforth a lot. Privately, they decided that they would rally round at the right moment,

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and lend Edward Oswald all the extra money he needed. But it would be as well, perhaps, to let him have his own way to start with. It might be a lesson to him not to act so rashly in future. Not that they could reproach him, for his impulse had been prompted by generosity.

"There's nothing to worry about, you fellows," said Handforth, after the others had gone and he was in bed with Church and McClure. "You heard what Dorrie said, didn't you? Buttons is bringing two brothers and a sister. I hope the sister is a nice girl," he added musingly.

"Well, that makes four of them," said Church. "I don't see how you can afford to pay for the four all the week. The big match starts on Friday, and it may go on until the Friday of next week——"

"Let it go on!" broke in Handforth. "Do you think I care?"

He turned over in bed, leaving McClure totally exposed, and for some moments there was a kind of volcanic upheaval. Fortunately, a great amount of bedclothes was not necessary, for the temperature was mild.

Church and McClure managed to get to sleep—mainly because Handforth was so thoughtful that he did not bother to toss about. He had selected the middle of the bed, considering, perhaps, that this was the safest place. If anybody was kicked out

on to the floor, it would not be him.

Handforth realised, although he would not confess it, that he had been unduly reckless in his promises. Perhaps he had had a vague idea of an ordinary school match in his mind—a single-innings match, which is started and finished on the same day. At all events, it came as a bit of a shock to him when he remembered that the Test match at Melbourne would probably occupy the better part of a week. And, since he had promised Ben Martin that he would treat him to the Test match—to say nothing of his brothers and sisters and cousins—he would necessarily be obliged to pay all the expenses for the whole duration of the game.

Even if Handforth had wanted to get out of his promise—which he certainly did not—he could not have done so. Such a thing would have been a discredit to the name of St. Frank's. He had given his word, and he must keep it.

With eight pounds in his pocket, Handforth had felt very rich—but now, realising just what lay ahead of him, he came to the conclusion that he was horribly poor. The very thought of borrowing money in order to fulfil his obligations, however, was distasteful to him. Even now he had a wild idea that he might be able to smuggle his guests aboard the School Ship and maintain them there for the week. In this way, his supply of money would be sufficient for the match expenses.

He went to sleep in a rather troubled frame of mind, but when he awoke on the following morning, to find the sun shining brilliantly through the window, all his high spirits were revived. Besides, what was this little trouble compared with the perils that he had passed through during the previous day? He laughed aloud at these trivialities.

There was no sign of Ben Martin. True to his word, he had gone down to Porepunkah in a car that had left in the early morning. There was little doubt, however, that he would turn up, bright and smiling, on the station platform.

Immediately after breakfast, Nelson Leo collected the juniors together, and they all took their places in two splendid automobiles that were ready.

Mr. Manners saw them off, and he promised Leo and Dorrie that he would see them, within a day or two, in Melbourne.

It was a wonderful ride—about twenty miles of it—from the Chalet down to the railway. There was an ever-changing vista of forest and mountain. The road went winding round in sinuous curves. There was a startling assortment of mountain scenery—magnificent gorges, waterfalls, fern gullies, with glimpses of lakes and streams.

The cars went gliding past enormous granite masses, majestic and rugged in their grandeur. These St. Frank's juniors were being entertained more lavishly than they realised, perhaps. For there was hardly a road in the whole of Australia more pic-

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turesque than this one. Every yard of it was a revelation—every half mile was a realm of wondrous scenery.

At Mackey's Lookout there was a clear spot, and the cars stopped for a few minutes, so that the passengers could obtain a good view of the wonderful panorama. Then onwards again, down past the bank of the Eurobin Creek. Downwards into the valley, and finally across the Buckland River, until at last the station of Porepunkah was reached.

"Well, by jingo, that was a rare treat!" declared Nipper, with conviction.

"Rather!" echoed the others.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "What's that?"

"A wonderful ride, Handy," said Nipper.

"Where?" said Handforth. "I mean, what was?"

"Haven't you just driven down from the Chalet, through marvellous scenery?"

"Have we?" said Handforth. "I didn't think much of it."

"Why, you silly ass—"

"The fact is, I wasn't looking at the scenery," confessed Handforth. "I've been thinking. Now, lemme see. Eight quid ought to go a goodish way— By George! There he is! There's Buttons!"

Handforth ran off to a spot just outside the station, where Ben Martin was standing—now dressed in a smart lounge suit, with an open collar, and looking free and easy and cheerful. With him were two young fellows, slightly older than himself, and a girl of about fifteen.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Ben, as Handforth came up. "This is my English cobbler Handforth, this is Tom, and this is Charlie, and this is Edith. My brothers and my sister."

"Jolly pleased to meet you!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

He shook hands heartily with Edith—who proved to be a merry-eyed lass with plenty of good looks. Handforth was beginning to congratulate himself on the whole enterprise. He loved the limelight, in any case, and acting the host was one of his favourite rôles.

"Now, don't forget—I'm standing treat!" he declared, after he had shaken hands with Tom and Charlie. "Everything's on me!"

"You bet it is!" nodded Ben coolly. "You gave me your promise, old pal, and I know that you'll keep your word. All my brothers and sisters, and all my cousins. This is the first instalment!"

Handforth started.

"The—the what?" he asked, with a gulp.

"There'll be a few more join us as we go along in the train," said Ben placidly.

Handforth, who had been congratulating himself, felt a certain spasm of alarm. The first instalment! And others were to be picked up along the railway! This was a state of affairs that Handforth had certainly not bargained for!



CHAPTER 15.

The More, the Merrier!

"I think it's wonderful of you," said Edith Martin smilingly. "In fact, we ought not to take advantage of your generosity like this."

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Handforth in some haste. "Only too delighted! We're English, and you're Australian—and we're all British. Might as well be pally and sociable, eh?"

"It's very generous of you," declared Edith enthusiastically.

Handforth, finding that she was intent upon conversation, had very little chance of pondering over his new troubles. Yet the problem was now becoming acute. How many more brothers and sisters were there? He had been consoling himself with the thought that his guests would be limited to four, but perhaps there were four more to come! This thought gave Handforth a pain. It wasn't that he regretted his generosity; it was purely a matter of finance.

Nipper and Travers and Church and McClure came along with the other fellows, and they were introduced, too. They made it perfectly clear to Ben Martin and his brothers and sister that Handforth was the host—that Handy was paying all the expenses.

Lord Dorrimore was much in evidence, too. He made himself very sociable with the Australian youngsters, and later on he found an opportunity of having a word with Handforth alone.

"You're lucky, young man!" he said softly.

"Lucky, sir?"

"Yes," said Dorrie. "Be thankful that there are only four of these—"

"Only four!" echoed Handforth. "Why, Buttons tells me that there are some more to come!"

"Oh!"

"And the trouble is, I don't know how many more!" went on Handforth. "For all I know, there might be half a dozen—"

"Or a dozen?"

"Oh, cheese it, sir!" protested Edward Oswald. "The chap couldn't have a dozen brothers and sisters!"

"Don't you believe it!" said his lordship. "There are lots of large families in Australia. And what about the cousins? There might be a lot of cousins—"

"Oh, help!"

"You must keep your word, old man!" said Dorrie sternly. "No backing out now, you know!"

"I'm not thinking of backing out, sir!" protested Handforth indignantly.

"I'm sure you're not," nodded Dorrie. "You've got to take all these Aussie cobbles of

yours to Melbourne, and you've got to see that they are provided with good accommodation, and you've got to buy them good seats for the Test match——"

"All right, sir—I know!" interrupted Handforth desperately. "It wouldn't be so bad if Melbourne was only a mile or two away, and if the Test match was played in a single day. When I gave my promise to Buttons I'd almost forgotten that these Test matches last a week."

"H'm! Well, my son, experience costs money, and it seems to me that you'll have to do a lot of paying," said his lordship. "But I know you'll do it with a light heart, and with a smile on your face. Always remember, Handy, that you are giving wonderful pleasure to these youngsters. They've never had an opportunity of seeing a Test match before, and cricket is in their blood. You're doing splendid work!"

Handforth flushed.

"That makes it worth while, sir," he said enthusiastically.

The train came in, and in the meantime Handforth had bought four tickets for Melbourne. These he gave to Ben Martin, much to the latter's satisfaction. Here was the first genuine evidence of Handforth's sincerity.

All the St. Frank's fellows were greatly interested in the view as the train proceeded on its way down the picturesque valley. The train pulled up at Myrtleford, some miles further on, and Ben Martin quickly hopped out. He was instantly surrounded by half a dozen boys and girls. They were all younger than himself, one of the boys being no older than eight or nine, and one girl being of similar age.

