THE DEMON CRICKETER!

By

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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7.7.38

BOMBARDED BY THE STARS!

DID you know that every year as many "bombs" fall from the stars on to the earth as were dropped by all the bombing 'planes during the Great War? They come from Outer Space, but their exact origin is something which still baffles scientists. They can only tell us what these meteorites are made of, and what happens to them when they strike the belt of air around the earth.

Maybe, on a fine night, you have seen what looks like a fiery star suddenly blaze across the sky. That is a shooting star, similar to the meteorites which sometimes hurtle into the earth's crust, only much bigger.

Hurtling Through Space.

Just what causes these astral bodies to flare across the firmament? This is the explanation: every now and again, a mass of matter breaks away from a star or planet and goes plunging through space, or else a grain of dust becomes electrically charged, and attracts billions of other particles to it, forming a big chunk of matter.

In either case, this mass of matter starts flying through space, attracted by the pull of gravity from one of the bigger stars or planets. Once in a while, it is the pull of the earth's gravity which controls the direction of the hurtling mass' flight—and then the chunk of rock, travelling at a speed that would make a Schneider Trophy 'plane look silly, rips towards our world.

While in space, where there is no air, the meteor encounters little friction. But as soon as it strikes the belt of air around the earth, friction against the air through which it is passing sets up tremendous heat, and the whole block becomes incandescent, melting and burning.

It is in that fiery stage that we see the meteor as a shooting star. More often than not, the meteor is burned up to gases by its own heat before it lands; sometimes, a chunk comes smashing into the earth's crust.

Harder Than Steel!

Meteorites which reach the earth have been examined by scientists, and have been found to be so hard that even steel cannot cut them. They are very valuable, and the South African Government, which claims all meteors found in South Africa, recently refused over £20,000 per ton for one big specimen!

South Africa, for some reason, is more frequently bombarded with meteors than any other country. All the meteors found are preserved as national treasures, and may not be exported. An explorer who tried to steal one, and ship it away to America, was fined heavily a few years back for his crime.

Meteors have been known since men first walked the earth. The histories of ancient tribes tell us that people used to think them a sign from the gods of some great event that was coming. The Eskimos and Red Indians of North America, on the other hand, were more practical—they tried to chip bits off the "star-bombs" to fashion super-tough axe-heads and hunting-knives.

The biggest meteor that ever fell—or at least, the biggest we know about—landed in Russia, and devastated an area as big as the South of England. Another, in Arizona, carved out a crater big enough to bury every trans-atlantic liner on the high seas, and there are marks in the rocks all round it to show that, had it fallen on a big city like London, the capital of the British Empire would have been wiped out of existence in a split second.

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Told by NIPPER of the Remove.

Meet JERRY DODD, the St. Frank's newcomer from "down under"! Jerry's a great fellow and a demon at cricket—but the game is barred to him! Why? Read this great yarn of mystery, sport, fun and adventure.

CHAPTER 1.
The Coming of Jerry Dodd!

"CHOCOLATES!" exclaimed Handforth scornfully. "Not for me, thanks! I never want to see another chocolate as long as I live!"

"Same here!" said Church, nodding.

Fatty Little grinned.

"All right—all the more for me!" he said cheerfully.

He withdrew the box of chocolates he had offered to Handforth & Co., who were leaning idly against the doorway of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. It was a fine summer afternoon, and a half-holiday.

Fatty Little proceeded to partake of his chocolates, although not very long since he had demolished an excessive dinner. By the way he was eating, one might have judged that he had tasted nothing for days.

"What's the idea of refusing chocolates?" he asked, with his mouth full. "It's the first time I've known anybody to do anything like that!"

"I was poisoned by a chocolate!" replied Handforth grimly.

Fatty glared.

"These aren't poisoned!" he said indignantly.

"Perhaps not; but I've lost my appetite for chocolates!" replied Handforth. "The very sight of 'em makes me feel bad. Go away and guzzle them somewhere else."

"Oh, I forgot that!" said Fatty Little. "By chutney! You did have a narrow squeak a week or so ago, Handy, now I come to remember it. Just because of eating one chocolate, too! It's

a good thing I wasn't there—I should have eaten a dozen!"

Handforth and Church and McClure looked rather serious. They were thinking of when they had been marked down by Ivan Grezzi, one of the chief members of the Tagossa—the grim Mordanian secret society which Nelson Lee and the St. Frank's boys had been instrumental in wrecking during their recent trip to the Balkans.

But that was all over now, and there was no further danger. The fellows were just settling down to the regular routine of school work and pleasure.

Personally, I meant to devote myself a great deal to cricket this term. Things had been going rather badly with the Remove eleven, and every match, so far, had been lost. But this was hardly to be wondered at, considering that all the best cricketers had been absent from the school.

But now I was determined to put a different complexion on matters. I told the juniors that I should require them to practise for all they were worth during their spare time. The honour of the junior eleven was at stake, and we could not afford to suffer any further defeats.

At the moment when Handforth & Co. were lounging on the steps, I was busy on Little Side. There was no match on this afternoon, but we were hard at practice. Handforth would be required a little later on, after one or two other fellows had had their turn at the wickets.

"Yes, it's a good thing we didn't peg out after eating those giddy chocolates!" said Handforth thoughtfully. "It was a jolly near thing. Why, what the dickens—— My only hat!"

Handforth broke off and stared in astonishment towards the gateway. Church and McClure stared, too, for at that moment a chestnut pony had come dashing into the Triangle at full speed. Upon its back was seated a youngster, who was hatless, and attired in riding breeches, leather leggings, and a dark red flannel shirt. The latter was open at the neck, and tastefully adorned with a carelessly knotted scarf. He certainly looked quite out of place in the Triangle at St. Frank's.

Handforth & Co. stared in wonder. The pony was a beauty. Not particularly small, but graceful in all its limbs—a fine, active animal. The rider uttered a sharp word, and the pony instantly came to a standstill, swishing his tail impatiently, and pawing once or twice with his front hoofs. The rider looked round him with apparent interest, unhooked a wide-brimmed soft hat from the peak of the saddle, and slung it carelessly on the back of his head.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, his face hardening. "Of all the nerve! Who does this silly fathead think he is?"

"Better go and ask him!" said Church.

"By George, I will!"

Handforth strode forward, looking very grim and determined. One might have supposed that the whole of St. Frank's belonged to him, and that it was his duty to go forward and demand explanations on the spot. But this was merely one of Handforth's little ways; he was always giving himself tasks which had nothing whatever to do with him.

Other fellows were approaching the newcomer also. It was obvious at a glance that neither the animal nor the rider were English bred. They reminded one of sunbaked plains and wide, open spaces, and there was a Colonial touch about the rider's appearance which could not be overlooked.

The very way he straddled the pony proved that he was accustomed to riding almost since he had been able to walk. His face was open and cheerful—not exactly handsome, but, nevertheless, good-looking. His mouth was slightly too large, but it possessed a certain upward twist at the corners which told of good nature and humour.

Handforth approached and stared up at the rider somewhat aggressively. He

found himself looking into a sunburnt face, where two twinkling blue eyes were set, and where a perfect set of teeth were revealed in a cheerful smile. From beneath the wide-brimmed hat a number of curly wisps of dark-brown hair were escaping.

"Who the dickens do you think you are?" demanded Handforth bluntly.

"Jerry Dodd!" replied the new arrival promptly.

"Eh?"

"You asked for my name, I believe?" said the other. "It's Jerry Dodd!"

Handforth sniffed.

"Well, you're welcome to a name like that!" he said witheringly. "Where do you come from?"

"New South Wales, Australia!"

"If you're trying to pull my leg, you'll jolly soon find yourself off that pony and counting a collection of stars!" said Handforth grimly. "So you come from Australia, do you?"

"Sure!"

"And what are you doing here?"

"Why, I've arrived," replied Jerry Dodd.

"What do you mean—you've arrived?"

"I reckon the words are plain enough," said Jerry Dodd. "And perhaps you will give me a little information while you're about it. Which is the Ancient House?"

"This one," put in Church, pointing.

"Say, that's good—I was hoping for that," said the new arrival, nodding. "I reckon this house is a lot better than the other one across the square. There's no reason why I shouldn't be fairly comfortable."

Handforth stared.

"Comfortable!" he repeated. "What the dickens are you getting at?"

Jerry Dodd removed his hat, and grinned.

"I may not look it, but I've come here to learn things," he said. "I reckon I'd better explain at once that I didn't want to come—so don't blame me. But, now that I'm here, I'll make the best of it."

"Well, I'm hanged!" muttered Fullwood, who had strolled up with his two chums.

"You'll make the best of it!" repeated Handforth. "Why, you cheeky rotter, are you trying to make out that you are a new kid—that you're coming into the Ancient House as one of us?"

Jerry Dodd nodded.

"I apologise!" he said calmly. "I didn't think you were so smart—you've guessed it the first time!"

"But—but it's absurd!" exclaimed Church. "Whoever heard of a new chap arriving on horseback, and dressed up in togs like that?"

"Perhaps it's unusual; but I'm rather unusual, too!" said Jerry Dodd, slipping down from the saddle, and standing before the juniors. "Well, chums, aren't you going to shake hands? I reckon we're going to be together a good deal in future, and we might as well start well. Shake!"

He held out a rather big fist to Handforth, and the latter took it rather dazedly.

"You—you ass!" he said. "You're spoofing, aren't you?"

"I don't like to disturb your peace of mind, but I'm not," replied Jerry Dodd. "It's dead right, chum. I'm Jerry Dodd, and I've arrived at St. Frank's to stay for a whole piece! My dad reckons that I shall go up to Oxford later on; but I reckon—— But that doesn't matter!"

Handforth hardly knew what to say. It was one of his greatest delights to get hold of a new kid and "put him through his paces," as Handforth termed it. But he didn't quite know how to manage this newcomer. He couldn't very well see how he could put Jerry Dodd through any paces.

But he certainly was not going to let the new boy escape now.

"Hold on!" he said grimly. "You're a new kid, and you're coming into the Ancient House?"

"You've got it, chum!"

"I'm not your chum, and if you say that again I'll biff you!" roared Handforth—not because he objected to the term, but because he wished to show his authority. "Which Form are you going into?"

"Some blamed place they call the Remove," replied Jerry Dodd.

"My hat!"

"So he's for the Remove, eh?"

"It's the first time I've heard it called that!" snorted Handforth. "A blamed place, eh? I'm going to punch your nose for referring to the Remove in such a way, you new fathead!"

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"There's no need to get excited——" he began.

"Who's excited?" bellowed Handforth, rolling up his sleeves. "I'll soon show you whether——"

"Say, Bud, headrs—headrs!" said the new boy quickly.

The pony pricked up its ears on the instant, and it evidently understood precisely what this curious term meant. For, without any delay, he put his head down, pranced round for a moment, and butted Handforth squarely in the back. Then he proceeded to push Handforth before him in quite a surprising way. Whichever way the unfortunate Edward Oswald tried to dodge, the pony followed. The sight was so comical that the onlookers—who were now fairly numerous—roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Call him off!" roared Handforth desperately. "You—you rotter, I'll smash you! Hi, what the thunder——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's efforts to escape the pony were futile. As fast as Handforth went round the Triangle, Bud followed him, with his head still down, butting Handforth in the back. And Jerry Dodd stood looking on with his face wreathed in smiles.

"Right-ho, Bud!" he sang out suddenly.

The pony ceased his efforts at once, and came trotting back to Jerry Dodd's side, where it stood quite passive and obedient. Everybody regarded the performance with wonder and admiration—everybody, that is, with the sole exception of Handforth.

"By Jingo!" said McClure. "That's a ripping pony!"

"Rather!"

"And doesn't it understand this new chap, too?"

"I reckon we're the best of pals—real good chums!" said Jerry Dodd. "Say, we've known one another since I was ten years old, and what Bud doesn't know in the trick line isn't worth learning."

"And you've brought him right over from Australia?" asked Reginald Pitt, in surprise.

"Sure thing, chum."

"But you can't keep that pony here, you ass!" said Pitt good-naturedly. "A junior isn't allowed to have a pet of that kind."

Jerry Dodd smiled.

"If Bud doesn't stop, I don't," he said coolly. "I don't reckon we're going to be parted again. It was bad enough when he came over on the boat before me. Bud stays at St. Frank's. I guess it's all arranged."

Before anybody could ask any questions, Handforth came up, dusty, hot, and red with exertion and indignation.

"What do you mean by that?" he bellowed.

"No offence; only just a little joke," said Jerry Dodd calmly. "Say, you're not the sort to make a fuss. I reckon we'll be chums within a day or two—or right now, if you like. What do you say?"

Handforth was contemplating assault on the spot, but the new boy's calm and cheerful manner completely disarmed him, and Handforth's sense of humour had permitted him to see the comical side of the incident.

"Well, you're a corker!" he said bluntly. "It's not my way to squabble, so here's my paw!"

They shook hands again, and Fullwood sniffed.

"And have we got to put up with this low-down bounder?" he asked, addressing everybody in general. "By gad! What a come-down for St. Frank's! I thought the school was goin' to the dogs, an' now I'm bally well sure of it!"

"Disgraceful!" said Gulliver.

"I don't see why we should stand it," added Bell.

Fullwood & Co. were all there, and the Co. dutifully echoed the sentiments of their leader. Ralph Leslie Fullwood was always keen upon seizing an opportunity to be unpleasant. It seemed that Fullwood only really enjoyed himself when he was saying or doing something nasty.

"Shut up, you cad!" said Pitt, turning.

"I don't see why I should shut up! I've got a right to my opinion!" retorted Fullwood sourly. "Anybody can see that this chap isn't our sort. I'm going to make a protest about him being sent to St. Frank's!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bell.

"A rough cad like this never ought to be admitted," added Gulliver.

Jerry Dodd flushed slightly, and looked round.

"Say, chums, do you all agree to that?" he asked quietly. "Aren't I welcome here?"

Pitt clapped him on the shoulder.

"My dear chap, as welcome as flowers in May!" he replied. "You mustn't take any notice of these snobs. We'd like to get rid of 'em, but we can't."

Fullwood scowled.

"Who told you to interfere?" he demanded hotly.

Reginald Pitt's eyes flashed.

"And who told you to insult this new chap?" he retorted. "For two pins I'd knock you down. But this new chap has got more sense than to take any notice of you."

Jerry Dodd smiled again.

"Thanks!" he said. "I don't reckon to stay where I'm not wanted."

"Well, you're not wanted here!" snarled Fullwood. "These other chaps can say what they like, but I'm against you. Understand? This is a school for gentlemen!"

"You really surprise me!" said Jerry Dodd smoothly. "May I inquire how you happened to get in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good for you, Doddy!"

Fullwood glared.

"Did you hear that?" he shouted thickly. "This—this new cad has had the nerve to insult me!"

"Well, you've only got what you asked for!" said Handforth.

"He won't remain at St. Frank's if I can help it!" shouted Fullwood fiercely. "A low, uncouth son of a Colonial backwoodsman, who probably can't write his own rotten name, or put two figures together! If chaps of this sort come to St. Frank's, it's about time ——"

Jerry Dodd's eyes were flashing, and he turned to the pony.

"Catch him, Bud, old son—catch him good!"

The pony obeyed instantly. Fullwood had an idea that he was going to be treated as Handforth had been treated, and he dodged. But it was not of much use attempting to dodge the active Bud.

The pony rushed after him and caught him within a few yards. But he acted very differently now. Instead of harmlessly pushing the junior in the back, he opened his mouth and caught the collar of Fullwood's jacket between his teeth. The teeth came together firmly, and Fullwood was held as in a vice, quite unhurt, but thoroughly scared. He wriggled and twisted and struggled, but it was no good.

In spite of his efforts the pony half pushed, half dragged him across the Triangle to his master's side. Fullwood yelled for all he was worth, but nobody took any notice of his appeals for help. He deserved what he was getting, and all the juniors knew that he was not harmed. They were far more interested in the pony than in Fullwood.

"Good boy, Bud!" said Jerry Dodd.

"Now, Fullwood—I think that's your name—you've got to apologise!"

Fullwood, finding that he was unhurt, began to calm down.

"Apologise!" he roared. "What for?"

"For insulting the new kid, of course," said Handforth.

"No, not for insulting me," said Jerry Dodd quietly. "But for insulting my dad. I don't stand for that!"

"Lemme go!" snarled Fullwood. "Call this rotten pony away! If you don't, I'll kick!"

"Go ahead!" said the new boy calmly. "I reckon you'll find that Bud can kick one better every time. He doesn't release you until you've apologised."

"You—you new cad!" gasped Fullwood. "I won't—I won't!"

"Take him round, Bud," said Jerry Dodd softly.

The pony trotted forward, and Fullwood trotted with him. That grip upon his collar was like a vice. And as the pony trotted, he gained speed. Fullwood had to accommodate his own pace to that of his captor. Round the Triangle the pair went, until Bud came to a halt in front of his master again. Fullwood was nearly exhausted.

"Still of the same opinion?" asked the new boy.

"I—I apologise!" snarled Fullwood. "But, by gad, I'll make you pay for this before long, you Australian——"

He pulled himself up, realising that he was only making matters worse. But he had been compelled to apologise in public, although it was quite obvious that he did not actually mean it.

"Release him, Bud!" said Jerry Dodd easily.

The pony was certainly well trained; it seemed to know every word that his master said. It opened its mouth and allowed Fullwood to go free, then trotted quietly round and stood behind Jerry Dodd. The latter leapt lightly into the saddle and grinned.

"See you all again later!" he said cheerfully.

He said one word to the pony, and they both disappeared out of the Triangle into the street, going towards the stables at the rear.

Reginald Pitt took a deep breath.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he exclaimed. "I reckon he's about the queerest new chap we ever had—and a good sort, too!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Headmaster's Decision!

JERRY DODD had created quite an impression.

Unfortunately I had not witnessed his arrival, or the arrival of Bud, the amazing pony. But all the details of the incident were fully described to me by Pitt and several others. And, although I had not seen Jerry Dodd yet, I came to the conclusion that he was made of the right sort of stuff.

And while we were talking about Master Dodd, Dr. Malcolm Stafford was seated in his study, thoughtfully drumming his fingers upon his blotting-pad. The Head of St. Frank's was deep in thought.

Then the door opened, and Nelson Lee, the Housemaster detective, appeared.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I just want a few words with you, if you don't mind," said the Head. "Sit down—sit down! The subject of my chat will be the new boy who has arrived at St. Frank's this afternoon."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I was fortunately able to witness the youngster's entry into the Triangle," he said. "I didn't interfere, because I thought it better to let the boy meet some of the juniors alone. He seems to be quite an original character."

The Head frowned in a perplexed way.

"You are certainly right there, Mr.

Lee," he agreed. "This boy's name is Dodd—Jerrold Dodd, and he is the son of a very rich Australian sheep-farmer. I think that Mr. Dodd possesses one of the largest ranches in New South Wales. But I fancy the boy has had very little schooling. He has lived an open-air life on his father's ranch. I suppose you know about the pony? Mr. Dodd wrote me that the boy positively refused to come to England without the pony. Nothing would appease him, and at last his father was forced to agree. And here we have the boy—and the pony as well. I have had to make special arrangements to have the animal placed in one of the stables. Needless to say, his father is perfectly willing to pay an added fee on behalf of the pony."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I can't altogether blame the lad," he said. "That pony is indeed a wonderful little chap, and there is a perfect understanding between him and his master. I dare say they have been friends for years, and the thought of coming to England for several years, and leaving the pony behind, did not appeal to Master Dodd at all. He is evidently a boy who likes his own way."

"And there is another matter I wish to discuss with you, Mr. Lee," went on the Head. "You see, Mr. Dodd has great ambitions. He does not want his son to follow in his own footsteps. He has decided Jerrold shall read for the Bar. After leaving St. Frank's he will go to Oxford, and then, later, he will become a barrister."

"Is the boy keen upon this programme?"

"That's just the point, Mr. Lee—that's just the difficulty," said the Head. "The boy is not. He doesn't want to have anything to do with the law—his ambition is to lead an open-air life, like his father. But Mr. Dodd is obstinate, and means to have his own way. He tried his best to keep Jerrold at school in Australia, but he couldn't do anything with the boy. For that reason he has sent him right across to England, believing that the changed environment will have its due effect. Mr. Dodd believes that after settling down here, Jerrold will get into different habits, and will settle down comfortably and willingly to his task. Whether such will be the case remains to be seen. The whole thing is in the nature of an experiment."

"So I should imagine," said Nelson Lee. "Of course, Mr. Dodd may be right—the changed conditions of England may cause the lad to forget his yearning for his father's ranch, and, being so far away, he will be more inclined to settle down. He has come to St. Frank's, I understand, to spend his time in diligent study?"

Dr. Stafford nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "You have used the right term, Mr. Lee—diligent study. But will the boy do it? Will he be content to spend his time indoors, poring over books, and cramming his head with classics, and such like? Personally, I am doubtful—I hardly think it will work."

"Of course, we cannot do anything just now," said Nelson Lee. "We must wait until Dodd has had time to find his feet. No doubt he will work hard and devote his spare time to cricket, and so forth——"

"Now you have hit upon the real point, Mr. Lee," interrupted the Head. "I must confess that I'm greatly worried. Mr. Dodd has instructed me most firmly that his son must not play cricket for the school."

Nelson Lee elevated his eyebrows.

"But why?" he asked. "Why should the boy be denied that?"

"Well, it seems that he is excessively keen on cricket—he is, indeed, one of the most wonderful players that Australia has ever bred," replied the Head. "This, of course, is his father's opinion—and that opinion may be prejudiced. I know nothing about the boy's capabilities myself. Well, Mr. Dodd does not want his son to play at all, because, if he does so he will spend all

his spare time at cricket, instead of at his studies. That is the point."

"I see—I understand now," said Lee thoughtfully. "And, after all, it is quite a good point. A boy who devotes all his time and thought to cricket—a boy who looks upon cricket as the serious business of life—takes but little interest in lessons. And I agree that Dodd will not study very much if he devotes too much of his time to cricket and sports in general. But surely he can have a game now and then?"

"I don't think it would be wise," replied the Head. "As a matter of fact, it has been left to my discretion whether Dodd shall play cricket or not. He certainly must not play for the eleven—that is forbidden. And I do not think we had better let him play at any other times, for it would only cause trouble all round. Dodd himself would feel aggrieved because he could not partake in the school games—the recognised fixtures—and the other boys would be highly indignant because they could not use a good player. Therefore, in my opinion, it will be better to tell the boy at the outset that he must not play at all."

Nelson Lee nodded in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, perhaps you are right in this particular case, Dr. Stafford," he said. "Practice takes up a great deal of time—and Dodd would be compelled to practise if he was given his cap. He must take his recreation in another way—walking, riding his pony, and so forth."

"It is rather hard on the lad, but I do not blame myself in any way," said the Head. "After all, these restrictions are not of my making, but of Mr. Dodd's. The man has a right to say what his own son shall or shall not do. He does not want the boy to spend his spare time in sport—that, in fact, is the main reason why Jerrold has been sent to England. I am trusting you, Mr. Lee, to see that the lad devotes himself to his studies. On half-holidays he will, of course, have his own pleasures. We cannot compel the boy to study at such times, and it would not be fair."

"What character does Mr. Dodd give his son?" asked Lee.

"Oh, it is excellent in every way," replied the Head. "The boy is good-natured, generous, and thorough in all his work. He came over, I understand, with a friend of Mr. Dodd's, and has been staying in London for two or three weeks."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, he certainly arrived at the school in a most novel manner," he said. "I do not think any other boy has ever presented himself at St. Frank's on the back of his own pony!"

A tap sounded upon the door.

"Come in!" said the Head, glancing up.

The door opened, and Jerry Dodd appeared.

But he now presented a very different appearance. He no longer wore the riding breeches, the leggings, the red flannel shirt, or the wide-brimmed Stetson hat. Instead, he was immaculately clothed in well-cut Etons, with highly polished shoes, spotless linen, and with his hair carefully brushed.

Jerry Dodd had certainly done his best to convert himself into a normal St. Frank's junior; but the effort could not be called absolutely successful. The clothes, although perfect in fit, were obviously uncomfortable to the wearer.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head. "I do not think I sent for you, my boy."

Jerry Dodd beamed.

"No, sir," he said calmly. "But some of my new chums reckoned that it was up to me to come and see you. So here I am, sir."

The Head restrained a smile.

"Yes, so I see," he said. "So you are Jerrold Dodd?"

"Sure—Jerry Dodd, to be more exact," said the new boy. "I don't figure on any fancy names, sir."

"Well, Dodd, now that you are here, we might as well have a good chat," said the Head, rising and extending his hand. "You have come a long way to St. Frank's, and I hope that you will settle down to your new life and devote yourself to your studies."

Jerry Dodd made a wry grimace.

"I'm scared, sir," he confessed; "plumb scared. By jings! When I think of squatting right down and nosin' into books, I get a sort of creeps down my back. I don't reckon I've done much book learnin', sir. My dad wants me to study for the Bar, and become a great lawyer later on."

"And a most excellent prospect, Dodd," said the Head. "If you devote yourself to your studies, you will do well."

"Well, I'll try, sir," said Jerry Dodd. "My dad's dead set on it, and that's the only reason why I'm goin' ahead. I wouldn't like to hurt my dad's feelin's for worlds—he's the best man in the whole of the little island Down Under. An' I'm goin' to work hard to make good his hopes about me."

"Splendid—splendid!" exclaimed the Head. "That's the right spirit, Dodd—the spirit that carries a boy onwards. By the way, this gentleman is Mr. Nelson Lee, your Housemaster. In future he will have a great deal to do with you."

Jerry Dodd thrust out his hand.

"I reckon I'm pleased to know you, sir," he said warmly. "Say, this is plumb good! Mr. Nelson Lee! We've heard of you down there—I guess we know heaps about what you've done, sir. I'm sure a lucky feller to have you for a master."

Nelson Lee took the new boy's hand.

"That's the style, Dodd," he said, in his free-and-easy way. "I am quite sure that we shall get on well together. I want you to look upon me as your friend—somebody you can come to with all your little troubles and difficulties."

"Say, that's bully of you, sir," said Jerry Dodd warmly. "But I reckoned that a new chum wasn't allowed to go tellin' tales to a master. I've read that it's kind of bad form."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"It is certainly bad form to sneak—to use the juniors' own term," he replied. "But I dare say you will find plenty of other little troubles, Dodd, and I should like you to seek my advice when you are in doubt or difficulty. Don't look upon me as a master—don't be afraid to approach me. I always like to be friendly with my boys, and to do my best for them. In return, I expect them to do their best for me."

"By golly! I'm sure havin' my peepers opened!" exclaimed Jerry Dodd enthusiastically. "I never reckoned that St. Frank's would be like this—no, sir! And I'm feelin' good an' comfortable right now."

"With regard to cricket and other sports, I am afraid you will be disappointed," put in the headmaster. "At St. Frank's, Dodd, you must devote yourself to your studies, and not to sport. I may as well tell you at once, to avoid disappointment later, that it is against your father's wishes for you to play cricket while you are here."

"By jings! Ain't that just my durned luck?" complained Jerry Dodd, with comical dismay. "But it don't surprise me, sir—my dad fixed all these things in my head before I sailed. No cricket! Say, it's the worst punishment I could have. But I've got to do what dad says, and I'll try as hard as I can."

Both Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford came to the conclusion that Jerry Dodd would do well at St. Frank's, and that he would justify his father's high opinion of him. He accepted the decision about the cricket cheerfully, but with great inward disappointment. It was a bigger blow to him than he would allow the Head and Nelson Lee to see.

After a further talk—mainly about lessons—he was allowed to take his departure. And he made his way straight out into the Triangle, and was

at once surrounded by a group of Remove fellows.

"So this is it!" exclaimed Bob Christine, eyeing the new boy curiously. "This is the merchant who had the nerve to bring a pony here as a pet! What's your name, you new kid?"

"Say, ain't you heard it yet?" asked Jerry Dodd. "I don't figure that it's a name of any great distinction, but it was presented to me by my dad, and it's good enough. Jerry Dodd—that's my handle!"

"Well, you've got a good lot to say for a raw, new kid!" exclaimed Christine. "I'm not sure that we oughtn't to scrag you!"

"Rats!" put in Owen major. "If you lay your paws on the new chap, you College House bounder, we'll jolly well wipe you up!"

"Yah! Clear off, you Monks!"

"Fossils! Mouldy old Fossils!"

The juniors yelled at one another, and Jerry Dodd looked on with mild surprise.

"By jings! What's the game, chum?" he asked, turning to Owen major.

"Why, those chaps belong to the College House," said Owen major warmly. "We don't mix with them, you know; they aren't exactly our class!"

"Not your class, eh?" yelled Christine. "Why, we wouldn't have you in the College House if you begged on your knees to be admitted. As for that antediluvian old barn you call the Ancient House, it isn't worth burning down!"

"Yah, Fossils!"

"Yooh! Monks!"

The juniors hooted at one another, but they did not risk a fistic encounter in the open Triangle. The eyes of a master or two might be upon them. Jerry Dodd looked on, grinning. This was something quite new to him. But he would soon learn all about the House rivalry at St. Frank's. Actually, the Fossils and the Monks were the best of friends, but they took a great delight in slanging one another on every available occasion.

It was quite a puzzle to Jerry Dodd at first. By the way the juniors insulted one another he imagined that they were bitter enemies. But he would soon learn that this was only just one of their little ways.

Handforth came out of the Ancient House in flannels, with a cricket bat tucked under his arm. And Jerry Dodd eye him rather enviously. The new junior had rather taken to Handforth, in spite of the latter's aggressive ways.

"Oh, here you are!" said Handforth, with a proprietary air. "I was looking for you, you ass! You've got to come along to Little Side, the cricket ground, you know."

"Oh," said Jerry Dodd, "that's good! I'd like to see a bit of cricket."

Handforth looked the new boy up and down.

"Well, you look more decent now," he said critically. "A bit stiff, perhaps, but that clobber is new, and I don't suppose you're used to wearing Etons. You'll soon shake down. Keen on sports?"

"Sure! Er—that is, no!" said Jerry Dodd quickly. "I don't play a great deal."

"Oh, well, you'll have to alter that," said Handforth. "Come along; I'll introduce you to Nipper. Our skipper, you know."

He took Jerry Dodd's arm and marched him across the Triangle towards the playing fields. Church and McClure were just behind, rather amused at Handforth's fatherly manner with the new junior.

"By the way," said Handforth, "what study are you going into?"

"Study F."

"Not so bad," said Handforth critically. "You'll have Burton and Conroy minor as studymates. Quite decent chaps!"

"So I understand," said Jerry Dodd, as they entered Little Side. "Mr. Lee was telling me—— By jings, that was a bully swipe!"

Jerry Dodd paused, and looked with great admiration at the junior who was at the net, batting. He was Reginald Pitt, and he was certainly shaping very well. I was bowling, and I was quite pleased with Pitt's form.

I crossed over at once as soon as I saw the new boy.

"I heard you'd arrived," I said, extending my hand. "How are you, old son? I'm Nipper, and you're Jerry Dodd, I believe. I hope we'll get on all serene. We're lucky to have an Australian chap in the Remove."

"Thanks!" said the new boy. "I reckon that's a nice compliment. I've come to St. Frank's to learn things, so I don't reckon you'll hear much of me out in the open."

"Oh, so you're going to devote yourself to study—eh?" I said. "You don't look much like a swotter. How about sports—cricket, and all that?"

Jerry Dodd held himself firm.

"I don't play," he remarked quietly.

"What!" I exclaimed. "You come from Australia, and you don't go in for sports! What about cricket?"

"I don't play," repeated Jerry Dodd.

"What do you mean—you don't play?" I asked curiously.

"I reckon the words are distinct enough."

"Do you mean that you can't play?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I can—just a bit," said Jerry Dodd. "But I don't reckon I'd be much good to you. You chums mustn't figure that every Australian can play cricket. We raise a few big men Down Under, but we're not all swell cricketers."

"Oh, well, we'll give you a trial, and see what you can do!" I said. "If you like, you can have a go at the nets now."

Jerry Dodd looked rather uncomfortable.

"I don't figure I could do much in these clothes," he objected.

"Well, go and change into flannels," said Handforth promptly.

"There aren't flannels in my outfit."

"That's nothing; I'll lend you some," said Handforth obligingly. "Come on; you're just about my size, and I'll soon rig you up."

Jerry Dodd looked more uncomfortable than ever.

"You're sure good fellows, but there's nothing doing," he said quietly. "There is no sense in me taking hold of one of them pieces of wood."

"Pieces of wood!" I echoed, staring.

"Sure—like that fellow's got a hold of," said Jerry Dodd, nodding.

"Oh, you mean a bat!" I exclaimed.

"Sure! Is that what it's called?" said Jerry Dodd. "A real swell name!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth. "Didn't you know it was called a bat? I suppose you know what those things are called over there?" he added, pointing to the wickets.

Jerry Dodd smiled.

"You can bet your life I do!" he replied. "They're round bits of stick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Round bits of stick!" yelled Handforth. "Why, you idiot, they're the stumps!"

"Yes, I recollect having heard the name," said Jerry Dodd, nodding.

"I don't think you'll become very famous as a cricketer," grinned Pitt, who had strolled up. "But you might as well take this bat and have a go. There'll be no harm done. We'll see how you shape."

The Colonial boy shook his head.

"It wouldn't be no sort of use," he objected.

"Rats, you've got to!" I broke in briskly. "Never mind about flannels. We're always on the look-out for new talent, and, just at the moment, we want some smart fellows in the Remove eleven. You may be a dark horse, for all we know. Grab hold of this bat, and I'll send you down a few easy balls."

Jerry Dodd hesitated for a moment, and then grinned, his eyes sparkling for a second.

"I let on that I could play a bit," he said. "But maybe you'll think differ-

ent after you've seen me. Don't blame me if I disappoint you."

"We shan't blame you," I said. "Go ahead!"

CHAPTER 3.
Strangers Within the Gates!

QUITE a number of juniors had collected round by this time, and they stood watching with interest. They wanted to see how the new fellow would shape.

Jerry Dodd went to the wicket accompanied by Handforth, who was still acting as the new boy's guide. And Jerry Dodd was holding the bat in his hand as though he was mortally afraid of it.

"Now, then," said Handforth; "we'll see what you can do."

"Where do I stand?"

Handforth stared.

"Where do you stand?" he repeated blankly. "Why, there, of course! Don't you know the giddy position?"

Jerry Dodd looked rather hopeless, and grasped the bat firmly between his fingers and held it high above his head, as though he were about to play tennis—and he stood with his heels only an inch or two from the stumps.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is this right?" asked Jerry Dodd uncomfortably.

"Right!" bellowed Handforth. "You—you silly lunatic! You don't hold the bat up there; you've got to put it on the ground, and you've got to be a yard away from the wicket. How do you think you're going to swipe with the stumps only an inch behind you?"

"I'm sorry!" said Jerry Dodd awkwardly. "I reckon you'd best put me right."

"Oh, the chap's a born idiot!" said Handforth gruffly.

He grabbed the bat from Jerry Dodd's hands and planted himself on the crease in the correct position.

"That's what you've got to do," he said. "Hold the bat like this—see? And when Nipper sends the ball down you've got to swipe at it."

Jerry Dodd gripped the bat again and tried to copy Handforth's example. He stood there, very clumsy and awkward, but his position was something after the right style. I grinned and held up my hand.

"Get ready!" I sang out. "I'll give you an easy one!"

I sent down a slow, simple ball. Jerry Dodd lifted his bat, sent the bails flying up from the stumps, and whirled the bat round with such force that he threw himself off his feet and sat down with a bump. Naturally, he had missed the ball by about a yard, and he looked about him dazedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you fathead!" roared Handforth. "And you told us that you know a bit about cricket!"

"I reckon I'm sorry," said Jerry Dodd humbly. "By jings, but I warned you, didn't I? I said I shouldn't shape well. A fellow doesn't see much cricket on a sheep-farm in Australia."

