A Dangerous Experiment

By J. B.

CHAPTER I.

We were both "stone-broke;" there was no doubt about it—absolutely "stony."

The Leger had been too much for us, and as Bob Disney and I sat in the clubhouse of the Westshire Golf Club and went over the events of the last few days, our spirits were considerably dampened by the prospect that lay before us. It was worse for me than for him, for in his case it was merely a question of inconvenience that can be lived down; but I was engaged to be married to a charming young lady whose father hated racing and all its ways, and had promised to join them at Homburg in a week's time. How I was to get there, when we had been so cleaned out that I had not even the money to pay for my ticket, was the problem we were trying to work out in the clubhouse that bright autumn afternoon.

It was a cheery little clubhouse, looking out over the links, and a blue line of sea beyond a gap in the undulating ground made a fine background for a viscous-looking, yellow sand bunker, which spoke of trials past and to come. We had come down to play golf but so far had found the discussion of our woes more absorbing, and we idly watched couple after couple, or an occasional foursome, start off from the first tee just outside the clubhouse window.

"There goes Hamilton Burnley," Bob said, as a tall man with a dark mustache took his stand on the tee. "What a brute he is!"

"Very," I answered, absently; but Bob did not take the trouble to ask me what I meant.

"Why were we such fools?" was his only remark.

"It's no good saying that," was my impatient reply, "and it looks much worse for me than for you. My father-in-law-elect will be simply furious if he hears that I have lost money again racing.

He told me the last time he would never let his daughter marry a betting man; I shouldn't be at all surprised if he insisted on breaking off the engagement."

"Can't you raise the money anyhow?"

"Impossible! I've thought of every scheme under the sun. You are the only man I would borrow from, and you're in the same boat. Hang it all!"

"Couldn't we get up a match somehow and win some bets over it?"

"Nice suggestion, considering we couldn't pay up if we lost, and how would you arrange it? Are you to play me? There would be one satisfaction: it wouldn't matter a bit who lost or who won, as neither of us could pay."

"Of course, I don't mean that, but I suppose it's no good any way." I replied, lapsing into despondency. "Your play is too well known—no one would bet against you; and mine is, too," I added; "nobody but a fool would back me to bear anybody."

This seemed to settle the matter, and we puffed at our cigarettes for a few moments in silence.

"Here comes Stanton," said Bob at last, as a dark figure crossed the window. "I suppose it's getting late, but I can't say I feel inclined to play. Well, who won the match?" he asked, as Stanton came into the room.

"Oh, Nevill, of course," the other growled. I had all my usual luck, and was rather off my play, besides. What a cad that chap Burnley is!" he added viciously.

"I don't admire him. Has he been doing anything extra atrocious?"

"Only making himself generally obnoxious: seems to think the links were made for him alone. He puts us all to the right-about and gives his advice when it's not asked nor wanted, and shouts sarcastic remarks whenever he is
within reach of you. I can't think how he gets any one to play with him. I wish you would give him the licking he deserves; you ought to beat easily,” Stanton said, turning to Bob.

“I always fancy I can beat him; but the fact remains that he beats me as often as I beat him. There's nothing to choose between us.”

“No doubt he is a tough customer, but not quite as invincible as he imagines. I should like to see him well put through.”

“Who wouldn't?” said Bob; and, as the room began to fill gradually with players coming in from their rounds, we temporarily forgot our woes and enjoyed the gossip of the hour.

Finally, Burnley made his appearance, with that peculiar swaggering air of his, and his quondam adversary meekly in tow.

“Couldn't make a match of it anyhow,” he said. “Gave him a half, and that was no good, and then a stroke a hole, and that was no good either.” (The object of the remark began to talk nervously about not knowing the links.) “It’s rather hard lines being a scratch player; you never get a good game, you know. Thank you,” he added carelessly as the victim handed him over what was apparently the payment of a bet.

“Been getting money on again with the unwary alien,” muttered Bob in my ear, and with the remark there entered into his head, as he told me afterwards, a scheme, the temerity of which I now tremble to think of.

“Burnley,” he said quietly, “I'll bring some one to play you who will beat your head off.”

“I dare say,” he sneered; “Hutchinson or Taylor, perhaps.”

“No,” Bob replied; “he is not a well-known man. Probably none of you have ever heard his name.”

“What club does he belong to?” asked Burnley.

“None that I know of.”

“Humph! no one has ever heard of him, and he doesn't belong to any club; I needn't be afraid of that lout, I should think,” the other said with a shrug.

“Good enough to beat you, however,” Bob somewhat tauntingly rejoined.

“I bet you he doesn't,” exclaimed Burnley, thoroughly roused.

“Done,” was the prompt answer; “how much?”

“Oh, I don't know,” Burnley hesitated, but cries of “Play up, Burnley!” “Sure it's yourself that no one can beat!” and so on, apparently decided him.

“All right,” said Bob, booking the bet. “He'll beat you.”