"Good-o!" shouted Ben. "Where's my cobber? Where's Handy?"

"Handy, you're wanted!" said Church, grinning.

Handforth got out of the train, his heart beating rapidly.

"Who—who are these?" he asked thickly. "More of your brothers and sisters, Ben?"

"Too right, they are!" chuckled Ben Martin. "Meet my cobber, Handforth. He's going along to buy your tickets for Melbourne——"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Handforth.

But he bought the tickets, although now he was getting into a bit of a panic. For his capital was rapidly decreasing—and his expenses had only just started. He pulled himself together, however, and made himself very sociable with these six other brothers and sisters.

Presently the train restarted, and Handforth felt the worst was over. Before long the train stopped again—this time at a place called Everton. Handforth was feeling quite comfortable, because at Bowman, the previous station, no further Martins had been in evidence.

But Edward Oswald now received a shock.

He beheld a group of ten young people waiting for the train—the majority of them being boys, their ages ranging from twelve to sixteen, and there were three girls of a similar age.

"This is fine!" said Ben Martin. "My Everton cousins."

"Wha-a-a-at!" gurgled Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hard lines, Handy!"

The other St. Frank's fellows roared with laughter as they beheld the expression on Handforth's face. The leader of Study D quickly pulled himself together, and he was relieved when Ben jumped out of the train. Handforth dashed up to Archie Glenthorne.

"Quick, Archie!" he panted. "Lend me some money!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean, as much as you like, old kangaroo! But I rather thought that you didn't want any——"

"I've got to have it!" insisted Handforth. "I'll pay you back later—even if it takes me all the giddy year!"

Archie handed over a couple of fivers, and Handforth dashed out of the train to be introduced to Ben Martin's ten Everton cousins.

"I say, this is getting a bit thick, you know!" protested Church. "Handforth was pretty lavish in his invitation, but we never expected that Ben Martin would take advantage of it like this!"

"It's awful!" said McClure.

"You can't blame the chap," put in Travers. "For the love of Samson! They're not rich people—they're not in a position to take a trip to Melbourne and see Test matches! This is going to be the treat of their lives, and it's only natural that they would grab at it. Handforth shouldn't be so wholesale."

"Yes; he's only got himself to thank for all this," said Nipper.

"But there's twenty of 'em now—with perhaps more to come!" grinned Jimmy Potts.

Sure enough, when the train finally reached Wangaratta, the big junction, Handforth got a bigger shock than ever. For it seemed that Wangaratta, an important agricultural centre, with a population of five or six thousand, was fairly littered with Martin's cousins. They had collected in readiness for this great treat, and they were now waiting for the train, all sizes and all shapes.

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" gurgled Handforth, when he spotted that throng, and promptly collapsed into McClure's arms. Mac, not being prepared, allowed Handy to fall to the platform with a thud.

There were twenty guests at least—boys and girls for the most part, but with a sprinkling of smartly-dressed young men and fashionably-dressed young ladies.

"Are—are these more of your cousins, Ben?"—asked Handforth hoarsely, as he got up.

"These are my swell Wangaratta cousins," nodded Ben Martin, with a grin.



"And since there are fifty guests, I shall require the sum of five hundred pounds!" said the manager of the very exclusive hotel. Handforth reeled. Five hundred pounds! How was he going to get hold of five hundred pounds?



CHAPTER 16.

Handforth, the Host!

It was fortunate for Edward Oswald Handforth that Archie Glenthorne and Vivian Travers and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were included in that party. These three juniors could always be relied upon to "whack out" large sums of money at a moment's notice, and they did so now—handsomely.

Thus Handforth was enabled to save his face; and with that money in his possession he recovered some of his composure. It gave him confidence. Indeed, he was now beginning to enjoy himself. His alarm had gone, and he was living for the moment. Now and again he received a pang when he remembered what was to come, but he cast these thoughts aside. He was able to pay his way now, and that was really all that mattered.

He bought the tickets for these Wangaratta cousins, and there were many cheers, and Handforth was voted to be a real bonzer clobber.

The party now consisted of forty! Handforth, who had never dreamed of such a state of affairs, felt his responsibilities weighing heavily on his shoulders.

They had got into a new train at Wangaratta, and Handforth really and truly felt that it was impossible for Ben Martin to have any more cousins. Yet, all the same, when the train drew up in the fairly big town of Benal'a, he gazed out with a strained, anxious expression on his rugged face. And when he saw a crowd of schoolboys and schoolgirls, numbering about fifty, he gave a yelp of dismay.

"What is it?" asked Church.

"Look!" gurgled Handforth. "Thousands of 'em!"

Ben Martin looked out.

"They're not my cousins," he said.

"They're nothing to do with this party."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's face was so expressive of relief that everybody yelled with laughter.

"Haven't you any cousins in this place?" he asked, swallowing hard.

"No, not here," replied Ben.

"Not here!" croaked Handforth. "Then—then you mean that you *have* got some more cousins somewhere?"

"What about my Euroa cousins?" asked Ben. "Euroa's a bit farther down the line. I dare say ten of them will be able to join us—"

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth, fingering the few notes that were still left in his possession. "Only ten? Haven't you made a mistake? Sure you haven't got a thousand cousins in Samoa?"

"Not Samoa—Euroa."

"Well, Euroa, then."

"No, only ten," grinned the Chalet buttons. "Gosh, I hope you're not regretting your promise?" he added concernedly. "You don't think I'm taking advantage of you, do you?"

"Nun-no, of course not," stammered Handforth.

"You were very firm about it," continued Ben. "You told me to bring all my brothers and sisters and cousins, and I'm taking you at your word. Still, if you want to back out of it—"

"I don't!" interrupted Handforth. "Not likely! When I say a thing, Ben Buttons—I mean, Ben Martin—I mean a thing! By George! Are you implying that my word isn't my bond? If you're looking for a thick ear—"

"Steady, old man!" said Church. "You mustn't threaten one of your guests!"

"Sorry!" gasped Handforth. "I—I'd forgotten for the moment!"

Ten more cousins duly boarded the train at Euroa, and then, at last, the alarming business was over. Ben definitely announced that there were no more cousins to come. By this time Handforth had a vague idea that Australia was largely peopled by Ben Martin's relatives. But he bore no grudge against Ben. This cheerful Australian youth, he felt, had been thoroughly justified in taking him so literally, for, after all, Handforth had been very explicit.

But the problem was a fearful one.

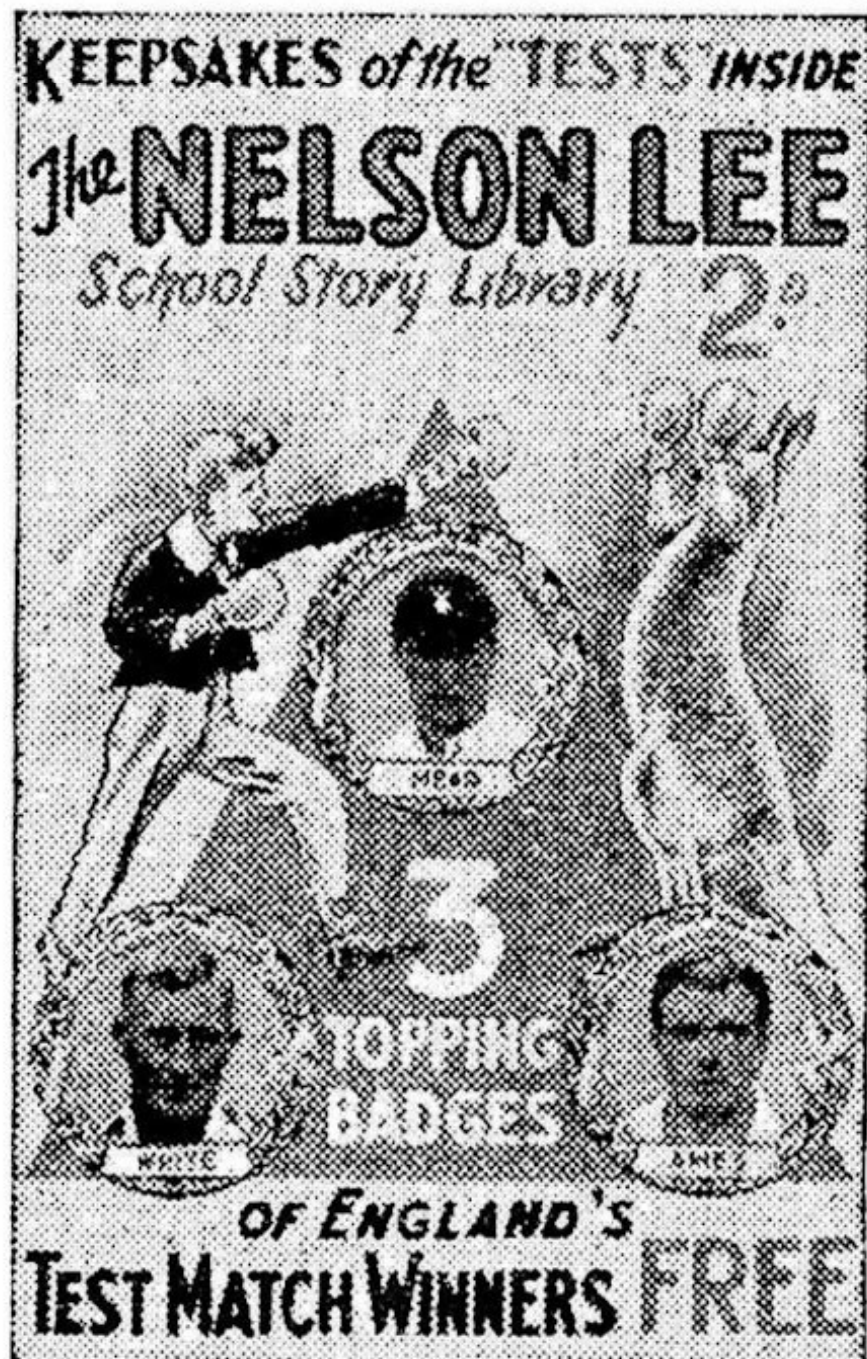
Already Handforth was hopelessly in debt. He had nearly skinned out Archie Glen-thorne and Vivian Travers, and he had no idea how he was going to pay them back. He had a vision of returning to St. Frank's and selling his wireless set, his cricket-bat, and even his precious Austin Seven! In addition, his pocket-money would probably be mortgaged for two or three years!