"Much?" echoed Pitt. "I should imagine he doesn't see any."

I strolled down the pitch.

"Well, I don't think it's any good trying him again," I said, with a chuckle. "That's enough for us, my sons. Dodd, old scout, I'm afraid you won't develop into a champion this season."

"I'm sorry——"

"Rats! It's not your fault," I interrupted. "You're at liberty to peg away at your lesson-books all you like. We certainly shan't ask you to fill a vacant position in the eleven."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jerry Dodd nodded.

"I don't reckon I'd be much good," he said regretfully.

If we had only known it, it had cost the new boy a very great deal to act as he had just acted. It was only by sheer will power and grim determination that he had played the fool so cleverly. Not for one moment did any of the fellows suspect that Jerry Dodd had deliberately made himself out to be a duffer.

He could play cricket; he could play in a manner which had caused wonder and admiration in local circles in Australia. But here, at St. Frank's, he had to keep that secret.

Knowing that he could beat every other fellow in the Remove, knowing that he could show St. Frank's an exhibition of batting which would open all eyes, it was hardly surprising that Jerry Dodd felt somewhat bitter and despondent.

As far as the Remove went, nobody gave another thought to Jerry Dodd as a possible acquisition to the junior eleven. He was dismissed for good and all, and interest in him flagged a bit.

At a big school like St. Frank's a duffer at sports was not particularly popular. A boy who always pored over his lesson-books was, as a rule, left strictly to himself, and his friends were not numerous.

At tea-time Jerry Dodd went into the Ancient House and presented himself in Study F. He had not yet met Tom Burton and Conroy minor, for these two juniors had been absent during the afternoon. But they were at home now.

Jerry Dodd entered the study and looked round.

"Hallo, chums!" he said pleasantly.

"Oh, so you're the new chap!" said Conroy minor, staring at the newcomer with all a boy's rudeness. "We've heard about you, Dodd. You made a frightful mess at the nets, didn't you, and you caused a bit of a sensation by arriving on a donkey?"

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"Say, that's an insult to Bud!" he exclaimed. "He's the best chum I've got, is Bud—a pony, not a donkey."

"Oh, it's all the same thing!" said Conroy minor. "Did Mr. Lee put you in this study, or did you choose it yourself?"

"I wasn't allowed any choice," said the new boy. "But I figure that we shall get on pretty good. I won't be much bother; just a corner of the table and a few inches of the bookshelf—that'll suit me."

"Swab my main decks!" said Tom Burton, starting up. "We don't do things like that in this cabin, shipmate. You're one of us now, and you'll have your locker and an equal share of space. We're glad to have you here."

"That's decent of you," said Jerry Dodd. "But I figure I didn't know this room was called a cabin——"

"Oh, that's only Burton's way of speaking," grinned Conroy minor. "His father is a retired sea captain, you know, and the Bo'sun always uses nautical terms. It's a habit with him."

Before tea was half-way through, the three juniors were getting on well. Burton and Conroy minor were rather attracted by their new studymate's frank and open manner. They caught him looking very thoughtful now and again, but asked no questions. A new boy was generally reticent for the first two or three days.

"Say, how do we go on about feed?" asked Jerry Dodd suddenly. "Does the school provide this grub?"

"Well, no," said Conroy minor. "Any chap can have tea in Hall if he likes, but it's only wishwash and slabs of bread with a ghostly film of butter on the top. Times have to be pretty hard before a chap descends to having tea in Hall. We generally provide our own grub for the studies."

"Oh, I see," said the new boy. "Kind of pool together, eh? Well, it's up to me to stand my share——"

"Souse me!" interrupted the Bo'sun. "Not to-day, messmate! You're having tea with us, at our expense—you're a guest. Later on we'll arrange things. The general idea is to pool the money at the end of the week, when the pocket-money is paid out by the skipper——"

"He means the Head," put in Conroy minor. "Most of the chaps here have an allowance from their people, in charge of the headmaster. And the Head doles it out every Saturday."

"My dad wasn't agreeing to that," said Jerry Dodd. "He reckoned that I could bring enough money with me to last a week or two, and then I could draw some more from my dad's bankers in London."

"That's all right," said Conroy minor. "How much have you got?"

"Oh, not much—about thirty pounds."

"Thirty what?" yelled Conroy minor, nearly dropping his teacup.

"Pounds!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Conroy. "Thirty quid—to last a week or two! And you say that's not much! Why, I'd consider myself lucky if I got thirty bob; in fact, I don't get much more than that during the whole term!"

"Say, I hope I didn't sound like boasting——"

"Rats!" said Conroy minor. "That's all right."

By the following morning Jerry Dodd was feeling quite at home in Study F. He had taken a great liking to his studymates, and they passed the seal of approval on Jerry Dodd.

During morning lessons we were able to discover what the Australian junior was like in class. There was no denying that he was decidedly backward, and, consequently, took his place at the bottom of the Form. Many fellows considered that he ought to have been put into the Third.

Strictly speaking, this was probably his place, but he was a big chap, and fifteen years of age. He would have been very conspicuous among the fags. Mr. Crowell was easy with him, and pleased to find that Jerry Dodd was very anxious to do his best. The new boy applied himself to his lessons with surprising energy.

There was a good reason for this.

Jerry Dodd earnestly wanted to catch up with all the other fellows in the Remove, and he wanted to move up from the bottom place—which, hitherto, been the sole possession of Teddy Long.

Jerry buried himself in study, and he made good progress. He was even surprised at himself at the amount he learnt in such a short space of time. He spent every spare minute at his books, and after tea that day he remained in Study F, seated at the table, and laboriously writing exercises—drilling himself into habits which he had never expected to acquire.

Outside, the July evening was delightful—warm, sunny, and with a gentle breeze blowing through the trees. And on the breeze came the enticing "clack" of bat meeting ball. The shouts of the juniors came through the open window, too. Looking up, Jerry Dodd could catch a glimpse of white-clad figures on the green turf.

He set his teeth, and turned back to his books.

It was hot in the study—close and stuffy. And, after a while, an idea came to Jerry. Why shouldn't he take his books and go to some quiet, shady corner by the river bank? He could study just as well there, and he would be under the open sky, and away from this stuffy little room.

Jerry Dodd collected his books together, tucked them under his arm, and sallied out. Seated upon a grassy bank near the river, he breathed in the pure air, and lost himself completely in the difficult subject of English grammar. The whole thing was hateful, but it had to be done.

Meanwhile, Tom Burton had come into Study F to do his preparation; he wanted to get it over quickly, so that he could go out again. The Bo'sun was rather surprised to find the room empty.

"Hallo! What's happened to the new hand?" he murmured. "He told us he wasn't going ashore this evening!"

Tom Burton could hardly blame the new boy for being tempted by the glorious evening. And he settled down to his prep. without much enthusiasm.

And, out in the Triangle, two strangers had appeared.

Fortunately for them there were very few juniors about at the moment. They were two extraordinary looking individuals, and would certainly have caused a great deal of interest and laughter.

Having entered the gateway, they came to a halt and stood looking about them with an air of lofty importance. They stared at the College House, and they stared at the Ancient House. Then one looked down at the other, and they both gave mysterious nods.

They were certainly not ordinary people. One was a gigantic, stout man—tall, broad, and so enormous that it seemed rather wonderful that he could move at all. He was attired in a singularly quaint manner, wearing a light-grey suit with a pronounced check, with a small, soft hat perched upon the top of a perfectly bald head. It really seemed as though he had grown out of all his clothing, for his suit and his hat were sizes too small. He sort of oozed out of it from every quarter, overflowing the limits, so to speak. Nothing short of a disaster would have occurred if he had bent down with any suddenness.

From one pocket a large round glass protruded—and this, upon examination, would have been seen to be a powerful magnifying lens. His face was red and large, with about half a dozen chins hanging in fat, puffy folds over his collar, and from between his lips projected a large-bowled briar pipe.

But if this specimen of humanity was remarkable in appearance, his companion was no less so. The other man was just as small as his friend was large, being an extremely diminutive person. He hardly reached higher than the large gentleman's chest, and, although his clothing was not exactly loud, it certainly appeared to be too large for him. His sleeves descended over the backs of his hands; his coat came nearly to his knees; his trousers hung in baggy folds; and his feet seemed to be encased in a pair of police-size boots. He wore a bowler hat which almost obliterated his face entirely. It could be seen, however, that this face was thin and perky-looking. It possessed a sharp nose, not unlike a beak, and the little gentleman held his head forward in a curious, inquisitive fashion.

"We are here, Mr. Podge!" said the little man in a high, piping voice. "What is our next move to be? Would you suggest inquiring of a master——"

The fat man held up a large hand.

"Tut—tut! Have you no sense, Mr. Midge?" he asked, his voice resembling the puff of a steam-engine. "A master! Certainly not! We will inquire of this boy—the youngster we now see in front of us. No doubt he will put us on the track—not that it is necessary for anybody to do that. We are past-masters of the art!"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge — undoubtedly!" murmured Mr. Midge.

The boy they referred to was Teddy Long, of the Remove, and Master Teddy was eyeing the strangers with wondering, inquisitive interest. The busybody of the Remove was always ready to make himself important when the occasion demanded. He strolled forward now, trying to look careless.

"Looking for somebody?" he asked casually.

Mr. Podge removed his enormous magnifying lens, and, bending down, focused it upon Teddy Long. The latter stared in blank astonishment, and every line of his face was enlarged ten times by the lens.

"Ha!" said Mr. Podge. "A boy! Yes, undoubtedly a boy."

"What did you think I was—a beetle, or something?" asked Long sarcastically. "What's the giddy idea of squinting at me through that fatheaded glass ——"

"Young man, you are impertinent!" puffed Mr. Podge severely. "We have come here with one definite purpose in mind—in short, we are looking for a certain young gentleman named Master Jerrold Dodd. He arrived here a day or two ago, I imagine. Possibly

you can direct us to him?" he added, inserting two fat fingers into his waistcoat pocket and producing a half-crown.

Teddy Long's attitude changed; he eyed the coin greedily.

"Yes, rather!" he said. "I expect Dodd's in his study. I'll take you along, if you like. Relations of his, I suppose?"

"We have called to see Master Dodd on business," put in Mr. Midge meekly. "I understand that he is at present in the school?"

"Yes, I think so," said Long. "This way."

He hesitated for a moment, still looking at the half-crown. The coin was passed over to him, and Teddy seized it eagerly. He led the way into the Ancient House, through the lobby, and into the Remove passage. Hardly anybody was about, for the evening was so fine that the juniors were all in the open.

Teddy Long came to a halt outside the door of Study F. He was about to knock upon the panels when Mr. Podge grasped his shoulder.

"Wait!" he said. "This is the room where Master Dodd spends his time?"

Long stared.

"Well, he spends some of his time here, sir," he replied. "This is his study, you know. During the day he's in the class-room, with the rest of the chaps. I expect we shall find him here; he's a frightful swotter, I believe."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Podge.

He and his little companion looked up and down the Remove passage critically, and with rather unnecessary scrutiny. Teddy Long tapped upon the door, and a cheerful voice from within invited him to "Come aboard!"

Long opened the door and looked in.

"Oh, Dodd isn't here, sir," he said, turning. "There's only Burton—one of the other fellows who share the study with him. I'll go and find Dodd, if you like."

"Thank you, it is unnecessary," interrupted Mr. Podge.

They marched into the study in a stately manner, and closed the door after them. Long remained outside in the passage, having discovered that one of his bootlaces had come untied. In order to attend to this matter thoroughly, his left ear, by some curious chance, came into very close proximity to the keyhole.

Tom Burton looked up from his prep, and stared blankly at the two extraordinary men.

"We came here to see Master Jerrold Dodd," said the fat stranger impressively. "Apparently, however, Master Dodd is absent."

He and his companion looked round the study, as though they half-expected Jerry Dodd suddenly to appear from behind the coal-scuttle or the bookcase.

"Yes, sir; Dodd's not on board just now," said the Bo'sun. "He went ashore some little time ago. I suppose he thought it was a bit stuffy in the cabin, and the air's certainly better on deck."

"Evidently a boy with some nautical knowledge," puffed Mr. Podge.

"Undoubtedly," observed Mr. Midge —"undoubtedly."

Tom Burton rose to his feet.

"Do you want to see Dodd, sir?" he asked.

"We came here for that purpose," replied the fat man.

"Then I'll just go ashore and scout about for him," said the Bo'sun obligingly. "I don't exactly know where he is, but he can't be very far from the old boat. I'll go ashore and have a look."

And Burton hurried out of the study, his intention being to go in search of Dodd.

"We are alone, Mr. Midge," said the stout stranger softly.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge — undoubtedly!" said Mr. Midge.

"A most remarkable boy," went on Mr. Podge. "But we are here on business—we must not forget that. I do not think that Dodd will disturb us; we know for a fact that he is nowhere

within the school property. Our plans have worked well."

"They have, Mr. Podge," said the little man, nodding.

"Our methods are thorough, that is the reason," said Mr. Podge solemnly. "We must waste no time. H'm! Quite so! Rather a small room, but that is no disadvantage. Not many comforts, by all appearances."

He frowned as he glanced at the window; then he scrutinised it carefully through his lens.

"Most unsatisfactory," he said. "This apartment is on the ground floor—the window easily accessible. A pity, Mr. Midge—a great pity!"

"As you say, Mr. Podge—a great pity!" agreed Mr. Midge.

"Kindly bear in mind the position of this window," continued Mr. Podge softly. "You will observe that three chestnut trees are in direct line. It will therefore be impossible for us to mistake the window from outside. You see my point, Mr. Midge? You agree that it will be easy for us to recognise the window from without?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge — undoubtedly!" observed Mr. Midge, with a wise nod.

"So far so good," said the other. "But we must not linger. We have accomplished our object. Have we ever been known to fail?"

"Never, Mr. Podge."

"Our methods are infallible," said Mr. Podge calmly. "And now that we have seen Master Dodd's study, it will be fitting for us to retire. Any further steps we may take must be indicated by circumstances. You have the envelope, Mr. Midge?"

"It is here, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge.

"Good! Place it on the mantelpiece."

Mr. Midge produced a stout envelope bearing a heavy seal. He propped this against a cheap clock which adorned the mantelpiece, and regarded it with approval. He stepped back and put his head on one side, looking more than ever like a bird.

"I do not think it will fail to attract attention now," he said. "What is your opinion, Mr. Podge?"

"The position could not be bettered," puffed Mr. Podge. "Come, we will go—we have remained too long as it is."

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge — undoubtedly!"

The strangely assorted pair left the study and passed out of the passage, through the lobby, and out into the Triangle, Mr. Midge trotting just behind Mr. Podge, like a dog following his master. Within a minute they were out in the lane. Apparently they had no wish to encounter any more of the boys.

Tom Burton having failed to locate Jerry Dodd, returned to Study F rather breathless. He entered red of face and apologetic.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but I can't find —— Souse my scuppers!" he ejaculated, staring round. "They ain't here—they've both slipped their anchors."

The Bo'sun was rather indignant.

"Swab me!" he murmured. "I wonder if they've left port altogether? Why, what's this—— A note!"

He stared at the envelope on the mantelpiece, and picked it up. He looked at the writing, and at the seal on the back.

"'Master Jerrold Dodd—Private,'" he read. "Souse my maindeck! Those fish were in a hurry to leave like that, without even waiting for me to come back! Oh, well, it's not my business, anyway!"

And the Bo'sun settled himself down to his work again.

Some time later, just when he had finished his prep, the study door opened and Jerry Dodd entered. The Australian boy was looking somewhat weary. He had been putting his heart and soul into the drudgery of learning English grammar, but it went against the grain, and took away some of his natural cheerfulness.

"Hallo, shipmate!" said Burton, look

ing up. "Where did you steer away to?"

"Oh, I reckon I've been stewin' in grammar!" replied Jerry Dodd. "By Jingo! The feller that invented the stuff ought to be baked! Say, chum, there's nothin' like the open air! I've been out near the river——"

"Oh, so that's where you entered port?" interrupted the Bo'sun. "A couple of freaks came here after you—on business, I suppose."

"Freaks?" repeated Jerry Dodd curiously.

"Yes," grinned the Bo'sun. "You never saw such guys! A huge fat man an' a tiny companion!"

"Who were they?"

"Souse me! I didn't ask their names!" said Burton. "And they went away while I was looking round for you. They left that note for you; it's on the mantelpiece. Maybe it will explain things."

Still looking rather surprised, Jerry Dodd took the envelope from the mantelpiece, turned it over once or twice, and then broke the seal. He knew nothing of any visitors. He had not been expecting anybody, and he could not imagine who the two men could have been.

"Well, this beats me, chum!" he exclaimed. "I don't figure I'm havin' any friends in England—or any relatives, come to that. And these men came to see me on business? I don't know what business they could want to discuss."

He pulled out a piece of notepaper from the envelope, unfolded it, and stared at the writing rather blankly for a moment or two. Then he looked across at Tom Burton, who was mildly interested.

"Great jumpin' kangaroos!" he ejaculated.

"You seem a bit surprised," said Burton.

"Surprised! I should say I am, chum!" said Jerry Dodd. "This fairly takes the wind out of me, by jings! Look at it—just cast your eyes on this queer thing!"

Tom Burton took the sheet of paper and regarded it curiously. It was not in the form of a note, and bore no address. And the words were quite few, consisting merely of the following remarkable, short sentences:

"POINTS TO REMEMBER.

"(1) At any moment you may be in danger.

"(2) Be constantly on your guard.

"(3) Do not venture beyond the school grounds unattended.

"(4) When danger threatens, friends will be near."

Tom Burton looked up, his fresh, open face expressive of much astonishment and wonder.

"Well, swab my fo'c'sle!" he ejaculated. "What's the meaning of this, messmate?"

"It's no sort of use asking me," replied Jerry Dodd. "By Jingo! It must be a joke—some idiot's idea of being funny!"

"What's all this about danger?"

"How can I tell you?" asked the Australian boy. "I'm in no danger, and not likely to be. Those fellows must have been here for fun. Anyhow, this thing's goin' in the place where it deserves to be!"

And Jerry Dodd tore the sheet of notepaper and the envelope to fragments, and tossed them into the fireplace. He grinned cheerfully, and sat down, but there was still rather a puzzled look in his eyes.

"Oh, hang it!" he said abruptly. "I'm not going to worry about that fool thing! There's nothing in it—there can't be anything in it!"

And Jerry Dodd proceeded to forget all about the mysterious note, the even more mysterious warnings, and the unaccountable visit of Messrs. Podge and

Midge. Who or what they were, he did not care.

But, at no very distant date, Jerry Dodd was destined to remember this trivial and mystifying incident.

CHAPTER 4.
Not Such a Duffer!

REGINALD PITT looked at the sky critically.

"Not quite so fine as it was yesterday, and I don't like the look of those clouds," he remarked. "Still, with luck, we shall get through the afternoon all serene. It would be rough if it rained."

"Well, it wouldn't surprise me," growled Tommy Watson. "It's generally fine when we're at work in the class-rooms, and wet and miserable on the half-holidays—that's just the way of things."

"My dear chap, what's the good of worrying?" I put in cheerfully. "If it rains, it rains. All the talking in the world won't make any difference. There's an important match on this afternoon, I know, but, personally, I think we shall have quite decent weather."

It was Saturday afternoon, and the juniors of Bannington Grammar School were to be our visitors on Little Side, quite an important fixture in junior cricket.

I was far more concerned with my eleven than about the weather. Most of the juniors were showing up well at practice, but they were a long way from perfect form, and we had heard reports that Bannington Grammar School were hot stuff this season. They had already been doing great things.

I had chosen my eleven. Tregellis-West and Watson were included, and Pitt and Grey and Handforth. I was also giving Bob Christine and one or two College House fellows a show. But I knew very well that we were weak, particularly in batsmen.

"It's a beastly shame that Australian chap is such a dud," remarked Pitt. "I was hoping that he would turn out to be something particularly good. Still, all Australian fellows can't be good cricketers."

Jerry Dodd himself was not feeling very happy. It was a half-holiday, and he would not do any work. He had been studying hard during all his spare time, but he felt that he must take some recreation on a half-holiday. The "swotting" was distasteful to him at any time, and he was likely to get stale if he did too much of it.

When the youthful cricketers arrived from Bannington, laughing and cheerful, Jerry Dodd felt strangely out of the picture. All his natural instincts were on the cricket-pitch; he wanted to be there, attired in flannels, and ready and eager to do his utmost for his school. The thought of being a spectator was galling to Jerry Dodd. It destroyed his natural buoyant good-humour, and made him feel sullen and despondent—a state of mind absolutely foreign to his open, generous temperament.

Cricket! The one game he loved better than all others in the world—the one game in which he excelled! And he was forbidden to play.

It was a listless and despondent Jerry Dodd who lounged towards the ropes at Little Side when the junior match commenced. The sun was now shining brilliantly, and the weather promised to be excellent for the game.

Jerry Dodd sighed.

"By jings!" he muttered. "I'd give all I've got to be in this!"

The fresh green turf, the figures in cricketing flannels, the gaily coloured blazers, all contributed towards making a picture which filled the Australian boy with eager longing.

Meanwhile, we were getting ready to start the match.

I won the toss, and I decided to bat first. Pitt and Handforth walked out to open the St. Frank's innings, and they were loudly cheered as a matter

of course. Handforth observed that this cheering was a whisper compared to the reception he would receive when he carried his bat back to the pavilion, after scoring a century. Handforth's optimism was delightfully refreshing!

The innings opened disastrously. The first ball of the over looked a simple, easy one, and Pitt, who was receiving the bowling, swiped away at it with the intention of getting a boundary to start with. The ball curled under his bat, and neatly jerked back the middle stump. Pitt stared at his wicket in dismay.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said blankly.

He received no cheers as he walked back to the pavilion. His place was taken by Jack Grey, who met with better luck. Grey was a cautious batsman, and for the first two or three balls he did not take any chances. He was content with one or two light taps while he was feeling what the bowler was like.

At the end of the over he was in the same position, and Handforth now received the bowling. Handforth's very attitude told me that he had no intention of being cautious.

The new bowler was a fast one, and the ball came down like a bullet. Handforth swung his bat and the next second the leather was winging its way swiftly to the boundary. It was the first real hit of the match.

"Good old Handy!"

"Keep it up, old son!"

Handforth lounged on his bat, full of confidence. As a slogger he was an excellent man, but the risks he took filled me with doubt. I was wondering whether it had been wise on my part to include him in the team.

I expected to see Handy bowled out almost at once; but this didn't happen. He did remarkably well, slogging away and sending the leather to the boundary two or three times, and getting in twos and threes regularly.

"My hat! He's improved since last season!" I said. "Not that I think a great deal of these bowlers. Handy would be nowhere if he had a tricky bowler facing him."

"Never mind—he's doing pretty well," said Tommy Watson.

Jerry Dodd stood looking on without much interest. It was not that he was indifferent to cricket—the very opposite was the case. But he wanted to be in it. Feeling fed-up and irritable, he found no pleasure whatever in standing against the ropes, watching other fellows engaging in the great sport.

While Handforth and Grey were still batting, Jerry Dodd walked away, and strolled with idle footsteps across the grass in the direction of the river. He didn't know where he was going—he didn't particularly care.

He found himself on the towing path, and he went on, his thoughts far away in Australia. He was thinking of his cricketing days there—days that had been cut short abruptly. He remembered his surprise when his father announced that he was to be sent to England, to one of England's most famous Public schools. At first Jerry Dodd had been filled with joy and delight.

And now, here he was, at St. Frank's College. He was more than pleased with the school, and with his surroundings; but he was denied the pleasure of participating in the school's sports, and this was what hurt Jerry more than anything else.

"It's just my rotten luck, I reckon!" he muttered disgustedly. "Golly, I'm durned if there ain't some other fellows playing cricket now! It doesn't matter which way I turn, I can't escape from it!"

He had walked on a good distance, and now he was not so very far from Dr. Hogge's Academy—in other words, the River House School. This was a small, but very select establishment, situated close to the river, and not far distant from the village itself.

Jerry Dodd left the towing path almost mechanically, attracted by the sounds of cricket which proceeded from beyond a hedge a short distance away.

He arrived at the hedge, parted a few twigs, and looked through. He beheld a sight which again brought that longing to the surface.

There were several junior schoolboys practising round the nets. The ground was not a very large one—nothing to be compared to Little Side, and it was almost completely enclosed by this high hedge. On one side lay Bellton Wood, thick and impenetrable. The River House junior practice ground was certainly very secluded.

Jerry Dodd stood watching. He was unseen here, and he could look on without these boys knowing anything of his presence.

He had never met Brewster & Co., the leading lights of the River House Fourth Form. They were thoroughly decent fellows, and were on excellent terms with the Removites of St. Frank's.

Within a week or two a match would come off between the two schools. It was a match which generally ended in victory for the Remove; the River House fellows hardly expected to win, and were generally content if they put up a good show. But this year Hal Brewster had high hopes of bringing off a victory. He was doing his best to knock his team into shape.

And Jerry Dodd watched keenly. He stood there, behind the hedge, eyeing the practice with a critical gaze. He approved, found fault, passed judgment, and generally acted as though he had been appointed a special critic.

And then, quite unexpectedly, a voice hailed him from the rear—practically at his back.

"Hallo," it said. "What the dickens are you doing?"

Jerry Dodd twisted round abruptly, and found himself staring into the face of a good-looking youngster, who was mildly astonished. He wore a cap which labelled him as a scholar of the River House.

"Seen a ball over here in this grass?" he asked.

"Er—no. I—I——" began Jerry, rather confused. "Say, chum, I'll just help you to search. I reckon I was interested in the practice."

"Oh!" said the River House boy, eyeing the other curiously. "I don't think I've met you before—you must be that new Australian chap—Todd, or Rodd ——"

"Dodd!" corrected Jerry. "Jerry Dodd, sir!"

"Pleased to meet you, old chap!" said the River House boy. "My name's Brewster, and I'm the junior sports skipper. But what's the idea of being down here, wandering about on your lonesome? There's an important match on at St. Frank's to-day."

"Yes, sure," agreed Jerry. "But I'm not playing—I don't figure much on cricket. Say, we'll search round for that ball."

Jerry Dodd had taken an instant liking to Brewster, and the latter was rather attracted by the Australian boy. They were soon searching through the long grass for the lost ball. It was Jerry who ultimately found it. He seized the leather between his supple fingers, and a feeling of joy thrilled through him as his hand closed over the ball.

An irresistible impulse seized him. In spite of himself he could not avert his next action. The sheer joy of having the leather in his hand was like a tonic to a parched throat. He flung his hand back and sent the ball shooting skywards at terrific speed. It came down only a yard or two from its starting point. Jerry reached out his left hand and caught the ball with adroit neatness.

"My hat!" said Brewster. "You're pretty warm, my son!"

Jerry Dodd suddenly remembered himself.

"I—I don't play!" he exclaimed hurriedly.

Brewster grinned.

"Tell that to the marines!" he said calmly. "You can't spoof me, old chap! Only a good player could handle the ball in that way. But you're

a new kid at St. Frank's, and I'm not surprised that you've been left out of the eleven. You must feel a bit lonely, and I suppose that's why you came down here?"

"Sure!" said Jerry eagerly. "Golly! I—I mean——"

"That's all right!" smiled Brewster. "We're only practising this afternoon. If you like, you can come round and join in. We don't mind."

Jerry Dodd's eyes sparkled. The temptation was almost irresistible, and for a few moments he had a bit of a struggle with himself.

After all, why shouldn't he take advantage of this offer? What harm would come of it? This practice ground was quiet and secluded, and away from all observation. There was hardly any likelihood of a St. Frank's fellow appearing on the scene. The River House juniors seemed to be good sorts, and it would do him a world of good to take a bat into his hands.

And it struck Jerry that this practice ground would provide him with a natural outlet for his energies. He might be able to come here often, and to indulge in cricket practice on the quiet, without anybody at St. Frank's knowing. Such a prospect was distinctly alluring—and just now Jerry was feeling rather reckless.

He wondered if he could trust the River House boys to keep his secret, for, of course, he would be obliged to explain. He knew they were booked to play St. Frank's. He thought it most probable that they would refrain from talking about what he could do—for it would be to their interests if he remained out of the St. Frank's team.

And almost before Jerry Dodd had had time fully to consider the question, he was taking Hal Brewster into his confidence. The latter listened with some surprise. He couldn't quite understand, and he didn't try to.

"It's all right, my son—I don't want to know your giddy business," he interrupted. "Your pater wants you to swot, and he's put the ban on cricket. That's hard lines, particularly if you can play. But, after all, there's something to be said for your pater—cricket does take up a lot of time, you know."

"Sure it does," agreed Jerry. "But—but I was just thinking. On an afternoon like this, for example, I——"

"You don't quite know what to do with yourself, and you don't see any reason why you shouldn't have a little game?" suggested Brewster. "I've got you, Steve! A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse! You can't practise at St. Frank's because you've spoofed Nipper and the other chaps that you don't know a cricket bat from a croquet mallet. Perhaps it's just as well that you haven't told him the truth. If it's a bit of use to you, you're always welcome to pop down to our ground if you're feeling a bit stale. I don't suppose our chaps will take the trouble to jaw about you—in any case, I'll give 'em the tip to keep mum."

"By jings! That's great!" said Jerry Dodd enthusiastically. "Say, chum, you're a real sport!"

"Rats!" interrupted Brewster cheerfully. "Come on!"

He seized Jerry's arm, and they went round the meadow until they arrived at a high door which was set in the thick hedge. Brewster opened this, and they passed inside. They went across the soft turf to the spot where a number of juniors were round the nets. They regarded Jerry with interest.

"Allow me to introduce you," said Brewster, waving his hand. "Jerry Dodd, the new chap at St. Frank's—Glynn, Ascott, Kingswood, Norton, Hawke, Brampton, and Grant. That's the lot, I think. Oh, and there's Bingham just coming along."

"Pleased to meet you!" said Jerry Dodd genially.

"Same here!" exclaimed Kingswood. "You're the new kid, I suppose?"

"Exactly!" said Brewster. "He's the new kid, and he's going to take a hand at the nets. His pater wants him to swot like old boots, and cricket has been placed on the forbidden list. He can

play all right, and he's spoofed the St. Frank's chaps that he can't. But that's not our business, and we don't want to ask any questions. If we find out that he can handle a bat decently, we've got to keep it mum. Is that understood? I've given Dodd my word, on behalf of you all, that we'll keep his horrid secret!"

The juniors grinned ,and agreed; and somehow Jerry Dodd felt as though he had fallen among friends. His heart was lighter, and his step more springy.

"It's awfully decent of you chaps—I reckon you're good sportsmen," he said. "Golly! It'll be fine to get a bat in my hands——"

"No need to jaw—grab hold of this," said Ascott, thrusting a bat into Jerry Dodd's hand. "We'll see what you can do. I'll give you one or two balls."

The other juniors grinned. Ascott was the champion junior bowler of the River House—and his bowling had won him much praise and fame. If it hadn't been for his age he would have played for the first eleven.

Jerry Dodd took the bat and went to the wicket.

He took up his position in an easy, nonchalant manner, as though he were expecting the bowler to deliver an under-arm ball. The River House boys grinned more than ever.

"We'll surprise the bounder in a minute!" chuckled Glynn. "At least, Ascott will!"

"Play!" sang out Ascott, taking a short run.

The ball left his hand at what appeared to be a slow speed, but by the time it arrived at Jerry Dodd's bat it was coming like a cannon ball. The Australian junior lifted his bat slightly, and just flicked the ball as it came. It shot away to the boundary at an angle.

"Not so bad," remarked Brewster. "A fluke, of course!"

The ball was recovered, and Ascott sent it down again. This time it broke at a nasty angle Jarry Dodd leapt forward.

Clack!

The leather went soaring away into the distance.

"My hat!" said Ascott blankly.

"You seem to be pretty hot stuff!" said Brewster, stepping forward. "If you go on at this rate, my son, we shall use up all our supply of cricket balls. As a matter of fact, we've only got two!"

"Sorry!" grinned Jerry. "I won't let it go so much!"

His face was flushed with enthusiasm, and his eyes were sparkling. He discovered that he had lost none of his adroitness. Handling the bat came just as naturally to him as it had the last time he had played in Australia.

The ball was recovered, and now the River House juniors distributed themselves over the practice ground. They still thought Jerry Dodd was lucky, and that his two hits had been in the nature of flukes.

But the Australian boy soon disposed of this impression.

He proceeded to make his new friends work with a vengeance. No matter what kind of a ball Ascott sent down, Jerry was ready. Ascott used all his tricks; he employed every dodge he knew. But not one ball shot past the batsman; he played everything with the same easy, careless manner.

He hardly seemed to exert himself in the slightest degree, and Ascott became aware of the fact that he was uncomfortable. When he took his run to bowl his usual confidence deserted him.

He seemed to have an idea that he couldn't defeat this batsman, no matter what he did. In a strange way, Jerry Dodd had an extraordinary influence over the bowler. His very attitude, his calmness, his careless ease—all this made it difficult for Ascott to retain his confidence.

For over twenty minutes Jerry remained at the wicket, and not in one instance was the ball allowed to escape. Balls that broke awkwardly, balls that curled in unexpectedly, balls that twisted and spun—they were all the same to Jerry Dodd. He was ready for

everything, and seemed to know exactly what the bowler had planned.

At last, hot and somewhat disgusted, Ascott gave it up.

"Oh, it's no good!" he grunted. "I can't touch the chap. Either I'm off colour, or he's a holy terror!"

"I'll take a shot!" said Brewster.

He was a good bowler—slower than Ascott, but capable of dismissing the best of batsmen. But, with Jerry Dodd in front of him, he might as well have saved himself the trouble, for Jerry proceeded to knock his bowling into every corner of the practice ground.

The Australian boy was enjoying himself immensely. He felt that he could return to his studies with a cheerful mind after this. So long as he had a taste of cricket now and again, he would be able to carry on, and the River House ground would be his safety valve.

Brewster flung the ball down at last, and walked along the pitch.

"That's enough!" he said, panting. "My only hat! You're just about the limit, my son—I've never seen anything like it!"

"It's amazing!" declared Ascott. "The man's a wonder!"

"A marvel!"

"Rather!"

Jerry Dodd chuckled.

"I don't reckon I've got words to thank you," he said. "Say, chums, it was great—just great! There's something about cricket that makes a fellow feel good!"

"Oh, rather!" said Ascott sarcastically. "We're all screaming with merriment and joy. Chasing that ball about is gorgeous fun!"

"Oh, I reckon I'm sorry——"

"Rats!" said Brewster. "We offered to give you a turn at the wicket, and we can't grumble if you do your best. And what a best! Great guns! You're the best cricketer I've ever seen—and that's not flattering you, either! And do you mean to tell me that you won't play for the St. Frank's junior eleven?"

"No, there'll be nothing doing like that," replied Jerry, shaking his head.

"Lucky for us!" said Kingswood feelingly.

"Rather!" agreed Brewster. "I don't think we should care to have you batting against us, Dodd, my son. And you can rely on us to keep this secret."

"Not a syllable!" said the others promptly.

"If Nipper or the others get to know of this chap's form—why, he'll be in the eleven within a minute, whether he wants it or not!" went on Brewster. "So it's up to us, my sons, to say nix."

But, as it happened, the secret was already out!

CHAPTER 5.
Handforth's Great Discovery!

"WELL done, Handy!"

"Played, old son!"

Church and McClure welcomed their great leader enthusiastically as he carried his bat into the pavilion. Outside, the other juniors were still cheering and clapping. For Edward Oswald Handforth had given us a surprise; he had knocked up no less than forty-three runs—his record performance.

He had knocked up the runs quickly, too, and mainly because of his slamming, go-ahead play. But at length his recklessness had paid the penalty; he had been a shade too hasty, and the ball slipped under his bat and flicked out the off stump.