“Beat me!” retorted the other angrily. “I'll engage to knock his head off—and give him a stroke a hole, too.”

“You'll give him a stroke at every hole?”

“You said so, Burnley,” cried a chorus of voices. “Come, stick to it like a man.”

“All right,” he answered surlily; “I'll stick to it. It's long odds, but he'll probably want two or three strokes to make any difference.”

“Very good,” Bob said, as the matter was settled. “Now as to details. The match is to be played on this course, and so long as I adhere strictly to the wording of the agreement, I win my bet?”

Burnley nodded. “Of course, your man must play fair,” he added.

“My man will play strict golf, of course, and an umpire named by the secretary of this club shall go round to see fair play on both sides.”

“Well, all I can say is, I think you are mad to make the bet,” Burnley said with a sneer.

“That is my lookout,” was the retort; “there is only one thing I should like to ask, but do not insist on. Let the match be decided in nine holes instead of eighteen.”

“Nine or ninety, it's all the same to me,” he replied, flicking the ash off the end of his cigarette. “I've no doubt he will have had quite enough of it by the time he has played nine holes. I presume you have seen him play?”

“No,” Bob answered carelessly. “Now for the day and hour.”

“Well, this is Monday; say Thursday at 2.30, and if I don't put him through call me a duffer.”

“There's lots of things we could call you, Burnley,” I remarked, but the other affected not to hear, and sauntered out of the room.

“Who is the man?” I asked curiously, as we sauntered home together.

“Have you ever heard of Nat Bunnicombe?”

“What? fat Bunny? But he doesn't play golf.”

“Nevertheless he is the man I have backed to beat Burnley.”

“Nat Bunnicombe!” I exclaimed, pulling up short in the road. “Why, man alive, I don't believe he has ever had a club in his hand.”

“I know he hasn't. I heard him say so last week. The fact of his absolute ignorance of the game is what commended him to me. I would rather have it so than if he had played once or twice and fancied himself. I'll tell you all about it. You've had a slight taste of my powers, and I may tell you Nat Bunnicombe is one of my best subjects.”

“Yes, but what has that to do with it?” I interrupted impatiently.

“Everything,” was his reply. “Don't whisper
it in Gath—my idea is to make him beat Burnley under the influence of hypnotic suggestion."

CHAPTER II.

The eventful day dawned fair and still; bright with sunshine as an Autumn day can be—and usually is not. I cannot say that my feelings were those of unmixed delight. Bob assured me that he had made a few hypnotic experiments with Nat on the quiet, and had found them succeed beyond his anticipations.

"How on earth can you make a man play golf, when he doesn't know even how to hold his clubs?" I asked sceptically.

"In the same way you can make a man sing a song which he has never seen, in a language he doesn't know, and that I have seen done. Hypnotic suggestion will accomplish anything. You see, whatever is the cause of the sympathy between hand and eye is for the time being under my control, and acts according to my suggestion, and I can therefore make his hand and eye play golf as well as I can myself. Whether I could make him play better I am not so sure of," he added thoughtfully, "but if he plays as well with his stroke he will be more than a match for Burnley, and he will have the advantage of not being nervous." This all sounded very well. Nevertheless I was anxious.

At 2.30 sharp we appeared at the club-house—quite a large concourse of spectators besides the players. Burnley had with him the only friend he had been able to collect, and was glancing at Nat Bumcombe—whose fat, short person looked like anything but that of a golfer—with the expression on his face with which one fancies Goliath may have greeted David, and promptly offered to lay two to one on himself, which probably Goliath did too. Little Nat looked quite peaceful, but I thought Bob seemed a trifle nervous. He was going to caddy for Nat himself, and followed him like a shadow wherever he went. Of course I had faithfully kept Bob a secret and excitement ran high, for, though nearly everyone wished Burnley to be beaten, they thought Bob's man had very little chance. At a word from the umpire Burnley took his stand on the tee and drove off—a good ball, despatched by a confident hand straight in the direction of the first hole.

Then came Nat's turn. Bob made his tee, and as he placed the ball on it I noticed his hand shook a little. He then selected the driver from the clubs in the caddie bag, and put it in his hand's grasp carefully, with an earnest remark or two. Nat, I am bound to say, with a rather stiff swing, then drove the ball also straight for the green, though not quite as far as Burnley. That he should have hit the ball once even brought a certain mild comfort to my doubting heart, and I could see Bob breathed again as he replaced the driver in the bag, and we all moved on.

"He'll never stand the strain," was my inward thought, "He'll give out half way round, and then what will little Nat do?" And I grew rather hysterical at the idea. However, Nat was again addressing the ball, with apparently every confidence, and in response to Bob's earnest remark, "Draw back slow, keep your eye on the ball, and strike it in the direction of the hole," he hit full and clean, a fair iron shot, and lay not far from the right-hand corner of the green.