But he managed to put these unpleasant thoughts out of his mind, and he tried to do his duties as a host. It is certain, however, that he saw nothing of the countryside during that journey, and by the time Melbourne was reached, in the evening, he was dizzy and bewildered. He couldn't imagine

what he was to do with all this crowd. Fifty of them—and quite a number of them was girls! And they were all his guests; they had all come to Melbourne to see the Test match at his expense! These Australians were undoubtedly as keen as mustard!

Handforth was greatly relieved when he observed that Nelson Lee and Dorrie went off with all the other juniors. They passed out of the great station in Melbourne, where everything was a blaze of light and bustling with activity, and the fellows were taken off in two big motor-cars. Apparently, they were going straight to the School Ship.

NEXT WEEK'S COVER!



"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Ben Martin politely.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "Do?"

"Yes," said Ben. "You're in charge, old man."

"Oh, rather!"

"We can't stay here, can we?" went on the cheery Australian. "Don't forget there are some young ladies in the party—and we're all hungry, too."

"Hungry!" said Handforth, with an even more violent start.

"We've got to eat, haven't we?"

"Yes, of course," said Handforth hastily. "Fifty square meals at five bob each—Oh, crumbs, I—I—"

"Aren't you going to take us to a hotel?" asked one of the girls, smiling sweetly.

"I—I thought we'd go to the ship!" said

Handforth, in desperation—knowing full well that he could not afford hotel accommodation for all these guests of his. "I—I think we shall be able to have plenty to eat aboard. How do we get to the docks?"

"We don't know much about Melbourne," admitted Ben. "We're leaving everything to you, Handy."

So Handforth led the way through Melbourne—down the wide magnificence of Collins Street, with its electric tramways, its traffic. Then he found himself in Elizabeth Street, near the superb structure of the General Post Office, on the corner of Bourke

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More exciting chapters of Edwy Searles Brooks' grand football and dirt-track racing serial.

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Street. Behind him came his fifty protégés—all marching along in a big crowd. Incidentally, there was quite a sensation in the City. Everybody wanted to know who these young people were, marching along so aimlessly, led by a youngster who was obviously a raw stranger.

Finally a kindly policeman made inquiries, and when he learned that Handforth wanted to go to the docks, he indicated that South Melbourne was more in Handforth's line—and that Port Melbourne might be a useful place to go to.

So when a big tram came along, Handforth and his host of guests piled into it, filling it to overflowing. And off they went—with Edward Oswald rapidly coming to the conclusion that he would soon wake up out of this nightmare.

Unfortunately, it happened to be reality!



CHAPTER 17.

Turned Off!

HANK goodness!" breathed Handforth fervently.

Somehow or other—he never remembered exactly how—he had reached the docks, and he was now gazing into Hobson's Bay, where, quite close at hand, moored to one of the piers, was the good ship St. Francis.

The School Ship—the floating edition of St. Frank's.

She proved to be one of the finest sights that Handforth had ever set eyes on.

"Well, here we are," he said briskly. "Now look here, Ben, you'd better keep your brothers and sisters and cousins here for a bit, and I'll dash on board and make some arrangements."

There was an immediate chorus.

"Don't be too long!"

"We're all hungry!"

"Too right, we are!"

"We're tired, too, and we don't want to wander about any longer."

"You'd better arrange something quick, old clobber," said Ben confidentially. "They're getting a bit impatient. We're mostly strangers in Melbourne, and we don't want to be stranded."

Handforth had a full realisation of his responsibilities, and he pulled himself together.

"You won't be stranded," he promised. "Leave everything to me. I've brought you here, and I'm going to look after you until the Test match is over. And then I'm going to send you all back to your homes."

"Good-o!" said Ben. "You're the real sport!"

Handforth managed to drag himself away, and he did not feel particularly pleased when a crowd of Removites and Fourth-Formers surrounded him as soon as he had put foot on deck, after having crossed the gangway.

"Here's Handy!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Back at last—safe and sound!"

"And we thought that you were going to be killed yesterday, too!"

"Never mind about that now," said Handforth, as he faced the throng. "There's something more important to attend to. I've got to find accommodation for all my guests."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've heard about your giddy guests!" chuckled Boots of the Fourth. "My hat! They're all on the docks now! What have you brought them here for, Handy?"

"Where else could I bring them?" demanded Handforth desperately. "There

are fifty of 'em—including fifteen or twenty girls!"

"Oh, great Scott!"

"I can't take them to a hotel, because I haven't any money!" went on Handforth.

"My idea is to smuggle them on board——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Impossible, Handy!" said Nipper, shaking his head. "You can't smuggle fifty people on board this ship. Besides, it wouldn't be fair to them. And what about the girls? You can't expect them to hide away in a hold, and for a whole week, too!"

"Then—then what shall I do?" asked Handforth bleakly.

"That's your trouble, old man," said Church. "You insisted on inviting Ben and his family. Hard lines, Handy!"

"I didn't think I should get half Australia!" interrupted Handforth, with a groan. "Oh, well, I shall have to bring them on board boldly and make the best of things. I dare say Mr. Lee will make some arrangements as soon as he finds they're all aboard. There's nothing like being bold about it."

He marched off, and there were many headshakes amongst the other juniors, and they took care to get out of sight as quickly as possible. Apparently they did not wish to be associated with Handforth in this "spot of bother."

"It's all right," said Handforth, as he rejoined his guests. "At least, I hope it'll be all right. You'd better all come aboard."

"Have you arranged things?" asked Ben Martin politely.

"I haven't exactly arranged them, but I'm hoping that they'll arrange themselves," replied Handforth, with a vague wave of his hand. "Anyhow, come on! Something's got to be done, hasn't it?"

"Too right, it has!" agreed Ben.

Since Handforth was the host, and since he had seen them through so far, their only course was to follow his suggestion. Handforth marched up the gangway, arrived on the deserted deck of the School Ship, and all the Australian boys and girls came trooping after him. They seemed delighted with these quarters, and they made no attempt to silence their voices. It was natural, therefore, that some attention should be attracted, and Fenton of the Sixth came along, accompanied by Biggleswade and another prefect. They took a look at the crowd, consulted together, and then moved off. By the time Mr. Norton, the Remove master, appeared on the scene everybody was on board.

"What—er—is the meaning of this?" asked Mr. Norton mildly.

"They're my guests, sir," said Handforth.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Norton. "Well, well! It's you, Handforth, is it? How are you, my boy? I was greatly relieved to learn of your lucky escape yesterday. I can assure you that we were all worrying——"

"That's all right, sir," interrupted Hand-

forth hastily. "That's over now. I've brought these fellows and girls on board, you know. I invited them to stay in Melbourne for the week, just to see the Test match. I thought——"

"By all means!" said Mr. Norton, beaming. "I am certain that Mr. Lee will approve."