But Handforth had had a good innings, and he accepted the plaudits of the onlookers as his due.

"Oh, it was nothing!" said Handforth, as Church and McClure seized him. "Ease off, you asses! I'm rather disappointed, to tell you the truth—I was out for a century——"

"Never mind the century," said Church. "You knocked up forty-three, and that was topping."

Handforth continued to belittle his performance; but, of course, his object in doing this was merely to invite com-

pliments, and he expanded visibly under the words of praise which were showered upon him.

He affected to be quite indifferent to the rest of the play, and stood looking on for some time while Tregellis-West added to the score. Handforth was critical, and he had many faults to find with the bowling, the batting, the fielding, and everything in general. One might have supposed that Handforth was a cricket instructor by the way he passed judgment.

After he had cooled down, he lounged on the grass for some little time, with Church and McClure beside him; then, suddenly, Handforth sat up.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter?" asked Church.

"Why, those photographs of mine!" he exclaimed. "They were to be done by this morning, and I forgot all about it. Just run round to the village, Churchy, and collect the giddy things."

Church grunted.

"Rats!" he said. "They'll do this evening."

"Oh, will they?" said Handforth grimly. "I want 'em now. I posed specially for those photographs—all dressed up in cricketing flannels, and I want them particularly this afternoon."

"Why?"

"It doesn't matter to you why!" retorted Handforth sharply.

"My only hat!" said McClure. "Do you want to send one to a young lady —— Yow—yaroooh!"

McClure collapsed, Handforth's fist having come into operation.

"And if you insult me again, I'll give you another!" said Handforth aggressively. "Just as if I should spend money on having photographs taken, and then give them to a girl! A fat lot I care about girls!"

"Then what's the idea?" asked Church curiously.

"You inquisitive rotters!" snapped Handforth. "If you must know, I want to give one of those photographs to the Bannington junior skipper. He happened to mention before the match started that he was making a collection of photographs—all the most famous cricketers, you know——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Church and McClure.

Handforth glared ferociously.

"You—you yelling asses!" he shouted.

"All the most famous cricketers!" gasped Church, holding on to McClure for support. "Oh, Handy, you'll be the death of us one of these days! Your modesty is the most wonderful thing ——"

But Handforth didn't wait to hear any more. He rose to his feet and strode off, promising dire punishment for his chums later on. At present he could not very well do anything. Mr. Crowell had strolled near by, and he had looked rather straight at Handforth just after McClure had howled. It would not be policy for the leader of Study D to use his fists again.

Handforth decided to go and fetch the photos himself. It wouldn't take him long to run to the village, and he could take the short cut by the towing-path—for the pavilion on Little Side was situated comparatively near to the river, and quite a good walk from the Triangle. It was much easier to reach the village by the towing-path than by going back to the school and taking the lane.

Handforth would not be required in the match for some little time, and he felt quite safe in going. And it was highly important that the photographs should be obtained, so that Grey, the Bannington skipper, could have one to add to his collection of famous cricketers. But whether Arthur Grey would be highly delighted remained to be seen.

Handforth walked quickly, and as he was passing the hedged enclosure of the River House junior practice ground, he heard sundry shouts.

"Those fatheads think they can play!" he muttered. "We'll show them something when our fixture comes off!"

He was comparatively near to the

hedge, and just then he heard two juniors running along the turf on the other side of the hedge.

"It's all right, you ass!" panted one of them. "I've got it."

"Good!" said another. "That chap's a perfect terror! I've never seen such batting in all my life!"

"And he's not playing for St. Frank's at all!" said the other boy. "Why, if Nipper only knew, he'd fall over himself to include——"

Handforth didn't hear any more, but what he had heard provided him with much food for thought. He came to a halt, and stared irresolutely at the hedge. His brow was puckered into a frown.

"A perfect terror!" he muttered. "Not playing for St. Frank's! They must be talking about one of our chaps! But who can it be?"

While he was still thinking he heard the sharp sound of bat meeting ball, and his experienced ear told him that the stroke had been a clean, neat one. The shouts from the other side of the hedge were also indicative of the batsman's cleverness.

Handforth had many weaknesses, and one of these was curiosity. He forgot all about his photographs, and walked up to the hedge. He wanted to see who was batting at the moment.

He parted the branches, and stared through the little opening. He was just in time to see Jerry Dodd make a beautiful cut at a most difficult ball. The grace of Jerry's movements could not be denied. He swung his bat easily and with the utmost confidence.

Handforth nearly fell over backwards.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "Dodd! He—he told us he couldn't play—he made an awful mess of it. The awful, spoofing bounder! Well, I'm jiggered!"

Handforth continued to stare, as though transfixed, and his eyes were opened even more after he had seen Jerry Dodd dispose of a few other balls. Then Jerry was surrounded by the River House boys, and they appeared to be having a discussion.

"Dodd—the duffer!" muttered Handforth. "Why, he can play topping cricket! He's almost as good as I am!"

This was saying a tremendous lot. Such praise from Handforth was praise indeed—for, of course, there was only one cricketer, in his opinion, who was really perfect. To name this cricketer would be superfluous.

And then, while Handforth was still watching, Jerry Dodd took the ball, and walked easily up the pitch.

"Oh, so he's going to try his hand at bowling, is he?" murmured Handforth. "I don't suppose he'll be much good. He won't get Brewster out, anyway. Brewster's the best batsman they've got."

The skipper of the River House juniors took up his position, and waited for the first ball to come down.

Jerry Dodd took a peculiar run—quite short and easy, and with no particular effort. His hand went round, and it seemed that the ball would be a slow one. But at the last second his wrist shot forward in a peculiar movement, and the leather came shooting down the pitch.

It touched the ground. Brewster raised his bat, and the ball swerved round it and lifted out the middle stump.

"Great corks!" said Handforth blankly.

Brewster smiled in a sickly kind of way.

"I thought that was coming straight!" he said. "Let's have another, Doddy!"

Jerry Dodd obliged. This time Brewster was well on the look-out for the sudden swerve of the ball. But it didn't swerve at all; it came down like a bullet, close to the ground, and again the middle stump suffered.

"My only hat!" muttered Kingswood. "The chap's a demon—he can't

do anything wrong! There was no fluke about that, you know!"

Again Brewster tried, and again Jerry Dodd beat him, by giving the ball a totally different spin. All Brewster's confidence oozed away, and he held his bat nervously and uncertainly.

"The chap's uncanny!" he muttered. "I can't make him out! I've got a feeling that I shall do nothing when I'm facing him."

Two or three other juniors tried, and, although Jerry Dodd did not succeed in wrecking the wicket at every ball he did so on so many occasions that the River House boys regarded him as the most deadly bowler they had ever seen.

And then Handforth appeared.

Handforth was coming to demand an explanation.

Jerry Dodd saw him, and he gave an abrupt start. In that second he knew that he had been rash—he knew that he ought never to have revealed himself in his true colours, even to the River House boys.

"You blessed fraud!" said Handforth sternly. "At the same time, I'm jolly pleased. I don't mind admitting that you're a bit of a wonder. You made these River House fatheads look a bit sick, anyway. Who on earth told them they could play cricket?"

"Now then, Handforth—none of your cheek!" said Brewster, grinning. "You'd better be careful—the river's not far off, and we might be tempted to give you a ducking. What's the idea of butting in now? It's just like you to appear when Dodd didn't want anybody to see him."

"Say, Handforth, you're a good chap—I know that," said Jerry Dodd quietly. "I reckon I did spoof you, but I had a reason. You'll oblige me a whole heap by keeping quiet about this."

"Keeping quiet!" echoed Handforth. "Rot! I shall tell——"

"Now, look here, chum, be reasonable," said Jerry Dodd, seizing Handforth's arm. "If you'll promise to keep quiet, I'll promise to explain to Nipper and to you. I'll get busy on the explaining game directly after tea. Is that a go?"

"You mean I've got to keep my mouth closed until then?"

"Yes."

"I don't see why I should," said Handforth obstinately. "And what's the reason for it, anyway? You can play cricket pretty well, considering. You'd be of some use to the eleven—you ought to have been playing to-day, as a matter of fact."

"Sorry, but it couldn't be done," interrupted Jerry Dodd. "I don't want the Remove to know that I can play; but since you've found it out, I've got to explain, and I'll explain to Nipper at the same time. What do you say?"

"Oh, all right—I give my word," said Handforth. "But I'm blessed if I can understand the idea!"

Very shortly afterwards Handforth and Jerry Dodd left the River House practice ground. They strolled to the village, collected the precious photographs, and then returned to the school.

Although Jerry Dodd's secret was out, Handforth was the only fellow who knew it—and Handforth, for all his faults, could be implicitly trusted once he had given his word.

The St. Frank's innings was just at an end, and, on the whole, we considered that we had done pretty well. I had added thirty-five to the score, but the other scores averaged between ten and fifteen.

But I may as well say at once that St. Frank's went down. It was an unfortunate result, mainly owing to the fact that our eleven was out of practice. The Grammarians had a big fight to win, for some of their best men were dismissed quite early in the innings. Arthur Grey, however, put up a splendid fight, and won the match off his own bat. His companion was a fellow who was content to keep his wicket intact without making any runs, and Grey knocked up the score at a remark-

able speed. As we had expected to lose, it was not much of a disappointment.

I was on my way to Study C soon afterwards when Handforth came along with Jerry Dodd. Handforth touched my shoulder.

"A word with you!" he said mysteriously.

"Eh? What's the idea?" I asked.

"I've got something to tell you—in private," said Handforth. "Who's in Study C?"

"Nobody," I replied.

"Good!"

We entered, and Handforth closed the door; then he went to the window, and closed this, too. Jerry Dodd, meanwhile, was looking unusually serious.

"What's all this mystery about?" I demanded.

"I'll tell you," said Handforth, pointing an accusing finger at Jerry Dodd. "This chap's a spoofer. He can play cricket better than you can!"

I grinned.

"Exactly," I agreed. "I saw a sample of it at the nets——"

"Say, chum, that was a bit of play-acting," put in Jerry Dodd. "I reckon I can play cricket, and Handforth surprised me while I was taking a turn at the nets on the River House ground."

Handforth interrupted, and explained all the circumstances. I listened with some surprise, and not without a feeling of pleasure.

"Why, this is great!" I said at length. "If you can play like that, Dodd, I'll give you a place in the eleven——"

"You're real good, but I can't accept it," interrupted Jerry.

"Why not?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I'm forbidden to play cricket."

"Forbidden!" I echoed, staring.

"Sure, chum. Head's orders."

"But why?" I asked. "Why on earth should the Head——"

"I reckon my dad wants me to learn things—to study away at books," said Jerry Dodd, with a grimace. "He put the Head wise to this, and the result is that cricket has been banned."

Jerry went into further details, and I felt rather indignant.

"But, hang it all, it's too bad!" I protested. "We need cricketers just now—we need them badly, and it's all rubbish to say that you'd spend too much time at practice. I'm not going to let you slip through my fingers, anyway—that is, if you can play as Handforth reckons."

"By jings! I'd like to, but it's impossible——"

"We'll see!" I interrupted grimly. "Both Handy and I will keep it quiet, Dodd, but when we play the return match with Bannington next week—well, by hook or by crook you'll be included in the junior eleven!"

And the matter was left at that.

CHAPTER 6.
A Cricket Secret!

"A SECRET?" said Tommy Watson inquiringly.

"Yes, my son, and I'm going to tell you chaps all about it," I replied. "We don't have secrets in this study, and I've decided that it will be better if you know the truth; but you've got to give me your word that you won't let the cat out of the bag."

"Dear old boy, we don't know what the cat is yet!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

I stirred my tea thoughtfully, and looked at my chums.

It was the following day, and we were seated at tea in Study C. It was to be a rather hurried meal, for the weather outside was glorious, and we were all anxious to get out to the cricket ground for practice.

"This secret is known only to two fellows at present—Handforth and myself," I went on.

"Then it won't be a secret for long!"

declared Watson. "Handforth can't keep anything—he's a terribly reckless chap!"

"But he's given his word, and I'm pretty certain he won't forget himself," I said. "Brewster and Glynn and Ascott, and a few other River House chaps—they all know the secret, but at St. Frank's only Handy and I know it."

Tommy Watson grinned.

"A jolly fine secret—I don't think," he remarked. "If all the River House chaps know about it——"

"My dear chap, you don't understand," I interrupted. "Brewster & Co. wouldn't give the secret away for worlds—because it's to their advantage to keep it. To get straight to the point, it concerns Jerry Dodd."

"Oh!" said Watson. "So he's got some mysterious and dark secret, has he? Then Teddy Long was right!"

"Teddy Long?"

"Yes; the young ass was spreading a yarn that two men had come to see Dodd—two queer-looking specimens who seemed to have come out of a museum—according to Long's yarn. When he started jawing to me I punched his head! I don't want to hear Dodd's business."

I grinned.

"My dear chap, my little secret isn't even remotely associated with those men who came to see Dodd. The whole question of one of cricket."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "But Dodd can't play!"

"He doesn't even know what a cricket bat is called!" added Watson. "He's the biggest duffer one could wish to see. Look at the way he made an ass of himself the other day. Dodd knows as much about cricket as this tea-table!

I leaned forward and winked.

"That's all you know!" I said mysteriously. "If you think that Jerry Dodd is a duffer, you've made a mistake. And now I've told you."

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez, and regarded me wonderingly.

"But, my dear old fellow, you've told us nothing!" he declared. "In himself, Dodd is quite a decent chap; but at cricket he's the most frightful duffer I've ever come across."

I became serious.

"Now, my sons, I'm not going to talk in a loud voice," I said softly. "The window's open, and they say that walls have ears. So we've got to speak quietly. And it'll probably surprise you when I explain that Jerry Dodd can play cricket better than we can. According to Handforth, he's a terror!"

My chums stared in astonishment.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Watson. "You can't spoof us like this, Nipper. I saw Dodd with my own eyes——"

"So did I, and I thought the same as you," I interrupted. "But the cute beggar was hoodwinking us. He tried to make us believe that he couldn't play."

"But why on earth should he do that?" said Watson. "If he's so keen on cricket, as you say, he would have shown us his best form."

"That's what one would naturally think," I agreed. "But his father wants him to put in all his time at studying, and to give sport the cold shoulder."

"What a queer idea!" remarked Sir Montie.

"Well, there's something to be said for it," I exclaimed thoughtfully. "If a chap is a good cricketer he's liable to put his heart and soul into the game, and to let his studies rip. I dare say you've noticed the same thing with many fellows. If they're good at sports, they're often backward with their lessons. The two things don't always go together. And Doddy's father insisted upon him devoting himself entirely to study. In fact, he gave the Head instructions to this effect; and, as a matter of fact, Jerry Dodd has been forbidden by the Head to become a member of the junior eleven!"

"Well I'm blessed!" said Watson.

"Knowing he could play cricket well, and knowing also that he wasn't allowed to join the eleven, Dodd thought it better to make us believe that he was a duffer," I explained "That's the whole idea. In reality, he's just the opposite. He's as hot as mustard, and just the chap we want in the team."

"And yet we can't have him?"

"Well, it seems like it just at present," I admitted. "But there's always a way out of every difficulty—and we'll find a way out of this one. We're going over to Bannington on Saturday to play the Grammar School—and we've got to whack them."

Sir Montie shook his head.

"That's a frightfully difficult proposition, old boy," he said. "We tried to whack the Grammar School here, but they whacked us instead. Our chances are pretty slim, I'm afraid."

I nodded.

"That's what it looks like at present," I admitted. "But if we can only get Jerry Dodd in the team we shall be all serene."

Tommy Watson gave an expressive grunt.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "Are you trying to make out that Dodd could win the blessed game for us? Have you seen him play?"

"No."

"Then you're an ass!" said Watson bluntly. "You know Handforth, I should think! You can't believe what he says. You say that Handforth told you that Dodd could play?"

"Yes; but I'm not relying on Handy's word alone," I replied. "I'm not quite such a duffer as that. Handforth saw Dodd on the River House practice ground, and his eyes were pretty well opened, I believe. You see, it was half holiday, and Dodd had nothing to do, and he happened to be strolling near the River House School. He got pally with Brewster & Co., and they invited him to have a go at the nets. Handy saw all this through the hedge. And, to his amazement, Dodd not only knocked the bowling all over the field, but he hit Brewster's middle stump three times in succession; and Brewster is the star batsman of the River House Junior Eleven!"

"Phew!" whistled Watson. "A bowler as well as a batsman! And Handforth told you this?"

"He did."

"Then you can't believe it!" said Tommy. "You know how Handforth exaggerates everything!"

"Yes, I know that," I said. "And so, at the first opportunity, I slipped down and had a word with Brewster and his chums, and this is the important part, my sons. Brewster told the same story!"

"Begad!"

"Brewster admitted that Dodd was a perfect terror," I went on. "He was frightfully cut up because I knew the truth—you see, he's afraid that we shall play Dodd against his own team, and that would spell disaster for the River House. Brewster says that the Australian chap is a perfect wonder!"

My chums were convinced at last.

"Have you spoken to Dodd about it?" asked Watson.

"Yes, of course; but he says he's forbidden to play," I replied. "But we'll see about that when Saturday comes. Naturally, I shall seize an opportunity to put Dodd to the test. I've got to see with my own eyes what he can do."

"And we mustn't say anything about this?"

"Not a word," I replied. "It would only cause a lot of talk among the chaps, and Dodd doesn't want that. If he can't play it's better that he should be considered a duffer, and then he won't be bothered with questions. But I mean to get out some scheme before Saturday; and Dodd will come along with us to Bannington."

Shortly afterwards we went out to Little Side, where most of the other junior cricketers were already at practice. I had surprised my chums with my revelation regarding Jerry

Dodd—for Jerry was regarded as an absolute ass in all matters connected with cricket.

And while we were disporting ourselves on the practice ground, Jerry Dodd himself was bottled up in Study F with his books. In spite of the warmth of the evening he had closed his window, and was now sitting at the table glaring at his books, and with his hands pressed tightly over his ears.

Jerry Dodd was doing his utmost to concentrate his thoughts. He wanted to shut out all sounds. But in spite of himself other thoughts kept obtruding. He found his mind wandering away from the subject in hand. He could see the cricket field, with the white-clad figures on the green turf.

And it was almost as much as he could do to restrain himself from flinging his books across the room and rushing out. It was only dogged determination which kept him there.

He generally had a struggle like this when he first brought his books out. But later, when he got thoroughly into the work, he became resigned. But somehow, this evening, he couldn't settle himself.

And, at last, he rose to his feet in desperation, tucked his books under his arm, and strode out of the Ancient House. There was a grim look on his face, and his lips were set as he passed out through the lobby. Handforth happened to be there.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's wrong, Doddy?"

"Nothing! "replied the colonial boy bluntly.

"Who are you going to wallop?"

"By jings!" said Jerry Dodd fiercely. "I don't figure on walloping anybody; but I'd like to get hold of the guy who wrote these books!"

Handforth grinned.

"Oh, swotting!" he exclaimed. "Why don't you chuck those books aside and enjoy yourself? I'm blessed if I'd turn my hair grey like that!"

Jerry Dodd set his jaw.

"It's got to be done," he said. "I've made up my mind to do it, chum, and I don't reckon it's my way to give in. I'm not over pleased with the amount of knowledge that's inside my head, so it's up to me to improve things."

"Oh, well, it's your funeral—not mine!" said Handforth. "Personally, I'm going out to the cricket——"

Jerry Dodd didn't want to hear any more. He felt himself weakening, and the influence of the other juniors might have due effect. The only way for him to stick to his work was to be alone—away from all temptations.

And he set out resolutely, passed through the gateway, and strode down the lane. But he only went a short distance before turning off across a meadow. And after a comparatively short walk he arrived at a very peaceful little scene.

Close behind lay the dense bulk of Bellton Wood. Just in front the River Stowe flowed lazily on its course. There were willow trees in plenty, and the river banks were grassy and very soft. And this little spot was curiously formed. It was a kind of hollow at a bend of the river.

The trees on the other bank completely obstructed the view. Bellton Wood, behind, had the same effect. Thus, the spot was quiet and secluded, and was hardly ever visited.

Jerry Dodd breathed a sigh of contentment as he sat down on the grass, and opened his books. It was better here—even quieter than in Study F.

It was now a regular habit of Jerry's to come down here on fine, sunny evenings to bury himself in studies. He couldn't hear the cricketers on Little Side—he couldn't see them—there were no shouts of Removites and Third Formers to worry him. There were no distractions at all.

Unknown to the Australian boy, his movements were causing a certain amount of activity on the part of two extraordinary looking gentlemen—none other than Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge.

They had been carefully concealed

behind the thick hedge which bordered Bellton Lane. They had been waiting there for some considerable time, and when Jerry Dodd appeared, on his way to his favourite spot by the river, they became instantly alert.

"Aha! That is the boy, Mr. Midge!" exclaimed Mr. Podge.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge — undoubtedly!" agreed Mr. Midge mildly.

"Our vigil has not been in vain, Mr. Midge!" puffed the fat Mr. Podge laboriously. "It is now our task to wait—and then follow. In no circumstances must we allow this boy to escape us!"

"I agree, Mr. Podge—I certainly agree!" piped Mr. Midge mildly. "But do you not think we are wasting time? The boy is already down the lane, and —— Good gracious! He has turned off the road, and is even now making his way across the meadow. We must hasten, Mr. Podge!"

The two queer-looking men looked about them with exaggerated care, and then pushed through a gap in the high hedge and walked down the road. Mr. Podge led the way, and Mr. Midge came trotting in the rear very much after the style of a monkey following its keeper. At length they arrived at the spot where Jerry Dodd had disappeared. They passed through another gap in the hedge, and were just in time to see the junior vaulting over a gate on the other side of the meadow.

There was an anxious light in Mr. Midge's meek eyes.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "We must hasten our footsteps, Mr. Podge!"

"Not at all—there is no need for haste, Mr. Midge!" replied Mr. Podge calmly. "We mustn't allow ourselves to be seen by this boy. If we did so, his suspicions would be at once aroused."

Mr. Midge still looked worried.

"But he will escape, Mr. Podge—he will undoubtedly get beyond our reach!" he protested. "Please be reasonable, Mr. Podge. We must waste no time here. It is our duty to——"

"Tut—tut! You will allow me to conduct this matter as I think fit, Mr. Midge!" puffed the fat man firmly. "Have you no confidence in our methods? Have we ever been known to fail?"

"Never, Mr. Podge!" said Mr. Midge obediently.

"Then why are you in such an unnecessary hurry?" demanded Mr. Podge. "This boy may turn round at any moment, and he would suspect our intentions if he caught sight of us. No, Mr. Midge, we must be careful."

"I agree, Mr. Podge—I certainly agree!" admitted Mr. Midge meekly. "But while we are arguing, Dodd is leaving us in the rear. He has already crossed the adjoining meadow."

Mr. Podge snapped his fat fingers.

"Do we care?" he asked contemptuously. "Do such matters worry Messrs. Podge and Midge? No, my dear sir! It will be child's play for us to pick up the boy's trail and discover his actual destination. As I said before—child's play, Mr. Midge!"

Mr. Midge said nothing, but he still looked anxious. By this time Jerry Dodd had completely vanished, and the two human bloodhounds crossed the meadow in rather a curious way. Mr. Podge was in advance, and he kept his gaze fixed upon the ground—closely watching the almost invisible trail which Jerry Dodd had made in the grass. Mr. Midge trotted behind.

Not that it was necessary for them to take this trouble—for they had seen the junior leaping over the gate at the other side. At length they arrived at the gate, and looked over with an air of exaggerated caution. A peaceful scene lay before them—a grassy slope leading down towards the river, with Bellton Wood on one side, and with clumps of trees growing here and there. But there was no sign of Jerry Dodd. He had completely vanished from view, and there was apparently no method of telling which direction he had taken.

Mr. Midge gave vent to a sigh.

"As I feared, we are baulked!" he said sorrowfully.

"Nonsense, Mr. Midge—nonsense!" said Mr. Podge, laboriously climbing over the gate, and heavily dropping to the other side. "Do you imagine for one moment that we shall fail to pick up the boy's trail? Nothing, I can assure you, will be simpler."

"I trust that you are right, Mr. Podge."

And Mr. Midge waited with a somewhat doubtful expression on his bird-like face, for Mr. Podge to show him how simple it was to pick up the trail.

CHAPTER 7.
The End of the Trail!

MR. PODGE uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"Aha! What have we here?" he exclaimed softly. "Did I not tell you, Mr. Midge? Did I not declare that we should be successful? See! This will lead directly to the boy's trail."

Mr. Podge was kneeling on the ground just on the other side of the gate, and he pointed dramatically to a little collection of nutshells. Mr. Midge regarded them without much enthusiasm.

"I fail to follow your train of thought, Mr. Podge," he said mildly.

"My train of thought!" echoed Mr. Podge scornfully. "Tut—tut! You are ridiculous, Mr. Midge—quite ridiculous. I regret that I should be forced to speak so, but it is an undoubted fact. This is a deduction I am making—a clear deduction which can lead to only one result."

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge—undoubtedly," murmured Mr. Midge humbly. "I must confess, however, that I am quite in the dark."

Mr. Podge rose to his feet, moved round for a few paces, stowed his big lens away, and then turned to his companion with a pleased smile upon his fat, ruddy face.

"These nutshells, as you will observe, were strewn upon the ground quite recently—within the last five minutes we may assume," he puffed. "It is clear that they were not here this morning, for they are perfectly dry, and there was a shower before luncheon."

"An astute suggestion, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge admiringly. "The sun, however, is shining powerfully, and the sun has, I believe, some drying properties——"

"Tut, tut—an absurd objection!" said Mr. Podge. "These shells were strewn upon the ground, as I said before, only a short time ago. Do you follow my line of reasoning? These shells indicate that nuts have been partaken of—Spanish nuts, by all appearances. And is it not well known that schoolboys eat a lot of these nuts?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge," agreed the little man. "I follow you now."

"Good! We are getting on!" said Mr. Podge importantly. "We have arrived at the one obvious conclusion—namely, that Dodd paused here for a few moments to crack a number of Spanish nuts, and to consume the kernels."

Mr. Midge nodded and looked eagerly inquisitive.

"Exactly!" he agreed, gazing up at his companion with a light of intense admiration in his eyes.

"Very well—so far so good!" said Mr. Podge. "I have also observed that one or two nutshells lie in the grass to our right—which further indicates that the boy continued on his way, cracking nuts as he walked. We have, therefore, but to follow this trail of nutshells, and they will lead us to the spot where Master Dodd is to be found. What is your opinion, Mr. Midge?"

Mr. Midge was almost speechless with admiration.

"Marvellous!" he said. "Your powers of deduction, Mr. Podge, are truly wonderful. But—pardon my im-

patience—do you not think it is time we made a move?"

The importance of this had evidently not struck Mr. Podge. He seemed quite reluctant to leave the spot. And, instead of acting on Mr. Midge's advice, he produced his large magnifying lens, and went down heavily upon his knees in the grass. After a careful examination of the ground, he rose.

"I regret there are no other clues!" he said, puffing somewhat. "And now, Mr. Midge, we will follow the trail. There is no hurry, as you seem to imagine. Progress was never made by hurrying. We must live up to our motto—slow but sure. Absolutely sure. We do not know the meaning of the word failure."

"It sounds strange and unfamiliar to my ears!" declared Mr. Midge.

Mr. Podge led the way across the meadow. Strangely enough, traces of nutshells were to be observed on the way—proving quite conclusively that their quarry had indeed passed in this direction. But when the opposite hedge was growing near, all traces of the nutshells came to an end. And Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge halted.

"This is unexpected!" said Mr. Podge, frowning, and impatiently fingering his fat chin. "Most ridiculous! Why on earth did the boy cease eating nuts at this point? But no matter—we are not beaten, Mr. Midge. We have never been beaten. This is merely a check!"

Mr. Podge waddled round in circles, apparently with the object of finding the trail once more. While he was engaged in this occupation, Mr. Midge suddenly started and stared fixedly at a portion of the hedge which lay a short distance to his left.

A figure was moving behind the hedge. Mr. Midge could distinctly see the movements, and then, through a little gap, he saw a boy in Etons. He drew his breath in sharply, ran towards his huge companion, and tugged at his jacket.

"Wait—wait!" said Mr. Podge. "I am concentrating my mind——"

"But I must insist, Mr. Podge!" said Mr. Midge grimly. "Dodd is just behind the hedge, and it is quite unnecessary for us to spend further time here. Indeed, unless we are very careful we shall be seen. I suggest that we take cover."

Mr. Podge looked doubtful.

"An easy matter for you, Mr. Midge, but somewhat more difficult for me!" he observed. "Yes, you are right—I see the boy myself. Come, we will creep near to the hedge."

They went with soft footsteps towards the hedge, and stood there motionless. Mr. Podge removed his ridiculous little hat, revealing a head which was completely devoid of hair, And this projected considerably above the top of the hedge.

Mr. Podge did not seem to worry over this matter—he certainly did not realise the possibility that his head might be seen. Certain movements from the other side of the hedge told the pair that Jerry Dodd was still close at hand.

It was impossible actually to see the boy, for the hedge was thick, and only a momentary glimpse of a foot, or a hand could be seen at one time. And to the surprise of Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge, the junior seemed in no hurry to depart.

"We must keep quiet—and perfectly still!" murmured Mr. Podge. "Do not move, Mr. Midge—for if we can see the boy it stands to reason that he can see us. Stand perfectly still, and wait. It is the best method."

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge—undoubtedly."

They waited. The sun was hot, for the evening was not at all advanced, and the sun was fairly high in the sky. It was shining, moreover, fully upon them, the shade being upon the other side of the hedge.

And then, while they were standing in this manner, a gaily coloured butterfly hovered for a few moments overhead, and then settled gracefully upon Mr. Podge's bald scalp.

Before Mr. Podge could even lift a

hand, an extraordinary thing happened. There was a swish of feet through the grass, a sudden whiz, and then an enormous butterfly net came shooting downwards. It descended fully over Mr. Podge's head, and the butterfly was certainly entrapped—but so was the face of Mr. Podge.

"Good heavens!" he gasped.

The next moment a junior schoolboy came wriggling through a gap at the bottom of the hedge. He wore big glasses, he possessed a shock head of hair, and he held his head on one side in rather a curious fashion. In point of fact, the junior was no less a person than Timothy Tucker of the Remove.

Tucker was looking just his usual self. His big spectacles, which were slightly green-tinted in hue, were perched upon his nose in a most careless way, as though they would fall off at any moment. Wisps of his dark hair were escaping from beneath a faded straw hat which looked as though it had seen many seasons' hard wear. The rest of Tucker's clothing was in keeping—untidy and dusty. The cheerful lunatic of the Remove was never careful about his personal appearance.

He blinked at Mr. Midge in astonishment, for he was almost a head taller than that gentleman. Then he looked up in even greater astonishment at the enormous bulk of Mr. Podge, who was now struggling out of the folds of the butterfly net.

"Dear me!" said Tucker mildly. "H'm! How extraordinary! The position is this, my dear sirs——"

"Confound you and your butterflies!" bellowed Mr. Podge, tearing the thing away and throwing it on the ground. "Boy! How dare you? Do you know who I am?"

"Really, my dear sir, I have not the faintest idea," said Tucker mildly. "I observe that you have done considerable damage to my net, and I must request you to make that damage good. I insist! Yes, my dear sir, I insist!"

"You impertinent young rascal!" puffed Mr. Podge. "Not content with half smothering me with that wretched net, you have the audacity to demand compensation! How dare you? What are you doing here—by what right do you wander about these fields?"

"I'm afraid we have made a slight mistake, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge nervously. "This boy is not Master Dodd——"

"Have you no sense, Mr. Midge?" snapped the big man. "Have I not eyes of my own? I can perceive quite well that this boy is not whom we thought him to be. He has no right here!"

"Admitted, my dear sir—admitted!" said Timothy Tucker. "The position is this. At the moment I am hunting for butterflies, and I am unfortunate enough to be somewhat nearsighted. Pray accept my full apologies for having netted your head as well as the butterfly. I can truthfully say that such was not my intention. Quite so—quite so!"

Mr. Podge glared.

"Go!" he said, pointing with a quivering finger. "Go at once!"

Tucker looked a mere midget compared to Mr. Podge, and he thought it would be wisdom on his part to go at once. He picked up his net, and discovered that it was not so badly damaged after all. And, to his joy, he found that the butterfly was still vainly attempting to escape.

"H'm! This is most fortunate!" murmured Tucker, as he moved off. "A wonderful specimen which will greatly beautify my collection. Quite so!"

"We have failed, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge sadly.

Mr. Podge glared.

"Such mistakes as this cannot be avoided," he declared. "We followed the trail of nuts, and we were not to know that the wrong boy had been eating them. We must now search round for further clues."

But although Messrs. Podge and Midge searched round for quite a long time, they found no other clues. They

came across no sign whatever of Jerry Dodd. And this did not say very much for their wonderful methods. For Jerry Dodd was only a short distance away, reclining easily on a grassy bank, buried in his books. But neither Mr. Podge nor Mr. Midge thought of acting in the most direct way. They went off into Bellton Wood in search of trails and clues.

Jerry Dodd was thoroughly settled to his work now. He knew nothing of the two extraordinary men who were trying to locate his whereabouts.

The sunshine was rather warm, and Jerry had been concentrating on his studies to such good purpose that he had already conquered the problems he had set himself out to solve, and now he was feeling rather sleepy. This was the effect of the sun.

But Jerry Dodd did not believe in sleeping at his work. The grass was certainly very inviting, and he thought it would be rather enjoyable to lay back and doze for a minute or two.

But the flies were troublesome. They buzzed round about him irritatingly, and he suddenly brought his hand to the back of his neck.

"By jings!" he muttered.

He had felt quite a little sting, and as he brushed his neck, his hand knocked something off.

"That must have been a nasty tempered beggar!" muttered Jerry. "I suppose they begin coming out at this time of the evening."

He went on with his work, rubbing his neck occasionally. To his relief, it was not swelling, and his suspicion that a wasp had stung him was unfounded. He felt nothing now.

He went on with his work. But somehow or other the words of the book became blurry. More than once his eyes closed, and he forced open the lids with difficulty.

He felt that it would be better for him to lay his head back for a moment. He did so, stretched out on the grass languidly, with his books in a heap close beside him. The result was inevitable.

Jerry Dodd slept.

CHAPTER 8.
A Staggering Experience!

THE Australian boy looked about him.

He was in a tiny glade of the wood, where the sunlight only entered at midday. All round, trees pressed closely near the little clearing, their foliage meeting overhead and forming a natural arbour. Although the evening was still young, within this shaded place it seemed as though twilight had fallen.

It did not seem to be a real place at all; but a dreamy, mystical spot where everything was strange. And standing right in front of Jerry Dodd, there was an Indian—impassive, motionless and silent.

At least, Jerry Dodd took him to be an Indian. He was a wiry-looking man with brown, wrinkled skin and pitch black hair. It was difficult to tell his age, for although he was clean-shaven, his face was all pluckered into thousands of little wrinkles. His eyes were deeply set below bushy brows.

He was attired in Oriental costume—rich silks of quiet colours, with a turban on his head. Perhaps he wasn't Indian at all—but Burmese. There was just a faint touch of the Chinaman in his appearance. Yes, he was certainly more like a Burmese than an Indian.

Jerry Dodd sat there looking up at this figure in a lazy, dreamy kind of way. He didn't feel particularly surprised to see the man. Somehow he fitted in with the surroundings, and with Jerry's own peculiar sensations.

The Australian boy almost expected the Indian to fade away as he stood there. He surely must be some image of the imagination. Jerry Dodd felt that his own brain was not working as it ought to work.

He couldn't remember things. He didn't seem to know how he had got into this glade, or what had happened before his arrival. It was a very queer thing. Was he in England, or somewhere in the far East? Jerry couldn't remember; he didn't seem to know anything beyond the fact that he was here.