This seemed to annoy his adversary, for he pulled his shot, and had to play the odd, which landed him a few feet nearer the hole than the other, who played a somewhat indifferent approach shot. Bob now handed the putter to Nat, with an injunction I could not quite hear, and to my astonishment he laid the ball positively dead in the most approved fashion, and I must confess that whatever be the merits or demerits of golf under the influence of hypnotism, on the green it was an unqualified success from beginning to end.

Though his behavior at other times may have been odd, the Bunny came off with the putter right through the match. However, his adversary was a bad man to beat, and as he managed to put in a very long putt, Nat only succeeded in halving the hole with his stroke after all.

It is needless to follow the details of each hole. A few eccentricities on the Bunny's part occasionally excited remark from the by-standers, but when both the second and third holes had been won by him with comparative ease, making him two up, our spirits began to rise. The fourth hole resulted in a half. Burnley's drive having been an exceptionally good one, but as the Bunny was still two up, we started, hope still high for the fifth.

This was a short hole, without any serious obstacle on the way and, bar accidents, we had every reason to suppose it might be again halved, but, to our consternation and the surprise of the spectators, the Bunny missed the globe clean, instead of laying himself on the green with the iron, and finished up the performance by digging his club violently into the ground, with the inevitable result that it broke, and the head, after describing a parabola in the air, struck Burnley on the fingers, evoking language which was neither choice nor elegant. Naturally this brilliant performance gave the hole to Burnley, leaving our friend only 1 up and 4 to play.

After this display on the Bunny's part Bob and I looked at each other blankly. We knew what it meant—the influence, or whatever they call it, was beginning to wane, and Bob would never be able to keep it going for four holes more. He stuck like a limpet to little Nat, and I could see he was trying all he knew, but the result was that, although he succeeded in halving the next,
he lost the seventh hole, leaving them all square.

Bunny now appeared to be getting thoroughly out of hand. The eighth hole was for the most part a chaotic scramble between both players to reach the putting green, but Bob's influence over his victim had waned, and the Bunny, when playing one off two, insisted upon playing the ball out of a bad lie with one hand, resulting in a dreadfully sliced shot, which struck Bob. So this hole was also lost.

How we ever reached that ninth hole I do not know. The Bunny was perfectly unmanageable, but, fortunately for us, Burnley had evidently taken his whiskey and soda a good deal too strong, which equalized matters a little. On the last putting-green Burnley was so favorably placed that he was playing the like with the stroke within a short distance of the hole. A half was all he needed in order to win the match.

But that was not to be the end. Whether Burnley played the wrong ball at the right hole, or the right ball at the wrong hole, we shall never know; we only know that he missed his short putt by about one inch and a half, giving the hole to the Bunny and halving the round.

A yell of delight went up from the spectators, who had probably never witnessed such golf before in their lives.

"I'm —— if I play another stroke," Burnley exclaimed, throwing his club on the ground; "my fingers have been half disabled by that grinning baboon over there, and not one more stroke will I play! I'm sick of this confounded tomfoolery!"

"All right, Burnley," Bob said quietly. "I agree. The match is halved, and the bet off."

And looking back at the match now, I really think we got well out of it. I thought so still more when I got back to my lodgings, and found an unexpected remittance waiting for me, more than enough to carry me to Homburg. I am not sure that I believe in hypnotism quite as much as I did—not in Bob's kind anyway. He and I have never spoken about that experience to this day. I do not mean to defend our behavior a whit, and, of course, readers, you will condemn us for trying to get a man's money by playing him such a trick. I am afraid I can't contradict you; all I can say in extenuation is, we know Burnley, and you don't.

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A La Auto.

Winks—Jinks mother-in-law talks at an awful rate.
Blinks—Yes, she ought to be arrested for exceeding the speed limit

Mere Honorable Mention.

Maud—"So Arthur's automobile ran over a tramp! What will they do to poor Arthur?"
Ethylle—"Oh, nothing. The club doesn't give medals for tramps."

Turn and Turn About.

Morton—Why does Sturtevant employ two chauffeurs when he has only one automobile?
Gilsey—he has to. One or the other of them is usually in jail for running over somebody.

In the Right Place.

Headlight—What an excellent chauffeur you have?
Sidelight—Yes, he used to be a locomotive engineer, but was discharged for criminal carelessness.

Automobile Proverbs.

He that trusteth his automobile to the care of a hired man shall come quickly to grief; but he that careth for it himself shall flourish like a branch.

A righteous man regardeth the life of his carriage: but the tender mercies of the scorcher are small and far between.

He that is void of wisdom criticises his neighbor's vehicles, but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.

It is better to ride alone in a trolley car than with a nervous woman in a brass-trimmed speed car.

A smooth road maketh a cheerful countenance; but by a rough one are repairers made glad.

When scorching cometh, then cometh shame; but with the careful rider is wisdom.

The fool rejoiceth in his speed; but the wise man looketh well to his going.