A great weight was lifted from Handforth's heart.

"Good egg!" he said eagerly. "Thanks awfully, sir!"

"Not at all," smiled the Remove master. "Mr. Lee will have no objection to your showing these excellent young people over the ship. I think, perhaps, you could have chosen a more opportune moment, but——"

"Showing them over the ship, sir!" broke in Handforth, aghast. "I—I didn't mean that!"

"No?"

"I thought perhaps that they could stay on board for the week, sir!" blurted out Handforth. "There's plenty of room, if some of the fellows will only give up their cabins, and——"

"Impossible, Handforth—quite impossible!" said Mr. Norton coldly. "What an extraordinary idea! Upon my word! I am astonished that you should get such notions."

"But, sir——"

"There is no accommodation on board this ship for so many of your friends," continued Mr. Norton. "And certainly there is no accommodation for ladies. My dear young people, I am dreadfully sorry that Handforth should have led you into this—er—predicament."

"But they must stay, sir!" panted Handforth. "They're my guests, and——"

"And I tell you it is quite impossible!" said Mr. Norton sharply. "Ah, here is Mr. Lee! I am very glad, sir, that you have come. Handforth has brought all these good young people aboard, and I am grieved that they should have been so misled. He has foolishly told them that they can be accommodated on board this ship for the duration of the coming Test match."

Nelson Lee smiled and shook his head.

"No doubt, Handforth, you have acted with the best of motives," he said kindly. "I have had an inkling of your activities, but really you cannot possibly have these guests of yours aboard. They must be provided with hotel accommodation."

"But—but—but——"

"Fortunately, there is an excellent hotel quite near," continued Nelson Lee. "It is almost within sight—the Hedingham Hotel. Take your friends there at once, Handforth, and make arrangements for their accommodation. But you must not stay there—you must rejoin the ship. The usual routine is once again in force, and I cannot make any exceptions."

Handforth opened his mouth to speak, but words failed to come!



CHAPTER 18.

Poor Old Handy!

BEN MARTIN turned to his brothers and sisters and cousins.

"You heard what Mr. Lee said?" he

asked. "Good-o! We'll go along to the Hedingham Hotel."

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth, finding his voice. "That's the idea! Perhaps, after all, a hotel will be better."

One of the Australian youths looked at him closely.

"I say, you're not worried about the expense, are you?" he asked.

"Expense!" laughed Handforth, with an air of absolute indifference. "What rot!

Hang the expense! I invited you all to the Test match, and I'm going to keep my word!"

"We knew you would!" said Edith Martin softly.

"Of course!" laughed Handforth. "Come along, everybody! Where's this giddy Hedingham Hotel? I'll soon have you fixed up nice and comfortable!"

He led the way ashore again, and although he maintained a bold front his heart was leaden. Furthermore, he was in an inward panic. For the life of him he could not see what to do. It was all very well for Nelson Lee to talk about taking his guests to a hotel, but what about the heavy expenses that a hotel would entail? It would be bad enough if the party numbered a mere half-dozen—but fifty—

Much to Handforth's dismay, the Hedingham Hotel, comparatively near by, proved to be a palatial establishment. There was an enormous entrance, with a great foyer beyond, and there was an air of exclusiveness about the place which struck a chill into Handforth's heart.

However, since he had led his guests in, he could not very well turn tail. There was nothing to be done but to maintain his bold front.

A gentleman in evening dress approached him as soon as he got into the foyer, and this same gentleman had passed a keen eye over the youthful crowd that followed at Handforth's heels.

"My friends," said Handforth, with a careless wave of his hand. "I'm one of the St. Frank's chaps—from the School Ship."

"Welcome to Melbourne, my boy!" said the man in evening dress.

"Are you the manager?"

"Yes."

"That's fine," said Handforth. "Do you think you can put my friends up? They've come to see the Test match, you know, and they need accommodation until the game is over. Just about a week, I should think—or perhaps more."

The manager beamed.

"We have, fortunately, a number of vacant rooms," he said smoothly. "If you will tell me how many ladies, and how many gentlemen—"

He rapidly cast his eye over the crowd again, made some mental notes, and called assistants to his side. As though by magic, Handforth's party was disposed of. Ben Martin and his brothers and sisters and cousins bade Handforth good-night, and went off to their rooms—it having been arranged that they should have a wash to start with, and then they would come downstairs and invade the dining-room. A meal, in the

meantime, was being specially prepared for their benefit.

"Well, that's a load off my mind," murmured Handforth, after the lift had ascended with the last load. "Thanks awfully, sir," he added aloud, turning to the manager. "Congratters on the way you handled the situation. You Australians are jolly smart."

The manager smiled.

"Everybody needs to be smart nowadays," he replied. "As a mere matter of formality, I would like your name—"

"That's all right," said Handforth. "My name's Handforth, of the Remove. You'll find me in the School Ship, if you want me. Good-night, and thanks—"

"One moment—if you don't mind, Master Handforth," said the manager, in a silky voice. "In the circumstances, I am sure you will not be offended if I suggest cash in advance?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "But—but—"

"You will realise that your friends have brought no luggage with them," proceeded the manager. "It is one of the rules of this establishment—"

"Oh, but this is different!" protested Handforth. "You can trust me, can't you? I'm from the School Ship, and I shan't let you down."

"Not for one moment, young man, do I doubt you," said the manager. "But I find it impossible to depart from the hotel rules. I understand that you require accommodation for your friends for the period of at least one week?"

"Yes, that's right."

FOR NEW READERS!

Portrait badges of Chapman, Hobbs, Sutcliffe, Larwood, Hendren, Tate, Duckworth, Hammond, Jardine and Tyldesley have already appeared in the last three issues of the Nelson Lee, together with an attractive Album in which to put them. Copies containing these Free Gifts can be obtained by applying to: Back Number Dept., "Nelson Lee School Story Library," Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4., and enclosing 3d. in stamps for each copy required.

"And there are, I understand, fifty of them?"

"Yes."

"I am providing them with the 'all-in accommodation,'" went on the manager smoothly. "That is to say, I shall make an inclusive charge."

"Yes, rather, it'll be better like that," nodded Handforth. "Everything they eat goes on the bill, eh? Fine! Put everything down to me."

"As I have already suggested, I shall require payment in advance," said the manager. "The rate will be ten pounds a week for each guest."

Handforth jumped about a foot in the air.

"Ten pound a week—each!" he gasped.

"That is the charge."

"But—but—"

"And since there are fifty guests, I shall require the sum of five hundred pounds!" said the manager gently.

Handforth reeled. He positively rocked on his heels, and the great foyer seemed to dance round and round.

"Five hundred pounds!" he babbled. "But—but— Oh, my only sainted aunt! Five hundred quid!"

If an earthquake had happened, he could not have been more startled. Now that it came down to "brass tacks," he realised the horrible enormity of his rashness. He had invited fifty boys and girls to see the Test match—and their hotel bill, alone, came to a fantastically impossible figure. What about the admission money—day after day—for fifty of them to go into the Test match enclosure? Handforth's brain was incapable of dealing with the point.

And he knew how impossible it was for him to find such a sum as five hundred pounds. It was grotesque—it was too awful for words. He could only stand there, staring dazedly at the manager, and, by this time, that gentleman had begun to look slightly suspicious.

"I take it, Master Handforth, that you are in a position to fulfil this obligation?" he asked sharply. "If not, these friends of yours will be requested to leave this hotel without any delay. They cannot even partake of a single meal until the money has been paid."

Handforth gulped and found his voice.

"But I can't do it!" he blurted out hoarsely.

"You can't do it!" frowned the manager.

"Not—not all in one go!" said Handforth.

"Give me time! Let them have a good square meal this evening, and let them stop here until to-morrow, anyhow! How much will that be?"

"Fifty pounds," replied the manager promptly.

"A pound each—just for to-night!" yelled Handforth.

"This is an exclusive hotel," replied the manager coldly.

"Great Scott! I should say it is!" ejaculated Handforth, aghast. "Fifty quid! All

right. Give me half an hour, will you? I'll promise to come back in half an hour with the money!"

The manager glanced at his watch.

"I do not quite like the situation, my young friend," he said. "However, I have no desire to appear arbitrary. You shall have this half hour—but if you fail to return in time, your friends will be politely but firmly shown into the street!"



CHAPTER 19.

Getting a Bit Hectic!