Right back in his mind he had just an occasional glimpse of a big building with many figures moving about near it. Some of the figures were shouting—some were attired in white. What could the place be? A hospital—a school—yes! Just for a faint instant Jerry had a flash of remembrance.

A school! Of course! But what school, and where? And then it all slipped away, even while he was thinking of the subject. He brought his mind back to himself, and looked at his clothing. Why was he here; who was he? He gave a sudden start. Extraordinarily enough he couldn't seem to remember his own name! The sensation was uncanny in the extreme.

It was ridiculous, too; and there was that Indian gazing down at him all the time, like some wrinkled statue bedecked with clothing. Jerry Dodd closed his eyes, moved slightly, and shook himself. He had a kind of presentiment that when he opened his eyes again the strange figure would have disappeared, for, of course, it was only an imaginary one.

He opened his eyes—and there was the Indian, just the same.

"By jings!" said Jerry, his voice sounding peculiarly husky in his own ears. "I'm either going dotty, or seeing things! Say, chum, what's the game? Who are you, and what do you happen to be doing?"

Naturally, the figure wouldn't reply. Jerry Dodd was quite sure of this. But he was somewhat startled when the Oriental relaxed from his stiff position and performed an elaborate salaam.

"Golly!" muttered Jerry Dodd blankly.

"Have no fear of me, O illustrious youth!" exclaimed te Indian, in deep tones. "Be thou of good heart, and all will be well. It is not my intention to harm thee; but thou must obey me in all things!"

"Say, this is a bit too much for me," said Jerry Dodd, scrambling to his feet and feeling rather unsteady for a second or two. "Who are you, and how in the name of jumping kangaroos did you get here? If it comes to that, how did I get here—and where are we, anyway?"

The Oriental salaamed again.

"It is not for thee to ask questions," he said solemnly. "Thou art here—it is sufficient. And thou wilt do as I say without question and without resistance. I am thy friend, O illustrious one, and thou need not be in fear."

The whole thing was more unreal than ever. Jerry Dodd looked about him, half expecting to see a dozen more of these silken-clothed individuals dodging about. But he and the Indian were absolutely alone.

"But what's the game?" asked Jerry wonderingly. "What are you going to do with me? There must be somethin' wrong—I can't remember a thing. Say, chum, when did you first see me? What was I doin'——"

"Time is valuable, and it is unwise to waste moments on idle speech," interrupted the Indian gravely. "Come with me, O my son, and I will lead thee to a place where thou wilt see many wonders; and remember—thou must do my bidding. Everything thou art called upon to perform, thou must perform."

Jerry Dodd felt an uncomfortable feeling running all down his spine. The eyes of the Indian were boring right into him. Jerry felt as though his own will power would be taken away. He shook himself, but this did not have the effect of removing that curious, helpless sensation.

"Come!" said the Indian. "Obey!"

He turned his back upon Jerry Dodd and walked through the trees. Just for

a second the junior had a struggle with himself; but he could not resist that order. He followed this strange Oriental—followed him meekly, as a dog would his master. His senses were becoming dulled.

He was beginning to lose the idea that all this was unaccountable and extraordinary. He felt that it was right that he should obey the Indian. And it did not occur to him to ask any questions.

Not a word further was spoken. They worked their way in between the trees and undergrowth, the Indian leading the way with swift, stealthy footsteps. They went right through the heart of the wood, where no rail or footpath existed. And then Jerry suddenly found himself looking over a great expanse of undulating grassland, with patches of gorse and heather dotted about profusely.

And there was not a house in sight—not a human being. This was Bannington Moor; but it might have been in the heart of Burma, for all Jerry Dodd knew.

"Wait!" commanded the Indian. "We must make one or two necessary alterations, O my son."

"Just as you like," said Jerry mechanically.

The Oriental bent down and produced a long, light raincoat from behind a bush. He donned this, and then, removing his turban, replaced it with an ordinary felt hat. The turban he tucked somewhere in his clothing.

"Now we will proceed," he said.

They passed out into the open, and went across the grass with swift footsteps. Jerry Dodd did not feel himself. He hardly had any desire to ask questions, or to take heed of his surroundings. As before, the whole adventure seemed to be strangely distant and unreal.

He didn't know exactly how far he walked. The sun was shining quite warmly, and several hours would elapse before darkness came. And then Jerry Dodd found himself walking down a steep path—almost down the side of a cliff.

He didn't trouble to wonder where he was, or why the scene changed so abruptly. Actually, he was descending the rough path into the old disused quarry on the Moor. Down below lay boulders, masses of stone, chalk, and many weeds. The quarry had been neglected for thirty or forty years.

There were tunnels on the south side—one tunnel leading right into the vaults of the old monastry at St. Frank's.

But the Indian did not take this direction. He went towards the north side of the quarry, where the masses of rock were blank and bare. He picked his way nimbly over boulders—sure-footed as a mule. And Jerry Dodd came behind, not quite so agile. And presently the Indian turned into a little cleft—a cleft which was practically invisible until one came within a yard or so.

He squeezed his way in, and Jerry followed. They were now in complete darkness. But this was soon remedied by the lighting of a flaring torch, which the Indian held well away from him. Jerry found himself walking along a rough floor, with the rock close on each side.

It was not a tunnel, but merely a fissure in the rocks—the two walls of the fissure leaning towards one another and narrowing to a mere slit ten or twelve feet above.

A corner was turned, and then an amazing scene presented itself. For here the fissure opened, and there was a fairly spacious cavern, irregularly shaped and with its roof sloping upwards into the darkness.

There were lights here—queer little oil lamps which were burning on pedestals. There was a brazier here, too, filled with red-hot embers. And from this a thin column of smoke was ascending. The pungent, aromatic smoke of incense.

There were many cushions—big, soft cushions upon which reclined three other silken-attired men with brown

skins and piercing eyes. They were not all clean-shaven. One had a flowing grey beard, and he appeared to be the most important individual present. For Jerry Dodd's guide salaamed reverently to him.

"Thou hast done well, O Rahzin!" exclaimed the man with the grey beard. "Thou are sure that this is the youth we require?"

"Even so, O Mighty One, I am sure!" said Rahzin humbly.

The Mighty One waved his hand, and Jerry Dodd was brought right into the centre of the strange cavern, and placed there, as though for inspection purposes. He was not extremely astonished to see all these queer sights. He took it all as a matter of course, and was only dimly interested. It didn't seem to matter much what took place.

"What is thy name, O youth?" asked the High Priest—for such he appeared to be.

Jerry Dodd heard the question only dimly.

"My name?" he repeated. "By jings! I seem to have forgotten it."

"Is thy name Jerrold Dodd?"

Jerry shook his head helplessly.

"I seem to have heard it—but I couldn't say for sure," he replied. "But, say, what's all this? Where am I, and who are you?"

"Thou must refrain from asking questions, O my young friend," replied the bearded man. "Thou hast been brought here for a purpose—but thou wilt not be harmed. But make no attempt at resistance. I order—thou must obey!"

The High Priest said some rapid words in a strange tongue to his companions. Rahzin and the others closed about Dodd and proceeded to unfasten his tie and collar. These articles were removed, also his coat and waistcoat.

Then his shirt was pulled down until his left shoulder was fully revealed. And there, on the shoulder blade, a curious little mark could be seen—a birth mark which almost looked like a scar.

"O great Master, this is indeed the wondrous Son of Rhann!" exclaimed Rahzin. "Our search need not go further."

"Thou art right," said the High Priest. "Replace his clothing."

Within a few minutes Jerry Dodd was as before; he himself fastened his collar and tie. He was becoming rather more interested now, and he looked at his surroundings with much curiosity.

"Boy, thou wilt sit down," said the High Priest.

Jerry Dodd didn't want to sit down, but he felt it impossible to disobey. A cushion was just behind him, and he sank upon it. He now found himself looking upon a great globe of glass—a crystal. It had just been revealed by the removal of a black cloth. Jerry could see himself in the glass, strangely distorted and unreal.

"Thou wouldst see into thy future?" asked Rahzin softly. "Watch the crystal, O youth, and thy wish will be gratified. Thou wilt see thyself even as thou wilt be in the years to come."

"Say, that'll be real good!" said Jerry. "What do I do? Just stare into this and concentrate?"

"Thou hast used the right word—for it is most important that you shouldst concentrate thy mind entirely," replied Rahzin. "See! Thou wilt be transported ten years hence, and thou wilt know what is to occur."

"By jings!" muttered the Australian boy.

He stared hard at the crystal, but somehow he couldn't see anything except his own distorted reflection. Then he became aware of the fact that the clear globe was becoming filmy. It was being filled with a greyish, smoky haze.

Jerry Dodd continued to stare into the crystal. Rahzin was close beside him, and the Indian pointed.

"Dost thou not see what the crystal reveals?" he asked, in a low, mysterious voice. "Dost thou not see a man—straight, well set up, attired in white clothing? See! He is holding a strange piece of wood in his grasp, and with

this piece of wood he is knocking a ball that is made of leather. He is playing the game that is called cricket."

"Cricket!" repeated Jerry sharply. "Why, yes—sure! I seem to recollect somethin'—— Oh, say, that's rough! I can't quite get it—it slips away. Cricket? No, I reckon I'm all queer just now."

"Dost thou not see?" whispered Rahzin tensely. "Thou art there—in the crystal—as thou wilt appear when thine age is twenty-five. Watch closely! Thou art now being surrounded by many figures—figures that are cheering and acclaiming thee as a wondrous man of great prowess. It is ordained that thou shalt earn great honours. But now the picture is fading."

"Sure!" said Jerry.

He didn't exactly know whether he had seen a picture or not. But Rahzin's voice was so queer, and the whole place was so strange, that Jerry believed he actually saw an indistinct scene within the crystal.

"Thou wilt come here again—at no great distant date," said Rahzin, covering the crystal with the black cloth. "And then thou wilt see other wonders. And before another moon has risen thou wilt be one of the selected brethren of the Twin Stars."

The Indian turned and pointed.

"That must thou worship," he said solemnly. "Salaam!"

Jerry found himself looking at a large, extremely ugly object which was apparently made of wood, and which represented a squatting figure, very much like a Buddha. It was quite repulsive in appearance, and its eyes were blood-red.

Rahzin bowed low before this idol, and Jerry Dodd found himself doing the same—not because he wanted to do so, but because some strange influence impelled him. He salaamed before the idol two or three times.

"Thou art in the presence of Rhoon!" said the High Priest solemnly.

"I wouldn't give much for his chances for the first prize at a beauty show!" remarked Jerry Dodd calmly. "By jings! Of all the ugly——"

"Silence, thou young dog!" snapped the High Priest. "Wouldst thou insult the Mighty Rhoon? Ere long thou wilt learn that thou must pay great respect to the God of Rhoon. But it is sufficient for this occasion. Thou wilt now leave!"

"But I'm not coming here again, am I?" asked Jerry. "I can't understand this affair at all. You've got me real puzzled. I don't seem to figure where I am or what all this means."

"Thou wilt understand later."

"That's all very well. Why can't I know now?" demanded Jerry Dodd. "Seeing that I'm the chief figure in this little business, I think I ought to know a few more facts. Where do I come in? And who told you that my father was named Rhann?"

"O foolish youth, thou must not ask questions which will receive no reply," said the High Priest. "And remember—thou art of us—belonging to us. We have thee, body and soul. Thou wilt never escape!"

Jerry Dodd had no feeling of anxiey or fear. He was only filled with a great curiosity—which had come upon him within the last three or four minutes. When he had first entered the cave he had not cared about anything. But now he felt that his mind was becoming more active. It was getting back to its normal state.

"Thou wilt take the boy away, Rahzin," said the High Priest, waving his hand. "When we require him he shall know—and he will come. But that will not be yet. The time will arrive when the youth must return, and when the great event will take place. Until then, he must go back among his companions. Begone!"

Rahzin caught hold of Jerry Dodd's arm and pulled it.

"Thou wilt come?" he said firmly.

"Oh, just as you like," said Jerry

Dodd. "But I reckon I'd like to know—say, what the thunder——"

He had walked forward while speaking, and his foot caught in a fold of the thin carpet which had been laid upon the floor of the cavern. He pitched forward, tripping over one of the squatting figures, and then collided full tilt with a kind of Oriental table. The table went flying.

One or two objects were scattered about, and Jerry Dodd himself lay full length on the floor, with a bruise on his shin and in considerable pain. Just against his right hand there was a dull little object. Jerry didn't see exactly what it was, but he took hold of it mechanically, his intention being to replace it on the table.

But at that moment he was seized roughly by two of the Burmans and jerked to his feet.

"Clumsy youth!" exclaimed Rahzin angrily.

"It was an accident, I reckon——"

"Silence! Thou must not speak!" said the Burman. "Come!"

He jerked Jerry Dodd roughly, and the latter was forced to follow. The little object was still in his fingers, and he had quite forgotten it. Mechanically he dropped it into his pocket. He didn't even know that he had done so. He was still in pain, and somewhat bewildered.

A moment or two later he was out in the tunnel, with Rahzin in front of him holding a torch. Jerry's mind cleared a bit now, and he wondered what he had done with the thing which he had held in his hand. He didn't remember dropping it, but he must have done so. He certainly did not know that it was in his pocket.

Then he was suddenly dazzled by a burst of sunlight, and realised with a shock that it was not night-time. Actually he had only been within the cavern for about fifteen minutes. But it seemed longer to him.

It was evening now—it had been evening all the time. The sun was slightly lower, and the shadows longer. The Indian led the way up the steep quarry path until he was nearly at the top. Then he commanded Jerry to stand still.

And Rahzin raised his head above the level of the moor, and gazed round searchingly. Nobody was within sight.

"Come!" said the Indian. "Thou wilt follow as before."

They crossed the moor, and then once again plunged into the thick wood. Rahzin had now discarded his raincoat, and was attired as Jerry had first seen him—in full Eastern costume.

They continued on their way, and in a surprisingly short time they reached the little glade in the wood where Jerry had found himself at first. He stood there facing the Indian, who now took up a stiff attitude with folded arms.

"Lie down, O youth," he said. "It is well for thee to rest."

"By jings, that's welcome!" said Jerry Dodd, with a contented sigh.

He felt strangely tired.

He lay down in the long, dry grass. The glade became somewhat dimmer. And Rahzin stood there, perfectly silent and motionless.

"I reckon this is just fine!" said Jerry lazily.

"Rest, O my son—rest!" murmured Rahzin.

Jerry Dodd continued resting. He looked at the Indian with languid interest. And then, strangely enough, the Oriental figure seemed to become unsteady. Jerry Dodd was still looking at him, but he wasn't so solid now. The Indian became blurred, and finally seemed to fade away into nothing whatever.

Jerry Dodd lay back. The trees were fading, too, and then almost before he knew it the whole scene went dark and gloomy.

The Indian had gone, and there was a chill feeling in the air.

CHAPTER 9.

The Mystery of the Golden Image!

WITH a sudden start Jerry Dodd awakened.

He was feeling rather cold, and he shivered slightly. The sun was weak, and a faint mist was beginning to creep over the marshy meadows on the other side of the river. The Australian boy sat up abruptly, rubbing his eyes, and taking in a deep breath.

"The Indian!" he muttered. "I reckon—— Great jumping kangaroos!"

Jerry Dodd stared down at his side blankly. There were his books, the pages of one flapping idly in the faint evening breeze. He was in the exact spot where he had gone to sleep. He wasn't in the wood—in that curious, unreal glade. He was just where he had dozed.

"By jings," he gasped blankly, "a dream!"

He sat there staring before him, hardly able to gather his wits. Of course it had been a dream—there was no other possible explanation. But it was so vivid that Jerry felt rather queer.

He was not generally a boy who suffered from nightmare, or extraordinary dreams. And why should he, of all fellows, go to sleep and have a weird nightmare about Indians and caverns and ugly-looking idols?

Jerry Dodds stood up and exercised his limbs for a moment or two. He hadn't been reading any sensational stories, or even any classical works on India. Then why had he dreamed such a peculiar dream as this?

He pulled out his watch and looked at it.

"Well, say, this is the limit!" he muttered. "I must have been asleep there for close upon two hours! Golly, I shall be late for calling over!"

He felt decidedly angry with himself as he gathered his works together. He was not thinking of his work now—his mind was fully concentrated upon that dream he had had. He felt that he could remember all the details. The first lucid memory of the dream was when an Indian had appeared before him. Jerry could see the Indian quite distinctly in his mind's eye. But he couldn't remember what the man had been called, although he had had a name. That had already slipped away.

The Colonial boy had an uncontrollable desire to talk to somebody—to tell his dream to others, and ask what they thought of it. He had heard that dreams were sometimes signicant—and this was so marvellously vivid that he knew it could not be any ordinary, commonplace nightmare.

He felt that he wanted advice, and he gathered his books up and hurried off towards the school.

It was not long before he arrived near the playing fields, for he was returning by the towing path along the river, having crossed by the bridge soon after leaving his little private hollow.

As it happened, one of the first fellows that Jerry Dodd saw was myself. Most of the other juniors had gone, and I had just pulled up the cricket stumps, and had them tucked under my arm. I waited for the Australian boy to come up. When he did so his face was flushed with a strange excitement.

"Say, Nipper, chum, I want to tell you something," he said eagerly.

"Right you are! Tell away!" I said. "I'm all ears!"

"It's something I don't want the other fellows to know."

"Don't worry about that. I'll keep any secrets you like!" I said. "You can talk as we stroll along. The rest have gone in. Something about the cricket, I suppose? By the way, I shall want you to show me what you can do——"

"Say, give cricket a rest!" put in Jerry Dodd. "What I'm figuring on tellin' you is connected with a dream."

"A dream?" I echoed. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, there's a little place just down the river which I have chosen," explained Jerry. "It's a kind of hollow where I go when I want to be quiet."

"Where you can stew away at your books, I suppose, without any interruptions?"

"Sure! That's just it," agreed Jerry Dodd. "Well, I was there this evening, and I did a bit of work, and then I happened to lay back. The sun was warm, and I reckon I must have fallen clean off to sleep."

"Naughty boy!" I said severely.

"Say, I'm real serious!" went on Jerry Dodd. "I went to sleep, and I dreamed for practically two hours——"

"Rats!" I interrupted. "Dreams don't go like that, my son. You may have slept for nearly two hours, but your dream only lasted about thirty seconds. That's what they say, anyhow."

"Well, I don't reckon it matters a heap how long I dreamed," said Jerry. "The main thing is the subject of my nightmare."

"You can't have a nightmare in the daytime," I objected.

"Ain't you goin' to take me seriously?" demanded Jerry Dodd, grasping hold of my arm. "This dream was just about the most vivid thing I've ever known. I dreamed that an Indian appeared before me, and I was in a forest glade."

"An Indian!" I repeated. "A Redskin, do you mean?"

"No, a kind of Hindoo fellow—a regular dusky son of the East," replied Jerry Dodd. "How he got there I don't know, but things are always like that in dreams. What this forest was, or how I came to be in it don't matter anythin'. But this Hindoo chap took me along to a cavern. And there were others there—just the same sort. And they were all worshippers of a darned ugly idol——"

"Well, I've had dreams just as queer as that," I said, looking at Jerry fixedly. "The fact of the matter is, my son, you've been swotting too much. You ought to ease off a bit, and take more recreation. If you go on at this rate you'll suddenly find yourself eligible for the county asylum. Weak brains soon turn, you know."

Jerry accepted my banter good-naturedly.

"I wouldn't be sayin' so much about this dream if it was just the ordinary kind," he said. "By jings, I wish I could explain it properly! I've had dreams before, but they've always been hazy. But this was so vivid that I could almost believe that it really happened. I can see those Hindoos now——"

"No, you can't!" I put in. "Take my advice, Doddy, and forget all about 'em. It won't do you any good to dwell on this nightmare of yours. But I'll tell you what," I added suddenly. "If you like I'll take you along to Mr. Lee. Tell your dream to him, and he'll probably give you some advice."

The Colonial boy's eyes sparkled.

"Say, that's a great idea, chum," he declared. "But do you think Mr. Lee will be annoyed? I don't figure he'll like being disturbed——"

"That's all right," I said. "He won't mind."

As a matter of fact, I had a somewhat selfish object in taking Jerry to see the guv'nor. Nelson Lee would soon perceive that the new boy was working too hard, and that it would be wise to allow him more recreation. Perhaps I could get the guv'nor to remove the ban whch at present prevented Jerry Dodd from playing cricket.

And so, shortly afterwards, I steered Jerry down the passages of the Ancient House, and we came to a halt before Nelson Lee's study. I tapped, and walked in, my companion following.

Nelson Lee was there, and he looked up inquiringly.

"I've brought a patient, sir," I said calmly.

"A patient, Nipper?"

"Say, sir, I'm sorry to trouble you, but it was Nipper's idea," said Jerry

Dodd. "I guessed you wouldn't like bein' disturbed."

"Not at all, Dodd. I'm always pleased to see any of the boys," said Nelson Lee cheerily. "Sit down; make yourselves comfortable. I suppose you have come with some particular object?"

"You bet we have, sir," I replied. "To cut it short, Doddy has been seeing things!"

Nelson Lee looked rather surprised.

"I'm afraid I fail to understand, Nipper," he said. "Perhaps Dodd had better explain the matter himself."

"Sure!" said the Australian boy. "Well, it was this way, sir. I was out working by the river—studying, you know. I went to sleep in the sun, and I dreamed. I had a regular queer dream."

"And you have come to tell me all about it—eh?" smiled Nelson Lee. "I'm afraid you've been doing too much work, my boy. In the first place a healthy lad like you ought not to drop off to sleep in the evening; and in the second place you ought not to be troubled by dreams. Was this one particularly vivid?"

"That's just it, sir," said Jerry Dodd. "It was the queerest dream I've ever struck. But, somehow or other, it don't seem to be quite so clear now. I reckon I'm losing the hang of it."

"That's generally the way with dreams," said Nelson Lee. "After a while they become less distinct, and it is only with great difficulty that the details are remembered. What was the subject of this dream of yours?"

"Well, I kind of reckon I was among Indians, sir—Hindoos, sir," replied Jerry Dodd. "I met one of them in a forest glade, an' he took me right away to a kind of cavern among the rocks. Not long ago I could remember everything, but it's gone now. I could see the forest, and the way we got to the cavern. There was a sort of cliff—— But that's misty now."

"But what about the cavern, and the Hindoos?" asked Nelson Lee.

"There were three or four of them, sir," replied Jerry Dodd. "Sittin' on cushions, and all the rest of it. By kangaroos! A queer-lookin' lot, too! There was incense burnin' in a brazier, and rummy looking lights. An' one of these Hindoos showed me a crystal, and kind of made out that he could tell me my future."

"That was certainly interesting," smiled Nelson Lee. "I take it there was nothing particularly horrible about the dream?"

Jerry shook his head.

"Not horrible, sir," he replied. "But just almighty strange. These Indians figured that I was theirs, an' that they'd want me again. An' there was a big idol—with red eyes. Two glittering red eyes."

Nelson Lee sat forward, suddenly alert.

"Like stars?" he asked sharply.

"Say, that's right, sir!" replied Jerry Dodd. "That's what they figured, too! The Twin Stars—one of the Hindoos called 'em that!"

"Indeed!" said Lee keenly. "Have you ever studied this subject, Dodd?"

"Never, sir!"

"Have you ever read books about Indian or Burmese religion?"

"I don't know a darned thing about it, sir," said Jerry. "Those subjects don't interest me at all."

"It is peculiar, Dodd—most peculiar," said Nelson Lee slowly. "Knowing nothing of this subject, it is rather remarkable that you should dream in this way. I should like you to give me more details."

Jerry Dodd looked rather helpless.

"I reckoned on doing that, sir," he replied. "But I'm darned if the dream isn't fadin' away. I can't seem to get the thread of it proper. That's what I can't understand, because it was as clear as daylight ten minutes ago."

"It is hardly usual for a dream to slip from the memory so rapidly," said

Nelson Lee. "Now, for example, how did you get to this cavern you speak of?"

"By jings! You speak as if I really went there, sir!" smiled Jerry. "At first I knew everythin', and I could describe it all. But all I can remember now is being in the cavern. I reckon the Indian took me through the forest."

"Where was this forest situated?"

"That's got me beat, sir."

"You have no inkling at all?"

"Not the faintest, sir," replied Jerry Dodd. "I've got a sort of notion that we went across a kind of plain; but it's all filmy and indistinct now. What I can mostly remember is the cavern where the incense was burning. I can see that clear, sir."

"Tell me about it," said Nelson Lee. "These Hindoos—did they speak English?"

"I kind of reckon they must have done, sir," he said. "Anyway, I understood their talk in the dream. They showed me a crystal, and I was supposed to see my future in the thing."

"And did you?"

"I don't figure I saw anything much," replied Jerry Dodd, shaking his head. "I can't seem to recollect. Oh, but say! There's something else, sir," he added suddenly. "I fell over a mat, and went sprawling."

"Oh, you remember that?"

"Sure, sir!" said Jerry. "I remember catching my shin, and bruising it. And I picked up something from the floor—a little, brown metal thing which had fallen from a table. I can remember picking that up."

"And what did you do with it?"

"That's got me beat again, sir," said the Australian boy. "By jings! I sort of feel several kinds of a fool, comin' here with this darned story! I apologise, sir, and I hope you won't——"

"There is really no need to apologise, Dodd," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I am quite interested in this astonishing dream of yours—for it is astonishing. Although so many details are lacking, it is evident that this dream was astoundingly vivid and clear. Where did you first meet the Indians?"

"Why, in that cavern, sir," replied Jerry Dodd.

"Rats!" I put in. "You said something about a forest just now."

"A forest?" repeated Jerry, puckering his brow. "Say, that's slipped away! I can't seem to recollect anything about a forest."

"But you just said——"

"You do not seem to understand, Nipper, that this dream of Dodd's is rapidly passing out of his mind," said Nelson Lee. "I am very glad that you brought him to me at once—before the dream had completely disappeared. Although his story is lacking in details, it is, nevertheless, significant and impressive."

"Say, does it mean anything, sir?" asked Jerry anxiously. "I've heard that dreams are sometimes a sort of warning——"

"My dear boy, you must not allow such ideas to remain in your head," interrupted Nelson Lee. "If this dream of yours means anything, it means that you have been studying too much. I commend you for this, Dodd, and I may say that I am very pleased with the way you are devoting yourself to your work. You are showing a determination which is praiseworthy. For I am quite certain that studying does not appeal to you."

"I reckon my dad wanted me to get busy on the job, sir," said Jerry.

"Exactly; and you have been doing your utmost," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps you have been working just a little too hard; you need more recreation. You must not overdo it, Dodd. That is even worse than slacking."

"Couldn't he try his hand at cricket, sir?" I asked casually.

"I am afraid not——"

"But it would be a great help to him," I went on. "Blow all the cobwebs out of his brain, you know, and make him fresh for another spell of

Latin or mathematics or Greek mythology, or whatever he happens to be doing. There's nothing like a game of cricket for making a chap's brain feel fresh."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I'm afraid cricket does not appeal to Dodd," he replied. "In any case, Nipper, nothing can be done at the moment. And now, Dodd, you must go and forget your lessons completely for this evening. And do not dwell upon this dream—try to forget it. And do not tell any of the other boys."

"That advice won't need to be told twice, sir," smiled Jerry. "I don't reckon I'd care to be chipped by the fellows. They wouldn't understand, and they'd sort of have the laugh on me."

A minute or two later, Jerry took his departure from Nelson Lee's study. I went with him, and parted with the Australian boy in the Remove passage. He went straight along, out into the Triangle, and for a time he walked about in the cool twilight.

He was successful in dismissing all thoughts of the dream, and this was not so difficult. For Handforth & Co. were in the Triangle, and Handforth was doing his utmost to drive Church and McClure out of their minds. An argument was in progress, and Jerry stood by listening with great interest.

And then, after Church had received a punch on the nose, and after McClure had fled, Handforth marched into the Ancient House.

Jerry strolled about for some time, and then returned to the House. When he arrived at Study F, he found that Tom Burton was there. The electric light was full on, and the Bo'sun was reclining in an easy chair, reading the latest issue of the "Gem."

"Oh, here you are, shipmate!" he exclaimed, as Jerry appeared. "Conroy was here a minute ago, but he's gone ashore."

"I didn't see him," remarked the new boy.

"What's this about a dream?" asked the Bo'sun. "Nipper told me just now, and he asked me to keep it quiet if you said anything about it. He doesn't want the thing to get all over the ship."

"Dream?" repeated Jerry Dodd, frowning. "By jings! I seem to remember having had a dream of some sort, but I couldn't tell you what it was about. It's gone—I've forgotten the whole darned thing."

"Souse me!" said the Bo'sun. "It hasn't taken you long to forget, shipmate."

"That's the queer part of the thing," said Jerry. "I was trying to remember a minute or two ago, and I reckon I'd just got hold of something when it slipped away. You know what it's like to think of a thing and let it go before you can grab a real hold of it. I figure that's how it was this time."

And it was quite true that Jerry Dodd could remember absolutely nothing. That strange dream about the Hindoos and the cavern had gone right away from his mind.

"Mr. Lee reckons I've been doing too much work," said Jerry, as he sat down. "I reckon I shall have to ease off a bit."

"That's sound advice," said the Bo'sun, picking up a pencil from the table. "You've got to mix work with pleasure. By the way, let's have your pocket knife for a minute."

"It's yours!" said Jerry Dodd obligingly.

He put his hand into his pocket, feeling for the knife. Then a little expression of surprise came into his eyes—a puzzled look. He withdrew his hand, but it did not contain the knife.

Instead, he held a very curious little object between his fingers.

It was heavy, so heavy, that Jerry wondered why he had not noticed its weight. This was probably because he had been in the habit of carrying a second knife—a much heavier one—in that same pocket.

He now looked at the object with wonder and astonishment. It was metal—dull and tarnished—and it represented a little squatting figure, repulsively ugly, not unlike a Billikin. The thing was oblong, with a flat base. In the head two small red pieces of glass were fixed—representing the eyes of the image—and these glittered strangely in the electric light. They seemed to fascinate the junior in a queer manner.

"By jings!" he ejaculated blankly.

"What's that, shipmate?" asked Burton. "You seem to be surprised."

"Say, I can't understand — I'm puzzled," exclaimed Jerry. "Where did this thing come from?"

"Why, you just took it out of your pocket!"

"Sure, but I didn't put it there!" said the colonial junior. "I've never seen the thing before—I've never set eyes on it until now!"

Tom Burton looked astonished.

"That doesn't seem right," he said. "It was in your pocket, Dodd, and you must have put it there. What's wrong with your memory? Swab my maindecks! A chap doesn't find things in his pocket——"

"But I tell you I've never seen it before!" interrupted Jerry. "Golly! What a horrible-looking object! It's a kind of image—one of those Oriental things. What do you think I'd better do with it?"

"Well, if it's not yours, you'd better take it to Mr. Crowell," suggested Burton.

Jerry Dodd was still looking intently at the image, and he was more puzzled than ever. He finally decided that he would take it at once to Nelson Lee, in preference to Mr. Crowell. Jerry felt that Lee would understand better. The Australian boy had a very great respect for his Housemaster.

He presented himself in Nelson Lee's study a few minutes later. He did not notice that the schoolmaster detective had an open book of reference on the desk—a book dealing with India and Burma and Oriental religions.

"Yes, Dodd?" asked Lee, looking up. "What do you want?"

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but I thought I'd best hand this over to you," replied the junior. "Maybe you can explain things."

Nelson Lee took the little image from Jerry Dodd's hand. Then he started, his eyes became grim, and he looked at his visitor sharply.

"Where did you get this?" he asked, in a tense voice.

"That's just the puzzle, sir; it was in my pocket."

"In your pocket?"

"Sure, sir!"

"But that is no answer, Dodd," went on Lee. "How did it get into your pocket—where did you obtain it in the first place?"

"That's fair got me beat, sir," said Jerry. "I didn't obtain it. I've never seen it before. Somebody must have put it into my pocket—it wasn't there earlier in the evening, I'll swear to that."

Nelson Lee looked at Jerry Dodd very curiously.

"Does this image bring back anything to your mind?" he asked quietly.

"No, sir."

"Dear me!" murmured Nelson Lee. "Very curious! Well, Dodd, you had better leave the thing in my charge. If anybody claims it I will at once hand it over. In any case, it does not appear to be a matter of importance."

"Say, that's good!" exclaimed Jerry Dodd, with relief. "Maybe one of the fellows was trying to be funny. Thanks very much, sir."

"By the way, Dodd, there's just a question or two I should like to ask," said Lee, "about that dream of yours. Can you tell me——"

"Dream, sir?" repeated Jerry frowning. "I can't remember it now, sir; it's completely gone."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"Very well, Dodd, I will not question you any further," he said. "But there is just one little thing I should like you to do. Pull up the leg of your left trouser, and show me your shin."

"By jings!" ejaculated Jerry. "What for, sir?"

"Never mind what for; do as I say."

The Australian junior, full of wonder, did so. The shin was in perfect condition.

"Now the other one," said Nelson Lee.

It was different this time. On the shin a distinct bruise was visible—not particularly painful to Jerry, but there it was.

"How did you obtain that bruise, Dodd?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Say, I couldn't tell you, sir," replied Jerry Dodd. "I don't remember how I got it or when I got it, and it fair beats me how you knew it was there. It's a real puzzle. How did you know?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Perhaps I will explain that a little later on," he replied. "For the present, Dodd, you may go. By the way, if you are troubled with any further dreams come to me at once, you understand? At once."

"Sure, sir," said Jerry, more puzzled than ever.

He passed out of the study, and Nelson Lee stood perfectly still, staring before him.

"By James!" he muttered tensely. "What an extraordinary state of affairs! That was no dream of Dodd's—it actually happened! And the boy doesn't know it, that is the amazing part of the whole thing!"

Just at that moment I happened to come into the study, and I found Nelson Lee standing before his desk with the little metal image in his hand. The guv'nor was about to put it away, but he did not do so when he recognised me.

"Come in, Nipper," he said, with a curiously grim note in his voice. "I am rather glad you came at this moment. I wish to speak to you about Dodd."

"Why, that's queer," I said. "I wanted to speak about Dodd, too. It's concerning the cricket, sir——"

"Never mind the cricket now, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee. "There is something of much greater importance to discuss. Dodd came to me a few minutes ago, and it appears that he has completely forgotten all about that dream."

"Well, that's not so very startling, sir," I said. "Dreams do fade away after a bit. This one of Jerry's was a bit strange, but he's been studying too hard."

Nelson Lee looked at me squarely.

"Now, Nipper, I am going to tell you something," he said quietly. "You have never had any suspicions about this dream, have you?"

"Suspicions?" I repeated.

"You really took it to be a dream?"

"Why, guv'nor, what are you getting at?" I asked. "Of course it was a dream! How could it have been anything else? There aren't any Indians roaming loose about this district, with funny caverns and incense and crystals——"

"Wait a moment, Nipper, I have something to say," put in Nelson Lee. "I am telling you this because you know the whole story. Dodd told us that in his dream he bruised his shin. Do you remember that?"

"Why, yes, sir!"

"On Dodd's right shin there is a distinct bruise," said Nelson Lee significantly.

I stared.

"A bruise?" I repeated. "But it wasn't real, sir, it was only—— Great Scott! You're not suggesting that it actually happened?" I added breathlessly.

"You may further remember that Dodd mentioned a little metal object," went on Lee grimly. "He fancied he put it in his pocket; at least, he didn't know where it went to after he had picked it up. Dodd has forgotten the dream now, but he just brought me

this; he found it in his pocket and could give no account as to how it got there."

Nelson Lee held out the little image, and I regarded it blankly.

"The idol with the twin stars!" I exclaimed. "Great goodness! And—and Dodd doesn't know how it came to his pocket?"

"The boy knows nothing whatever," said Nelson Lee. "But it is quite obvious, Nipper, that this is the little metal thing which Dodd referred to in his dream. In brief, it was no dream at all, but an actual happening."

I was fairly staggered.

"But—but I don't follow, sir," I said. "How could it have happened? And what is this idol, anyway?"

Nelson Lee examined it thoughtfully.

"To begin with, it is made of solid gold," he said smoothly. "The stones representing the eyes are rubies of exceptional quality ,and the whole image is not worth one penny less than five hundred pounds!"

"Five hundred pounds!" I echoed faintly. "And Dodd found it in his pocket?"

"Exactly, Nipper; but you need not be so startled," said Nelson Lee. "All this proves one thing—Dodd passed through an actual experience. It was not merely a fancy of his imagination, as he himself believes."

"But I don't see that it's possible, sir," I protested. "How could he have met these Indians and been taken to a cave? And, if it really happened, why doesn't he remember it?"

"Those are questions which I cannot answer just now, my boy," replied Nelson Lee slowly. "There is a mystery here which will apparently tax all my ingenuity. I have told you this so that you shall know something of the truth. Do not speak of it to the other boys, and, above all, say nothing to Dodd himself."

"Have you any idea what it means, sir?" I inquired curiously.

"To tell the truth, Nipper, I have none," said Nelson Lee. "I intend to investigate the matter thoroughly. And perhaps, before so very long, I may be able to arrive at a solution. The problem is one which greatly interests me."

Shortly afterwards I left Nelson Lee's study. I was still filled with astonishment. I could hardly believe that what the guv'nor had said was true—that Jerry Dodd had actually passed through the experience which he thought to be a dream.

But the bruise on the shin and the golden idol proved otherwise. What was the mystery of that strange little image?

CHAPTER 10.

Nelson Lee's Surprising Adventure!

BELLTON LANE was quiet and peaceful, with only a faint breeze disturbing the tree tops of the dense wood. The darkness was quite dense here, although out in the open the brightly shining stars served to dispel the complete gloom of night.

Nelson Lee walked thoughtfully up the lane. Here, in the shadow of the wood, it was almost impossible for the famous detective to see a couple of yards ahead of him. The road was hard and rather dusty, and Lee was wearing a pair of light tennis shoes with rubber soles. His movements, therefore, were noiseless.

He had been for a walk—a late stroll. St. Frank's was asleep, for the hour was close upon midnight. Nelson Lee never retired early—scarcely ever before one a.m. Six hours sleep was the utmost he allowed himself, and it was sufficient.

Nelson Lee had been thinking over the curious events connected with Jerry Dodd's imaginary dream. And the detective was trying to arrive at some solution of the problem—he was endeavouring to puzzle out how those strange events had taken place, and how it was that Jerry had believed an actual happening to be a dream.

Lee could not quite settle himself to any definite line of reasoning, and as he walked along there was a puzzled frown on his forehead. He was not smoking now, although shortly before he had thrown away a cigar end.

As Nelson Lee was walking his thoughts strayed for a moment, and he came to a halt. The night was very quiet, only the slight rustle of the trees disturbing the complete stillness.

But almost subconsciously there came a curious sound to Nelson Lee's ears—a faint, elusive kind of chanting, not altogether unmusical, which seemed to fade and swell alternately.

Nelson Lee stood quite still, half-believing that his ears were deceiving him, and that he was hearing sounds which were merely in his own head. But no, this was not the case. He soon became convinced of that.

Standing quite motionless, listening intently, he came to the conclusion that the sounds were fairly close at hand—and not in the distance, as he had at first imagined. The chanting—if chanting it actually was—was low and very quiet. Those who were responsible were afraid to raise their voices.

Nelson Lee came to the conclusion that the chanting dirge was located somewhere within the deep recesses of the wood. At the slightest sound of approach the sounds would stop—that was certain.

But Nelson Lee had spent a great deal of time in the forest regions of Africa and other wild countries. He was as accomplished as an Australian black tracker. He could move through a wood as silently as a shadow.

Nelson Lee entered the wood like a ghost. He made not the slightest sound. His progress was slow, but he knew that he was going in the right direction. The chanting was already louder in his ears. It was coming from a point only a stone's throw away from him. But all was pitch blackness ahead, under the dense canopy of the wood's foliage.

And then Nelson Lee's keen eyes noticed a slight change. The blackness was slightly diffused. And after he had moved forward a few more paces he became aware of a strange, ruddy glow—so slight as to be almost imperceptible. He edged his way methodically through the trees, and not a twig crackled under his foot—not a leaf stirred as he moved.

Quite abruptly, the faint glow became a definite, exposed light. For Nelson Lee, parting the branches of a thick bush, found himself looking straight down into a cup-like hollow. It was a quaint little depression in the wood, where no trees grew. Even in broad daylight it would have been difficult to discover this secluded spot.

And there, in the centre of the hollow, stood a tiny brazier, with glowing charcoal contained within its bars. The light it gave out was insignificant. But, in that pitchy darkness, it seemed almost powerful. Nelson Lee could distinguish three men crouching round the brazier.

For a second, Lee rubbed his eyes, hardly able to believe that they were not deceiving him. The men were dark—Hindoos or Burmese. Although Lee could not see very distinctly, he was inclined to think they were the latter.

All the men were attired in rich Eastern clothing—silks and gaily coloured turbans. And they were chanting monotonously over the brazier.

Burmese in Bellton Wood—at midnight, and chanting with fanatical solemnity! It was an extraordinary state of affairs, and almost unbelievable.

The detective could not help thinking of Jerry Dodd, and the latter's strange experience of the previous evening. And Lee could not help thinking of the golden image with the two ruby eyes—the Twin Stars.

What connection was there between Jerry Dodd and the idol?

How were these dark men concerned

with the Australian boy? Why were they here, and what was the object?

Nelson Lee knew well enough that these Burmese were not in the district merely for pleasure. They had some definite object—and that object, no doubt, was a grim one. They were undoubtedly interested in Jerry Dodd. But why?

Nelson Lee realised he was up against something of a very unusual mystery. He did not act now. It was too early for him to make any decisive move. And so, as quietly as he had approached, he slipped away from the hollow, leaving the three Indians still chanting monotonously over the brazier.

So quiet had been Nelson Lee's movements, that the strangers did not know anything of his presence. And, within a few minutes, Nelson Lee was back in the lane—with much food for thought.

He had known since the previous night that Jerry Dodd's dream had been a reality, and that the Indians really existed. Now he had seen them with his own eyes—and he was more puzzled than ever.

The chanting still continued—but so faintly that no ordinary ears would have heard. It had only been Nelson Lee's trained hearing that had detected the unusual sounds. And even he would probably have missed them had the breeze been a little stronger.

He walked slowly and thoughtfully up to St. Frank's, let himself quietly in by the masters' gate, and went straight into the Ancient House. He did not linger in his study, but retired at once to his bed-room.

"There is something here that must be fathomed!" he told himself grimly. "My greatest difficulty is in discovering how Dodd can be associated with these men of the East. It is a most puzzling affair."

He did not switch on the electric light, but partially undressed in the dark. Then he slipped on his dressing gown and sank into an easy chair near the open window. He filled his pipe, lit it, and lay back.

He did not sleep—he sat there thinking deeply.

For perhaps half an hour he remained seated, quietly enjoying his pipe, and with no desire to slumber in his active mind. Then the pipe went out, its contents burned through.

But Lee still held it between his teeth. And he remained there, thinking out the problem—and arriving at no decision. His data was meagre and limited, and he knew that he would have to make more discoveries before arriving at any sort of solution. And, at last, he decided to turn in.

And then, at that very moment—just as he was about to move, his quick ears detected a faint, unusual sound.

It was so slight as to be almost indistinguishable. But Nelson Lee was keenly on the alert, and he held himself tense, listening. His mind flew back to the Indians in the wood. He had not thought for a moment that they would disturb the peaceful calm of St. Frank's.

Perhaps he was wrong—perhaps he had jumped to a hasty conclusion. The sound was repeated, and Nelson Lee knew that it was caused by the opening of a lower window. The intruder, whoever he was, performed his work with the utmost care. But Nelson Lee was alive to every unusual noise, and he knew that something was amiss.

He waited for two or three minutes. Then, quietly and stealthily he rose to his feet and moved across to the door. By the sound he judged that the midnight marauder was making an entry by means of the little window which led into the lower passage, near the lobby.

Nelson Lee emerged upon the landing, and his slippered feet made no noise. He reached the top of the stairs, and stood for a moment listening. No sound came to his ears, except one or two of those little creaks which are to be heard in all big houses during the still hours

He commenced descending the stairs.

The lobby below was quite dark. At last he reached the bottom. Then, holding himself tense, he suddenly switched on an electric torch. The light shot across the lobby in a silver beam.

It revealed a portion of the floor and the opposite wall, but no human figure. Nelson Lee shifted the light about quickly. Then something happened.

A large brown object, which glistened in the white electric light, shot across the lobby floor. The torch was jerked out of Nelson Lee's hand, and he caught his breath in. He knew what that brown object was.

A man—an Indian, devoid of clothing except for a cloth round his middle. His skin gleamed in the light as though it was polished, and he moved with lithe agility. And then Nelson Lee found himself grappling with this strange and uncanny intruder. The man did not attack Lee—his sole object was to extinguish the light, and in this he was successful, for the torch crashed to the floor.

Only one glimpse had Nelson Lee received, but it had been sufficient to tell him what this figure was. Then he went to the attack, his intention being to capture the man and demand an explanation.

But it was not such an easy task.

The instant Nelson Lee commenced his struggle, he discovered that his antagonist was as slippery as a newly landed eel. Lee could not obtain a grip anywhere; his fingers clutched helplessly at the fellow's skin.

The Indian was greased—from head to foot!

The brown man did not make a sound, except for his heavy breathing. And with a quick, sudden jerk he freed himself and vanished into the blackness. Nelson Lee judged that he was making his way to the open window, and the detective hurried off in pursuit. He arrived at the window and stared out into the starlit Triangle. Everything was quiet, and not a sign of any human being could be seen.

"The slippery rascal!" muttered Lee tensely.

Two hands, with long, wiry fingers, came round his throat from behind. This was absolutely unexpected, for Lee had not believed that the Indian was still within the building. Lee jerked himself round quickly, and the fingers tightened over his throat. But only for a moment.

With a sudden heave, Lee was sent hurtling backwards. He crashed against the wall of the passage, and fell to the floor. He caught a glimpse of a black shadow leaping in one bound through the window. Then it disappeared.

By the time Nelson Lee had picked himself up, the extraordinary instruder had vanished. And Lee knew that it would be futile for him to go in pursuit. So, closing the window, he went upstairs to bed—fully convinced that the Indian would not make any further attempt that night.

Nelson Lee was startled by what had occurred. The light was full on in his bed-room now, and his first action was to bathe his neck, for it was considerably bruised. Then, at last, he paced up and down the room, smoking a cigarette.

"The idol—undoubtedly the idol!" he told himself grimly. "That can be the only possible explanation."

There was nothing else to be thought. The Indian was one of the three Nelson Lee had seen in the wood, and that peculiar chanting had probably been a kind of preparatory move. No doubt the Burmese gentlemen had been invoking the aid of Buddha before their emissary went on his errand.

The man had come for the golden image—which Jerry Dodd had brought away unknowingly from the mysterious cavern. And, though Nelson Lee had not met with any great success in his present investigation, he was by no means downhearted.

Here was a problem after his own heart—the most mysterious case he had ever been called upon to handle!

Meanwhile, Jerry Dodd, of the Remove, was sleeping peacefully in the dormitory — unconscious of the smouldering fires which would shortly be stirred into flame. The Australian boy had settled down very quietly at St. Frank's. But, before so very long, he was destined to provide the old school with more excitement than it had seen for many a day!

CHAPTER 11.

Nelson Lee Makes Inquiries!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH winked mysteriously.

"Yes, my sons, it's a secret, and you aren't going to get it out of me," he said. "You can ask me until you're blue in the face—but it won't make any difference!"

"We shan't ask—we don't care twopence about your silly old secret!" exclaimed Church, with an air of indifference. "What do you say, Clurey?"

"I'm not interested," replied McClure.

The three chums of Study D were strolling down Bellton Lane leisurely. A moment before they had emerged from the Triangle at St. Frank's. Tea was just over, and the evening was sunny, but rather windy.

"I believe in keeping secrets," went on Handforth. "This one concerns somebody you know as well as I do."

"But we don't know him," said Church.

"Don't know whom?"

"The chap the secret is about.

"Why, you silly ass!" exclaimed Handforth, glaring. "Do you mean to say that you don't know Jerry Dodd?"

"Oh, Jerry!" grinned McClure. "Well, we haven't had much to do with him. Rather a quiet sort, and fond of swotting. He's a frightful duffer at cricket——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Handforth.

Church and McClure came to a stop and stared.

"What's the cackle for?" asked McClure wonderingly.

Handforth suddenly pulled himself up and coughed.

"Ahem! Nothing—oh, nothing!" he said hastily. "Something tickled me, that's all."

"You know as well as I do that Dodd can't play cricket," put in Church.

"Of course he can't—didn't we see him make a mess of it?" asked Handforth. "Anyhow, you won't get that secret out of me——"

"The secret about Jerry Dodd, you mean?"

Handforth looked startled.

"Jerry Dodd?" he gasped. Who—who told you—— I—I mean, what rot! Just as if the secret could be about Jerry Dodd!"

Church and McClure chuckled.

"But you just told us——" began Church.

"I didn't tell you anything!" roared Handforth fiercely. "And if you give me any more of your rot I'll punch your silly noses!"

Handforth marched down the lane, quite unconscious of the fact that he had nearly let the cat out of the bag. When Handforth kept a secret he only kept it for a short time—not that he was incapable of being trusted, but because he allowed things to slip out quite unconsciously. He was a frightful ass in that way.

Church and McClure said no more. They didn't want to start any trouble—particularly this evening, as Handforth had received a nice fat remittance from home, and they were even now on the way to the village tuckshop to celebrate the occasion. Church and McClure were nearly stony, and they were hungry. Tea in Study D had been a bit of a farce, for the supplies had been extremely scanty. Church and McClure had no wish to fall foul of their good-natured leader just now.

"Lovely evening!" said Church, deeming it wise to change the subject.

"Oh, rather," agreed Handforth. "I was just thinking—— Hallo! Look at that kid's balloon on the hedgetop!" he added, pointing. "Must have got

blown up there by the breeze, I suppose."

Just a little distance ahead, where the hedge was thick, a perfectly round smooth object projected slightly over the hedge.

"We'd better rescue it," said McClure. "This balloon seems to be a good one—although I never saw one that colour before. We'll nip along and unhook it——"

"Rot!" put in Handforth. "Do you think we're going to be seen walking down the road carrying a baby's balloon? Just watch me bust the giddy thing."

Handforth produced a deadly pea-shooter from his pocket, dropped a pea into the tube, and placed the instrument to his mouth.

"You see it bust first shot!" said Handforth.

He took a deep breath and operated the peashooter with deadly effect. The tiny missile hit the target with terrific force—although, of course, the juniors could not see this. But they heard quite a lot.

"Yow-yarooh!" roared a puffing, bellowing voice.

Handforth & Co. came to an abrupt stop, gaping. The toy balloon had not burst. Instead, it jerked upwards, turning round at the same moment. And the startled Removites found themselves staring into an enormously fat face. A fat hand was rubbing the perfectly bald head vigorously.

"Great pip!" panted Handforth. "I—I thought——"

"Oh, my goodness!" murmured Church. "Bunk, you asses; bunk!"

"Yes, that's the wheeze!" muttered McClure.

Handforth declined.

"Rats!" he said. "We've got to apologise to this gentleman! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourselves, you prize duffers! Telling me that the chap's head was a balloon——"

"Why, you were the first one to speak——"

Church, in the midst of his protestation, found the words failing on his lips. For the owner of the bald head and the fat face came plunging through a gap. And his appearance was such that Handforth & Co. nearly collapsed. The stranger was a tremendously big man, attired in a loud check suit. Needless to say, it was Mr. Podge.

"It—it must have escaped from somewhere!" said Church faintly.

A further surprise awaited the juniors. Happening to glance down, they beheld another figure appearing through the gap. At first sight it looked like a Second Form fag attired in his father's suit; but upon careful scrutiny it turned out to be a fully grown man—in short, Mr. Midge.

"You—you impudent young scoundrels!" puffed Mr. Podge, glaring down at Handforth & Co. ferociously. "How dare you? How dare you deliberately throw stones at me in that ruffianly manner?"

Handforth swallowed hard, and managed to find his voice.

"Sorry, sir; but it was a mistake," he said. "You see, we thought your head was a toy balloon——"

"What?" belowed the fat gentleman.

Handforth didn't realise that his apology really constituted an insult.

"We saw it over the top of the hedge," he explained. "It looked just like a bladder, and I took a pot-shot at it with my pea-shooter. Awfully sorry, of course, but we weren't to know, were we?"

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Podge. "Not content with injuring me, you make matters worse by adding a deadly insult! You have the audacity to suggest that my head resembles a bladder!"

"You've put your foot in it, you ass!" muttered Church.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "How was I to know? Doesn't his head look like——"

"You apparently do not realise whom you are addressing!" interrupted the injured one. "Boy, allow me to present my card!"

Mr. Midge tugged hard at his huge companion's coat.

"Be cautious, Mr. Podge!" he murmured. "It is not wise perhaps to——"

"I know what I am doing, Mr. Midge!" puffed Mr. Podge. "You will kindly allow me to do as I please! There is no reason why our identity should be kept secret. Indeed, we are really well known in the village."

Handforth took the slip of pastboard which was thrust into his hand. He looked at it curiously, and his eyes opened wide. Church and McClure looked, too. And what they saw rather astounded them.

For this is what was printed on the card:

The Firm That Has Never Failed!
Cash Or Deferred Payments!
Telephone: Central 99999.
Telegrams: Incompetence, London.
PODGE AND MIDGE.
The Deadliest Sleuths on Earth!
Wrotland Yard, London, W.
Cases investigated at Shortest Notice. Specialists in Crime. Trails Picked Up In Any Corner of the World. All Kinds of Mysteries Unravelled while You Wait! Special Charges for Overtime. It is Impossible to dodge Midge & Podge!

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Church blankly.

"They—they must have escaped from an asylum!" whispered McClure, in startled tones.

Handforth's hand shook as he held the card.

"You prize asses!" he hissed. "Don't you understand? Can't you read plain English? These chaps are detectives!"

"Eh?"

"Which?"

"Detectives!" repeated Handforth. "My only hat!"

He turned to Messrs. Podge and Midge, and smiled in his best manner. When Handforth liked he could be almost charming.

"Please accept my apologies, sir, for what happened," he said humbly, addressing Mr. Podge. "I'm awfully sorry—but I didn't know that you were important gentlemen like this. It was quite a mistake, sir."

Mr. Podge was somewhat mollified.

"Very well!" he puffed. "I will say no more."

"I—I'm awfully interested in detectives," went on Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I am a bit of one myself. I've always prided myself on my cleverness in that line. Of course, I can see it all now—I can understand perfectly. And I'd like to congratulate you, gentlemen, on your wonderful disguises!"

"Disguises!" repeated Mr. Podge with dignity.

"Rather! They've ripping!" said Handforth confidentially. "I could see there was something wrong, of course—you and Mr. Midge look awful freaks. But now I understand everything. Your disguises are meant to represent escaped lunatics, aren't they, sir?"

Church and McClure nearly exploded, and Mr. Podge actually did so.

"Boy!" he thundered. "You—you insolent young rascal!"

"But—but——" gasped Handforth.

"We are not disguised!" put in Mr. Midge, in his thin, piping voice. "I am afraid you have made a mistake, young man."

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth. "I—I thought——"

"Enough," put in Mr. Podge pompously. "Beware, my young friend—beware! Do not fall foul of me, for I have never been known to forgive an insult, and I have never failed to capture my man. Begone before I lose my temper!"

Handforth & Co. hurried off down the lane, at least, Church and McClure did and they dragged their leader with them. Church and McClure were nearly bursting themselves with laughter.

"Of all the giddy freaks!" grinned Church. "Detectives! Oh, my only aunt! Did you ever see such Fifth of

November guys? They must have founded that firm on the first of April."

"Oh, dry up!" put in Handforth. "That's rot. There's something behind all this—something deep, you know. They're detectives all right, but they didn't want to give the show away. I wonder what they're doing, hanging about this district?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church. "They can be seen a mile off, anyway, and they've been here for some time, too. It strikes me these are the chaps Teddy Long was speaking about the other day—they came to see Jerry Dodd about something. Have you got that card?"

"Yes," said Handforth. "I'm going to keep it, too. I mean to have my eyes well open, and I'll find out what these detectives are doing. It's quite likely that I shall join forces with them!"

"Well, that's not a bad idea," said McClure casually. "Messrs. Podge, Midge and Handforth—the marvellous freak detectives! You'd all take first prizes at a contest for duds."

"You—you—you——"

"Steady on—no squabbles!" said Church hastily. "Cluey was only joking, old son. Let's get down to the village and have that tuck."

Meanwhile, Messrs. Podge and Midge had retired once more behind the hedge. Mr. Podge took good care not to reveal his bald head this time. They were on the watch for Jerry Dodd. And it was quite likely that they would remain on the watch for some little time.

For Jerry Dodd was, at that very moment, hurrying along the passages in the Ancient House, making his way to Nelson Lee's study. The famous schoolmaster-detective had summoned him a few moments earlier.

While Nelson Lee was waiting for Jerry to appear, he held the tiny idol in his hand, turning it over curiously. On the base there were one or two written characters, incomprehensible to the average man; but Nelson Lee had looked up the subject a great deal.

"Rhoon!" he murmured. "So this is the god of Rhoon? Most interesting, but at the same time most puzzling. I have not the least doubt that Dodd's strange Eastern friends are very anxious to get this object back into their possession."

Before the detective could think any further a tap sounded upon the door, and immediately afterwards Jerry Dodd appeared. He was looking rather puzzled.

"You sent for me, I reckon, sir?" he said.

"Yes, Dodd, but not to find any faults," smiled Nelson Lee. "Sit down, my boy, and make yourself comfortable. I am very pleased with the way you have been getting on since you came to the school. Your progress has been rapid and highly satisfactory, and I know that this result has only been achieved by hard work and dogged determination on your part. You have stuck to your guns manfully."

Jerry Dodd flushed slightly.

"I—I didn't figure on this, sir," he began.

"No, Dodd, and, as a matter of fact, I had quite another reason for inviting you to my study," said Nelson Lee. "But I thought it just as well to tell you how I appreciate your very excellent progress."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said Jerry.

"With regard to this little image," went on Nelson Lee, holding it up and revealing it for the junior's inspection. "When you first found it in your pocket, Dodd, I put a few questions to you. I wish to ask you some more now."

"I'll do my best to answer them, sir," said Jerry Dodd obligingly.

"Well, to begin with, have you ever been to Burma?"

"Burma?" repeated the junior wonderingly.

"Yes, in the Indian Empire."

"Oh, I reckon I know where it is, sir!" said Jerry. "But the question

kind of surprised me at first. I've never seen Burma, except on a map, and the nearest I've been to it was when the ship brought me from Australia to England."

"And you have never been to India?"

"No, sir."

"Have you travelled at all—before this trip to England?"

"No, sir! I was never out of Australia."

"Well, Dodd, do you know if your father has ever travelled in Burma?"

Jerry shook his head.

"Not as far as I know, sir," he replied slowly. "As far back as I can remember I was on the ranch, and my dad was always there. I don't think dad's ever travelled at all, and I'm sure he's never been to India."

"Why are you sure?"

"Well, sir, I should have heard something about it, shouldn't I?" asked Jerry, smiling. "My father wouldn't keep a thing like that to himself; I reckon he would have referred to it at times, but he never did, sir. I've never known him say a word about India or Burma."

"You must not mind my asking you these questions, Dodd," smiled Nelson Lee. "I have a very good object in doing so, and I shall explain to you when I think it necessary. It is not mere inquisitiveness on my part."

Jerry Dodd was sitting in his chair, and a sudden thoughtful look had come into his eyes. He roused himself and looked across at Nelson Lee.

"I reckon there's one little thing that I ought to mention, sir," he said. "It kind of slipped my mind until just now, but this talk has brought it back. But I don't suppose it means anything."

"Well, let me hear it," said Lee.

"I reckon it was about a month before I came to England, sir; perhaps a little over," said Jerry Dodd. "A stranger came along to my father's ranch. He looked very much like an ordinary gentleman, except that he was dark."

"Dark?"

"Sure, sir, a kind of Indian."

"Oh, indeed!" said Nelson Lee. "Who was this gentleman? And why did he come and see your father?"

"Well, I figure he came on business, sir; that's how I took it, anyway," replied Jerry. "He was a Rangoon merchant, I believe; a native, of course, and a big pot, in his own way. I think he got round the ranch concerning sheep."

"Possibly, but there may have been some other motive," said Nelson Lee slowly. "Trivial as this seems, Dodd, it may be of the utmost importance. This Rangoon gentleman came to visit your father. How long did he stay?"

"Why, not more than a day, sir."

"Did Mr. Dodd expect him?"

"I don't think he did, sir. Anyway, I remember that dad was very quiet after the Rangoon fellow had gone back," said Jerry Dodd. "He was thoughtful and worried, and kind of lost his usual smile; and then, a couple of days after that, he figured that he'd send me to England."

Nelson Lee bent forward suddenly.

"Had there been no previous talk of your coming to England?" he asked.

"Why, no, sir. It took me completely by surprise!" said Jerry. "I was home on vacation from my school in Sydney, and I was due back there. The fellows were anxious to have me, because I was junior cricket captain of the school. I wasn't altogether pleased with the idea of coming over to England, but I reckon I'm pretty content now. I've sort of taken a liking to St. Frank's."

"I am glad to hear that, Dodd," said Nelson Lee. "What you have told me is quite interesting. So there was no talk of your coming to England until after your father had received a visit from this Rangoon merchant?"

"I never sort of figured it out that way, sir," said Jerry Dodd thoughtfully. "But I can't see that there's any connection. It doesn't seem reasonable."

"In any case, Dodd, there is no

necessity for us to worry," smiled Nelson Lee. "You must forgive me for asking you these questions. I can assure you that I have an excellent reason for doing so."

A minute or two later the Australian junior left the study, and he went back to the Remove passage in a reflective kind of mood. He knew why Nelson Lee had been making these inquiries: he was almost certain that Lee had been thinking of that mysterious golden image. And Jerry Dodd felt that the matter was not yet done with.

He was certainly right there!

CHAPTER 12.
The Hindoo Fortune-Teller!

TEN minutes later Jerry Dodd sallied out into the Triangle with a bundle of books under his arm. It was his intention to go to his usual spot, and settle down to some studying.

Messrs. Podge and Midge were extremely unfortunate. These deadly sleuths—as they called themselves—were on the look-out for Jerry. Unhappily for them, the Colonial boy did not emerge into the lane at all, but went across the playing fields, and so over the meadows towards the River Stowe.

Why Podge and Midge were so anxious to keep their eyes on Jerry was a bit of a mystery, but they had certainly no opportunity of doing so this evening. And they still remained in their place of concealment, waiting for Jerry to appear.

Meanwhile, Jerry Dodd was calmly settling down to his studies in the little hollow by the river.

He was busy with his studies when he happened to glance up. He had heard no sound, but he seemed to know that he was not alone. But he was certainly not prepared for the sight he actually saw.

He dropped his book and stared.

It was no ordinary individual who was approaching him, who was already within twenty yards, in fact. The man was attired in nondescript garments, most of them ragged and threadbare. They were ordinary articles of clothing, and in no way Oriental in aspect. In fact, they would not have looked out of place on a scarecrow.

But upon the man's head there rested a quaint turban, and over his shoulder was slung a much-worn wicker basket, in which, no doubt, he kept his wares. For this man was obviously a hawker.

He was an Indian, with brown, wrinkled skin, and deep-set eyes. Jerry Dodd could not help being struck by the fact that this Hindoo should appear, as though from nowhere. After his conversation with Nelson Lee about Indians, it was a strange coincidence that this stray man of the East should come.

Did it mean anything, or was it merely chance?

Jerry Dodd was inclined to the latter view. It was the only reasonable explanation. After all, he told himself, there were plenty of hawkers of this type going up and down the country. No doubt his basket concealed reels of cotton, fancy silks, and so forth. Jerry waited curiously for the man to come up.

He did so, and bowed low before the junior.

"Pardon my intrusion, O young master," said the Indian, in deep, low tones. "I would beg of thee to give me one moment's attention. Mayhap I have something that thou wouldst be interested in."

"That's all right," said Jerry. "You are disturbing me a bit, but I don't suppose you'll stay long. What have you got to sell?"

The Hindoo shook his head.

"Nay, I have nothing to sell, sahib," he said. "I am merely a humble teller of fortunes. For a few pence I will look into the future, and tell thee

where thou wilt be and what thou wilt be doing in years hence."

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"Oh, that's bully!" he said. "It must be rather good to know things of that sort, old chum. A fortune-teller, eh?"

The junior was rather amused at himself for having had such preposterous ideas concerning this harmless old fellow. He had probably spotted Jerry from the distance, and had thought him a likely customer.

"Thou art right, young master, a teller of fortunes!" said the Hindoo gravely. "But I am serious; there is no swindle. I tell your fortune, and you pay me. It is a bargain?"

"Hold on!" said Jerry. "What's the charge?"

The old Indian shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no charge," he replied, his face creasing into a smile. "Thou wilt pay what thou thinkest fit, young sahib."

Jerry was not altogether struck by the arrangement, for it seemed to him that the old Indian would take up a lot of his valuable time. However, Jerry did not want to pack the man off without helping him; he seemed so ragged and poor.

"You don't need to get busy on the job," said the junior good-naturedly "Here you are, chum, take this half-crown. It may help you a bit."

The other refused the proffered coin.

"Nay, I am not a beggar!" he replied. "I would take no money unless I give thee value in return. It will take but a short time, young master. Thou hast but to gaze into the crystal, and thou wilt see."

While he was speaking he produced a round ball of glass from his wicker basket. He held it on a piece of shabby velvet. Then he sat down in a squatting position near to Jerry, and held the crystal in his lap.

"Gaze into the crystal, O my son!" he said solemnly. "Thou wilt see wondrous things."

Jerry Dodd gazed, extremely sceptical, and rather amused. The old Indian commenced chanting in a low, monotonous voice. Now and again his voice rose lightly, and the words were indistinguishable. His hands passed continuously over the face of the crystal. And at last he looked across at Jerry.

"Thou art gazing, young master?" he asked softly. "The magic spell is now cast upon the crystal. Thou wilt see many interesting sights if thou wilt use thine eyes. Put all thy mind into this effort, to the exclusion of all else."

Jerry Dodd, just to please the old chap, stared hard into the crystal. He could only see his own distorted reflection, and a curious-looking background of green trees and the river—all ludicrously out of proportion.

"Look, my son—look!" murmured the Hindoo tensely. "What dost thou see? Thou art there—many years older than thou art at this moment. Canst thou not see? Thou art attired in clothing that is white, and thou hast a strangely shaped baton of wood in thine hands. Thou art playing a game of some description."

"Oh, cricket, I suppose!" said Jerry. "I sort of figure there's something wrong with this crystal. I don't see much, anyway."

"Thine eyes are younger than mine—it may be that thou art not permitted to see into the future," said the Indian. "But I am the seer, O young sahib! Thou art a tall, fine man, and thou art speaking with an older man—thy father."

Jerry was at once interested.

"I can't see him," he said. "What's he like."

"Thy father is a tall, noble man, with bronzed cheeks and hair that is grizzled," replied the Hindoo. "He walks like a mere boy, with spring in his heel, and with shoulders set back. On his face there is a moustache, turning grey."

"By jings," said Jerry Dodd, "that's a pretty good description of my dad,

anyway. Where is this place—the spot you can see in the crystal?"

"It is miles from here," replied the Indian, still speaking in a low, chanting voice. "Ay, my master, it is a great distance from this spot. Miles—hundreds—thousands of miles. It is divided from this land by great seas. The climate is hot, and the sun beats down with great intensity. It is a land where there are wondrous plains, and where sheep abound."

"Australia!" muttered Jerry. "Well, say, that's rather good!"

He was far more interested now. The old Indian didn't seem to be a humbug, after all. He certainly knew a lot about Jerry's father, and where he lived in Australia.

"Look into the crystal, O my son!" said the Hindoo softly. "Thou art not putting thy mind to the matter, and I can never hope to make thee see unless thou dost obey. Watch—look closely!"

Jerry Dodd bent forward, and gazed into the crystal intently. He felt rather sheepish as he did so, for he instinctively knew that he would see nothing.

He could see his own reflection in the crystal, but nothing of the future. The whole thing, of course, was a spoof—fraud. The Hindoo had been doing it very well, but there was nothing so very remarkable about it, after all.

Jerry's very appearance was an indication to any observant man that he had been brought up in a hot climate. And his speech, no doubt, had told the Indian that Australia had been his home. The description of Jerry's father was accurate in the main, but it would also have applied to many fellows' fathers—a chance shot that had gone home, Jerry told himself.

But he admired the Hindoo's cleverness, and he decided that he would give him five shillings. It was well worth it.

And then, while he was still gazing into the crystal, he felt a sudden sting on the back of the neck. It was like the bite of a mosquito, or a particularly aggressive gnat. Jerry put his hand up, but it collided with the Hindoo's. The latter had been waving his hands about in mystical, sinuous passes.

"Golly, that was a stinger!" said Jerry. "Did you see a fly just now?"

The Hindoo sighed.

"It is useless—thou wilt not assist me by keeping thy mind upon the crystal," he said regretfully. "But thou art young, and possibly thou dost not fully understand. I will trouble thee no longer, O my son!"

Jerry Dodd thoughtfully rubbed the back of his neck. He couldn't actually feel any sting now, but there was a curious tingling sensation beneath his skin. And something had come into his mind—something which rather startled him.

He remembered that occasion when he had fallen asleep on this very same bank. He knew that he had dreamed, for he had told Nelson Lee all about it. The dream had vanished from his mind—every incident of it—but he remembered the other circumstances.

And he knew that he had felt a sudden sting in his neck a short time before he had dozed off. He had believed it to be the bite of an insect, for it certainly felt like that. And this sting now was exactly the same.

Was this merely a coincidence?

Jerry was not quite sure. For, curiously enough, he felt somewhat drowsy. The sensation had crept over him during the last few moments. Or was it imagination? He shook himself lightly and looked at the Indian.

"Well, it was very decent of you to entertain me," he said good-naturedly. "Thanks very much. Here's something for your trouble. You don't mind if I get on with my work now, do you?"

"Thou art generous, young sahib," exclaimed the Hindoo humbly. "Thou art giving me more silver than I deserve. Allah be praised! Thou wilt have great riches when thou art older, for one of thy noble heart can never be in want. My gratitude is great, O young master! I bid thee farewell."

Jerry nodded, and turned to his books. The Hindoo had replaced the crystal in his basket, and he now shuffled off across the grass, and disappeared in the direction of Bellton Wood. Jerry sat looking after the quaint figure in a thoughtful way. And that same drowsy feeling stole over him. The sun was quite warm, and the air mild. Just a little sleep would be very welcome.

Jerry lay back on the grassy bank, determined not to sleep. He would not give way to the inclination. His hands were clasped behind his head, and he stared up absently into the blue evening sky. He was in a dreamy, lazy kind of mood, and he had already put the thought of the old Hindoo out of his mind.

He was thinking of St. Frank's. He wondered what Tom Burton was doing at the moment, and whether Study F was empty. He thought of all sorts of trivial and unimportant matters, and his mind was at complete rest.

But, almost subconsciously, he became aware that something was different. He couldn't quite bring certain things to mind. His brow was puckered, and he felt ridiculously absurd. For example, for the moment he had forgotten what the school was called.