THE unfortunate Handforth was in a whirl of consternation as he fled from the Hedingham Hotel back to the School Ship. For the life of him, he could not see how he was going to get out of this trouble—without letting his guests down with a crash. And that would be tragic. He—Handforth—would have to admit to them that he was broke—that he could not keep his word! The very thought made him go hot and cold in turns. He set his jaw, and his expression became dogged.

"It's no good—I've got to go through with it!" he told himself fiercely. "The honour of St. Frank's is at stake!"

It appalled him when he realised that all this had followed because of his rash choice of words. Church and McClure had warned him, but he had scoffed at them. But then, how could he have guessed that the Chalet buttons would have taken him so literally? Handforth felt that Ben Martin had taken a somewhat mean advantage of the situation, for Ben must have known that Handforth's invitation was not intended to be so wholesale. It was a great nerve on Ben's part. But perhaps Ben, being an Australian, didn't look upon it in this light? Anyhow, Handforth knew, in his own heart, that he was to blame.

And he had looked forward so eagerly, too, to arriving in Melbourne. As it was, he hardly knew that he had reached that famous city. He had seen nothing of the streets, of the fine buildings, of the dockside. He had been so intent upon his guests that he had had no eyes for anything else. And, according to the way things were going, the rest of his stay in Melbourne would be a nightmare. As for the Test match, he couldn't even think of it.

He arrived back at the School Ship, dashed below, and burst into the big lounge that was now being used as the Junior Common-room. He found it full, as he had hoped.

"Good old Handy!"

"Here he is!"

"How did you get on with your little bunch of guests, old man?"

"Look here, you chaps—I need help!" panted Handforth earnestly. "I need—money!"

"Good gad!"

"He needs money, you chaps!" said Nipper, shaking his head. "He's come to the wrong place!"

"I'm afraid he has," agreed Travers. "He's had nearly all our cash."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, with concern. "I'm most frightfully sorry, Handy, old ostrich, but the good wallet is somewhat dithery."

"Let's have a whip round, anyhow," suggested Boots of the Fourth.

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll do all we can for the poor chap."

"Rather!"

"Good-o!" said Boomerang Bangs, the new boy in the Remove—the fellow from New South Wales, who was such a terror at cricket. "Here's my contribution, old clobber."

Boots was going round with the hat, and all sorts of coins were dropped into it. At last the collection was over, and then Handforth nearly had a fit. For the amount totalled exactly thirty-five shillings and fourpence-halfpenny!

"Is—is this all?" asked Handforth bleakly.

"How much did you expect, then?" asked Boots, with a cold glance. "I must say you appear ungrateful——"

"But I need fifty quid!" yelled Handforth.

"What!"

"Fifty quid—within twenty minutes!" said Handforth desperately. "And I've got to have five hundred quid by to-morrow——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's true!" thundered Handforth. "All those fellows and girls have been accommodated at the Hedingham Hotel, and I've got to pay five hundred pounds for the week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you believe me?" hooted Handforth.

"It's a bit thick, old man," said Church, shaking his head. "I know there are fifty of your guests, but ten pound a head is a bit thick, isn't it?"

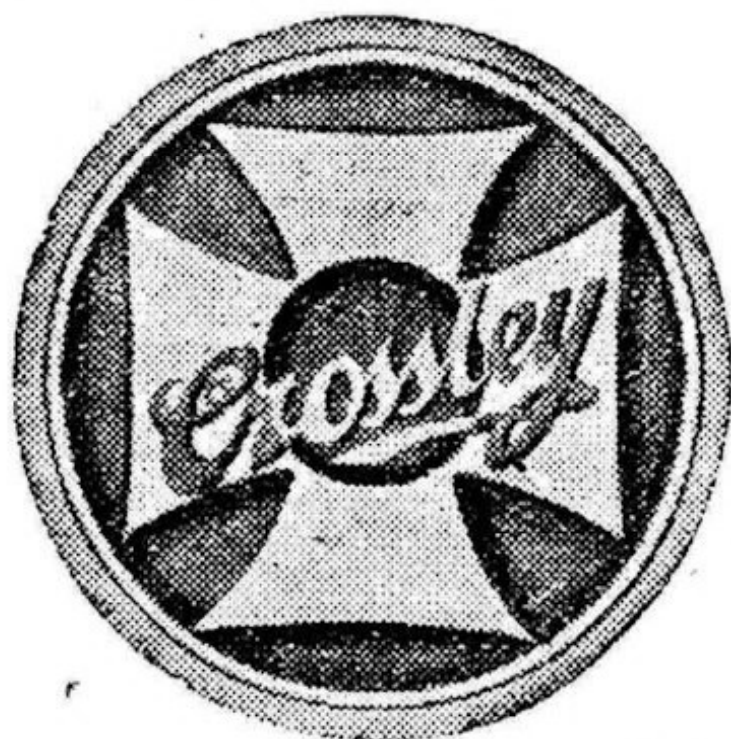
"They must have seen you coming, Handy!" grinned Travers.

"Hard lines, Handy!" said Nipper.

A knock sounded on the door, and the next moment the manager of the Hedingham Hotel walked in, his face grave, his eyes stern. There was an immediate silence, and everybody stared at him in wonder.

"I thought it better to follow you over to this ship, young man," said the manager, looking straight at Handforth. "I am beginning to realise that you have perpetrated a trick on my hotel."

"But—but I haven't!" protested Handforth.



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"You have brought fifty guests, and it is apparently quite impossible for you to pay for their accommodation—even for one night!" said the manager angrily. "Am I right? Have you the fifty pounds?"

"I've—I've got thirty-five bob!" blurted out Handforth.

"Thirty-five bob—I mean shillings!" ejaculated the manager. "Are you trying to be funny with me?"

"I can't raise any more!" groaned Handforth. "All these chaps are broke!" he added indignantly. "I've never known such a thing! Just when I wanted money badly, they fail me!"

"Well, I like that!" protested Travers. "You've had all our available cash."

"Sorry!" panted Handforth. "I didn't mean that, you chaps! You've been real sportsmen. But—but I don't know what to do. I can't let those guests of mine be turned out into the night, can I? There are lots of girls amongst them. I'm responsible, because I promised——"

"Poor old Handy!" chuckled Lord Dorrimore from the doorway. "Come in, Ben."

A ripple of laughter ran through the Common-room as Dorrie and Ben, the Buttons, entered. Even the manager of the Heddingham Hotel changed his expression.

"I meant to keep this up until the morning—but, in the cires, I think it would be as well to finish it off now," said his lordship coolly.

"Keep it up, sir," said Handforth, staring. "Keep what up?"

"The joke."

"Joke!" babbled Handforth. "But—but——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

This time it was no mere chuckle, but a roar of hilarious laughter. All the Removites and Fourth-Formers yelled at the top of their voices, and Dorrie joined in. Handforth looked round blankly—in complete bewilderment.

"But—but I don't understand!" he gasped. "Joke? What joke? It isn't any joke to me, anyhow! I've got to find fifty quid to-night, and five hundred quid by to-morrow!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Handy old fellow, we've been pulling your leg!" said Dorrie gently.

Edward Oswald gave a violent start.

"Pulling my leg?" he panted.

"The world's easiest object to pull," nodded Dorrie. "When I heard about your chat with Ben Martin, I thought it would be a good idea to work a little wheeze on you—just to show you the folly of making rash promises."

Handforth looked so utterly startled that a fresh yell of laughter rang through the room.

"You surely don't think that Ben would take such an outrageous advantage of your offer, do you?" grinned Dorrie. "You surely don't believe that he would pile fifty of his brothers and sisters and cousins on you?"

"Well, I thought it was a bit thick!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was only a joke," said Ben, laughing. "I've only got two brothers, and they're away in Baliarat. And my cousins are so small that they couldn't have come, anyhow."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth, with untold relief. "Then—then who are all these young chaps and girls?"

"Just friends of mine!" grinned Ben. "In fact, some of them aren't even friends—they're pals that my friends have brought along."

"But I don't understand!" said Handforth dazedly.

"It was my wheeze," said Lord Dorrimore, with a chuckle. "I got hold of young Ben last night, after you had made your promise. He dodged off to Porepunkah first thing this morning, and he sent a few telegrams. That's why you found the crowds on the stations at Everton and Wangaratta and Euroa. We thought we would give you a bit of a shock, old son."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but they're all here, sir—in Melbourne!" protested Handforth. "I've got to provide for them."

"Rubbish!" laughed Dorrie. "It was my wheeze, and I'm payin' the piper. You can treat Ben if you like—he's your own pal—but I'm payin' for all the others. In fact, I've already arranged everything at the Heddingham Hotel, and I've also fixed up about seats for the Test match. They're not your guests at all—but mine."