He almost smiled at the absurdity of it. He was at school here, and he didn't know—— Then, abruptly, he pulled up. A moment before he had been thinking about a study and some boys. What study? What boys? Jerry Dodd couldn't get hold of the thought again; it slipped away elusively, in a tantalising, will-o'-the-wisp fashion.

"By jings," he muttered, "there's something wrong with my darned memory!"

It was too much trouble to sit up, and thoroughly to arouse himself. And so he lay there, still staring up at the sky, still aware that things were slipping away—slipping in the most aggravating manner.

He knew he had been thinking about some big building a minute before, but he couldn't remember what it was now—it had gone. It was really an extraordinary sensation, and Jerry didn't even attempt to explain it.

He only knew that he was very comfortable, and that he didn't want to trouble himself over anything. And then he imagined that he was floating, and that everything was serenely happy and well. Why should he trouble about anything? The floating sensation was most delightful.

And, in this contented frame of mind, his eyes closed, and he dozed off. His mind became a blank—everything was dim and far away. Somehow or other he didn't seem actually to sleep, but he was being rocked gently about, to and fro, and there was never any jar. Everything was most glorious.

But at last he seemed to dream. And in his dream he opened his eyes, and found himself in a little forest glade, where the sun shone down through tiny openings in the foliage overhead.

And there, in front of him, stood an Indian—a dark man of the East, attired in rich native robes. And as Jerry Dodd sat up, the Hindoo salaamed respectfully. He looked suspiciously like the old fortune-teller, but Jerry Dodd had forgotten all about this incident now. In this queer dream of his he knew nothing of actualities.

"Arouse thyself, O Illustrious One!" exclaimed the Hindoo in deep, sonorous tones. "It is I, Rahzin, who would speak with thee. I am thy servant, and it is within thy power to order me as thou wilt!"

Jerry Dodd sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Why, yes!" he said. "I remember you now. We met here—in this same place. But I can't get the hang of things—I don't know what's happened in between!"

The Australian boy's hesitation was peculiar. He didn't know who he was, or anything about himself. He only knew that he had met Rahzin before, but never for a moment did he associate Rahzin with the old fortune-teller

by the river-bank. He had forgotten all about the river.

He only knew what had happened in that other "dream" of his. It had not been a dream at all, and this was no dream. The events were actually occurring, but Jerry Dodd hardly knew anything. He was in a peculiar state, and living in a world of dreaminess.

The Hindoo salaamed again.

"Thou wilt come with me, O my young master!" he said gravely. "I will lead, and thou wilt follow. It is not wise that we should waste time. Come!"

Jerry rose to his feet rather unsteadily. He couldn't quite understand why he should obey this Indian so meekly. But, somehow or other, he couldn't quite prevent himself. His will-power was not in its usual state.

"Say, just wait a minute——" he began.

"Come!" interrupted the Hindoo. "It is the will of Allah!"

Jerry Dodd followed his companion through the wood. Everything seemed to be hazy and unreal to him. He tried to remember events of his past life, but could not do so. It almost seemed as though he were suffering from the effects of some intoxicating spirit. But nothing had passed his lips.

After a while the wood came to an end, and Jerry found himself staring over a wide expanse of grassland—a great plain with patches of gorse and heather here and there. He did not recognise the scene. Certainly he did not know that this was Bannington Moor. It might have been in Egypt for all he knew.

The Hindoo took certain precautions. He discarded his turban and donned a long rain-coat. From a distance he now looked quite an ordinary individual. And he and Jerry Dodd walked across the moor—the junior following Rahzin's lead without question.

Presently they came to a steep path which led downwards. They were, in fact, just on the edge of the old moor quarry, which had been disused and deserted for something like forty or fifty years. Not a soul was about.

"We will go this way, O my son!" said the Hindoo. "Come!"

They went down the steep path. Jerry Dodd could remember nothing—except that he had been here before. His ordinary life he forgot, but he could remember the incidents which had occurred in his other "dream."

It seemed for a time that the pair were making for a blank wall of rock. But when this was reached a little cleft was seen, with a tiny opening just out of sight. Rahzin led the way, and soon had a torch alight. Jerry Dodd followed, being quite indifferent to everything that happened. He was not even curious. His senses and his feelings were strangely and unaccountably numbed.

As on the previous occasion, the rock passage was not a long one. And after a quick turn, a wide cavern opened—it was, in fact, a kind of wide opening in the rock, with two walls of cliffs rising up until they met in the darkness overhead.

A curious scene met Jerry Dodd's gaze.

There were two or three Indians here, all richly attired and seated on soft cushions. The air was heavy with incense, and a charcoal brazier was glowing. There were strange little lamps, too, which gave the cavern a weird, strange light.

"He is here, O Great Master!" said Rahzin.

He addressed the eldest of the other Indians—a man who possessed a flowing grey beard, and whose eyes were deep-set and intensely piercing. He was undoubtedly the most important individual present. Jerry looked upon him as the High Priest.

"It is well, O Rahzin!" said the old man. "Thou hast carried out thine orders in a fitting manner. Bring the boy here. It is my will to question him."

Jerry Dodd was taken over, and com-

pelled to stand in front of the bearded Indian.

"No harm will come to thee, O youth!" said the High Priest. "Dost thou remember being here on a previous occasion?"

"Yes," replied Jerry. "But everything else seems kind of vague. I figure that I'm lost—I don't know a darned thing. Where was I before this fellow met me in the wood?"

"It is not for thee to be curious, and thou must ask no questions," replied the High Priest. "It is thy duty to answer. Thou wilt understand many things when thou art older. For the present it is not well for thee to understand."

"But——"

"Be silent!" interrupted the old man. "I wish to question thee with regard to an image—a golden representation of our great god, Rhoon. Hast thou seen this image?"

Jerry Dodd scratched his head.

"Something like that one over there?" he asked, pointing towards a wooden idol which occupied a corner of the cavern—a hideous affair, grossly painted, and with two large glittering red eyes.

"Even so!" replied the High Priest. "It is as the one thou hast indicated, but small and far more costly. Perchance thou hast seen this idol?"

"No, I've never seen it!" replied Jerry.

He was speaking the truth, as far as he knew. He had no recollection of the image—he did not know that he had found the thing in his pocket, and that he had handed it over to Nelson Lee. That portion of his life was a blank.

"Perhaps I can remind thee," went on the old man. "When thou wert here last, thou didst slip upon one of the mats. Is thy memory good?"

"Why, yes, I sort of recollect that," said Jerry, frowning. "But it's all so blame strange, I don't kind of know what has come over me. It doesn't seem that I'm really livin'. I feel as though I'm floatin' around, and before long I shall wake up."

"Perchance thou art right," said the High Priest. "But thou dost remember falling?"

"Sure," said Jerry. "I slipped over, and knocked a few things down, too. An' I remember gettin' hold of somethin' heavy—a little brown thing which I didn't rightly see——"

"Ah! Then we are getting at the truth!" said the High Priest, bending forward. "Thou didst have the sacred image in thine hand. Think, O youth. Didst thou put that image away somewhere upon thy person?"

"I—I don't remember," said Jerry. "I had the thing in my hand; I've got that bit all right. But whether I stuffed it in my pocket, I can't say. Since you've lost it, I dare say I did."

The brown-skinned men looked at one another, exchanging glances.

"The boy has it, O Great Master!" said Rahzin. "It is well!"

"He shall be searched," said the High Priest.

Jerry Dodd was searched. The Indians did their work thoroughly, but they had no reward, for the search proved futile. There was no sign of the golden image.

"It is useless to keep the boy here," said the High Priest grimly. "He knows nothing. He has placed the image in some spot of safety, no doubt, but he cannot tell us of this—until later. It is thy duty, Rahzin, to obtain the information."

Rahzin was alarmed.

"It shall be done, Great Master!" he said humbly.

Jerry Dodd's arm was seized, and he was led out of the strange cavern. Once more he found himself in the daylight, which was dazzling bright after the gloom of the cavern. The evening was warm and mild, although the sun was hidden behind a bank of fleecy clouds.

It was not long before the pair had crossed the moor and were once again within the deep recesses of the wood. They passed through the trees,

Rahzin leading the way and making no sound. And at length they arrived in that tiny glade.

"Thou wilt sit down," said Rahzin. "Rest, my son—rest!"

Jerry Dodd obediently lay down on the grassy bank, and he felt extremely drowsy and peaceful. Somehow or other everything was becoming confused. He couldn't remember things properly. The adventure in the cavern was even becoming vague and indistinct. And, now and again, he had faint glimpses of other figures—schoolboys. He seemed to be passing out of one life into another. It was a curious sensation, and Jerry's brain was not in a very active state just then. He only wanted to lay back and take his ease. Thinking on any subject was too much trouble.

His eyes closed, and he went off into a vague kind of sleep, which was not actually sleep, but rather more like unconsciousness. And everything became dim and black.

CHAPTER 13.
The Beginning of a Clue!

THE sun shone again, and Jerry Dodd felt its rays warmly beating down upon his outstretched form. He lay quite still, very comfortable, wondering where he was, and what had been happening. Opening his eyes, he saw the clear blue sky, and one or two fleecy clouds. He could also see the upper branches of a willow tree, rustling slightly in the breeze. In his ears there was the gentle rippling of water.

But his mind was filled with strange thoughts—he could picture Hindoos wearing rich robes, a strange cavern with quaint lamps, and a brazier filled with glowing charcoal. Then, suddenly, he woke up.

"By jings!" he muttered blankly. "I must have been dreamin' again!"

He felt rather angry with himself, and he had no recollection of that former dream of his. This one was exactly similar in all respects, but Jerry did not remember. There was something very curious about all this.

"What was that chap's name—Rahzin, I believe!" he muttered. "Why, yes! What a darned ass I am! It was that old Hindoo fortune-teller—he made me dream like this!"

Even while Jerry was thinking in this way, a figure appeared from behind a clump of trees. A hobbling figure, attired in rags and tatters, with an old basket slung over his shoulders, and with a turban on his head. It was the old Hindoo fortune-teller, and he was approaching Jerry Dodd with weary footsteps.

The junior felt like kicking himself. He remembered his experiences before he had slept. He remembered how the old Hindoo had gazed into the crystal. Of course, that business had caused Dodd to fall asleep, and to dream about Indians—there could be no other explanation. Not for a moment did he believe that his recent adventure had been no dream at all.

The old fortune-teller came up and bowed low.

"I crave your pardon, young sir," he said humbly. "I regret disturbing thee again, but perchance thou might be able to help me in a great difficulty."

Jerry Dodd looked at the man with a frown.

"It's all very well for you to come buzzing round here," he growled. "What about my work? I fell asleep because of you, and I've been dreamin' all sorts of darned silly things."

The Hindoo allowed his face to relax into a smile for a second.

"It is natural for young boys to dream," he replied. "It has done thee no harm, my young master. Thou wert good to me, and I have been bold enough to return, hoping that thou wilt be able to assist me."

"I've already given you five shillings ——"

"Nay, I am not asking for money."

put in the old fortune-teller quickly. "Thou hast been generous to a degree, O my son. But I am sorely troubled. I have lost something which is of greater value than all the money thou hast. I have been unfortunate enough to lose a litle image, representing the god of Rhoon—worth much to me."

Jerry Dodd started.

"Oh, that little idol!" he said. "By jings! I was dreamin' about that, too. All sorts of things seem to have got mixed up. I found that idol in my pocket the other day, and I couldn't understand——"

"But thou hast got it?"

"Well, I know where it is," said Jerry.

"Allah be praised!" murmured the old fortune-teller. "The little image is my property, O young sir. I dropped it three days since, when I was wandering through the fields. If thou wilt return it to me thou wilt do me a wondrous service."

"But even now I can't get the hang of it!" said Jerry Dodd, in a puzzled voice. "How could that idol have got into my pocket without me knowing it? You say you dropped it?"

"It is even as thou sayest," replied the Indian. "And it is not mysterious, as you would think. Perchance thou picked up the image when thy mind was on other matters. It was slipped into thy pocket unconsciously. Such things are possible."

"Well, I suppose they are," said Jerry, nodding. "And that's about the truth, I figure. I must have picked the thing up and put it in my pocket without knowing. I'll allow I'm a bit absent-minded when I'm thinkin'. An' it stands to reason that the image must be your property. I'll let you have it back."

"Thou wilt be rewarded by a greater power than I," murmured the fortune-teller softly.

Jerry Dodd thought for a moment or two. Of course, it was quite clear to him now. The Hindoo had caused him to dream, and it was not unnatural that the idol should have appeared in the dream, too.

Jerry was greatly relieved, for he had been worrying to a certain extent. The mystery of the image was cleared up now, and he would be able to return it to its rightful owner.

"I didn't know what the thing was, or who it belonged to," went on Jerry. "So I gave it to one of the masters, and he's keepin' it for me. If you like I'll run up to the school and fetch it."

The Hindoo bowed.

"Thou art generous," he said gravely. "I shall never be able to reward thee for this service, O my son. If thou wilt do as thou sayest, my happiness will be complete. Thou wilt go now?"

"Yes, now at once," replied the Australian boy. "It won't take me long to run back. You just sit here and wait for me—I don't suppose I shall be more than twenty minutes. Anyway, wait till I show up."

And without waiting for the other to reply, Jerry Dodd set off across the meadows in the direction of the playing fields. His dream was still fairly clear in his mind—although, somehow, it seemed to him that it was growing rather dim.

Arriving at the playing fields, he hurried across, rather envious of the fellows who were at cricket practice. In a moment or two he was in the Triangle, and he went into the Ancient House, and made his way straight to Nelson Lee's study.

Fortunately, the detective was there, and he looked up with interest as Jerry entered the room.

"Ah, Dodd, come in—you are always welcome," said Nelson Lee genially. "You've come to me about some little problem?"

"Well, hardly that, sir," said Jerry. "The fact is, I've found out who that image belongs to, and I want you to hand it over, so that I can restore it to the rightful owner. That's all, sir."

Nelson Lee looked at Jerry Dodd curiously.

"And who is the rightful owner?" he inquired.

"A kind of Hindoo fortune-teller, sir," replied Jerry. "The poor chap is starvin', pretty nearly. Goes about in rags and tatters, lookin' like a scarecrow. You know, sir—one of those fakir chaps, with a crystal and all the rest of it."

"A Hindoo!" said Nelson Lee keenly. "You have met this man?"

"Sure, sir. At first I thought it a bit queer," said Jerry. "I remembered that talk of ours about India and Burma. But I don't figure there's any connection. This fellow is just a harmless fortune-teller."

"That may be so, Dodd, but we must investigate the matter carefully," said Nelson Lee. "In the first place, tell me about this meeting."

"I don't reckon there's much to tell, sir," replied Jerry. "I was sittin' by the river in my usual place, when the guy happened along. I didn't want to be bothered, but he insisted on tellin' my fortune. I gave him five bob, and off he went. Then I reckon I must have fallen asleep. Because I dreamed——"

"Dear me!" interrupted Lee. "You dreamed, eh? On what subject?"

Jerry Dodd grinned somewhat sheepishly.

"I didn't figure on tellin' you that, sir," he said. "It was a real jumble of nonsense. I saw that fortune-teller in the wood, all dressed up. He took me to a cavern where there were other Hindoos, and incense burning, and the rest of it. There was nothin' in it, sir. Just one of those silly dreams a chap suffers from sometimes."

Nelson Lee did not reply for a moment. He knew well enough that this was no dream—and he was rather surprised to find that Jerry Dodd was quite unsuspicious of the truth.

"Well?" he said at last. "What happened when you awoke?"

"Why, that old Hindoo came back, sir," said Jerry. "He mentioned the idol, and asked me if I could help him. Of course, I told him about the image, and said I'd deliver it back. He lost it in the fields, and I suppose I must have picked it up."

"Just wait a minute, Dodd," said Nelson Lee. "Tell me some more about this dream."

"Say, there's nothin' much to tell," replied Jerry. "They asked me about this idol in the dream—but there's nothin' in that. I can't quite get the hang of it now—it's sort of slipped away. I don't know how I got to this cavern, although I remember goin' through a forest, and then on to a plain."

Nelson Lee looked keen.

"Through a forest, and on to a plain!" he repeated. "That is quite interesting, Dodd. Now there is one thing I want to ask you. Did this Hindoo give you anything to smell—a bottle of scent, for example."

"Why, no, sir."

"Did he burn any incense?"

"Nothin' like that, sir," replied Jerry, rather surprised.

"Possibly you think it strange that I should ask these questions," went on Lee. "But I have an excellent reason for doing so, Dodd. I don't wish to startle you, but I have every reason to believe that you were drugged in some way."

"Drugged!" gasped Jerry.

"Exactly," said Lee. "Is it natural for you to sleep in broad daylight? Do you usually fall into a doze while you are at your work?"

"No, sir—I've never done it before," said the junior. "At least, there was only the occasion when I had the other dream."

"Do you remember that first dream?"

"Not a thing about it!" said Jerry Dodd. "An' it is a bit queer, now you put it like that. It didn't seem like a real sleep, sir—I sort of faded off, if you know what I mean. Everything became dim and strange—not a bit like a real sleep. But there was no mistake about the dream."

"Well, we'll leave that till later," said Nelson Lee. "At the moment I am

anxious to arrive at some solution concerning your strange sleep—which I believe, was induced by a drug. You positively assure me that this Hindoo fortune-teller did not drug you?"

"He didn't do anythin'—by jings!" Jerry Dodd suddenly came to a halt, and stared. "There was somethin' I couldn't understand, sir," he went on. "When I was lookin' into that darned crystal I felt a sting on the back of my neck, but I thought it was caused by a fly."

"Ah!" said Lee. "A sting, eh? Was it painful?"

"Well, not exactly, sir—a kind of sharp prick."

"Now, this is very important, Dodd," said Lee, bending forward. "Do you remember receiving a sting of that kind on the previous occasion?"

"Jumpin' kangaroos!" said Jerry, starting. "You're right, sir—dead true on the mark! I do remember a sting like that. But there was nobody near me then—I was absolutely alone."

"A matter of small importance," exclaimed Nelson Lee briskly. "A blowpipe, no doubt, and a tiny dart. And this evening the Hindoo fortune-teller pricked your neck with his own hand. My boy, you were drugged on both occasions."

"But—but why?" asked the bewildered junior.

"I cannot possibly answer that question—at the moment," said Nelson Lee. "But we are getting nearer to the truth, Dodd. Those dreams of yours are more significant than you seem to imagine. Let me look at your neck."

Jerry Dodd was willing enough, and Nelson Lee picked up a small magnifying lens, and closely examined the back of Jerry Dodd's neck. Under the powerful glass he could distinctly see a tiny puncture, the skin being slightly puffy and red in the immediate vicinity. Without the glass the place could hardly be seen. Lee could find no trace of the former puncture.

"I am going to hurt you a trifle, Dodd," said Nelson Lee. "But you must not mind."

The junior wondered what was going to happen. Nelson Lee opened a drawer, and removed a small glittering steel instrument. Jerry Dodd was somewhat startled.

"I guess I'm gettin' the wind up, sir!" he said uneasily.

"That's all right, Dodd—it will soon be over!" smiled Nelson Lee.

The next moment Jerry felt a sharp twinge at the back of his neck. It was not half so bad as he had expected. And when he looked round he found that Nelson Lee was gazing at a small piece of clear glass. Upon this glass Jerry could see one or two drops of blood. The blood had just been extracted from his neck.

"I intend to analyse this specimen of your blood, Dodd," said Nelson Lee cheerfully. "It may lead to important developments. I should advise you to say nothing to the other boys—keep this matter to yourself."

"But why was I drugged, sir?" asked Dodd, mystified. "What's the idea of it? I reckon I'm more puzzled than I can say."

"There must be some explanation, and we shall arrive at it sooner or later," said the detective. "You may know nothing of any Indians or Burmese, Dodd, but it is quite clear that they know something about you. I am getting on the track of the mystery now, and I want you to leave the matter in my hands."

"Sure, sir!" said Jerry readily. "But what about the idol? I promised to take it back to the old Hindoo."

"There is not the slightest doubt, Dodd, that you were drugged on this occasion for the express purpose of finding out where the idol was," said Lee. "The fortune-teller is not quite so innocent as you appear to imagine. I suspect that it is merely a pose, assumed for the sole purpose of deceiving you. You will go back to the man and tell him that he is at perfect liberty to have the image, but he must

come to the school for it and apply to me personally."

Jerry nodded.

"I've got you, sir," he said. "You want to have a look at the man yourself? But couldn't you come down with me——"

"No; that wouldn't suit my purpose, my boy," interrupted Lee. "I do not suppose for a moment that your Hindoo friend will present himself at the school. Go back to him and tell him, and report to me later. I shall be absent for the next hour or so."

Jerry Dodd went off, and when he arrived at the little hollow by the riverside, he found the Hindoo fortune-teller still there. The man rose to his feet as Jerry approached, and his dark eyes were burning with eagerness.

"My gratitude is overwhelming, O young master!" he murmured. "Thou art a true friend——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Jerry. "I haven't got the thing."

"Thou hast not brought it?" repeated the Hindoo sharply.

"Awfully sorry, chum, but it couldn't be done!" exclaimed Jerry. "Mr. Lee, of the Ancient House, has got the image in his possession, and he says that if you want it you can go up to the school. He'll let you have it at once."

The fortune-teller stood quite still, his eyes blazing. Then he muttered quickly and fiercely in a language which Jerry did not understand. It was quite obvious that he was giving vent to a few expressions of disappointment.

"It's not my fault," said Jerry. "Mr. Lee wouldn't give me the image, but it doesn't make any difference. You've only to go to the school——"

"Thou hast deceived me!" muttered the Hindoo fiercely. "By the will of Allah, thou shalt suffer!"

He turned on his heel and strode away, leaving Jerry Dodd looking after him wonderingly. The Hindoo did not seem to hobble so much now, and he went off towards the wood; and after he had plunged into the thick trees, a second figure, quite unseen, followed. That figure belonged to Nelson Lee.

He was on the track!

CHAPTER 14.

A Surprise for the Remove!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD scowled.

"Just our rotten luck!" he grunted. "We haven't done anythin' right ever since this bally term commenced!"

"Well, it was your own fancy," said Gulliver. "I distinctly told you to put your money on Golden Blaze, and you scoffed at that. You wouldn't even back him for a place. Instead, you put all your tin on Waterlily."

"Well, Waterlily was favourite!" snapped Fullwood unpleasantly.

"Favourites don't always win," put in Bell. "Just fancy Golden Blaze comin' home first at a hundred to seven! By gad, if we'd have risked ten bob each way on Golden Blaze, we should have got quids——"

"What's the good of talkin'?" demanded Fullwood harshly. "It's always easy to be wise after the event!"

"Rats! I was wise before the event!" interrupted Gulliver. "Didn't I say Golden Blaze——"

"Then why didn't you back the bally gee-gee?" asked Fullwood.

"Because you said——"

"Oh, hang! Give it a rest!"

The rascally chums of Study A were in an extremely irritable mood. They had been indulging in the doubtful pastime of backing horses—which, of course, was strictly forbidden at St. Frank's. But Fullwood & Co. considered themselves to be "gay dogs," and they thought it very sporty to have a little flutter now and again.

Occasionally these flutters were profitable, but in most cases Fullwood & Co. were the losers. They had lost fairly heavily to-day, and their tempers were

by no means improved. Their supplies of ready cash had disappeared into the deep pockets of Mr. Porlock, of the White Hart Inn, in Bellton. Mr. Porlock was the landlord, and he also carried on the business of a bookmaker as a side line.

Fullwood & Co. were now on their way to the village, just to make doubly sure that they had really "gone down." It was late evening, and would soon be getting quite dark. Even now it was dim and gloomy in the confined lane, where the high trees overshadowed the road.

Fullwood & Co. marched on sullenly, not caring to speak to one another, for they knew that they would quarrel, and that wouldn't do any good at all. Gulliver was particularly sore, because he had put all his money—at Fullwood's advice—on a horse which he didn't fancy.

Certainly, Fullwood had done his best; but risking money on horse-racing is always an extremely foolish speculation. For every man who wins there are dozens who lose.

As the three juniors were walking along, Fullwood suddenly came to a halt, his eyes glittering. Just ahead a figure had appeared from a gap in the hedge, and Fullwood instinctively drew his chums back into the shadows.

"What's the game, you ass?"

"Shush!" muttered Fullwood. "It's Dodd, that Australian cad!"

"Oh!"

"I owe him one!" went on Fullwood savagely. "I don't forget the way he made that rotten pony of his grab my collar. I feel like hittin' somebody now, just to relieve my feelin's. We'll collar this rotter an' rag him!"

"Good wheeze!" murmured Bell. "We can pay him out an' we can ease off our feelin's at the same time. The three of us ought to be able to handle him!"

"We can handle him!" said Fullwood grimly. "Get ready!"

They held themselves back, and Jerry Dodd came unconcernedly up the lane, his books under one arm. He had put in some more time at his studies, hoping to forget all about the incident of the Hindoo fortune-teller. He had certainly forgotten the "dream," but not the other part of his adventure.

And now he was coming along with his thoughts far distant from his immediate surroundings. Without warning, three figures sprang out at him, and were on him almost before he knew what had happened.

"Get him down!"

Jerry Dodd found himself lying on his back in the dust within a few seconds. He had had no time to put up any show of resistance. The attack had been unexpected, and Jerry Dodd hardly knew who the three were during the first moments. He had wild visions of Hindoos and men of that type, but the voices of his captors told him the truth.

"By jings!" he gasped. "What's the game?"

"Now, my fine Australian rabbit, you're going to get it in the neck!" said Fullwood grimly. "We've got you here, and we're going to give you beans!"

"Say, it's Fullwood!" ejaculated Jerry wonderingly. "What's the game?"

"I mean to pay you out for the way you treated me the other day!" snapped Fullwood. "Understand? You're a rotten, low-down outsider, and you're a disgrace to the whole school! We're going to show you what we think of you!"

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver.

"I'll tell you what," added Bell. "What's wrong with rolling him in the dust, and then cramming a handful of it down his neck?"

"Good idea!" said Fullwood. "We'll do it!"

"I reckon you're figurin' on doin' a whole heap," said Jerry Dodd calmly. "I don't fancy I'm goin' to be wiped up by three knock-kneed guys like you!"

Jerry Dodd was quite amused now. And as Fullwood & Co. held him tight, they suddenly found themselves dealing

with a bunch of springs. The Australian boy became intensely active, and his captors were startled. Gulliver went flying, and Fullwood and Bell clung desperately to their prisoner. It is practically certain that Jerry Dodd would have flung them off easily. But this was not necessary.

For an interruption came.

At a short distance it seemed that Jerry Dodd was engaged in a life and death struggle with three powerful adversaries. In the gloom it was impossible to see very much. And before the captive could get himself completely free, two forms loomed up out of the dimness.

One was huge and towering, and the other absurdly small.

In fact, Messrs. Podge and Midge had appeared upon the scene. It was Mr. Podge who did all the work. He sailed in like an angry elephant.

Fullwood was grasped from behind. He howled with terror, for he was lifted right off his feet, hurled whirling through the air, to alight on the top of the hedge, where he sprawled momentarily helpless, and with a hundred or so prickles penetrating his clothing.

Bell was caught up in the same way, but he went in a different direction. There was a ditch on the other side of the road, and Bell went flying into it, and landed with a sickly squelch in the bottom.

During the winter months this ditch was a deep one, filled with flowing water. But now it was in a condition which could scarcely be described as pleasant. Most of the water had drained away, leaving only a tiny trickle. But the mud was there; this had not yet dried up. The bottom of the ditch was filled with thick, sticky mud nearly eighteen inches deep.

Bell sat in this with terrible results. He sank deep in the oozing, slimy mess. He gasped and spluttered, and made vain attempts to get out. But the mud held him down, and the more he tried to lift himself, the muddier he became.

Jerry Dodd stood up, dusty, but quite unhurt.

"Thanks!" he said breathlessly. "I think I could have managed all right, but I guess I'm much obliged."

Mr. Podge looked round him somewhat regretfully. Perhaps he wanted some other victims to deal with—to fling about like ninepins. But Gulliver had fled up the road, thoroughly scared.

"It is our duty!" said Mr. Podge, glaring down at Jerry Dodd. "When you are in trouble, young man, we will be at hand. Remember, Podge and Midge are your friends!"

"Always ready to help you!" put in Mr. Midge nervously.

"But you must beware—you must be on your guard!" said Mr. Podge mysteriously. "Dangers surround you, Dodd, and not for one moment will you be safe."

"I don't reckon I understand!" said Jerry, staring at the world's deadliest sleuths in real astonishment. "Who are you, anyway?"

"That is not a matter that need concern you," puffed Mr. Podge. "But remember, we are your friends, and will keep you from all dangers."

"But you said, a minute ago, that I shouldn't be safe for a moment!"

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Podge. "A quibble—an absurd quibble! The danger would be deadlier if we were not at hand, but with Mr. Midge and myself near by, you have nothing to fear. We will guard you!"

"With our lives!" said Mr. Midge stoutly.

And, without another word, the extraordinary pair vanished. They burst through a gap in the hedge, and passed out of sight. By this time Fullwood had managed to get down from the hedge, and Bell was just crawling out of the ditch. In their own different ways they presented a remarkable appearance.

Fullwood was always noted for his smartness, and this evening he had been particularly neatly attired. He

was now a wreck. His clothing was torn in many places, his collar was unbuttoned, and his necktie flying loose. He looked more like a scarecrow than a junior schoolboy.

Exactly what Bell resembled would be difficult to state. He had practically disappeared beneath a coating of evil-smelling mud, and as he crawled through the grass he left a slimy trail behind him.

"By gad!" gasped Fullwood. "Who—who were they?"

Nobody answered him. Bell was incapable of doing so, and Jerry Dodd was still staring at the gap in the hedge. And just then Handforth and Church and I appeared. We were coming up from the village, and we looked about us at the scene with wondering eyes.

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "What's happened here?"

"I reckon I'm in a bit of a puzzle over it," said Jerry Dodd. "Fullwood and his two chums fancied they'd get lively, and they took me by surprise—fairly got me down. But I don't figure it was my intention to remain down for long."

"Great Scott!" said Church. "Did you do this to 'em? And what's happened to Gulliver?"

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"The queerest guys I ever set eyes on lent me a hand," he explained. "They came through the hedge suddenly, and—well, this happened!"

Handforth burst into a roar.

"It jolly well served the cads right!" he declared. "It's just like them to play a dirty trick of that sort—three on to one. They got what they asked for. Fullwood looks just about ready to be stuck in the middle of a cornfield!"

"The—the rotten ruffians!" snarled Fullwood. "I'm going to report this matter to the Head——"

"I don't fancy you will," I interrupted. "Your own part in the affair wouldn't do you much credit, Fullwood. Bell seems to have turned himself into a mud heap, by the look of him. Phew! Keep away from me, for goodness' sake! My word! What an aroma!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Handforth faintly.

The unfortunate Bell had come rather close, and the mud which smothered him was certainly not of an attractive odour.

"Somebody's going to pay for this!" sputtered Bell, almost in tears. "Oh, my goodness! This frightful stuff will poison me! I shall faint in a minute!"

"Rats!" I grinned. "The best thing you can do is to rush into the Triangle, and duck yourself in the fountain; that suit is ruined, anyway. After you've got the worst of it off, you can go and have a bath."

Bell managed to get to his feet, and he staggered off up the lane. And Ralph Leslie Fullwood, after uttering a few idle threats, followed his example. Jerry Dodd remained with us, rather amused.

"The asses thought they'd rag me," he said. "I think I could have dealt with 'em all right—but then those two men came up—the most amazin' freaks you ever set eyes on."

"What were they like?" I asked curiously.

"Why, one was a big, stout man, and the other a little tiny——"

"Podge and Midge!" said Handforth eagerly.

"Eh?"

"Who?"

"Podge and Midge, the famous detectives!" said Handforth, pleased at the sensation he was causing. "I know them—I was introduced to them just after tea. In fact, I'm going to help in their investigations—when I find out what they are."

"Podge and Midge!" I repeated blankly. "What's the joke? Detectives? I've never heard of any detectives named that—and I think I'm acquainted with most of the guv'nor's

rivals. How did you come to meet them?"

Handforth described the incident of the pea-shooter, and we yelled with laughter. And we fairly howled when Handforth showed us the card which Mr. Podge had presented. The hero of Study D couldn't quite see the joke.

"What's all the cackling about?" he demanded warmly. "There's nothing funny about that card——"

"My dear chap, it's the funniest thing I've seen for years!" I gasped, holding my sides. "The Deadliest Sleuths on Earth! Oh, my only hat!"

"They ought to do well on the music-halls," grinned Church. "Podge is about as fat as two barrels, and you could put Midge in your giddy pocket! And just look at their address on the card—that's spoof. Wrotland Yard! There isn't such a place."

I grinned.

"I believe there is," I replied. "It's a little mews, somewhere off Oxford Street. To be quite correct, I think it's called Wrotland's Yard, but these prize detectives have altered it for their own purpose, so that it looks like Scotland Yard. Perhaps they've turned one of the stables into an office!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We continued laughing at the card, and at Handforth's description of the wonderful pair. And then we strolled up to the school, and were soon in our respective studies, settling down to prep.

I had a word with Nelson Lee before bedtime, and I found him in a very thoughtful mood. He told me of Jerry Dodd's latest adventure, and hinted that he had made one or two important discoveries, which, however, he kept to himself.

I was certainly interested in Jerry Dodd's peculiar adventures, but I was far more interested in his qualifications as a cricketeer. And I had already come to one definite decision.

And when Saturday morning arrived I got hold of Jerry as soon as he came downstairs. He was looking bright and cheerful, as usual, but there were one or two lines about his eyes which told their own story. He had met with no further adventures, but had buried himself in his studies.

"You've been working too hard, my son," I said severely. "That sort of thing won't do—you'll go stale if you keep it up. What you need is some recreation—a jolly good game of cricket, for example."

Jerry's eyes sparkled.

"By jings! That would suit me real proper!" he declared. "But I don't reckon it could be done. It's no good——"

"What you've got to do is to go straight to the headmaster and beard him in his den," I said grimly. "Understand? Put it before him in as few words as possible. Say you've been working like a nigger, and you need a change. Tell him any old thing you like, but don't leave his study without permission to play in this afternoon's match."

"I'm afraid it won't work, chum," said Jerry, shaking his head. "And I can't very well play against the Head's orders."

"Well, it wouldn't be a crime if you did," I said. "Buzz along now—he hasn't had breakfast, yet, and he's always in a good temper when he first gets up."

Jerry Dodd went off, for he, too, was most anxious to play in the match against Bannington Grammar School. He arrived at Dr. Stafford's study, and tapped upon the door. He was invited to enter, and did so. The Head was seated near the open window, glancing over the morning paper.

"Why, my boy, this is an early visit," he said smoothly. "Come in, Dodd—come over here. I understand from Mr. Lee that you are getting on very well, and that you are more than fulfilling your father's high hopes of you. Your progress has been rapid, and I need not tell you how pleased I am."

"Thanks very much, sir," said Jerry awkwardly. "I've always been a bit of a duffer at books, but I've kind of taken to it since I came to this school."

"And do you know why, Dodd?" asked the Head. "No? Then I will tell you. Because you have devoted yourself entirely to your studies—because you have not allowed your mind to concentrate upon cricket and other outdoor games. It seems very hard to you, perhaps, that cricket should be forbidden. But it is your father's wish—and your father was wise. Do you think you would have advanced in your studies so far if you had played cricket with the other boys?"

Jerry Dodd was rather taken aback.

"Well, sir, I reckon I should have done better," he stammered.

"Nonsense, my dear boy—that won't do!" smiled the Head kindly. "You would not have given the time and thought to your studies that you have done. Indeed, it would have been impossible. You must keep it up for the rest of this term, and you will see how you get on."

Dismay was written clearly upon Jerry Dodd's countenance.

"But—but Mr. Crowell told me to take this afternoon off, sir," he said. "I've been doing enough work this week, and Mr. Crowell said I ought to have a rest."

"Exactly—I heartily agree with your Form-master," said the Head. "It is an excellent idea for you to take an easy afternoon to-day, Dodd. It will serve to recuperate your brain, and you will be fit for further serious study on Monday."

"Then—then I can go, sir?" asked Dodd eagerly.

"Go?" repeated the Head. "Go where?"

"Out this afternoon, sir——"

"Most certainly you can go out this afternoon," said Dr. Stafford pleasantly. "You must get hold of a light book, and settle yourself in a shady corner somewhere. But avoid all strenuous exercise. That will do you more harm than good."

Jerry swallowed rather hard.

"I—I was thinking about cricket, sir," he blurted out. "Nipper kind of figures that he wants me in the team," he went on hurriedly. "Just for this afternoon, sir—the match against Bannington Grammar School. I'd love it, sir. It would do me more good than——"

"Stop!" interrupted the Head, frowning. "I'm very sorry, Dodd, but I positively forbid this. I've already told you that you must only indulge in quiet recreation, and not in the strenuous, hard work of cricket. For cricket is hard work, and if you took part in this match you would be tempted to play again, and your studies will suffer. I'm sorry, my boy, but I cannot give you my permission."

"But——"

"No, Dodd, it is quite useless for you to argue," said the Head firmly. "You must not play cricket this afternoon—that is final. Possibly it is a disappointment for you, but you will soon get over that."

Jerry Dodd walked out of the study disconsolately, and I knew the verdict at once as soon as he appeared in the lobby. I had half expected it.

"No go?" I asked briskly.

"The Head won't allow me to play," said Jerry, with a long face.

"The old dragon!" I declared. "Well, never mind. I dare say we shall get on all right. I've got the list of fellows all made out, and I'll pin it up. There are only ten names, but I'll add the eleventh later on."

I took a sheet of paper out of my pocket, and pinned it to the notice-board.

"Say, chum, you don't seem upset a heap," said Jerry. "I thought you were rather counting on me this afternoon."

"So I was, but it's no good crying over spilt milk," I said calmly. "A cricket captain must be prepared for disappointments. I expect I shall be

able to find another fellow who'll help us to win."

Several other juniors came round and looked at the notice on the board. It was quite a brief one, and ran as follows:

"Return match at Bannington: St. Frank's Juniors against Bannington Grammar School Juniors. The eleven will consist of: Pitt, De Valerie, Tregellis-West, Watson, Nipper, Handforth, Grey, Christine, Yorke, Oldfield and——"

There was a blank space instead of the eleventh name, for I had been hoping to fill that blank in with "Dodd." Now, of course, it was impossible.

"Who's the eleventh man?" asked Handforth, turning round.

"Not selected yet," I said. "I'll put the name on later."

"What's wrong with me?" asked Owen major. "It's about time I had a chance in the eleven."

"Rats! I can play better than you any day!" shouted Simons.

There was quite an argument in the lobby until the breakfast bell rang. Everybody wanted to know who the eleventh man would be, but I said nothing. As a matter of fact, I was yet uncertain as to which name I should put down. After morning lessons, however, I came to a decision.

I strolled into the lobby shortly afterwards, and found a crowd of juniors round the notice-board chuckling.

"Oh, here's Nipper!" shouted Owen major. "I say, Nipper, some silly ass has been messing about with this notice of yours."

"Oh!" I said. "What's wrong with it?"

"Why, look at the last name on the list!" grinned Hubbard. "Some fathead has put down Timothy Tucker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He knows as much about cricket as an elephant knows about flying!"

"Who is the eleventh man, anyway?"

I pushed forward and looked at the notice.

"Well, that's my handwriting, anyway," I remarked.

"Oh, don't rot!" said Pitt. "You didn't put Tucker's name down."

"Yes, I did!" I said calmly.

"What?"

"Tucker!"

"That—that silly ass—in the eleven!"

I looked round calmly.

"There's the name, and you can make what you like of it," I said. "I'm cricket skipper, and I've chosen that name to put down. I expected it would cause a bit of a sensation, but I know what I'm doing. Timothy Tucker's a deep beggar, and he knows a lot more than he's given credit for."

Pitt clutched at my sleeve.

"But—but you aren't serious!" he gasped incredulously. "You're not really playing Tucker against Bannington?"

I grinned.

"There's the list, and it won't be altered," I replied.

"My hat! You must be mad!"

"Clean off your rocker!"

I pushed my way through the crowd to avoid further questioning. And the news soon spread through the Ancient House that Timothy Tucker, the lunatic of the Remove, was to play against the Grammar School.

"Why, it's insane!" declared Bob Christine, when he heard. "Tucker doesn't know anything about cricket; he's never even handled a bat! You might just as well play the kitchen cat, and done with it!"

Directly after dinner the eleven got ready for the trip, most of the juniors going on their bicycles; for, of course, a large crowd of supporters would follow us to Bannington. But the eleven could not very well cycle the journey, since there were many ungainly cricket bags to be carried.

We went by the afternoon train, which would land us in Bannington in excellent time. Quite a crowd gathered to see us off, and there were many

shouts of astonishment when Timothy Tucker was seen among our number.

"He's there!"

"He's really going—Tucker!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

Timothy Tucker looked round with dignity through his green-tinted spectacles.

"Go away, little boys, go away!" he said, in his high voice. "How dare you insult me? H'm! Quite so!"

I took hold of Tucker's arm.

"Come along, my son," I said cheerfully. "You're going to do wonders for the eleven this afternoon, and you'll open the eyes of these staring asses!"

And we passed out of the gateway amid general amusement and astonishment. Many of the fellows were really anxious, for we could afford to take no risks in a game of this sort. The Grammarians were at the top of their form, and they had beaten us on our own ground the previous week. Every fellow in the eleven was determined to do his utmost to avenge the defeat.

And Timothy Tucker, the biggest duffer in the Remove, was included in the St. Frank's Eleven! Everybody concluded that I had taken leave of my senses. But I hadn't.

I knew exactly what I was doing.

CHAPTER 15.

Saints versus Grammarians!

THERE was a certain cocksure air about the Grammarians when we walked on to their splendidly kept cricket ground. They were not exactly rude, but they gave us to understand by their attitude that we were in for a terrific licking.

Arthur Grey, the junior skipper of the Grammar School, was a throughly decent fellow, and he came forward with outstretched hand. He greeted us all in turn, including his own namesake—Jack Grey, of St. Frank's. The two, of course, were in no way related.

"Glad to see you, you chaps," he said genially. "Of course, we're going to do our best to whack you; that's understood. I see you haven't made many changes," he added, casting his eye over us all.

"One or two," I said. "And I rather fancy that we shall pull the game off. Still, it's not my way to anticipate things, so we'll let it rest."

Arthur Grey chuckled.

"It may interest you to know that we've improved a bit since last week," he observed. "Our batting's better, anyway, and I can give you my word you'll have a pretty stiff task to get our men out."

"Oh, we've got some decent bowlers!" I said modestly. "And it's never exactly wise to be too sure of yourself, Grey. I rather fancy we've got a surprise for you to-day."

"A dark horse?" smiled the Bannington skipper.

"Exactly," I replied.

Pitt nudged me.

"I'd like you to point him out to me," he murmured. "There's no dark horse in our team, Nipper, unless you mean Tucker; and he's a bit of a forlorn hope, I imagine. What on earth possessed you to include him is more than I can imagine."

"Well, we'll see," I said cheerfully. "Tucker may not be such a duffer, after all."

It was not long before everything was ready. The afternoon had turned out extremely hot and sunny, and the scene was an alluring one. The Bannington Grammar School ground was surrounded by shady trees, and there were two pavilions, one for the juniors and one for the seniors. As there was no important senior match on to-day, practically all the spectators were gathered upon the lower school ground.

As it happened, Arthur Grey won the toss, and he elected to bat first. There was a good deal of clapping from the Grammarians. Personally, I was not at all sorry; for, after dismissing Grey's eleven, we should know what kind of a

task we had to face. It was to be a single innings game, for there was hardly time for two each.

The Grammarian innings was opened by Gordon and Davis, two excellent batsmen, but not the best that our rivals could show. Arthur Grey himself was a terror, and Collins and Gregg were supposed to be as hot as mustard. They would face our bowling later.

The St. Frank's eleven went into the field, and I placed Timothy Tucker at third man, where he was rather out of the way. The bowlers were Bob Christine and De Valerie. The latter had been showing up well as a bowler of late.

Gordon received the first ball of the over, delivered by De Valerie; and Gordon started well by sending the leather out into long field for a three. Davis went one better with the second ball by sending it over to the boundary. The Grammarians applauded with much vigour.

Hitting did not continue at this pace, of course, but both batsmen piled up runs very easily.

The two batsmen were certainly good, but at last, after fifteen minutes' play, Gordon's middle stump was ripped out of the ground by one of De Valerie's fast balls.

"Oh, good!"

"Well played, Gordon!"

He retired to the pavilion looking quite pleased with himself, and his place was filled by Howell. This junior was a tall, thin fellow who took enormous strides. He opened up well by scoring a two, then a three. He loped up and down the pitch with the greatest of ease.

But his innings was a short one.

He was rather unwary when Bob Christine sent down a slow, easy-looking ball. Howell swiped at it, and it went soaring away into the sky, to drop neatly into the hands of Reginald Pitt at square-leg.

"Oh, well caught!"

"Good old Pitt!"

"Hard lines, Howell!"

The next man in was Bates, a short, sturdy junior who looked very business-like. He didn't do much in the scoring line, but kept his wicket intact whilst Davis mounted up the runs. By ones, twos and threes the score crept up on the board, and now stood at thirty-eight for two wickets.

Davis added another fifteen to the score, and then he fell a victim to De Valerie's bowling. Fellbury, who was the next in, partnered Bates, and the pair of them provided the spectators with fifteen minutes of dull, uninteresting cricket. Neither of them were hard hitters, and for the most part they were content to block the ball or snatch a single run here and there.

The onlookers became impatient.

"Buck up, you slow coaches!"

"Put some pep into it!"

"You've only scored three in two overs!"

Bates replied at once and departed from his usual method. A ball delivered by Christine broke at a convenient angle, and Bates caught it perfectly with his bat. It went soaring away into the sky, and the next second the two batsmen were running as hard as they could go.

It seemed impossible that the ball could be caught, for it was descending in a distant part of the field where no fieldsman had been placed.

And then it was seen that Timothy Tucker was running desperately, like a hare. The whole field watched, breathless. The sun was in his eyes, and even the best fieldsman on the ground would have found it well-nigh impossible to make that catch.

The ball came shooting down, and Tucker was some feet distant even now. He made a tremendous effort, leapt high into the air, and just clutched the leather with the fingers of his left hand.

The ball remained firmly within his grasp.

"Caught, by Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, well caught, Tucker!"

"Good man!"

It was, indeed, a magnificent catch, one of the finest I'd ever seen. Tucker calmly turned, blinked round, and tossed the ball accurately back to Bob Christine, who was looking rather blank.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed. "Tucker! And a catch like that, too!"

There was a great deal of clapping, and Bates carried out his bat looking somewhat aggrieved. He had not expected to be caught out so neatly.

Benson, of the Grammar School, was the next man in, and he proceeded to wake things up. He was a hurricane batsman of the type that gives a brilliant display for a few minutes before fizzling out. He probably knew that he wouldn't last long, so he made the most of his time. He was a reckless slogger.

He knocked up thirty runs in next to no time, sending the leather to the boundary three or four times in succession. I was bowling now in Christine's place, and I used all my best efforts to dismiss this run-getter.

Benson's recklessness, however, was paying well until he was the cause of disaster to his partner, the slow Fellbury. Benson neatly flicked the ball into the slips, but T. T. fielded the leather with extraordinary swiftness. Fellbury was running, but he was just a shade too late.

The ball left Tucker's hand with wonderful accuracy and sent the wicket crashing to pieces before Fellbury arrived.

"How's that?"

"Out!" said the umpire promptly.

"Well thrown, Tucker!"

"Good old T. T.!"

The St. Frank's fellows were amazed that Tucker should display such remarkable form.

And when the next batsman came in, a fellow named Green, we were feeling somewhat more hopeful.

At present the score stood at 95 for five wickets, and if we could only lower the remaining wickets at the same rate, the Grammarians would probably all be out for something under two hundred. Our own task would not be such a formidable one. But I knew that the best batsmen in the Grammar School Eleven were yet to go in. The Grammarian "tail" was not likely to fall to pieces.

It was impossible for Benson to last long, and I got him out after another five minutes' play, during which time the score had mounted to one hundred and seven. I was not surprised when Arthur Grey, the rival skipper, came out of the pavilion with a bat under his arm. He was the next man in.

And it was not long before he proceeded to show us what he could do. At first he went cautiously, feeling our bowling. Then he launched out, and the score began to mount up by leaps and bounds. Green did very little. He was content to "stone-wall," and to leave the run-getting to his captain.

This went on until the board informed me that the score stood at a hundred and twenty-six. I was not very optimistic. After Green the batsmen would be Gregg, Collins, and Browne—all of them clever batsmen.

Green was soon out, being dismissed by Sir Montie, who made a very neat catch in long field. Then Gregg went in, and things began to hum.

Seven wickets had now been disposed of, and the score stood at one hundred and thirty. The partnership between Arthur Grey and Gregg was an ideal one. The captain was a great batsman, and Gregg practically as good. They proceeded to knock the leather into every corner of the field. It was almost impossible to keep count of the score—the figures were altered constantly.

I was bowling at one end, and Pitt was now at the other. We used every trick we knew. We did our utmost, but it seemed impossible to touch these stalwarts. They toyed with our bowling as though it was one of the

simplest possible kind. And yet both Pitt and myself were bowling well.

I got quite a shock when I glanced at the scoring-board fifteen minutes later. One hundred and eighty-seven! This was terrible, for it seemed that Gregg and Grey would go on knocking up the runs all the afternoon. They were cool, calm, and deadly. They made no mistakes, and batted brilliantly.

Boundaries were of common occurrence. The fieldsmen were now spread out into the far corners of the ground—not that this made much difference. Neither Grey nor Gregg gave the fieldsmen a chance.

And so it went on, the Grammarians delighting their own crowd, and dismaying ours. A roar of cheering broke out when the two hundred mark was passed. And the score quickly crept up by twos, threes, fours—and even an occasional six—until it stood at two hundred and thirty. By this time Gregg had made forty runs off his own bat, and it seemed that he would never be dismissed.

I was feeling rather desperate. Somehow I felt that it would be rather impossible for us to equal this score when we went in after the tea interval. Some of the Grammarians were deadly bowlers.

Two-fifty!

Another burst of applause, and Gregg and Grey were still batting as freshly as ever. More shouts of delight went up when Grey completed his fiftieth run. He seemed perfectly set for a century, and nothing that we could do could stop him making it.

Fifteen minutes later his own score stood at seventy-five, and Gregg had not been idle during this time. Glancing at the board, I saw that the figures were—292. This was terrible, and I felt that all hope was lost.

The ball was tossed to me at the end of an over, and I felt that I would do better this time. I was looking grim and determined. Tucker, who had been fielding well at third man, passed me on his way across the pitch. He blinked for a moment, and then stopped.

"Things are pretty bad!" I said shortly.

"Er—quite so, Nipper—quite so," said T. T. mildly. "Admitted, my dear sir. I was about to suggest that it would not be unwise, perhaps, to let me try my hand at bowling. It is not my way to push forward——"

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "You shall bowl, old son! See what you can do!"

Tucker took the ball, and his eyes gleamed with satisfaction. I went to the slips, and I could distinctly hear a murmur of astonishment round the ropes. Timothy Tucker as bowler! It was staggering.

"Nipper must be mad!" snorted Handforth to Tommy Watson. "Do you see what he's done? Tucker's going to bowl——"

"Keep your hair on!" said Watson. "Even Tucker can't do much worse than the others!"

Handforth was obliged to admit the truth of this remark, and he hurried back to his position, just as Tucker was preparing to deliver the first ball of the over. Gregg was facing him, and Gregg looked extremely amused.

He decided that we should pay dearly for this experiment. But, of course, Gregg knew that things were desperate, and that we should attempt any device in order to dismiss him and his partner.

Timothy Tucker took a short run. He seemed to have thrown aside his usual ungainliness now. He had a style all his own, and the St. Frank's fellows watched with anxiety and astonishment. They were quite convinced that matters would now go from bad to worse.

T. T.'s arm went up in an easy swing. But, at the last moment, his wrist shot forward with lightning speed, and the ball fairly whizzed out of his hand like a four-point-seven shell.

Gregg was even more confident than

he had been before. Perhaps he was too confident. T. T. looked such a duffer that his bowling must necessarily be easy to deal with, and Gregg was still smiling.

He didn't smile for long.

Whiz!

The ball came down, and Gregg jumped at it, probably intending to send it into the next county. Unfortunately he played slightly too far forward. The ball whipped in, and neatly took the middle stump out of the ground.

"Out!"

"Oh, well bowled!"

"Good old T. T.!"

The St. Frank's juniors round the ropes fairly shrieked with excited delight.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Gregg, in a startled voice.

He gave a rueful look at his wicket, which had a somewhat forlorn aspect. The unexpected had happened; one of the lightning batsmen had been dismissed.

The partnership was broken.

"Good old Tucker!" I grinned. "What an ass I was not to tell you to bowl before!"

Gregg carried out his bat, and he was given a warm and enthusiastic reception. He had done well, but all his own supporters considered that he had lost his wicket through carelessness. That ball of Tucker's had been a fluke, and by swiping carelessly, Gregg had allowed it to slip under his bat.

The next man in was Collins, another of the Grammarian stalwarts. He was considered to be a better batsman than Gregg, and Arthur Grey was not at all disconsolate. With Collins at the opposite end, he reckoned they could make another hundred runs with ease. And even then, there was Browne as last man.

Collins was jaunty, for his chums sent him out with a rousing cheer. They expected great things of him, and he knew it. He felt in form.

Timothy Tucker delivered the second ball of the over. It was a very easy ball to play, and Collins gathered himself together as he waited for the leather to pitch.

But somehow things went wrong. The ball broke at an angle, Collins missed it altogether, and he gave a startled jump as he heard a crash behind him. He gazed round in utter dismay, and found that his wicket was a wreck.

"Out!"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, good for you, T. T.!"

The St. Frank's crowd roared—as much with amazement as enthusiasm.

The astounding Tucker had dismissed two of the best Grammarian batsmen in succession—Tucker, the prize duffer! It was certainly staggering.

Arthur Grey was now looking more serious. The last man was just coming in—Browne. If his wicket fell, the school would remain at 292—a respectable score, but not what Grey had anticipated. But, of course, it was ridiculous, Browne would never be dismissed at once, and Grey himself would have plenty of chances of obtaining further runs.

Browne was not looking very cocksure as he walked out of the pavilion. He had seen what had occurred to his two predecessors, and he was beginning dimly to realise that Tucker was not such a hopeless ass as he looked. There had been no fluke about that second ball; it had been a tricky delivery which had beaten Collins to the wide.

Browne reached the crease, prepared himself, and down came the third ball of the over. Browne almost grinned. It wasn't fast at all, and was going hopelessly wide. It was a good chance to open the innings in a spectacular fashion. Browne just lifted his bat, his intention being to cut the leather through the slips.

He could never account for it afterwards, but the ball, somehow or other, slid round his bat, curled in, and the

next second Browne's off-stump was lying over at an acute angle.

"Hurrah!"

The St. Frank's crowd fairly yelled themselves hoarse.

"Bravo, Tucker!"

"The hat trick, by Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

It was the end of the innings, and Arthur Grey could hardly believe it. Just when he had become set, just when he was reckoning to show us all what cricket really was, his three best men had been bowled out by the hopeless-looking Tucker. It was a considerable shock. But Arthur Grey was a sportsman.

"Hard lines!" he said, crossing over to me. "I thought we were going to touch four hundred this afternoon; we looked like it. Still, I'm not grumbling. I reckon you fellows will have your work cut out to knock up 293 runs."

"Yes, you've probably got us whacked," I said candidly.

T. T. was a modest youth. He evaded the fellows who wanted to crowd round him, and bunked for the pavilion, where he locked himself away in seclusion. He did not reappear until the tea interval was nearly over.

Then he came out, blinking through his green-tinted spectacles, and submitted to one or two hearty thumps on the back.

"Well, you've given us one or two surprises to-day, old son!" exclaimed Handforth heartily. "You're a giddy marvel! Why, even I couldn't have done any better."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tucker accepted the words of praise modestly, and for once he was reticent. As a rule, he was only too willing to talk at great length. But to-day he said as little as possible, and merely looked amiable.

And then the game was resumed, and the St. Frank's batting commenced. We had a heavy task before us, and only something like a miracle could save us from defeat.

CHAPTER 16.

The Mystery of Timothy Tucker!

DISASTER marked the opening of the St. Frank's innings.

I sent in Reginald Pitt and De Valerie to commence the scoring. They were both good batsmen, and I expected much of them.

But the first ball of the innings conquered De Valerie's wicket, and he walked back to the pavilion, looking glum and disappointed.

"Hard cheese," said Handforth. "I'm next man in, I suppose! I'll show you what ought to be done—— Hallo, Montie, where are you off to?"

"The wicket, dear old boy," said Tregellis-West smoothly.

Montie was next man in, and I watched him anxiously as he faced the fast bowling of Bates, who was one of the chief men to be feared. He was not particularly brilliant with the bat, but deadly with the ball.

He delivered the leather in a hurry, and Sir Montie was taking no chances. He merely blocked it. The next ball was of just the same variety, and Montie played it back to the bowler.

Then when Bates delivered his next Montie felt that he could launch out somewhat. It was an inviting ball. Clack! The ball went soaring away—upwards.

A breathless moment, a quickly running figure, and——

"Oh, well caught, Collins!"

"Out, by gad!"

Sir Montie looked round in dismay.

"Begad!" he murmured. "What a frightful misfortune!"

It was—two wickets down for nil!

The next man in was Tommy Watson, and he was looking rather grim and somewhat nervous. Watson was not a hard hitter, and he never gave a brilliant display. He considered he had done very well if he knocked up ten or fifteen runs before being dismissed. He was an excellent partner for a hard hitter, for he could "stonewall" his wicket until further orders.

The rest of the over was uneventful, and then Pitt had the bowling. This was now in the hands of Davis. Davis was considered to be the best bowler in the Grammarian eleven, and I knew from experience that he was hot stuff.

However, he didn't succeed in taking a wicket during the over. Pitt, on the other hand, knocked up two twos, a four, and a three. And Watson added a modest one. By the time Bates had the bowling again, the scoring-board showed the anything but gratifying score of 12 runs for two wickets.

Tommy Watson met with trouble shortly afterwards. He added four more to the score, and then was unfortunate enough to be run out. He thought he could get another run, hesitated, and was too late to get back to his crease.

Handforth was next man, and he assured me, just before leaving the pavilion, that everything was quite all right. There was no need to worry at all. It was his firm intention to make nothing under 80, and probably a century. Handforth, in fact, kindly promised me that he would win the match off his own bat.

"All right—go ahead and do it!" I said. "We want runs, Handy—not hot air!"

"You—you silly ass!" snorted Handforth. "Just you wait and see!"

He hadn't been actually boasting, but he was supremely confident. He always reckoned that he could do wonders—and it is only fair to say that generally he knocked up a decent score. He was a hurricane batsman—a deadly slogger who hit out at everything that came, and who put all his energy into the batting. He took risks which no careful fellow would dream of, and they frequently came off.

Luckily for us, he did fairly well this afternoon. He opened with a 4, followed it up by a 2, and then a 3. This was the end of the over, so he received the batting again after the change.

He proceeded to knock the leather all over the surrounding country, and for a brief burst he did wonders. Three boundaries in succession, then a pair of 2's and then a three to finish the over. He still had the bowling, and he had already scored 28 off his own bat.

He was dismissed during the next over, and he was quite astounded when he realised that his wicket had fallen. He had only made 32, bringing the total score up to fifty-three for four wickets.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "What rot! I'm not out!"

"Well, your middle stump is!" grinned the umpire.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth would not be convinced that he was out, and it was only after a little argument that he left the pitch.

His place was taken by Jack Grey, who did fairly well for about fifteen minutes, batting steadily, and partnering Pitt in an admirable manner. Between the pair of them they knocked up an additional 45 runs, making the total look more respectable.

A big round of applause was forthcoming when a 3 scored by Pitt brought the total up to 101. This, taking everything into consideration, was excellent, and if only we could keep up the pace, we should be able to put up a good performance.

Pitt and Grey were study-mates and the best of chums. They knew one another's form, and worked together like a machine. The bowlers could do nothing with them for a time, and before long the 125 mark had been passed.

Then at last Pitt's wicket fell. He was clean bowled, and he received a great ovation when he carried his bat in.

"Not so bad," I said critically. "One-twenty-five for five wickets is pretty decent. But we shall have to do better. Christine, old son, it's your turn now."

Bob Christine was soon fixed up, and he sallied out to the wicket. His innings was a brief one, but quite brilliant. In fifteen minutes he added 30 to the score, batting with tremendous vigour and force. Then he was caught out, and his place was taken by Yorke.

All the St. Frank's onlookers were now feeling highly elated. Matters were not half so bad as they had feared.

"Why, we're all serene!" declared De Valerie. "Grey's good for a long while yet, and Nipper and Oldfield are bound to made a tremendous score. Oldfield's rather a quiet chap, but as a batsman he's terrific. What's the score? Hundred-and-sixty-five for six! Not at all dusty!"

Optimism was general, but it did not last long.

For a period of awful disaster set in for St. Frank's. Before another run was made, Grey was declared out, leg before wicket. Oldfield took his place, and immediately after that Yorke was surprised to find his leg-stump out of the ground.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Pitt. "This won't do!"

"We'll try and pull the fat out of the fire," I said grimly. "I'm going in next, and Tucker will be the last man."

"Oh!"

"Help!" said De Valerie. "If Oldfield loses his wicket now, we're done. For goodness' sake, Nipper, make a terrific effort. Oldfield and you ought to make a stand, and knock up a hundred between you. As soon as Oldy comes out the game will be all over. We can't count Tucker at all."

"Well, he didn't do so bad at bowling," said Pitt.

"Jolly good, in fact," said De Valerie, nodding. "That's why he can't be much good at batting. In any case, I think we're in for a whacking."

I went out to the wicket, scored a 3 with my first ball, and then Oldfield sent up the leather in such a graceful way that it dropped neatly into the waiting palms of Gordon, in long field. Oldfield was out!

"Oh, my goodness!"

Groans came from the St. Frank's onlookers. Nine wickets down, and the score only stood at 168. The end of the game was inevitable—we should lose. There was only one man to follow Oldfield, and that man was Timothy Tucker.

It was the finish. The St. Frank's "tail" had cracked up completely, and nothing could now save the game. This is the way the juniors looked at it.

"Why, we might as well give up at once," said Handforth disgustedly. "What is the good of going on? T. T. will be out first ball, and that's the end of the game. Whacked by 124! Oh, my only topper!"

Tucker carried his bat out into the field and he removed his green-tinted spectacles. He passed quite close to me, and I gave him a grim look.

"It's up to us!" I said quietly.

But I felt sure, even while I was speaking, that nothing could be done. There was a deficit of 124 to make up, and if one of our wickets fell it would be all over. Our chances looked very slim.

Tucker received the bowling from Davis, and it was the latter's genial intention to smash the wicket to atoms. He would take his revenge for the way T. T. had dealt with the Grammarian wickets.

Davis took a curious run—a kind of mixture between a hop and a jump. His arm went round like a streak of lightning, and the ball flew down the pitch, making a direct line for Tucker's middle stump.

T. T. seemed reckless. He raised his bat in the most cool manner, then swung it round with enormous force. Clack! It was a magnificent hit, and the leather went soaring away, right over the pavilion into an adjoining meadow. There was no need to run.

"Six!" I grinned. "How's that?"

The spectators were tremendously astonished, and they cheered—supporters and rivals alike. It had been a glorious hit. A moment before the Grammarians had been grinning at the freakish-looking batsman. And even now the home supporters felt pretty certain that it was only a flash in the

pan, and that Tucker would not keep it up.

The ball was soon recovered, and Davis sent it down again—with the same terrific force. Tucker scored a boundary, and followed this up by a brilliant hit which was smartly fielded, and only resulted in two. Another boundary followed. T. T. rested on his bat, and blinked round at the field of play with quiet satisfaction.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Pitt. "Who would think the ass could play like this? He's a giddy marvel—he's as hot as cayenne pepper!"

"Well played, Tucker!"

"Good man!"

T. T. had now changed his attitude completely, and he looked business-like and tremendously alert. He continued his amazing innings. And it must not be imagined that I was idle. Between the pair of us we sent the Grammarians leather hunting in a way which filled them with dismay.

Every ball was sent shooting away. Both Tucker and myself took everything that came, and the runs were piled up with astonishing rapidity. We were not idle for a moment. Other bowlers were tried, but to no avail. We knocked the leather into every corner of the field.

Tucker was the best man—I am compelled to admit that. My hits were mainly 2's and 3's. Tucker scored boundary after boundary. He was like a fellow possessed. The strength behind his hits made the onlookers stare.

Two hundred—225—240—260——

The numbers on the scoring board changed with amazing rapidity. Already Tucker had obtained 65 runs off his own bat, and I had contributed over 30. I added 3 more, and then Tucker brought the score up to 275.

The excitement was now intense, for it was believed that we should be able to beat the Grammarians. Another burst on my part, and the score reached 282. Ten to draw—11 to win!

The Grammarian bowlers were desperate. They used every trick they knew, but it was useless. Tucker scored all the rest. He hit with precision and terrific force. And he was still as fresh as paint, and ready for another century.

"Hurrah!" shouted Handforth. "Two-ninety! Good old T. T.!"

It was the last ball of the over—and, as it turned out, the last ball of the game. Tucker caught it fully, and it went soaring away like a bullet, right beyond the ground into an adjoining garden. A faint tinkle of glass sounded. The match was won—and Timothy Tucker was the fellow who had brought about the miracle.

He came running towards me, his face gleaming. I winked, and T. T. understood. At the same moment a great crowd of fellows came charging on to the pitch, in order to seize Tucker and to chair him.

But Tucker vanished. He streaked across the green, vanished into a dense little wood, and the excited juniors followed. They found no sign of Tucker, and they were disappointed and exasperated.

"The modest ass!" said Christine warmly. "We were going to give him the reception he deserves!"

They were still searching among the trees. Jerry Dodd strolled up, looking somewhat flustered and hot. His hands were in his pockets, and he attempted to look at his ease.

"By Jingo!" he exclaimed. "What's the idea, chums?"

"You've just come, I suppose?" said Pitt. "We didn't see you here before, anyway, Doddy. What do you think of Tucker?"

"He's a wonderful feller—sure thing!" grinned Jerry Dodd.

A moment later he came face to face with me, and we gripped hands.

"Good man!" I murmured. "I'll tell you what I think of you later!"

The Australian junior merely grinned.

The other fellows noticed nothing, and were greatly mystified as to the strange disappearance of T. T. But the

match was won, and everything was all right.

Later on, when St. Frank's was reached, the fellows were even more astonished. For Tucker was found all right—accorded a tremendous ovation, much to his amazement. He declared that he had been butterfly hunting all the afternoon. And at last the truth dawned upon St. Frank's. The amazing cricketer at Bannington had not been Tucker at all, but somebody in disguise. They questioned me, but I was mum.

But the identity of the demon cricketer would easily have been known to the juniors if they had used their wits. That evening Jerry Dodd was very elated. As for the mystery which surrounded him, there were to be some remarkable developments before long.

CHAPTER 17.
A Startling Adventure!

MORROW of the Sixth, opened the door of the junior Common-room and put his head into that somewhat noisy apartment.

"Bed-time, you kids!" he said briskly. "Buck up!"

"Right-ho, Morrow!"

"Just coming!"

"Well, look alive!" said Morrow, nodding. "There'll be ructions if you're late!"

Tommy Watson yawned.

"Well, I can do with bed, anyhow," he said languidly. "My hat, I'm feeling tired this evening—I suppose it's the weather. It's been frightfully hot to-day, and even now it's sultry and close."

"Stiflin', dear old boy—it is, really!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

The Common-room window was wide open. Outside in the Triangle the atmosphere was hardly any cooler than within the Ancient House. The stars were shining, although they looked a bit hazy, and away in the Western sky the rich glow of sunset could still be seen.

St. Frank's had been stewing all day—sweltering under a glaring sun which had poured its heat down with tropical intensity, and everybody was feeling decidedly used up. The prospect of going up to bed was a welcome one, although blankets would certainly be cast wholesale.

I left the Common-room with my two chums, Tregellis-West and Watson, and we were just strolling through the lobby when I happened to notice Nelson Lee standing there, as though looking for somebody. He nodded as I appeared.

"Good-night, guv'nor!" I said cheerfully.

"Just a moment, Nipper!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "I want a word with you."

I hurried forward, leaving my chums chatting with Handforth & Co. and Jerry Dodd. Nelson Lee spoke in a low voice, so that none of the others could hear.

"Come to my study at midnight!" he said briefly.

I started.

"Eh?" I ejaculated, staring.

"I think you heard, Nipper," murmured Lee. "Come to my study at midnight. Say nothing to the others. I shall have work for you. That's all."

"Right, sir!" I said briskly. "You can rely on me."

Nelson Lee nodded, and with a cheery "Good-night!" to the others, he passed out of the lobby. Tregellis-West and Watson joined me at once.

"Anythin' important?" asked Watson.

"Oh, nothing—the guv'nor wants to see me in the morning about something," I replied vaguely.

I omitted to mention, however, that the "morning" in this instance would probably be about 12.2 a.m.—two minutes after midnight. It would certainly be morning, but much earlier than Sir Montie or Tommy imagined.

We went up to the dormitory, which was very close and stuffy, in spite of the wide-open windows, and we were

only too glad to divest ourselves of our clothing and to get into cool pyjamas.

I lay on my bed, covered only with a single sheet, and I did not go to sleep immediately. Nelson Lee had said very little to me, but it had meant much.

The guv'nor had some secret job on hand—some careful detective investigation which necessitated night work, and which was to be performed in secret by Nelson Lee and myself.

I thrilled at the thought. It was some little time since we had worked together in the old way. On these occasions Nelson Lee was not a schoolmaster, and I was no longer a schoolboy. We became detective and assistant, as of old.

And the thought of it was very genial to me. It did not require very much concentration on my part to realise the subject of this investigation. I was certain, in fact, that it concerned the affairs of Jerry Dodd.

However, there was no need for me to waste time in thinking things over. It was now not far from ten o'clock, and I laid my head on my pillow with the firm resolve that I should awaken at midnight. I was pretty certain that I should be able to rouse myself at the required time.

It was a knack I had developed for some years, and I rather prided myself that there was no possibility of my failing. Nelson Lee was even better than me in that respect. He could awaken almost to a second, and was immediately fresh and wide awake.

My thoughts grew dim, and I dozed off. Then, almost within a minute, it seemed, I found myself awake. The dormitory was dark and quiet, and the school clock was booming out solemnly.

"My hat!" I muttered. "It can't be midnight already—that must be ten!"

I fetched out my watch from under the pillow, and the luminous dial assured me that it was exactly twelve. I had slept for two hours, but it had seemed more like two minutes. With a little sigh of satisfaction I slipped out of bed, and quickly dressed, but did not trouble to don a collar.

I was feeling quite fresh, and when I stole downstairs I saw that a light was gleaming from beneath the door of Nelson Lee's study. I tapped gently upon the panels, and entered. The guv'nor looked up from his desk with a smile.