And Lord Dorrimore, with the hotel manager and Ben, strolled out of the Common-room, leaving Edward Oswald Handforth feeling as light as air, while all the other juniors were going off into fresh bursts of merriment.

"We knew it all the time, Handy!" grinned Church. "But Dorrie——"

"You knew it?" ejaculated Handforth. "Why, you—you traitors! Why didn't you tell me?"

"We couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"Because Dorrie swore us to secrecy," said Mac. "We couldn't even give you a hint. I believe that Dorrie even induced Mr. Lee to take a hand in the game—but only a small one. Hard lines, Handy! However, it's over now, and so are your worries."

"By George, yes!" said Handforth fervently. "Thank goodness! Now I shall be able to enjoy the Test match!"

But it was many a long day before the Removites stopped chipping Handforth about his fifty Victorian "cobbers."

THE END.

(Jolly fine yarn that, eh, chums? Next week's story, entitled, "The Melbourne Test Match Triumph!" is just as good, so you want to make sure of reading it. Next Wednesday's issue will also contain three more of our magnificent Free Gifts—coloured portrait badges of White, Mead, and Ames. Look out for them, chums!)



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.



ELSIE BRIGHAM

YOU write to me so often—Elsie Brigham (Norwich)—that I think it's time you had a few words in reply. And here's your photograph on this page this week, too. In answer to your inquiries, (a) no, I don't like you writing to me in pencil; (b) it was not easy to get the Moor View girls into the Australian series, but they will be well to the fore when the boys get home again; and (c), I think your New Year resolutions are fine, but I am wondering if, by this time, you have abandoned them. New Year resolutions have a queer way of coming unstuck by about the 4th or 5th of January. And why make resolutions only on the first day of the New Year, anyhow? Any other day is just as good.

* * *

Quite a good idea of yours—Julius Herman (Tarkastad, South Africa)—about including Empire characters in the inter-House football teams. As soon as possible, Duncan and Hussi Kahn and Vandyke and Russell and Dodd and O'Grady will go into hard training, so that they can play some keen footer for their respective Houses before the season is over.

* * *

It speaks well for your enthusiasm—Jack Hewitt (Birmingham)—when it leads you to give two copies of the Old Paper away every week to boys and girls who have not yet been acquainted with it. You don't say how long you have been doing this good work, and I should be interested to know. It would also be gratifying to me if these new readers, so introduced, would drop me a line about my stories, and about the Old Paper in general. I'm rather curious to know whether they're thanking you for your trouble, or slanging you, Jack. Anyhow, you're doing good work, old man. Words are good, but deeds are better.

* * *

Here—Lionel Worth (Cardiff)—is the information you require. Augustus Hart is still at St. Frank's, occupying Study P in the West House Remove with Justin B. Farman and Owen major. The following nine boys are placed as follows: Somerton,

Ancient House Remove, Study G; Owen major, West House Remove, Study P; Owen minor, Ancient House Third; Conroy major, Ancient House Sixth; Conroy minor, East House Fourth, Study 17; Clifton, East House Fourth, Study 14; Farman, West House Remove, Study P; Hubbard, Ancient House Remove, Study B; Levi, West House Remove, Study O.

* * *

Sorry you were disappointed—George S. Hunnable (Mistley)—that the Green Triangle stories did not appear in the Old Paper. However, perhaps you are getting some consolation in the Blue Crusaders serial which is now running in these pages. You might drop me a line and let me know how you like it—or how you don't like it.

* * *

I'm glad to know—F. W. Minde (Dalston)—that you are one of the "never-too-old" brigade. You are practically a man, and you tell me that you read my St. Frank's stories aloud to two elderly folks every week. It gratifies me very much to know that my yarns give a little pleasure to young, middle-aged, and elderly alike. But I always say that the folks who read my yarns are youngsters, whatever their age. It's the spirit that counts, and there's no denying that to be young in spirit is a great thing.

* * *

If there is any general desire—Clarence V. Hopkins (Chard)—for another series introducing Andrew Sylvanus Noggs, the cheery old travelling showman, you can be quite certain that I shall put one on the stocks. Both the Editor and myself always do the best we can to meet the wishes of the general run of readers.

NEW READERS CAN START THIS FINE SERIAL NOW!

RIVALS OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!

by
EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.

The Plotters!

CURLY HANKIN, the rascal of the Blue Crusaders Reserves, was in the Wheatsheaf, in Bannington. Roger Parr and Maurice Brewer, his cronies, were with him. They were engaged in a game of snooker, and they did not take particular notice of a squat, square-shouldered man who sat on one of the lounges, smoking and watching. He was florid and clean-shaven, and there was something about his eyes which was not exactly pleasant.

"Well, I suppose we'd better be going," said Parr, after the game had finished. "Piecan always kicks up a fuss if we're late."

The man on the lounge got to his feet and approached the three reserves.

"Just a minute, boys," he said pleasantly. "You'll have a drink with me before you go, eh?"

Curly Hankin & Co. looked at the man curiously.

"We don't mind a drink," said Curly. "But we don't know you from Adam."

"My name is Burke—Peter Burke," said the other. "I'm the track manager of the Speedway."

"Oh!" said Curly & Co.

"I'm rather interested in one of your players—Carrington. I think his name is," said Mr. Burke. "He won a race on Saturday evening, and won it splendidly, too."

"Those fellows have all the luck!" said Curly Hankin enviously. "Fancy him winning fifty quid like that! And when I asked him to lend me a tenner he turned me down."

"He turned all of us down!" said Brewer, with a snort.

Mr. Burke's eyes glowed with a satisfaction that he found it difficult to conceal.

"Come and sit down, boys," he said invitingly. "I'm afraid Carrington is an obstinate sort of fellow. There's just a chance that you might be able to help me, and if you can help me I'll see that you don't lose over it."

They went to one of the lounges; drinks were brought, and for some half-hour they sat talking. Finally, Mr. Burke produced a number of crisp, rustling notes; they changed hands; and when Curly & Co. left the Wheatsheaf, in time to catch the last bus for Bellton, they were looking flushed and eager.

But they seemed to be in no hurry to take any action—whatever action might be expected of them—for when they got to St. Frank's they slipped into the smoking-room and listened

casually to the gossip of the players. They looked pleased when they heard that Rex Carrington was more or less at loggerheads with Mr. Piecombe.

"It was entirely Piecan's own fault," Dave Moran was saying. "It was sheer idiocy to place the Speedway out of bounds."

"Of course it was!" grunted Fatty. "Rex was right to resist it. We're not a lot of school kids. And with a chap like Rex, you've got to be pretty careful. He's so thundering headstrong."

"If Piecombe hadn't made any fuss everything would have been all right," said Ben Gillingham. "As it is, I wouldn't guarantee what'll happen. But I *do* know that if we

Forbidden to have anything more to do with dirt track racing, this doesn't deter Rex Carrington from having another run round "the cinders." His defiance proves his undoing, however, for he comes a cropper—in more than one sense!

lose Rex we shall be in Queer Street. We've got some hard games ahead of us, and Rex is in tip-top form just now. It would be a tragedy if he went off colour."

Curly & Co., in their corner, exchanged glances.

"Everything's all right," murmured Curly. "We won't do anything to-night. Perhaps we shall get a chance of making a move to-morrow."

It was evidently a very insidious game that Mr. Peter Burke had set afoot. Nothing drastic—nothing sensational. The work that was expected of Curly & Co. was evidently of a single order.

Their chance came next day, after the players had put in some brisk practice during the morning. Rex Carrington strolled off on his own and stood in the big gateway, looking thoughtfully up the road towards the Speedway.

"Thinking of the money that you might earn as a track-racer?" asked Curly Hankin casually, as he came up with Brewer and Parr.

Rex Carrington grunted.

"I hear you won a fifty-pound prize on Saturday evening," went on Curly.

"Oh, go away!" said Rex. "I am not going to lend you any money——"

"I'm not asking for any!" snapped Curly. "I'm surprised at you, Carrington. With the chance to earn so much money, what's the idea of sticking to this club? You can't get more than eight pounds a week at the very most—even being a star player. And I understand that these Speedway racers can earn as much as a hundred pounds a week—and sometimes two hundred pounds."

"I know that!" growled Rex.

"And according to what you did on

Saturday night, you're a certain champion," said Hankin, with a sigh. "Wish I had the chance. It isn't everybody who can earn money at that rate."

"Well, I'm not going to desert the club—just when it needs me."

Hankin and Brewer and Parr laughed heartily.

"Do you think the club cares a toss about you?" jeered Curly. "Why, if you played badly for a game or two you'd get pushed into the reserves. A fat lot the club cares about you. I don't call that loyalty—it's idiocy!"

"If you're calling me an idiot, Hankin, I shall be very pleased to punch your head!" said Rex, glaring. "I've told Piecan that I'm not deserting the club, and I'll keep my word."

Curly shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you're afraid of the track," he sneered. "Lots of fellows can ride perfectly, but they're afraid of the spills. I thought you were made of sterner stuff."

"Confound you——"

"Or perhaps you're funky because Piecan has put the Speedway out of bounds?" said Hankin contemptuously. "What do you think of him, you two fellows? Shivering in his shoes because Piecan has told him to be a good little boy. It's more than he dare do to set foot in that Speedway again."

Rex was foolish, perhaps, to take any notice of this banter; but he was in just the mood to swallow it. Mr. Burke was a clever man, for it was he who had suggested this mode of attack.

"You infernal idiots!" shouted Rex hotly. "If you think I'm afraid of going into that Speedway, I'll soon show you——"

"Carrington!"

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. Piecan forbids Rex to do any such thing, fearing that the centre-forward will crock himself, but Rex defies him, and enters for a race. He wins—and his clever riding considerably impresses

PETER BURKE, manager of the Speedway. Burke, indeed, asks Rex to chuck up football and become a dirt-track rider. Rex angrily refuses—he's not a traitor to the Blues! The Speedway manager is not deterred, however; he's determined to get Rex by hook or by crook! Later that day Piecan lectures Rex for defying his orders, and finishes up by announcing that from then onwards the Speedway is out of bounds for all the players!

(Now read on.)

Mr. Piecombe came striding up, his brow black. Rex looked at him rebelliously.

"Did I hear you say, Carrington, that you are going into the Speedway?" demanded the manager. "Have I not told you that the dirt track is out of bounds? I forbid you to go near the place."

"And what if I do?" asked Rex tartly. "Are you going to put me into the reserves? What about the promotion we're after? Do you think the team can do without me, sir?"

He turned on his heel angrily and strode off, afraid to say any more lest he should say too much.

And that very afternoon, in direct consequence of what had just happened, Rex Carrington not only entered the Speedway, but he persuaded Smiling Billy Ross to lend him his mount, so that he could take a run round the track.

Rex was not only feeling reckless, but he was exceedingly rebellious, too!

Treachery!

IT was not very surprising, perhaps, that in these circumstances Rex Carrington should come a cropper.

It was not a serious cropper. Rex rode faster than he should have done, and during one of his broadsides, skidding wildly round a curve, he failed to get his roaring machine into control again. He crashed over, rolled headlong, and when he got up he was limping.

"Hurt yourself, old man?" asked Billy Ross, coming up.

"No, it's nothing," said Rex, screwing up his face.

Upon examination Rex found that he had nipped his foot slightly. It had probably caught between a part of the machine and the ground. His ankle seemed to be all right, however, and he made light of the injury.

In fact, when he took his departure, he was feeling a little happier—since his anger had cooled off. His foot pained him somewhat, and he was inclined to limp, although he tried hard to conceal his hurt, which, rather to his dismay, was on his shooting foot. He hoped against hope that nothing would develop by the morrow. There was a big game on—against Stratton Rovers.

Mr. Peter Burke had seen the incident, and that evening, by appointment, he met Curly Hankin & Co.

"I don't think the injury was anything much," he said. "But you can never tell. Anyhow, his right foot is a bit groggy, and if he should fail to score any goals to-morrow Mr. Piecombe will put two and two together, and there'll probably be a row."

"Your game is to make Carrington break with the Blues, isn't it?" asked Curly, with a grin.

"Never mind what my game is," frowned Mr. Burke. "I'm paying you to do as I tell you—and I expect you to be careful. Make sure that your manager hears of this mishap

of Carrington's. And there's something else, too."

They remained talking for some time, after which Burke took his departure. Later on, when Curly & Co. were standing in the Stronghold, they discussed Rex's ride round the track and his injury—in Mr. Piecombe's hearing.

Consequently, Rex found himself accosted by the manager shortly afterwards.

"Is it true, Carrington, that you were riding a motor-cycle round the Speedway to-day?" demanded Mr. Piecombe angrily.

"Who told you, sir?"

"Never mind who told me," said the manager. "Do you admit that you—"

"I don't admit anything, sir," broke in Rex. "I maintain that I can do as I like in my spare time."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Piecombe. "You are—er—most difficult to deal with, Carrington. Good gracious, you are limping! You have injured yourself! Did I not warn you what would happen if you persisted in this defiant attitude?"

"I'm all right, sir—and I'm fit to play to-morrow."

"You are taking advantage of me, Carrington," said Mr. Piecombe coldly. "You know that the club cannot do without your services, and you are presuming upon that fact. My opinion of you is not—er—enhanced."

Mr. Piecombe strolled off, and the gap had widened considerably. Little did Rex or the manager dream that they were now being made the victims of treachery. For without the activities of Curly Hankin & Co.—instigated by Mr. Peter Burke—the chances were that Rex Carrington and Mr. Piecombe would have forgotten their little differences.

Smart, the trainer, questioned Rex about his injured foot during the evening, but Rex refused to let "Growser" even look at his foot. Rex had found that there was a bruise on it, and he did not like to admit that he had hurt himself. He was, in fact, feeling slightly guilty. Mr. Piecombe had warned him that such an accident might occur, and he was angry with himself for having been so careless.

Next day, however, much to his satisfaction, he was feeling a great deal better, and he was convinced that that little bruise would make no difference to his shooting abilities.

But Rex did not know that Curly Hankin, shortly before the match, had made a private visit to his—Rex's—locker. It only took Curly a moment to "monkey" with the centre-forward's right boot.

Later on, when Rex pulled that boot on and felt a sharp little pain in his toe, he naturally assumed that it was the bruise which affected him. Having laced his boots up, he paced up and down once or twice, and he was really and truly scared when he found the pain to be acute.

"Good glory!" came Fatty Fowkes' voice from the rear. "You're limping, Rex! You're crocked!"

"It's nothing!" said Rex hastily.

"It must be something—or you wouldn't limp about like a cripple," said the big goalie. "Why didn't you let Growser have a look at your foot yesterday?"

"I can't understand it," said Rex, frowning. "There's nothing much the matter with my toe—it wasn't hurting at all this morning. For goodness' sake keep quiet, Fatty. It's nothing. I shall be all right as soon as I'm on the field."

"I hope so!" said Fatty fervently.

Rex soon found that it was not all right when he got on to the field. A big crowd had turned up for the match—the Stronghold being three parts full. This was extra-

of it, for a pain shot through his foot like the sear of a red-hot iron; and his kick, instead of being vigorous, as usual, was feeble. Fortunately, nobody noticed much, for it was assumed that he had merely lost his balance for a moment.

Five minutes later, after the Rovers had done some hard pressing, Tich Harborough secured the leather, and he went streaking up the touchline in one of his glorious runs.

Over came the ball—in a truly splendid pass—and at the same moment there was a mix-up between the Stratton backs. Andy Tait and Penniworth were out of position, but Rex found the ball dropping at his foot—and he was well on-side.



The ball fell at Rex Carrington's feet. He was only a few yards from the goal, and he had only the goalie to beat. He steadied himself; he shot—and the ball rolled tamely outside the post!

Rex, the sharpshooter, had failed to score what should have been a certain goal!

ordinarily good, considering that it was a mid-week match; but Stratton Rovers had a great name, and a hard game was expected.

Amid great enthusiasm, the whistle blew, and the match started. In the very first minute, Rex Carrington felt that he was indeed crooked. Every time he put his foot to the ground, he winced. And although he could kick well with his left foot, even this was difficult, since his right foot was paining him continuously, and it was difficult for him to steady himself.

In the grandstand, Mr. Peter Burke was watching, and Mr. Peter Burke was looking very contented.

The ball came Rex's way, and he snapped it up with all his old dash—having forgotten his pain for the moment—but when he attempted to kick, he was acutely reminded

of it, for a pain shot through his foot like the sear of a red-hot iron; and his kick, instead of being vigorous, as usual, was feeble. Fortunately, nobody noticed much, for it was assumed that he had merely lost his balance for a moment.

Forgetting everything, Rex steadied himself and kicked. Then he gasped aloud, sagged sideways, and collapsed—and the ball, slewing feebly away, rolled tamely over the goal-line, well clear of the post!

"Oh!" groaned the crowd.

It had been a gift goal—and any novice might have scored. But Rex, the sharpshooter, had failed!

The Blue Crusaders, with Rex Carrington as a passenger, were face to face—with trouble!

The Crook!