"Good lad!" he said. "Yes, close the door, Nipper."

"What's the wheeze, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"I'll tell you that later—we are going out within a minute or two," was the guv'nor's reply. "I hardly expected you to be so prompt."

Nelson Lee was making up his private diary, and, having completed this task, he rose to his feet, donned a cloth cap, and we were ready to start. We sallied out into the Triangle, where the air was now delightfully cool. Overhead the stars winked unceasingly, and not a breath of wind stirred the tree-tops.

We made our way across the Triangle, and then into Bellton Lane.

"Which way, sir?" I asked.

"This way—towards the moor," said Nelson Lee. "Now, Nipper, I may as well explain to you what this expedition is, and why I have decided to go upon it at such an unusual hour."

"Good!" I said. "I've been waiting to hear that, sir!"

"I expect you have some idea of my main motive?"

"Well, I expect its about Dodd, and those Burmese."

"Exactly, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "As we are walking, I may as well go over one or two facts. As you know, Dodd came to us with a peculiar story about a dream—a vivid dream concerning Indians."

"And it wasn't a dream at all, sir," I remarked.

"No, Nipper, it was not," agreed Nelson Lee. "Dodd actually passed through the experience. He was placed under the influence of some strange Eastern drug."

"What was the exact effect of this drug, sir?" I asked.

"I cannot positively say, for I have had no personal experience," replied Lee. "But the drug was administered by means of a tiny dart, the boy believing that he had been stung by a gnat. The drug induced sleep, but only for a short time. When Dodd awakened he was in a dreamy kind of state, and he had been removed during his period of unconsciousness. In this strange dream-state, brought on by the drug, he could remember nothing of his usual life. After the Indians had finished with him he was back in his old original place. And, not unnaturally, he believed that the whole thing had been a dream."

"But what does it all mean, sir?" I inquired. "What's the explanation? Why on earth should the Indians try these dodges with Jerry Dodd?"

"That is what I am trying to discover," said Nelson Lee. "I have already questioned Dodd closely, but he appears to know nothing about Burma or India. As you know, an attempt was made a few nights ago to burgle the school. It was an attempt to recover the golden image. A second attempt was made later. Dodd himself being approached by a man who appeared to be a poor hawker—or, rather, a dark-skinned fortune-teller. It was a trick, but it did not succeed."

"Was the man one of the Hindoos, sir?"

"He certainly was," said Nelson Lee. "And now I come to the important part. I followed this fellow—quite unknown to him, I think—and I was not exactly astonished when I found that he went across the moor, and disappeared into the old quarry. I could make no further progress without going to the risk of exposing myself. Therefore, we are now going to the quarry to make a few investigations."

"Oh, good!" I said eagerly. "We ought to learn a few things."

We walked on for some moments in silence, both of us busy with our thoughts. I wondered what this mystery concerning Jerry Dodd could be, and I was quite certain of one fact—Jerry himself was just as much in the dark as we were.

I kept thinking over what Nelson Lee had told me. I remembered Jerry Dodd's "dream," too. It seemed that there were three or four Indians—or Burmese. And why they had drugged Jerry in that peculiar way was a mystery.

What did they want with him? Why were they taking all this trouble to get him into their clutches, only to release him within an hour? It was a most extraordinary business. I could think of no possible solution.

And then I thought of Messrs. Podge and Midge, the wonderful detectives. At least, they believed themselves to be wonderful. My own opinion would not have flattered them.

There was scarcely any secret in the fact that Messrs. Podge and Midge were staying in the neighbourhood for the purpose of keeping an eye upon Jerry.

They were protecting Dodd from possible harm, and they were about as much use as a pair of film-comedy detectives. Their chief characteristic seemed to be blundering into every hole they could find.

Obviously they had been instructed by somebody to undertake this work; but Jerry Dodd knew nothing about it, and we were all in the dark. There were elements of comedy about the mystery which added greatly to its interest.

By this time Nelson Lee and I had passed the Mount—the last house before we came to the wide expanse of Bannington Moor—and arriving on the moor, we could see some considerable way across the great stretch of gorse-covered country. The starlight was fairly bright, and the night was not absolutely dark.

"It's only a comparatively short distance to the quarry, sir," I said. "And

what do you expect to find there, anyhow?"

"To tell the truth, Nipper, I have not anticipated the matter," said Nelson Lee. "I noted the exact spot where the old Indian disappeared, and I thought it would be wiser not to investigate at once, but to leave it for some future occasion. This is the future occasion. And I have brought you with me because there may be a little trouble. We never know."

I thought it was very decent of the guv'nor to have decided that way. He knew well enough that if any danger had to be faced, I should like to be there. And these Indians, although they had not proved themselves to be dangerous so far, there was no telling what their game actually was.

"When we get to the quarry we must not talk," said Nelson Lee in a low voice. "The night is very still, and sound carries a long way. We do not wish to give any warning of our approach."

Our movements were absolutely noiseless, for we were walking on soft grass, and we were both wearing rubber-soled shoes. And at last, almost before we realised it, we came to the edge of the quarry. It yawned beneath us, a treacherous trap for any unwary wayfarer.

For at this particular spot there was a sheer drop of a hundred feet, and below there were rough stones. We were obliged to walk round for some distance before we arrived at a place where we could make a safe descent into the quarry.

Over on one side there were some caves and tunnels, one of these tunnels actually leading underground to the old monastery vaults at St. Frank's. And I was rather surprised when Nelson Lee took the opposite direction. I had not known that there were any caves or caverns this way.

Lee could see that I was surprised, but he said nothing. And I could not very well ask him, after that warning of his. We crept forward, foot by foot, Nelson Lee leading the way and picking his footsteps carefully.

And so we progressed, until at last we arrived right up against the cliff face. It seemed quite blank, without any sign of an opening. It was apparently a pure waste of time for us to come. There wasn't room enough for a cat to crawl through.

"This is no good, sir!" I whispered.

"Hush, Nipper! Hush!"

Nelson Lee only breathed the words; then he wormed his way forward between two boulders. It was impossible for him to get beyond, for there was no room; but suddenly the guv'nor vanished, and I caught in my breath sharply.

Pushing forward I discovered that the appearance of the rock was very deceptive. Facing it directly there was no opening to be seen; but, close against the rocks, a narrow cavity was visible—a mere slit.

Nelson Lee had pushed his way through here, and I quickly followed.

We now found ourselves in a kind of cave entrance—narrow and low, and with a rough, rock-strewn floor. The darkness was pitchy; but this was soon remedied by Nelson Lee, who produced a small but powerful electric torch.

A bright beam of light shot out.

"Is it worth risking, sir?" I whispered.

"My dear Nipper, we must see," murmured Lee.

"I found that the place was bigger than I had at first imagined. It gave a turn to the right, and Nelson Lee paused. He cast the light of his torch upwards. It was not actually a tunnel or a cavern, but a fissure. Two rock walls rose up, meeting some distance overhead.

Nelson Lee examined the floor carefully, nodding to himself.

"Yes, we are right!" he breathed. "Do you see? Footprints!"

He pointed, and I nodded.

Not a sound could be heard in the fissure. Everything was intensely silent and black. With the torch ex-

tinguished we might have been in the catacombs. I had never suspected the existence of this fissure.

We walked on, taking the risk of running into the enemy—for I already regarded the mysterious Indians in this light.

Quite abruptly the character of the place altered, and Nelson Lee and I found ourselves gazing into a wide, low cavern. It was empty, except for two small wooden boxes and a trace of burnt charcoal here and there. The dry, sandy floor had been disturbed, and it was clear that the place had been only recently occupied.

Over on the other side a dark hole could be seen in the rock wall, and this was evidently the entrance to another tunnel, which led farther into the bowels of the earth. Nelson Lee turned his light here and there.

"The birds seem to have flown, guv'nor," I remarked softly.

"So it seems, my lad," agreed Nelson Lee; "but we must not take anything for granted. It is quite possible that this piece of ground is honeycombed with passages and caverns. We have never explored the place, and so we are quite in the dark. But do you see all this? Does it bring anything to your mind?"

I looked round, frowning.

"You mean Jerry Dodd's dream?" I said after a moment or two.

"Certainly," agreed the guv'nor. "Dodd mentioned that he was taken to a strange cavern after passing through the forest, and after being taken across a vast plain. There can be no doubt, Nipper, that the forest was Bellton Wood, and the vast plain a stretch of Bannington Moor. We are now standing in the spot where Dodd was brought to. It was here that he encountered the mysterious gentlemen from Burma. We are certainly getting a little nearer to the solution."

"But what about the Burmese beggars?" I inquired. "We've found their haunt, but they don't seem to be on view."

"We mustn't expect too much, young 'un," said Lee. "Our next task will be to explore this other passage and see where it leads us."

"Good!" I murmured. "And what if we come across the Hindoos?"

"I shall merely demand an explanation," replied the detective. "There is no reason to assume that these people are very dangerous. They may probably resent our interference, but that is only to be expected."

While speaking, Nelson Lee moved forward, and together we entered the low tunnel. It went on straight for ten or twelve feet, and then a sharp corner was reached. At this point another tunnel branched out, and Nelson Lee paused for a moment. Everything was tremendously still; only our own breathing disturbed the complete silence. Lee bent down and examined the faint marks in the soft sand.

"This way, Nipper," he murmured; "to the left. There are marks leading up both tunnels, but I rather fancy this one."

We entered the tunnel, which was very low. We were obliged to crouch down. And we had not proceeded very far before Nelson Lee came to a sudden halt, and I found him staring down into a yawning black cavern.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "This is rather unexpected."

I pushed past him until I could see clearly. He warned me not to go too close, and I understood. For there, right at our feet, gaped this dark hole, and there seemed to be no bottom to it. A narrow ledge to the left was the only method of passing the danger spot.

"My only hat!" I muttered. "It's a good thing you had the torch, sir."

"Yes, we should have plunged headlong——"

Nelson Lee came to an abrupt pause. He half-turned, switching his torch round. At the same second I fancied I heard a slight sound in the rear. Both Nelson Lee and I caught a brief glimpse of two swarthy, grim faces; then, before

we could take any action, disaster happened.

We were too late to put up any fight. I was pushed from the rear, and Nelson Lee was pushed at the same second. Utterly unable to save ourselves, we clutched at the air desperately and plunged down into that yawning abyss.

Down we went—down—down!

Nelson Lee's torch had been jerked from his hand, and we were in pitchy darkness.

CHAPTER 18.
The Escape!

SPLASH!

I hardly knew what I had been expecting—certainly not water. A fleeting glimpse of jagged rocks had flown into my mind; I had feared that both Nelson Lee and myself would be smashed to bits on the hard rocks. But no; this was not the case. We both plunged into deep, cold water, and the next moment we were gasping and fighting for breath. The inky darkness enveloped us.

Above, we could see nothing. All was dense black; no sounds came down to us. The Indians had vanished, knowing that there was no escape for us. We must have fallen about twenty feet, and we had no idea as to the nature of our wet prison.

"Are you all right, Nipper?" came Nelson Lee's voice.

"Yes, so far, guv'nor," I gasped. "Great Scott! What the dickens shall we do? The scoundrels! Pitching us down here like this!"

"We are in a tight corner, Nipper—that is absolutely certain," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I am sorry I brought you with me now——"

"Oh, rats, sir!" I broke in. "We'll sink or swim together. But perhaps there's a way of escape."

It was not Nelson Lee's way—or mine—to give up hope. We had been in many grim corners together, and we had come through countless ordeals. This present predicament seemed to be well-nigh hopeless. Shut in these tunnels, miles away from any human help, we were down in a pit, struggling in deep water, and with absolutely no hand-hold. We could shout until we were exhausted, and assistance would not come. The Indians would hear us, perhaps; but they would take no notice. They had cast us down into this death-trap, and it was their object, no doubt, to finish with us for good and all.

Rescue, therefore, was out of the question. Our only hope was to help ourselves. And this, on the face of it, seemed impossible. After swimming round and round for some few minutes, we gained an excellent idea of our position.

The pit was about ten feet in diameter, being much wider here than at the summit. It formed a kind of rough circle in shape; but the rock walls were smooth and wet and slimy. There was not the slightest trace of a nook or a cranny—nothing to which we could cling. And the water beneath us was deep—how deep we could not tell.

"It's no good, guv'nor," I gasped at length. "There's no opening anywhere, and it's impossible to climb up these smooth walls. They lean inwards, too, narrowing towards the top."

"You are right, Nipper—it is impossible for us to climb out of this pit," said Nelson Lee, treading water monotonously. "I have a rope in my pocket, but it is of no use in this hopeless position."

"The murderous devils!" I said fiercely. "They didn't give us a chance, sir—they pushed us from behind, and we didn't have a second to defend ourselves. This looks like the finish, guv'nor—it's all up!"

Nelson Lee was silent—and his silence was far more significant than any words could have been. He probably agreed with me. And so we continued to swim about, becoming colder and colder. My teeth were already chattering. And the intense

darkness seemed to push down upon us.

But, automatically, we kept on moving, and it caused the blood to circulate through our veins. We were by no means exhausted, although rapidly tiring. One second's thought was enough to convince me of the hopelessness of the situation. Another fifteen minutes of this useless swimming would be the finish of us. We couldn't keep it up for long. I should probably give up first. I should sink. Perhaps the guv'nor would try to hold me up, and that would only bring the end more quickly, for I should drag him down, and we should both go under.

Our disappearance from St. Frank's would remain a mystery for all time. Not a soul had known of our expedition; no search would be made. And it might be twenty years before another human being looked down into this watery pit.

In all our experience we had seldom been in such a tight corner—such an apparently hopeless predicament. And it was all the more galling because we had not expected a disaster of this nature. Both Nelson Lee and I had been taken by surprise.

"It's no good!" I muttered weakly. "We can't do anything, guv'nor."

"Keep your pecker up, Nipper—never say die!" came Nelson Lee's soft, encouraging voice. "While there's life there's hope. Hold still now—I'm going to dive."

"What for, guv'nor?"

"It may be fancy, but I have an idea that there is a current in this water," replied Lee. "At all events, the water is fresh and clean—certainly not stagnant, as one would expect it to be. Its source is evidently an underground spring, and I imagine that I can feel a current drawing at my feet. I mean to dive. Keep treading water until I come to the surface again."

"All right, sir," I muttered.

I felt certain that Nelson Lee was only attempting to revive my spirits, and that his supposition was merely imagination. I could feel no current, although I was compelled to admit that the water was fresh and pure.

A feeling of panic came over me when I suddenly realised that I was alone. The guv'nor had dived. After taking a deep breath he went down, with a great splash, and I was left there in the pool.

I waited.

The seconds seemed like hours. Still Nelson Lee did not come up. I went round in circles, swimming steadily and mechanically. And the panic increased in my breast. It seemed to me that five minutes had elapsed, and I knew that it was humanly impossible for anybody to remain under water for such a length of time. All sorts of horrible thoughts came into my mind.

Nelson Lee had dived, and his clothing had caught against a projection, perhaps. He had been held down there, until life passed out of his body. And I was alone—left to my fate!

It's not often that I give up hope—but I certainly did give up hope, then. It seemed such a useless proceeding to me—to keep swimming round and round in this aimless fashion. And still Nelson Lee did not come. He had dived straight down, and that was the last I had seen or heard of him.

Suddenly I made up my mind.

I would dive, too. After all, it was better than keeping up this hopeless swimming. If Nelson Lee had been caught and trapped at the bottom of the pit it would be too late to rescue him now—I knew that. But it would be something to do.

I filled my lungs with a deep intake of breath, and dived. Down I went, into the icy water. I descended quite a number of feet, and became aware of a most peculiar sensation. I was being drawn slowly but surely to one side of the pit. The water appeared to have me in its grasp, and with a sudden throbbing of my heart I realised that Nelson Lee had been right.

There was a current!

A strong one, too, for it dragged me along in spite of my efforts. All this only took a few brief seconds, it must be understood. But it seemed much longer to me at the time. Actually, I dived, was caught in that strange current, and the next moment I felt myself against the smooth, rocky walls.

Then, in a moment, I felt myself being forced through an opening in the rocks. I was carried along in a kind of sewer pipe. My lungs felt as though they would burst, and I fought to retain consciousness. Then, when I was nearly gone, I felt myself shooting upwards. Then I spluttered and gasped, and my lungs were filled with wonderful, life-giving air.

How it happened, I couldn't tell, but I had come to the surface again—but I was no longer in that terrible pit.

"Nipper!" a voice exclaimed. "Thank Heaven you have come!"

For a dull, dreamy second I wondered if the worst had actually happened—I wondered if this was death or unconsciousnes. Then a hand grasped my arm, and pinched it so tight that I winced. I was dragged along, and then I felt rough rocks beneath me, and I struggled half out of the water and lay back.

"What—what's happened?" I muttered dazedly.

I seemed to forget things for a moment or two, then I felt something against my lips. I was nearly choked by some fiery liquid which I recognised as brandy. The spirit went down my throat, and soon I was afire with the effect of the spirit. My wits completely returned. Nelson Lee was beside me, and he screwed on the stopper of his brandy flask.

"Upon my word, Nipper, I thought you were never coming!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't get back—the current was too strong. And I was in an agony of mind, wondering whether you would dive down and follow me through."

"But—but I can't understand, sir," I said weakly.

"Yet it is quite simple," replied Nelson Lee. "This is an underground spring—actually a flowing stream. We do not see such things on the surface, but they are always present, nevertheless. This little stream flows through the bottom of that pit. That is the current I felt. When we dived we were caught in that current and carried through into this cavern. We may be no better off than we were before, but we have certainly been provided with a breathing space."

"It's—it's wonderful, sir," I said wearily. "Oh, my goodness! I thought it was all up with us—I thought you were dead, and—and—— My hat! I'm shivering, sir! It's not particularly warm in here."

Nelson Lee gripped my arm again.

"You are right, my lad," he said grimly. "And it behoves us to get a move on. We must keep moving or we shall be chilled to the marrow, and that may result in bad colds."

Without any light, our task was a difficult one. We could only feel our way. And it was a great relief to find that these rock walls were not sheer and smooth. On the contrary, we found it possible to climb up a kind of gully, where there was plenty of handhold, and many rough edges. We didn't know where we were going, or what this climb would lead to, but we kept on.

And, foot by foot, we mounted. The intense darkness hemmed us in, and we could only judge our position by feeling. Now and again, as we paused, we could hear a faint trickle of water from the stream below. It came to us as though from the depths of a great canyon.

We did not lose sight of the possibility that we might soon find ourselves in one of the tunnels, and that we might come across the Indians. But Nelson Lee would now be prepared for these murderous fellows.

Our adventure had proved quite conclusively that the men from the East were grim and dangerous, and that their mission was not an innocent one. What business they could have with Jerry Dodd remained a mystery—and we did not feel like making any attempt to solve it just then.

"My hat! How much higher are we going, sir?" I asked breathlessly.

"We must be fairly near the surface now, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "Indeed, it is possible that we shall ultimately come out right on the face of the quarry cliff. That is, if we come out at all."

"That's right—be cheerful!" I muttered. "Well, I'm pretty well warmed up now, so that's one good thing. There's not much danger of us catching cold, sir."

"The main thing is to keep moving, Nipper," said Lee. "We are having a difficult task, and it is very unfortunate that we have no means of lighting our way. But if we persevere we shall probably meet with success."

We did persevere, and still we continued to mount upwards. Then we got to a point where it was impossible to go any higher. The rocks hemmed us in on all sides. For a time we believed that all hope was lost. No matter which way we crawled, we could feel no outlet.

But Nelson Lee was hopeful all the time.

"I am convinced, Nipper, that there is an exit somewhere," he declared. "The air here is quite fresh and pure—and, indeed, there is a distinct current. That proves conclusively that there must be a cavity leading to the outside."

"Yes; but it may be only a tiny hole, sir," I said gloomily.

"We must chance that, my boy."

The experience was an extraordinary one. Crouching there in total darkness, in this strange fissure in the rocks, it was hard to realise that a yawning space lay beneath us, and that a bad slip might lead to a disastrous fall.

I was wondering if we should ever succeed in our object when I heard Nelson Lee draw in his breath sharply. The next moment he touched my arm.

"This way, Nipper," he said softly. "I think I have discovered the secret. The exit is right above our heads, and it will be necessary for us to execute a somewhat difficult climbing feat. I will go first, and see how things stand."

I couldn't see the guv'nor, of course, but I could feel that he was standing up. He reached with his long arms and grasped a ledge of rock which was just within reach. If we could have seen, it would have been different. Right above our heads there was a jagged hole in the rocks, something like a trapdoor. And through this Nelson Lee hauled himself.

There was very little room for him to move, and he only just managed to turn round so that he could lean down and reach one of his arms for me to grasp. It was not so easy for me to climb up, for I was not blessed with Nelson Lee's tallness. However, with

his assistance, I managed to scramble up somehow or other.

Then, using our elbows and knees and feet, we worked our way up a kind of shaft, not unlike a huge, uneven chimney. And at last Nelson Lee felt a draught of cool air fanning his cheeks. Almost before he knew it he found himself looking through a small hole. Stars were twinkling, and he could see the moor, and the opposite cliffs of the old quarry.

After the intense blackness of the fissure, the night seemed quite light, and Lee could see many objects which were ordinarily invisible to the human eye. The night was calm and mild, and there was no sign of any light.

"Well, Nipper, we have succeeded so far," murmured Nelson Lee. "As I suspected, we have come out on the face of the cliff, and even now it may not be possible for us to get safely on to the moor. It would be something of a squeeze for a terrier to climb through this hole."

"Just what I thought!" I grunted. "Still, we've found the open, and that's a blessing.

Nelson Lee did not feel very confident as he tested the rocks at the edges of the little exit. To his surprise and delight, however, these rocks were loose, and almost at the first touch a large chunk fell away. A minute later the opening was large enough to allow his body to pass through.

"Splendid, Nipper!" said Lee. "We are extremely lucky.

It was rather a ticklish business getting through the opening, for the rock edge was in a precarious state, and bits crumbled away constantly. It was fortunate for us, really, that the rocks did crumble away—or we should have been imprisoned.

We found ourselves not far from the summit of the quarry cliff. A drop of sixty feet lay below us, but the cliff over our heads was not sheer, and with a little care we managed to climb up—until, at last, we stood upon the grassy moor, safe and sound and none the worse for our perilous adventure.

"Thank goodness!" I exclaimed fervently. "I thought it was all up with us, guv'nor."

Nelson Lee put an arm round my shoulders, and gave me an affectionate little hug.

"Now that the danger is over, young 'un, I don't mind admitting that for a period I almost gave up hope," he said quietly. "And now we must get straight back to the school and tuck ourselves between blankets."

We set off briskly across the moor.

"I had the wind up properly when we were in that pit, guv'nor," I said. "I never thought we should get out alive, and here we are walking back to St. Frank's as though nothing had happened. What are you going to do about it, guv'nor? What action will you take?"

"I don't know that I shall take any action at present, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "This adventure has fully convinced me that our Burmese visitors are highly dangerous, and grimly in earnest in their undertaking—whatever that may happen to be. I fancy we have had enough of them for one night."

I was in entire agreement. By this time we were nearly dry, our exertions had caused us to perspire freely, and the heat of our bodies had dried the clothes on us. And there was certainly no danger of us contracting serious chills.

Our suits were in a terrible condition, and, as I was collarless. I dare say I looked a sorry spectacle. Not that this mattered a jot. We had come through our adventure with whole skins, and we were now thoroughly on our guard. The Indians would not catch us napping on a second occasion.

We found St. Frank's silent and asleep, and we crept in and made our way straight to Nelson Lee's study—the guv'nor insisting upon my taking a drop more brandy before going up to

bed. His flask was empty, but there was plenty in the guv'nor's cupboard.

Nelson Lee entered the study and switched on the electric light. Then he stood in the doorway, quite still. There was something in his attitude which caused me to wonder, and I pushed past him.

"Apparently we have had visitors," observed Lee smoothly.

"My only hat!" I ejaculated.

The apartment was in a peculiar condition. Apparently every drawer in the room had been ransacked—the contents taken out and scattered all over the floor. The cupboard had been smashed open, and even Nelson Lee's bureau was in a wrecked condition. In short, every article of furniture had suffered.

"Burglars!" I exclaimed breathlessly.

"Not the ordinary type, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I have not the slightest doubt that our late enemies are responsible for this state of affairs."

"But—but what's the idea——"

"The golden image!" said Lee grimly. "They know that the idol is in my possession, Nipper, and as soon as they had dealt with us in the quarry, they knew that the coast was clear. So they came along—and this is the result."

"And do you think they've got the image, sir?"

"I have an idea that their search was a failure," replied Lee dryly. "The image is in a safe place, and the Indians failed. Probably we shall find the bed-room in a similar condition to this."

We went upstairs, and Nelson Lee's surmise was correct. The bed-room had also been ransacked. But the golden image, which the Indians were so anxious to recover, was safe and sound in Nelson Lee's possession, for he had concealed it in a distant part of the building, in a secret cavity of his own.

"Now, my boy, you must go to bed," said Lee, smiling. "I am afraid our investigation has not proved very successful—but we know, at all events, that these Burmese fellows are dangerous. We must be very cautious in all our dealings with them in future. I rely upon you to say nothing to the other boys."

"Not even to Montie and Tommy, sir?"

"If it is necessary, you can tell them, because they can be trusted," replied the guv'nor. "But keep your own counsel as far as possible, Nipper. My main object, in future, will be to discover what connection these men of the East have with Master Jerry Dodd."

A minute or two later I stole into the Remove dormitory, and slipped into bed. The other fellows knew nothing of what had happened during these eventful hours of the night.

CHAPTER 19.
An Unexpected Visitor.

WHEN I went into Nelson Lee's study just before dinner the next day, I found him busily engaged with the microscope. He was examining some tiny glass slides, each one of which contained a minute speck of something.

"What's the idea, sir?" I asked.

"I am merely pursuing my inquiries, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I am pleased to say that I have been able to identify the particular drug which has been injected into Jerry Dodd's blood on more than one occasion. It is harmless enough, but has a most peculiar effect upon the victim. It induces a brief sleep, followed by a trance-like period. While in this condition the victim will obey all orders without question—his will-power has been conquered. It is a drug peculiar to India, and I don't think it has any English name."

"And who are the men who are doing all this, sir?"

"I am afraid I cannot give you any

answer to that, Nipper," replied Lee. "I can only say that I shall pursue my investigations closely, and before long I hope to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. By the way, it is quite possible that I shall need your help before so very long."

"It's yours, sir," I said eagerly. "What do you want me to do?"

"I cannot tell you just now; but when I have my plans fully completed, I will tell you all about them," said the detective. "Will you be ready on Saturday?"

I grinned.

"Not likely, sir," I replied promptly. "It's the Helmford match on Saturday."

"Oh, I see; cricket naturally comes before all else," smiled the guv'nor. "Are you playing at home or away?"

"At home, sir," I said. "The Helmford juniors are coming here to wipe us up—that's their idea. But if we can only keep up our proper form, we shall open their eyes. There's Jerry Dodd, too; we'd love to have him play for us."

"I'm afraid——"

"Oh, come on, guv'nor, there's the honour of the school to think of," I said. "Jerry's a wonderful cricketer, although most of the chaps here believe him to be a duffer. They think he doesn't know a cricket bat from a tennis racket. But I know different; he's as hot as mustard."

"Obviously," said Nelson Lee dryly. "The Bannington match proved that."

I started.

"The Bannington match?" I echoed. "But Dodd wasn't playing, sir. It was Tucker who made——"

"Come, come, Nipper, you needn't try to hoodwink me," chuckled the guv'nor. "The boy who put up such a splendid performance certainly looked like Timothy Tucker; but that was merely an indication that your art of make-up has not suffered during the past few months. I rather fancy the whole school knows that the boy was not really Tucker. But they are in the dark regarding his real identity."

"Do you think he was Dodd, sir?"

"I do not think anything about it; I know that he was Dodd," said Lee smoothly. "And you must not take such liberties again, Nipper. The Head, fortunately, has no suspicion. It is very hard on Dodd that he should be forbidden to play——"

"And hard on us, too," I put in.

"I can quite understand your feelings, young 'un," said Nelson Lee. "It is not Dr. Stafford's fault, however. The Head is merely carrying out the wishes of the boy's father. If at all possible, something will be done between now and Saturday."

I took this as a hint, and later on I told Jerry about it.

After dinner Jerry Dodd strolled out into the Triangle, his intention being to go over to Little Side and watch the practice.

But almost immediately afterwards he received a big surprise.

A stranger came striding through the gateway. He was a big, well set-up man, clean-shaven, with a deeply bronzed complexion.

He was attired in light tweeds, and carried a mackintosh and a small handbag. Jerry Dodd stared at him for a moment, and then caught his breath in sharply. The next second he was tearing across the Triangle.

"Uncle Bill!" he shouted delightedly. "By jings! This is a surprise!"

"Hallo, Jerry! I've soon found you!" he said genially, as the junior rushed up to him. "Steady on, young 'un! Steady on! You're looking fine, and ——"

"But, say, I didn't know you were coming!" exclaimed Jerry breathlessly. "What does it mean, Uncle Bill? I didn't even know that you were in England."

And Mr. William Dodd sighed.

"And I was kidding myself that I was famous," he said regretfully. "Why, Jerry, haven't you seen my name in the papers?"

"I don't read the papers, uncle."

"Well, you take an interest in cricket——"

"I haven't read anything about cricket since I came to St. Frank's," interrupted Jerry. "I've sort of given it the slip. But say, have you come over to England to play cricket?"

"Well, considering I came over with the Australian team, and that I'm booked to play in the Test matches—well, I kind of reckon that I'm in England to play cricket," he replied calmly.

Jerry eyed his uncle proudly.

"A member of the Australian team!" he exclaimed. "By jings! What an honour! Say, Uncle Bill, it's great of you!"

"And as it was an odd day, I thought I'd run down and see how you were getting on, young fel'," went on Mr. Dodd.

"My hat!" muttered Pitt. "It's Doddy's uncle—and he's a member of the Australian team!"

Mr. William Dodd turned to the juniors who had gathered round.

"Well, youngsters, I am pleased to see you all," he said. "What do you think of Jerry as a cricketer, eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

All the juniors laughed at the joke.

"I don't quite catch on!" said Mr. Dodd. "Hasn't Jerry done some great things since——"

"Say, uncle, cut it out!" muttered Jerry. "I've got things to explain!"

Uncle Bill caught on at once, and didn't proceed any further. And very shortly afterwards he was alone with Jerry Dodd in Study F. Tom Burton and Conroy minor were both on the playing field.

"Now, my lad, what does it mean?" asked Mr. Dodd grimly. "What's this mystery about cricket? According to all my knowledge, you are one of the most promising players Australia has ever sent from her shores. Yet, at the very mention of cricket, your companions laugh at you."

Jerry nodded.

"They kind of think I'm a duffer," he said.

"But why? Haven't you shown them what you can do?"

"No; dad arranged it all for me," said Jerry bitterly. "Before I came across he fixed it up with the Head here that I shouldn't play cricket—I've got to spend all my time studying, and reading books!"

Uncle Bill frowned.

"Rot!" he said bluntly. "We'll soon put a stop to this game, Jerry, old fel'! Forbidden to play cricket! Why, it's as bad as forbidding a man to drink water!"

Jerry's eyes sparkled.

"There's a big match on Saturday," he said eagerly. "Do you think you could fix things up, Uncle Bill? Could you see the Head, and obtain his permission for me to play in that match?"

The visitor from Australia smiled.

"That permission is already obtained!" he said calmly. "You can take it from me, Jerry, that you'll play in that match."

"Oh, thanks awfully, uncle!" said Jerry Dodd, gripping his visitor's hand.

The Australian junior did play—he played a wonderful game. And that match, as we were shortly to find, was to be a match of destiny!

THE END.

Look out for the further adventures of Jerry Dodd at St. Frank's! Make sure you read "THE SCHOOLBOY TEST MATCH PLAYER!"—out on Thursday, August 4th.

S.S.

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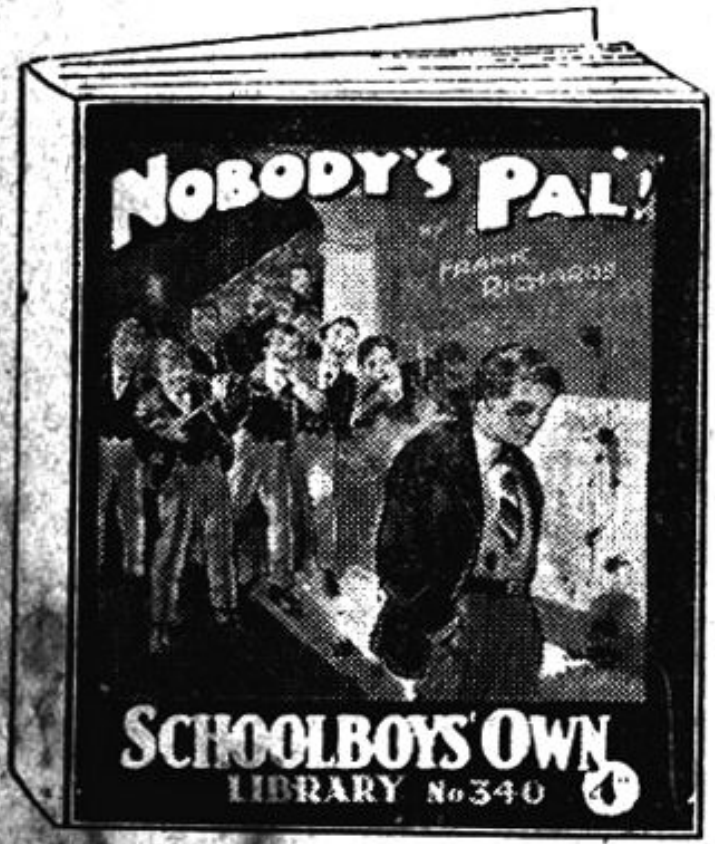

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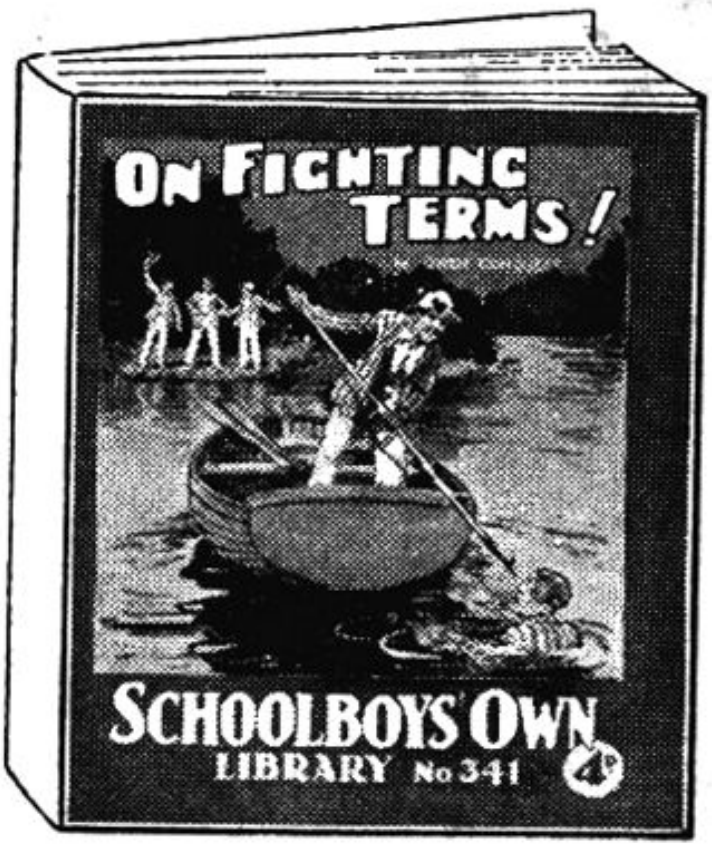

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