MR. ULYSSES PIECOMBE turned his gaunt face towards Lionel Corcoran, and he was looking bitter and angry.

"You see?" he said fiercely. "Was I not justified in my fears?"

Corcoran had no reply for the moment. For he, too, had seen the pitiful exhibition on Rex Carrington's part. The game between the Blue Crusaders and Stratton Rovers was in full swing and the crowds were silent with disappointment because Rex had failed to score when he had had an absolute "sitter." It was inexplicable. It was unaccountable. As a rule, Rex was amazingly sure-footed, and when he kicked, he kicked true.

But this time he had made a very feeble shot, and the Stratton goalkeeper had not even been troubled, since the ball had tamely rolled over the line, beyond the post.

"Was I not right, Corcoran?" insisted Mr. Piecombe.

"I suppose you were, sir," admitted the schoolboy owner of the Blue Crusaders. "But even Rex isn't a machine. He can't score every time."

"I am ready to admit the truth of your assertion, Corcoran, but that is merely not here nor there," replied Mr. Piecombe, with some asperity. "You know perfectly well that young Harborough's pass was a perfect one. Carrington failed to score because his right foot is injured. And he came by that injury on the dirt track—in direct—er—defiance of my orders."

"Well, perhaps he'll make up for it now," said Lionel hopefully.

But there was not much confidence in his voice; for, looking at Rex Carrington, he could not fail to see that the Blue's centre-forward was very much of a passenger. He was not limping badly, but whenever the ball came his way, and he attempted to kick, his efforts were clumsy and feeble. His shots were inaccurate, weak, ill-timed.

To make matters worse, the Rovers centre-forward broke away a few minutes later, after some keen play in mid-field. The mighty Ben Gillingham was after him, but Ben was just a shade too late. From an acute angle, the Stratton man sent in a hot shot which had Fatty Fowkes nearly beaten.

But with a roar, and a mighty leap, the sixteen-stone goalie flung himself outwards and sideways, and he just got his fingers to the leather in the nick of time. Everybody expected the ball to go over the net, and now a mighty yell went up.

"Oh, well saved!"

"Good old fatty!"

The cheers were premature, however. The ball just touched the underside of the cross-bar, and rebounded into play. In a flash one of the other Stratton forwards was on it, and although Fatty made a desperate grab the leather was back-heeled smartly into the net.

It was a goal!

"We shall lose this game," said Mr. Piecombe sourly.

"Cheer up, sir," protested Lionel Corcoran. "The first half isn't over yet."

"We are one down, and Carrington is absolutely useless on the field," retorted Mr. Piecombe. "Good gracious! It will be a serious blow for the club if Carrington fails us during this crucial period."

Before half-time the Crusaders pressed hard more than once, but with Rex right off his form, none of the movements came to anything. Luckily for the Blues, the halves—Keane, Dave Moran, and Hales—were playing a great game, and the Rovers were not allowed to take the offensive again. If Rex had been playing in anything like his true form, the Blues would undoubtedly have scored two or three times.

As it was, the whistle blew for half-time with the home team one down.

"What's the matter with you, Rex, old man?" asked Fatty Fowkes concernedly, as he overtook the centre-forward on his way to the dressing-room. "You're absolutely off colour."

"Don't I know it?" said Rex miserably.

"I haven't got much to boast about, either," said Fatty. "By glory! If I'd only tipped the ball a little more, it would have gone over the bar, and I'm not afraid of corner kicks!"

"It's no good crying over spilt milk, Fatty," said Dave Moran. "Let's buck up in the second half, and take the lead."

"That's meant for me, I suppose?" asked Rex.

"It's meant for all of us," replied Dave.

In the dressing-room, Rex lost no time in taking his right boot off. He was about to put it on the floor without another thought when he fancied he saw something move inside the boot. He plunged his hand inside, and then whistled.

"Great Scott!" he muttered, staring.

He was looking at something in his palm—a small square of india-rubber, apparently cut from a pencil eraser. He turned it over, and it seemed to him that there was a trace of glue on one side.

The thing seemed so pointless to him. He pressed it absent-mindedly between his fingers, and then uttered a sharp ejaculation. For something had pricked him.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" he said tensely.

Upon closer examination, he found that there was a tiny needle of some kind embedded in the rubber. It was not apparent at first sight—or even when feeling the piece of rubber. Only when pressure was applied did the needle-point manifest itself.

And in a flash Rex Carrington understood.

The little piece of rubber had been deliberately glued into the toe of his boot!

(There's been foul play here, obviously; and it's pretty certain that Burke, the Speedway manager, is responsible for it. Look out for some more startling developments in next week's stirring instalment, chums!)

ENGLAND'S SELECTED!

Our Special Contributor tells N.L. readers some interesting facts about the three famous players who form the subjects of this week's wonderful Free Gifts.

MAURICE LEYLAND

THE next best thing to being in a Test match team is to be twelfth man, and the player who has occupied that position for England most during the present series of games is the Yorkshire left-hander—Maurice Leyland. But though twelfth man has been his lot, there is no doubt that he would have been a worthy player in the team itself, and there is also very little doubt that England will call on Maurice Leyland quite a lot in the future. He is one of our younger hopes, being now only 28 years of age.

In the county of many acres they speak of him as the natural successor of Roy Kilner, and in many respects Leyland reminds us of that great Yorkshireman, whose career came to such a sudden end.

Leyland has cricket blood in his veins, and of all the modern players there is none who was showing such prowess at such an early age. Though born at Harrogate, Maurice went to Lancashire as a lad because his father was then the professional to the Moorside club, near Oldham. And the boy and the father played together in that Central Lancashire League team—where the cricket is really very good—when the boy was still in knickerbockers—and only thirteen years of age.

When the family returned to Harrogate the Yorkshire county committee began to take an interest in Maurice, and he played for the second eleven of the county ere he was twenty years of age. His baptism in first-class cricket came in 1920. Since then he has made rapid strides in the all-round sense. His left arm slow deliveries are

worrying. As a batsman he is sound as well as forceful, and has knocked up 247 for Yorkshire. He is also great in the long field, and his brilliant work here has often gained great applause.



ALFRED PERCY FREEMAN

If you talked about Alfred Percy Freeman to the average cricketer he would probably wonder to whom you were referring. But if you said "Tich" Freeman, then every cricketer—and every cricket follower—would know that the little man of Kent was the subject. He is "Tich" to everybody.

It would be difficult to find a more striking example of what can be accomplished by the will to win through than that provided by the Kent and England bowler. He stands only five feet five, and his hand is so little that you doubt its capacity to hold a full-sized cricket ball.

Then consider his cricket experience. For some time previous to the war he was on the ground staff of Kent, but could get no higher than the second eleven. Well do I recall his first game for Kent's premier side. It was against Surrey at the Oval, just after the war started.

When Freeman went on to bowl the onlookers laughed; the very idea of a little fellow like that getting out Surrey's best batsmen. Well, Freeman didn't get them out. War service prevented him from progressing further just then, and in 1919, when he was over thirty years of age, he had practically to start again. Yet last season this little fellow broke all previous records for the number of victims gained by one bowler in one season. His bag was 304. What a record; what a triumph!

His approach to the wicket is little more than a walk. His right hand deliveries seem the simplest thing in the world. But there is guile in every one of them. The secret is in the deceptive flight, and the cunningly concealed break.

GEORGE GEARY

A considerable amount of pluck is required, as well as implicit faith in the opinion of the experts, to send a bowler to



ENGLAND'S SELECTED!

(Continued from page 43)

Australia before he has sent down a ball following a serious operation to his bowling elbow.

Many people thought that the England team selectors were making a mistake in taking the risk with George Gentry. But it is a risk which has proved well worth while. The bad elbow has not troubled him, and in the second Test match especially he came to the rescue of England at a time when there was a distinct possibility of the bowling being collated.

Gentry is Leicestershire born, of course, and he plays for Leicester, but there was a time when he seemed likely to be lost

to the County. This was soon after the war, when he could not get going in county cricket with success. So he went to Nelson, and played for them in Lancashire League cricket. Here, however, it soon became evident that his bowling prowess had returned and he went back to play for Leicester and for England.

Playing the game right from his early school days, Gentry has some claims to be an all-rounder. His bowling is of the right-hand medium to fast variety, and he is almost a Tate off the pitch. He can bat more than a bit. Playing against Kent in 1925 he went in last when the rest of the Leicester batsmen had been dismissed for a small score and knocked up his first century. That showed the fighting spirit. It was further illustrated against the Australians at Leeds in 1926 when he helped Macaulay to put on 108 for the ninth wicket, and saved England having to follow on. He is also a great slip fielder.



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